

CENTER FOR THE ECONOMICS OF SUSTAINABILITY

Climate change and a burgeoning world population put dire strains on the environment as demands on natural resources for food and energy production are rising. The result is a set of existential threats to food and water supplies and to species and ecosystems that provide services and intangible value to humanity. The Center for the Economics of Sustainability at Illinois will engage in cutting-edge research and vigorous engagement with external audiences to find solutions to these threats and challenges, fostering sustainable food production, energy use, and urban development.

OPPORTUNITY:

The Department of Agricultural and Consumer Economics (ACE) is ideally positioned for this critical work. Economics studies tradeoffs, human behavior, and the allocation of scarce resources. Applied economists in ACE collaborate with researchers from many other disciplines to show how best to manage natural resources and how to design policies and market to achieve sustainability at the lowest possible cost. ACE has three key assets that can be activated and coordinated to find solutions to sustainability challenges and to communicate those solutions to industry, government, and the public.



- We have a world-class set of researchers working on the economics of agricultural-environmental challenges, energy production and efficiency, land conservation, urban sustainability, and climate change.
- We work in an institutional environment with great assets to draw upon for sustainability research, such as privileged access to farm level data from 2,000 producers in the Illinois Farm Business Farm Management Association, unmatched capability in managing big data in partnership with the National Center for Supercomputing Applications, data and researchers at the Prairie Research Institute, and big-data initiatives including Big Data, Food Security and the Environment and the Illinois Data Science Initiative.
- We are housed in the land-grant College of ACES at Illinois, with a long history of external engagement and interaction and access to the communication resources of University of Illinois Extension.

RESOURCES REQUIRED:

Several key resources are needed to transform this set of researchers into a Center, make it nimble enough to address emerging challenges quickly, and enhance its bi-directional connections with external audiences.

Resources to increase research nimbleness.

- An endowed faculty Chair in the Economics of Sustainability would provide:
 - » A faculty leader to coordinate research among the faculty in the Center and allocate program resources effectively across the group.
 - » Annual research funds to allow seed research for grant proposals and quick-response research on time-critical issues.



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- Two graduate fellowships in the Economics of Sustainability to facilitate recruiting of the best graduate students in this field.

Resources to power external connections

- An endowed Fund for Economics of Sustainability Communications would alert researchers in the Center to emerging research questions and support timely and extensive communication of research results to external groups.
 - » The fund would support two annual meetings:
 1. An annual Economics of Sustainability Roundtable meeting between faculty in the Center and representatives of interested industries, policy makers, consumer groups, NGOs, and foundations will inform Center faculty about new issues to study and communicate research results back to the external audience.
 2. Annual Heartland Environmental and Resource Economics Workshop. This event already has international stature, and keeps faculty in ACE connected to other prominent researchers in the economics of sustainability. Funds are needed for it to continue, and will allow key portions of the workshop to be recorded for a broad audience.
 - » A Director of Economic Sustainability Communications staff member would be hired to manage events, create and maintain a new website, and manage an enhanced stream of communications of research results and policy analyses.



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