Global Sustainability Institute

INITIATIVE

The Global Sustainability Institute facilitates and supports interdisciplinary collaborations to build and apply evidence-based knowledge needed to address issues related to the global environmental change. Our goal is to help build resilience into our communities, infrastructure, and institutions so they are capable of adapting to changing environmental conditions.

This past spring, the Useful to Useable (U2U) project hosted six focus groups with farmers and agricultural advisors in Indiana and Nebraska to showcase two new decision tools, one providing access to historical climate data and crop yields and another focused on applying Growing Degree Day information to cropping decisions. We received valuable feedback on improving tool function, and our stakeholder groups have been invited to re-evaluate these tools during our upcoming summer focus group series.

Each year, natural disasters threaten the strength and stability of communities worldwide. Responses to the challenges of recovery vary greatly and in ways that are not explained by the magnitude of the catastrophe or the amount of aid provided by national governments or the international community. The difference between resilience and disrepair, as Daniel P. Aldrich shows, lies in the depth of communities’ social capital. In his new book, Building Resilience, Aldrich highlights the critical role of social capital in the ability of a community to withstand disaster and rebuild both the infrastructure and the ties that are at the foundation of any community.

A new initiative was launched this year that combines the efforts of social scientists, physical scientists, and engineers to ask: How do you create more sustainable communities in the face of growing and increasingly interconnected environmental stresses? Seven new faculty hires over the next 2 years will complement existing strengths related to the study and practice of building more resilient and sustainable communities through interdisciplinary work on three areas in particular: informal institutions and decision making, critical infrastructure systems, and resilient (engineered and ecological) systems.