

**2014 Massachusetts Envirothon
Current Issue Problem**

Sustainable Local Agriculture

Background (For more extensive background see <http://www.maenvirothon.org/currentissue.htm>)

Local agriculture will play a key role in the 21st century transition to a sustainable – ecologically sound, economically viable, socially just – food and fiber (including wood products) system.

The challenges are immense. We are emerging from a century of addiction to fossil fuels that allowed us to neglect agriculture's ecological foundations. Our use of fossil fuels is also causing climate change, which is likely to cause increasing disruption of agricultural production. The infrastructure of our industrial food system works most efficiently for global agribusiness focused on profit, not local enterprise that aims to be responsible to the environment and to people.

At the same time, there is a growing, powerful momentum for a new, sustainable food & fiber system. Many favorable conditions are in place for such a system in Massachusetts. Support for local food is especially strong. Farmland protection mechanisms are well tested. Grassroots organizations have developed innovative communications networks for marketing and information sharing. Agricultural research increasingly takes an ecological perspective. State and federal government programs have responded to the needs of small farms. And young people are proving to be an important force for innovation and hard work in the development of sustainable food systems.

No individual community can be a sustainable food system on its own. At the same time, every community has much to contribute to the transition to a sustainable system that makes the most of local and regional resources. Every community has a unique combination of geography and natural resources, people resources (expertise, interests, energy), and infrastructure (existing farms, businesses, and other organizations) that can be put to work. New and renewed forms of organization (cooperatives, community supported agriculture, food policy councils) and communication (social media, websites, listservs) are proving to be essential for this development.

The Problem

What can your community contribute to the transition to a sustainable food & fiber system?

Your team's research of local agriculture has provided you with a big picture overview of local agriculture, and the potential for a sustainable food system in your region.

Through your Envirothon preparations you have also become familiar with two critical natural resources available for agriculture: soil and water. You are also familiar with trees and forests – another way we can harvest sustainably., and with wildlife, which represents the diversity that is critical to sustainability.

You have met people who are actively engaged in agriculture and food system-related activity, in a variety of different ways. You have encountered people – individuals and organizations – who have the vision and the determination to make change.

You have seen and heard enough to have good ideas about what needs to be done and what the resources to do it.

Your task is to identify an important next step that should be taken by your community, paying particular attention to who should be involved in making it happen.

In your presentation you should:

- Provide an overview of food and agriculture resources and systems that are in place and already happening in your community, and what they have to do with building sustainability. Include natural resources (soil, water, wildlife, forests), land use, people resources, and infrastructure. Include specific information about people you talked to and places you visited, and what you learned from any projects and volunteer activities you participated in.
- Provide an assessment of what more your community can contribute to the transition to a sustainable food & fiber system. Are natural resources being used and conserved as well as possible? Are people working together effectively? What additional natural and people resources can be mobilized? What are the opportunities? What are the challenges?
- Identify a key way that your community's contribution to the transition to a sustainable food & fiber system can be increased. What will be the benefits? What are the obstacles?
- Propose a do-able next step to accomplish this. Detail what individuals, citizen groups, government agencies, and businesses (including farms) should be involved, and why.

Some tips for your presentation

How it works:

- The Current Issue Presentation score is 25% of your team's total Envirothon score.
- Five (and only five) members of your team will make your presentation to a panel of five to eight judges. Your coach and other team members will be able to observe but not participate. The judges' job is to listen, ask good questions, assess your work, and give you feedback on your research, your proposal, and your presentation.
- Presenters will have 15 minutes for your presentation, followed by a 10 minute period when the judges can ask questions.
- Five of the judges will give your team a number score. The average of these will be your score for the competition.
- All the judges are asked to give you helpful comments. Copies of the score and review sheets are sent to your coach.

Show the judges how you know what you know, and how you came to your conclusions. Tell them about where you visited, who you talked to, what documents you researched, what activities you participated in.

Use visual aids and examples. Photographs, charts and graphs, samples, and quotes can help you make your points and distinguish your presentation from others. **Your Envirothon map** can help you to introduce your community and to make points about new opportunities.

Practice your presentation. Practice makes it easier for you to be poised and at ease in your presentation, including being able to make good eye contact and speak naturally with the judges.

Be Prepared! You will be presenting in a tent, outdoors. The day of the Envirothon is often surprisingly windy and cold, and sometimes wet. Mount your visual aids on sturdy boards in case of wind.

Participate in the Roundtables. During lunch time, relax and review your year informally: lay out your presentation materials so other teams can see what you did, talk with other teams about their community investigations and activities, answer and ask questions.