

“The big, big everybody”:

The role of farmer and advisor networks in supporting adaptive food systems in a changing climate in the NE-US

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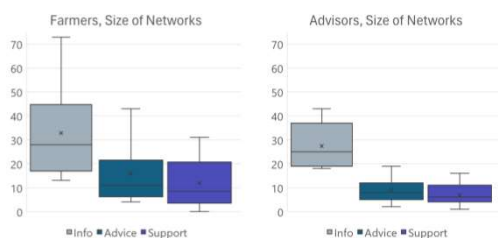
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BACKGROUND: Climate change impacts to agriculture are significant and accelerating. We need new services for farmers and advisors to build on existing knowledge and adaptive capacity. We know this group learns within knowledge networks, but not how to utilize these networks.

METHODS

1. Collected climate adaptation social network data from eight farmers and seven advisors in the NE-US over two years.
2. Added context with interviews.
3. Used SNA to analyze and illustrate.

RESULTS



Social networks attributes can lead to farmers and advisors being:

Better informed: “I think that certainly describes how I want to function. If all I hear is the same thing from the same group of people, I’m never going to learn. Right? So, I know I need to be interacting with people from all different perspectives.” (Farmer)

More confident: “The ability to get together with other people who are focused on this and to share ideas is always important, and kind of powerful.” (Advisor)

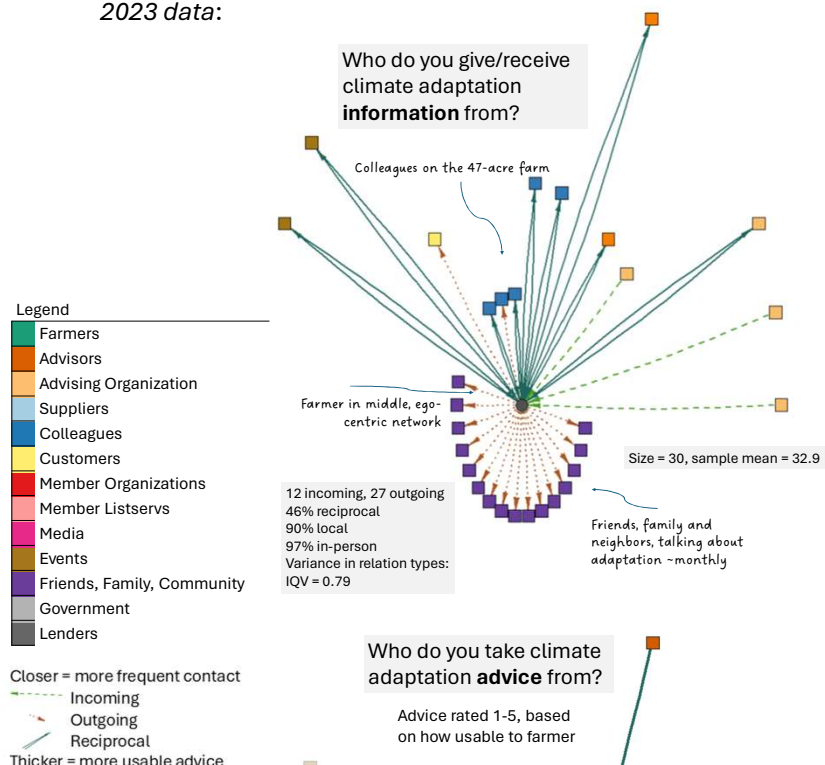
Motivated to persist: “It’s like the circle, the things that I listen to, the things that I read, the people that I look up to...they’re all from that same ethos. It just comes down to feeling like-- for the way that I want to farm, that this feels like the right way. Not necessarily in terms of all the practices being perfectly dialed in, but in terms of the value system and the ethos behind it.” (Farmer)



Contact info to learn more

Size, strength and diversity of social networks influence climate adaptation capability, confidence and motivation

Climate adaptation social networks, example from one farmer’s 2023 data:



Who do you take climate adaptation advice from?

Advice rated 1-5, based on how usable to farmer

Size = 5, sample mean = 15.8

Farmer starts taking advice from one colleague in 2024 interview

Taking advice from advisors and advising orgs

Who keeps you going with your adaptation work?

Purple shading = support

Size = 22, sample mean = 13.6

“My relationships with my colleagues have been really important to me”

Desire to feel more supported by customers

4/7 farmers reported that they feel supported by their customers

trusted Extension advisor

Uses friends, family and neighbors to reduce climate anxiety, stay in the “here and now”.

“I have this belief that even if our farm succeeded in that goal tomorrow it couldn’t do it without bringing everybody in our community, and in our region along with it. It has to be literally everyone involved in that process. In order for that to be successful, it has to go beyond just the farmer implementing these practices, and I don’t know what that looks like. The net needs to be wider. It can’t just be convincing farmers to grow in a different way. It has to be convincing consumers to spend their money to help farmers grow in those ways. And those people need money from somewhere. So, it’s got to be a big, big everybody.” (Nic Cook, farmer in the study, poster co-author)