



International Laboratory  
For Better Food, Farming & Fishing  
in a Sustainable Way  
China, 6–15 April 2008

International multi stakeholders dialogue in China  
to generate more sustainable food systems



DRAFT 07 Feb (rev 4mm)

Ongoing dialogue



International Laboratory  
For Better Food, Farming & Fishing  
in a Sustainable Way

**A Leadership Experience for Global Food System Leaders**

Organized by:  
Sustainable Food Laboratory, USA  
Charles Leopold Mayer Foundation FPH, France  
Risteco Consortium, Italy  
Rural Development Institute, Chinese Academy  
of Social Sciences & Rural Development Institute-CASS, China

**Introduction:**

The Second China Europa Forum, coordinated by the Charles Leopold Mayer Foundation (FPH) took place at the beginning of October 2007. AlimenTerra and Consortium Risteco, **with the support of Regione Piemonte and I.C.E**



**China-Europa Forum**

**中欧论坛 2007**

(Italian Institute for Foreign Trade), were in charge of the local organization of the thematic workshop dedicated to 'Sustainable Agri-Food Chains and Systems' (WT35) in Turin. During two days of intense debate and dialogue, 16 European and 5 Chinese representatives of the agri-food chains and systems were able to share their knowledge and focus on specific questions in a pleasant and positive atmosphere.

This laboratory in China is an opportunity for many of those participants to follow up the dialogue began in October last in Turin together with US and Latin American leaders. A part of these leaders had been involved in an international process (sustainable Food Laboratory <http://www.sustainablefoodlab.org>) with leaders from different sectors like business, social and civil society and public bodies. Few pilot projects had been launched at international level.

During these 10-days laboratory in China, 45 food system leaders will learn together and explore future collaborations. Participants will come from the business sector, the government sector, and civil society from China, Europe, Usa and Latin America.



### **Objectives of the lab:**

The lab will focus on supply chains that enhance the interests of farmers while also protecting the natural environment and providing healthy and safe food for consumers. Many Chinese agricultural producers supply local traditional markets. Others have become increasingly integrated into modern supply chains supplying large supermarket chains. Despite these changes, the incomes of farmers have not kept pace with their urban counterparts, and adequate quality systems have not been put in place. **This situation is common across the world, and the lab will bring together food system leaders from several countries to share their experiences and address these questions:**

- What are the essential steps for family farmers & fisherman to develop good opportunities in the changing market structure of China and other countries?
- How can market players rapidly share information about changing consumer demands and ensure that an increasingly safe, healthy, diverse, and high quality food supply is produced with fewer energy inputs and negative environmental impacts from all stages of supply chains?
- What will it take for multi-national businesses and local businesses of all sizes to play a positive role in promoting sustainable and secure food systems?
- What is the role of government, including regulations, public investments, and rules for intellectual and real property rights, to support more sustainable and equitable supply chains?
- What is the role of producers' organizations and NGOs to support the improvement of sustainable supply chains?
- What are the most important ways in which Chinese food system development and food system development in the rest of the world are mutually interactive and dependent?

China's future development is important for the whole world because China is so large and strategically important, and China's development path also serves as a microcosm of the challenges and opportunities facing much of the rest of the world. The lab will provide all participants, Chinese and non-Chinese, with many opportunities to see and learn through one another's eyes, to imagine innovations that might not have occurred to one another before, and to design joint work in a variety of potential areas, including model supply chains, infrastructure for family farmers, food procurement specifications, commodity standards, and public policy.

At the end of learning journeys and retreat, a report will share the key learning of the project. This report will include both individual and collective learning by participants and possible future initiatives and projects.



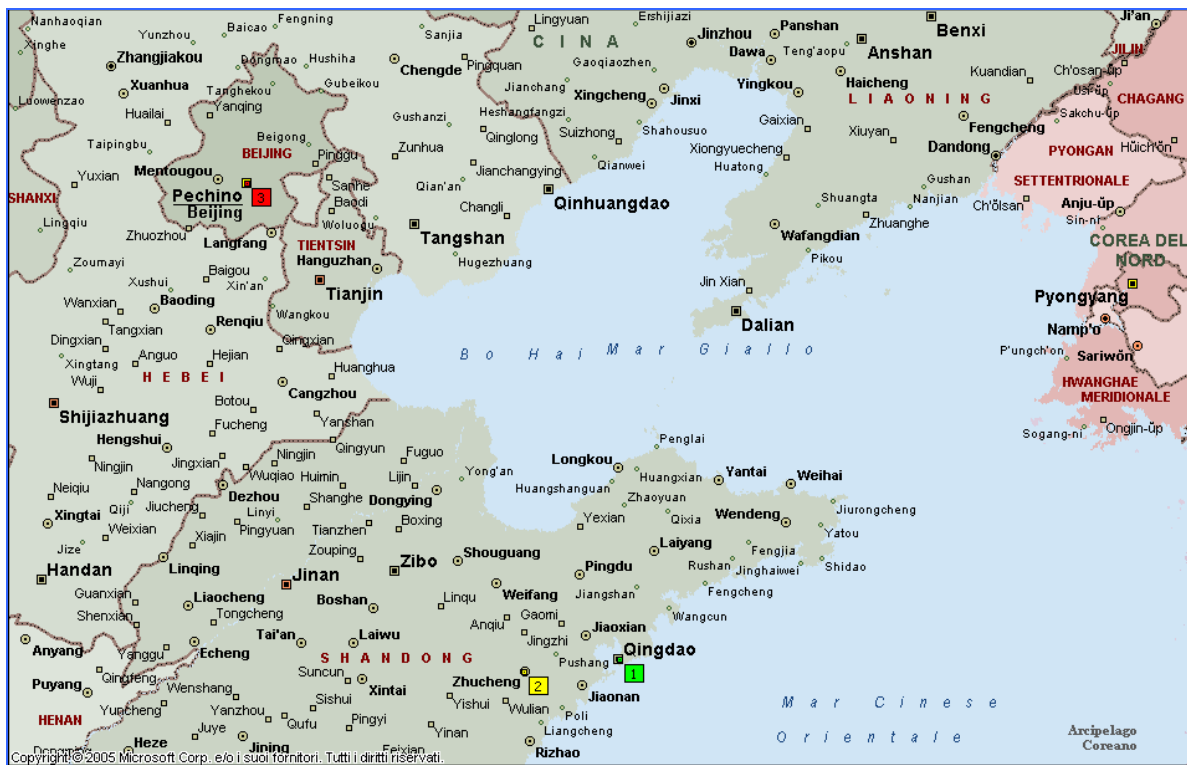
The U-Process, a unique social technology practiced by the Sustainable Food Lab, will maximize the potential for learning, inspiration, and future relationships.<sup>1</sup> Translation during the lab among languages of participants will be provided

**Where and When:**

The international lab will take place April 6-15, 2008 in China; first in Shandong Province (Zhucheng) and the last part in Beijing.

Participants could flight directly to Qingdao Liuting Airport (Shandong Province) via Beijing and arrive at Zhucheng by train.

To get more details about the trip, please contact the organization & logistics office of one of the promoter.



**Participants:**

Around 45 persons coming from:

<sup>1</sup> The U-Process is described in two recently-published books: Peter Senge, Claus Otto Scharmer, Joseph Jaworski, and Betty Sue Flowers, *Presence: An Exploration of Profound Change in People, Organizations, and Society* (New York: Doubleday, 2005) and Adam Kahane, *Solving Tough Problems: An Open Way of Talking, Listening, and Creating New Realities* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler, 2004).



14 Europe, 8 Usa, 8 Latin America, 15 China.

All participants are food system experts and coming from Business sector, Public Bodies and Civil Society.

Applicants must send a brief description of their motivations to participate to the lab.

**Agenda :** *(Work in progress until feb 25):*

Main work

One day to arrive and to present the program, the methodology, presentation of participants to share perspectives and experiences with sustainable supply chains, and to prepare for learning journey in Shandong Province.

Four days in Shandong Province in 3 simultaneous learning journey for group members to immerse themselves in the realities of the Chinese food, agriculture & fishing system.

Four days to debrief learning journeys, develop a shared understanding of food system challenges and opportunities, retreat in nature and articulate future shared work.



**For further information contact:**

**Europe:**

Consorzio Risteco, Environment Park, Via Livorno 60, Turin, Italy:  
Maurizio Mariani [m.mariani@risteco.it](mailto:m.mariani@risteco.it)  
Phone 0039 335 7352763

or

Fondation Charles Léopold Mayer, 38 rue Saint Sabin 75011 Paris France  
Pierre Vuarin [pvuarin@fph.fr](mailto:pvuarin@fph.fr)  
tel: 00 3314314 7585

**USA:**

Hal Hamilton, Sustainability Institute; 3 Linden Rd., Hartland VT 04048 USA  
Voice: +1 802-436-1277; Fax: +1 802-436-1281; [hhamilton@sustainer.org](mailto:hhamilton@sustainer.org)  
[www.sustainablefoodlab.org](http://www.sustainablefoodlab.org); or

**China:**

杜志雄 研究员 Professor Du Zhixiong  
中国社会科学院农村发展研究所  
Rural Development Institute, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences  
地址: 北京市东城区建内大街 5 号, 100732  
ADD: No 5, Jiannei Dajie, Beijing, 100732, PRC  
电话 (Tel) 65275067(O)/13910789165  
电邮 (Email) [duzhx@cass.org.cn](mailto:duzhx@cass.org.cn)

Or

檀学文·Tan Xuewen

博士, 助理研究员 ·Ph.D. and Assistant Research Fellow

中国社科院农村发展研究所·Rural Development Institute-CASS

地址/Add: 北京建国门内大街 5 号·No. 5, Jianguomennei Street, 100732, Beijing

电话/Tel: +86 10 8519 5656

传真/Fax: +86 10 6513 7559



## From Sustainable Food Lab.

### Sensing: Learning Journeys

(excerpted from a U Process Fieldbook by Zaid Hassan)

#### **Purpose**

The simplest understanding of a learning journey is a study tour, which is typically a data-gathering (facts and figures), but to be truly useful learning journeys can also serve other purposes:

- Learning journeys can be used as a basis of building more intuitive, holistic and human pictures of a system.
- To give participants a deeper emotional as well as intellectual sense of the system under study.
- To train participants in "suspending judgement".
- To give participants an understanding of the "whole system."
- To give participants an understanding of their role within the whole system.

For participants to learn from each other about the whole system.

#### **Preparation**

##### **Briefing of hosts**

One of the most crucial (and time-consuming) tasks is for the learning journey organiser to visit each of the sites in person and to work with the host(s) to plan a good visit. The key is to explain to the host the purpose of the learning journey and to emphasize that our team wants to meet people and talk with them and to see and feel for ourselves what's going on. What we want is to be able to sit down and talk with people, preferably one on one (not just as part of a large tour group walking around). This means being clear that our team must in many cases split up at each site and talk with different people. At the risk of being repetitive, what we absolutely don't want—except for a very brief introduction or in the case of a visit to a very exceptional host—is to be seated in the organization's Board Room and to be shown a video or a PowerPoint presentation.

Do not assume that the host will understand what we want: in most cases they will not and then we show up and be forced, through politeness, to endure a highly inadequate visit. The organizers must be prepared to be clear about what kind of experience we want and don't want. This also includes being clear on what kind of space the team requires for debriefing and plenary sessions.



## **Facilitator**

Depending on the size of the LJ there may be more than one facilitator. It's important to ensure that the facilitator has been involved in and has a detailed understanding of the Learning Journey process and protocols. This means that they must have a good understanding of WHY we're doing learning journeys and their relationship to the U-Process.

The key task of the facilitator during the LJ is to ensure that participants follow the process and protocols of the LJ. During the Facilitation Team Meeting its worth discussing what the team's success criteria for the LJ is. What is it that the Team would like to see at the end of the LJ? What would the team like to see happen during the LJ?

## **Documentation & Notes**

The current LJ design assigns each of the participants to be "journalists" in order to report on site visits. This decreases the overall need for the Facilitation Team to document the process.

The Facilitation Team as a whole needs to take some responsibility for ensuring that moments of importance enter the official record. This can be done through pointing such moments out to the Documenter or through taking their own notes.

## **Logistics**

The Logistics person has a very critical role within the LJ process. They are primarily responsible for ensuring that host organisations are aware of the group's needs – in terms of their mode of engagement. This means that ideally, they should have visited each of the host organisations prior to the LJ and briefed them on the purpose of the LJ and the groups' expectations. This is a fairly labour and resource intensive task but should not be underestimated.

During the LJ the Logistics person is also responsible for ensuring the group gets from point A to point B in time. This means liaising with bus drivers, train drivers and so on. It's critical that the Logistics person is local or at least speaks the local language and has a deep understanding of the local context.

# Learning Journey Protocol I

## "Seeing Our Seeing"





## **Before**

Agree visit leader and reporter.

Spend 10 minutes in silence:

- Quiet your mind.
- Check in on yourself. What are you feeling? What are you thinking? Observe the flow of your thoughts.
- What do you think you already know about the site and people you are about to visit? Write down 5 assumptions or expectations you are carrying.
- What do you want to know about the site and the people? Write down 5 questions or areas of interest.

## **During**

- Listen and observe carefully. Pay attention both to the visible and to the invisible.
- At some point, if possible, strike out on your own.
- Interview people you meet. Ask questions. Pay attention to their thinking. Also notice your own thinking: your reactions, judgments, projections, etc.

## **After**

Immediately find some space to write up your notes. Keep silent—delay sharing and chatting.

Write down, in a stream of consciousness, your observations and thoughts.

Then consider:

- What stood out for me? What struck me most strongly?
- What surprised me? If nothing, why?
- What did I notice about myself and my reactions? What might I have failed to notice?
- What was sustainable in what I saw? Why?
- What was unsustainable in what I saw? Why?
- What new questions and puzzles are coming up for me?

After 10 minutes, gather for a team debrief. The visit reporter must take careful notes.

Each person passes around one of their photographs and shares their observations, thoughts, and reflections.

After every person has shared, take 5 more minutes in silence to round out your notes.

# Learning Journey Visit Protocol II: "Sensing the Whole"

## **Before**



Agree visit leader and reporter.

Spend 10 minutes in silence:

- Quiet your mind.
- Check in on yourself. What are you feeling? What are you thinking? Observe the flow of your thoughts.
- What do you think you already know about the site and people you are about to visit?
- What do you want to know about the site and the people?

### **During**

- Listen and observe carefully. Pay attention both to the visible and to the invisible. Listen to both the words and the music.
- At some point, if possible, strike out on your own.
- Pay attention to where you are coming from. Open up your heart to what is going on around you and inside you.
- Interview people you meet. Listen to where they are coming from. Listen from within them, without judgment, with empathy.

### **After**

Immediately find some space to write up your notes. Keep silent—delay sharing and chatting. Write down, in a stream of consciousness, your observations, feelings, and thoughts.

Then consider:

- What stood out for me? What struck me most strongly?
- What surprised me?
- What for me was the essence of the whole of what I saw? What images, stories and metaphors capture that essence?
- What did I learn about choices people are making and why they are making them? What does sustainability mean to them?
- Putting myself in the shoes of the people I met, what advice would they have for our Sustainable Food Lab Team?
- What options does this visit open up for my work and the work of our Lab Team?
- What impact does and might my and our work have on the people I met?
- What new questions and puzzles are coming up for me?

After 10 minutes, gather for a team debrief. The visit reporter must take careful notes. After every person has shared, take 5 more minutes in silence to round out your notes.

### **Notes From the Field – By Alison Sander**

The following notes were made by Alison Sander who participated in the First Sustainable Food Lab Learning Journey to Brazil in August 2004. The LJ was facilitated by Adam Kahane with Alison providing support. The logistics of the LJ



were managed by Margaret Sweitzer-Hamilton and Tacito Nobre. The LJ made use of the "illustrative process" outlined above. These notes can be considered as a commentary on the process and how it all panned out in practice.

#### Major LJ Objectives/key roles for a Facilitator

1) Take time to listen to and connect with each and every participant on the trip making extra effort with those who may be hard to connect with or who seem to be outside of or struggling with the process.

Adam took meals and bus rides to sit with each person and listen to how the process was working for them, where they were coming from etc. As Adam took time to sit with each participant, even those participants originally on a bit of the fringe felt included or valued by a process that "listened to each person's ideas."

2) Vigilantly and rigorously follow the methodology around learning journeys.

Take time for set up, to record notes in silence after each experience, and to fully debrief. This is essential for making clear the need for group learning from each other and for creating the multi-eyed and multi-perspective vision of what we were seeing. The methodology includes scheduling a min of 30 min each day before each visit to try to quiet our minds down before each visit. During each visit one person was assigned to be a leader and one to be a reporter.

Each person was instructed to take and label 3 photographs. After each visit we would have at least 10-15 min of silence for people to take notes and reflect on what they saw and then we took 45-60 min to debrief which included hearing from each person what they saw. This methodology was key and it is not an easy environment in which to enforce this (with bus trips, airport meals, early starts, desire to chat). This is essential even when people are tired, it is hard to take the time or you are on bumpy roads. Build this time into the schedule but be sure to get people in this habit from the beginning.

Participants will sense whether the facilitators see this as vital. Adam made very clear from the first day that this process had to be part of each trip and was as important as what we saw. This had a fascinating effect on all of us as I believe people started to be more consciously observant knowing that afterwards they were going to have to share their reflections with the group and that they had an important role in our seeing "part of the whole."

3) Teach and share about sensing and seeing on multiple levels so the group sees how this process can work and how personal and group transformation is essential for deeper abilities of "seeing and sensing."

4) Create the field and set the intent for this to be a "learning journey" not a field visit. Adam said we need to work together to see "what we can tell about the whole through the doorway of particular visits." His sense of focus and insisting that time be created for the learning and not only the journeying reinforced this



sense for all the participants. People may have left tired at the end of the week but they also felt stretched and physically we could sense our progression to deeper parts of the U.

### **Learning Journey Materials**

Requirements will obviously vary considerably from learning journey to learning journey. Here's an instructive list of what we took on our last trip, on which there were 14 participants.

- two packs of flipchart markers
- one roll of narrow masking tape
- 100 small yellow and 100 small blue hexagons
- 14 journals
- the "gorilla" DVD about visual perception
- 200 normal size Post-It notes (not 200 pads)

### **Limitations & Pitfalls**

The only sure-fire way of understanding a system is to live within it. Learning journeys cannot, of course, provide this level of insight and nor should they be expected to. Rather they provide a limited snap-shot of the reality of the system – which can nonetheless be transformative. It is important to be conscious that one is seeing a specific case and to be careful in over-generalising from a single, limited experience.

The value of the snapshot is a function of the state of the participants. If they are experienced at suspending judgement and are open to truly "seeing" then learning journeys have the potential of being transformative. Beyond this the success or failure of a learning journey is a function of how well prepared the learning journey guides are and how well the host organisations understand the purpose and methods of the learning journey.

For host organisations, often the default mode of dealing with a group visit is to put on some form of presentation, be it a speech from the Mayor, a powerpoint slide or a video. It should be made clear as early on as possible that the group is coming to learn through conversation and dialogue. Sometimes this makes a lot of sense to the host organisations and sometimes such a request causes confusion and consternation. It's a matter of making expectations clear.

Double-check and then re-check all travel distances and timing! All too often conceptions of time and space are culturally determined and are NOT universal.

### **Learning Journeys in Developing Countries**

Executing learning journeys in developing countries presents a whole different level of complexity. Here, the possibility of an "honest conversation" becomes even more remote due to vast cultural and social boundaries.



All complexities, be they with host organisations or the participants themselves, can be handled through remaining clear on the purpose of the learning journey and the intentions of the participants to learn and engage as honestly and as openly as possible.

Often the greatest barriers to conversation are the assumptions, judgements and barriers of the participants themselves.

Western participants usually arrive at Third World sites (especially rural sites) with the assumption in their mind that people who have less material wealth than them are "poor." Individuals on site can often also re-enforce this label through their own actions – partially because this is the only relationship they have known with Westerners. This leads to a re-enforcing of power-structures which only entrench the barriers to honest conversation.

The alternative is to arrive differently. Rather than assume that people with less material wealth are "poor" it makes much more sense to arrive with at least the possibility in mind that they are equally, or more, wealthy in other domains. This creates the space for a conversation between equals.

A number of times I've had participants ask me what we're giving back to a site, it being clear that we have somehow "taken something away". Such an attitude, again, tells us more about the mindsets of participants than it does about the real needs of people at a site. It assumes that people "need" something that we have and they don't. While this may be true at some level, it's an assumption and a judgement which should be questioned.

It is generally good practice to follow-up with sites with some form of a thank-you. This could range from a simple thank-you note, to copies of any reports that come from the learning journey.

Further reading: Helping, in The Development Dictionary Ed. Wolfgang Sachs

### **Rules of Thumb**

Be clear to host organisations that you are coming to learn and have honest conversations.

The mode of engagement for learning journeys should be dialogue not presentation.

If the learning journey group is large then it should be split up into smaller groups, ideally no larger than 8 people per group.

Build enough reflection time and space into your agenda to allow participants to reflect on what they have seen during the learning journey



Do local sites have any expectations from the group at a cultural level?

### **Observation Prompts: Developing “System Sight”**

- Pay attention to your projections and reactions
- Suspend judgement
- Listen, don't interrogate
- Be hyper-aware of your inner filter
- Allow room for silence
- Silence is a dramatic answer
- Ask yourself questions
- Be curious
- Follow your senses
- Observe your thought flow
- Perception, not analysis
- Try other worldviews for size
- Participation rather than detachment
- Expand your circle of empathy
- Context is everything
- Listen to how you're listening
- Listen with your entire body
- How many cows are in the field?
- Pay attention to the periphery
- Practice active patience
- Be alert

### **10 Suggestions for Solving Tough Problems**

1. Pay attention to your state of being and to how you are talking and listening. Notice your own assumptions, reactions, contractions, anxieties, prejudices, and projections.

2. Speak up. Notice and say what you are thinking, feeling, and wanting.

3. Remember that you don't know the truth about anything. When you think that you are absolutely certain about the way things are, add “in my opinion” to your sentence. Don't take yourself too seriously.

4. Engage with and listen to others who have a stake in the system. Seek out people who have different, even opposing, perspectives from yours. Stretch beyond your comfort zone.

5. Reflect on your own role in the system. Examine how what you are doing or not doing is contributing to things being the way they are.



6. Listen with empathy. Look at the system through the eyes of the other. Imagine yourself in the shoes of the other.

7. Listen to what is being said not just by yourself and others but through all of you. Listen to what is emerging in the system as a whole. Listen with your heart. Speak from your heart.

8. Stop talking. Camp out beside the questions and let answers come to you.

9. Relax and be fully present. Open up your mind and heart and will. Open yourself up to being touched and transformed.

10. Try out these suggestions and notice what happens. Sense what shifts in your relationships with others, with yourself, and with the world. Keep on practicing.

Excerpted from Adam Kahane, *Solving Tough Problems: An Open Way of Talking, Listening, and Creating New Realities* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler, 2004)