



Northeast Regional Food Council Report



May 19, 2016

Strengthening partnerships to create a thriving, resilient community-based food system

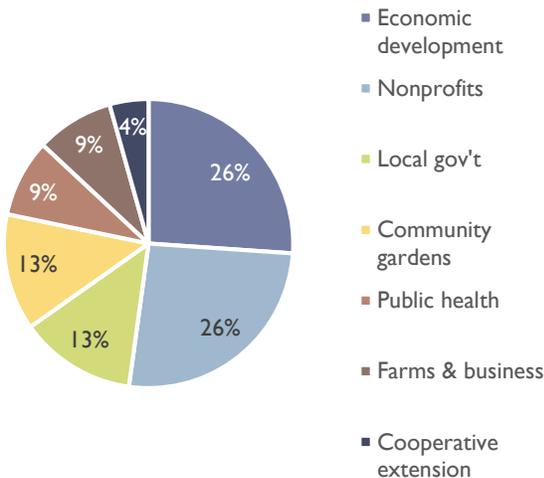
Touring the Warren County Produce Center, mapping supply chain assets, developing regional priorities, and building relationships were all part of the Northeast Regional Food Network Meeting attended by key community leaders. Working Landscapes partnered with Community Food Strategies and the Local Food Council of North Carolina to host this event as one of six regional gatherings to further connections, ideas, and synergies that will improve the local food economy.



Attendees toured the Warren County Produce Center, where 1000s of lbs of greens are processed every week for schools and other large-scale buyers. This facility is one of several Working Landscape initiatives to fill missing links in the regional supply chain.

Gabe Cummings, co-founder of Working Landscapes, set the need for a regional context: "We have become increasingly convinced that the solutions to food systems challenges in northeastern NC are going to be regional, due to the small size of local markets and shared logistics challenges. This event was well timed and really valuable to start a shared conversation with counties across the region."

Sectors Represented at Event



Council Happenings

Members of the following food networks in the region attended to share and learn from other initiatives:

- Off the Docks
- Outer Banks Food Council
- Roanoke Valley Local Food RoundTable
- Twin Counties Just Foods Group
- Warren County Food Council
- Wilson Food Network
- Working Landscapes

Attendees mapped existing and potential regional assets and infrastructure to further develop the context of a thriving regional food system that supports the local farmers with distribution outlets and consumer demand.

Developing Regional Priorities

Community Food Strategies facilitated a process to develop regional priorities so that communities and organizations can better align programs and contribute to common goals. Small groups each used a similar shared result or goal: *a thriving, sustainable community-based food system across all NC counties*. They developed indicators to track the shift toward that result and ranked the following as priorities:

- # of supply chain connections
- # of economic opportunities in food & farming for people of color and/or low-income individuals
- # of viable small farms
- % of population with chronic diseases related to diet or food production
- \$ spent on local food
- # of minority farm owners or principle operators

The groups brainstormed various partnerships, actions, and resources that would continue advancing this work. Review full summary at communityfoodstrategies.org

Selection of Participant Data from Regional Visioning Exercise

Shared Result:

A thriving, sustainable community-based food system across all NC counties.

Experience

What you would hear, feel, or see if the shared result were true:

- Drive-through restaurants selling local food
- Greater % of income on food
- \$ staying in the community
- Healthy choice = easy choice
- Inclusive and participatory systems
- Marginalized communities involved in and benefiting from decision-making
- Everyone knows how to cook and preserve fresh food
- Less lawns
- Sustainable farming practices
- Kids riding bikes on a greenway to a farm
- People walking to buy food
- Vibrant downtown
- More multi-generational activity around local food
- Young people aspiring to work in their hometown
- Composting at municipal level
- Multiple scales of robust supply chains

Indicators

What you could measure to track a shift towards the result:

- # of students graduating from sustainable agriculture college programs
- Social mobility indicators
- % of population that is food secure
- # of facebook posts with healthy, fresh food photos
- Decreased hunger among senior citizens
- # of jobs in rural areas
- % of population with a livable wage
- # of acres in small production
- \$ from local food economy
- # of local food supply chain businesses or facilities
- Race, gender, age of farmers
- # of supportive local food & farm policies
- # of institutions with local procurement policies
- # of farms using integrated pest management
- # of school gardens

What's happening

What is already happening in our communities to reach this result:

- Roanoke Valley Community Health Initiative around healthy food access, healthy living, and built environment
- Garysburg Advisory Board
- General transformation towards viewing agriculture as an economic driver
- No more manufacturing
- June 10th meeting about value-added production as an economic driver
- Rocky Mount Food Hub
- More interest and conversations around local food
- Some farmers markets
- Agriculture-rich communities value farming
- Abundant, productive land
- Slight increase in infrastructure supporting the local food supply chain
- Lots of landowner interest

Greater Impact

What we could do more of to have greater impact:

- Help small-scale producers enter distribution outlets and work together to compete with big industry
- Grow more food advocates and farmers through education and capital access for start-ups
- Illustrate how the existing and new components of the food system could work
- Provide more technical assistance for grassroots organizations
- Promote buy-in and funding support at institutional level for procurement
- Diversify who is having the conversations and who has access to opportunities
- Help farmers get GAP certified to enter new markets

This is a portion of the ideas generated at this regional gathering. Local food networks plan to continue collaboration and encourage more community involvement. View more at www.communityfoodstrategies.org.