COMMUNITY FOOD STRATEGIES

NC FOOD COUNCIL NETWORK
Policy Engagement in 2018

Over the course of 2018, food councils in North Carolina have begun to show an increasing interest in changing their community food systems through recommending policy change.

As discussed in this New Food Economy piece, where the NC network of food councils is mentioned, this trend of policy engagement at the local level is happening across North Carolina and across the nation. From writing letters of support to their Congresspeople to joining statewide strategy calls to support each other in local work, members of food councils in NC are engaging more collaboratively and are making their voices heard across the state. Check out these short stories from the network organized by region for ideas and inspiration.

> *"Our 2018 Candidate Forum gave our citizens an opportunity to meet their local to national level representatives, and bring community food issues to the forefront of policy conversations. The forum served as a catalyst for increased political involvement and support for improving food issues within McDowell County and western North Carolina", says Alex Portelli, member of the McDowell Local Food Advisory Council."*
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> *--A quote from the lead of the McDowell Local Food Advisory Council about their first food focused candidate forum hosted in 2018*

Statewide:

- Eleven food councils (Alamance Food Collaborative, Asheville-Buncombe Food Policy Council, Cape Fear Food Council, Capital Area Food Network, Charlotte-Mecklenburg Food Policy Council, Orange County Food Council, Davidson County Local Foods Network, Durham Farm and Food Network, Forsyth Foodworks, Just Foods Collaborative, Watauga Food Council) and over 120 other community organizations advocated to maintain SNAP program structure and funding in the 2018 farm bill through a letter writing and media campaign.

SNAP Putting Healthy Food Within Reach — USDA Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program

- Six food councils (Asheville-Buncombe Food Policy Council, Charlotte-Mecklenburg Food Policy Council, Davidson County Local Foods Network, Greater High Point Food Alliance, Orange County Food Council, and the Onslow Food Council) came together to explore food recovery regulations.
- Several food councils and their partners have joined together to explore local and state policy opportunities to decrease sweet and sugary beverage consumption.

McDowell 2018 Candidates Forum.

Northeast Region:

- Pitt County Farm and Food Council worked with Eastern Carolina University to develop a composting policy to reduce food waste.
- Warren County Local Foods Promotion Council conducted three forums to receive community input. Of particular concern is the closing of a grocery store, which limits access to healthy foods by limited resource populations. The Council is seeking policy and programmatic solutions that will benefit this population, as well as offer opportunities to local farmers. Findings have been reported to the Board of County Commissioners.
- Representatives from the Beaufort Healthy Eating Active Living (HEAL) Collaborative and the Just Foods Collaborative signed letters in support of exploring sweet & sugary beverage consumption reduction policy.

Residents of Warrenton give their opinion on opportunities for local farmers and food choices.

Southeast Region:

- The Men and Women United for Youth and Families' Youth Ambassadors met with their local legislators to learn about the NC General Assembly and to talk about food issues important to their community.
- The Cape Fear Food Council worked on council reorganization to prioritize policy work.

Triangle:

- Orange County Food Council:
  - Supported passing resolutions in Chapel Hill, Hillsborough and Carrboro to support maintaining SNAP funding and program structure in the 2018 Farm Bill.
  - Partnered with the Orange County Agricultural Preservation Board to draft a Present-Use Value (PUV) Tax policy brief and proposal for a new Agriculture Trust Fund using PUV program deferred taxes.
  - Co-hosted a Food Advocacy Training workshop with Community Food Strategies.

- Capital Area Food Network:
  - Worked with Wake County Board of Commissioners to officially adopt and fund the 2017 Food Security Plan and has worked to introduce and tailor the Plan to individual Wake municipalities for sign-on and adoption.
  - Co-managed implementation process and coordination of Wake County's Food Security Plan.
  - Advised on and supported recommendation for comprehensive urban agriculture planning in the City of Raleigh.

- Chatham Community Food Council:
  - Provided the Town of Pittsboro with zoning recommendations.
  - Hosted a focus group with farmers and food businesses to identify policy needs in the community.

Farmers and food entrepreneurs in Chatham County come together for a focus group to discuss local policy needs.

- Durham Farm and Food Network:
  - Led a successful grant submission with other food council partners for free technical assistance for Harvard's Health Law and Policy Clinic to explore policy opportunities at the local and state levels to lower sweet and sugary beverage consumption.
  - Supported the City and County of Durham in exploring one of their policy recommendations: the creation of a Food Systems Coordinator position within city and county government.

Triad Region:

- Forsyth Foodworks:
  - Focused on developing networks and partnerships in order to better influence policy efforts at various scales, from local to national level. Examples of this include helping to create and join, as a permanent organizational member, the Winston-Salem Urban Food Policy Council; joined Forsyth County's Agricultural Advisory Board; populated other boards with our members, including ZSR Foundation's Community Leadership Council, Kate B. Reynolds Charitable Trust's Local Impact Council, Neighbors for Better Neighborhoods, and the U.S. Solidarity Economy Network.
  - Proposed city adoption of the Good Food Purchasing Program through the Winston-Salem Urban Food Policy Council (pending).
  - Worked closely with the County's Healthy Corner Store Initiative to engage local retail, community members, and populate corner stores with healthier food options,particularly in leveraging County Health Educator funds toward supporting the program, starting a supporting community garden, and working with local urban farmers to help supply produce to corner stores.
  - Began formalizing plans for a hyper-local community wealth-building initiative via neighborhood-led food system development. One policy implication that arose out of that robust initiative has been working with the City of Winston-Salem toward the adoption of an organic land maintenance protocol for neighborhood parks in primarily low-income/-access neighborhoods across the city (still developing).

- Greater High Point Food Alliance (GHPFA):
  - Engaged in advocacy around reclaiming food from the school system.
  - Drew attention to the Guilford County School (GCS) System's choice to opt out of the Community Eligibility Provision, which stood to impact 58 schools and 28,000 students. GHPFA worked with a number of groups to raise awareness, and with children's programs, nonprofits, food pantries, families and schools to help complete Free & Reduced Meal application forms. GCS has since reversed their decision and gone back to providing free meals to these 58 schools.
  - Successfully advocated to the City of High Point to create an in-kind grant program to provide soil and mulch to local community gardens.
  - Successfully advocated for the creation of a Community Garden Coordinator position that is funded by High Point, Greensboro, and Guilford County and housed at the NC Agriculture Extension Office of Guilford County. This was a collaborative effort with all three municipal governments and NC Agriculture Extension Office.

Charlotte Region:

- Charlotte-Mecklenburg Food Policy Council:
  - Hosted a well-attended Food Advocacy Workshop to share advocacy tools and their policy efforts, and to plan for new collaborations.
  - Participated in Congresswoman Alma Adams' Hunger Initiative and connected constituents to legislative resources, allowing them to share stories and advocate for their own communities.

Mecklenburg County farmers come together to learn about the potential benefits of adopting a Voluntary Agricultural District Ordinance.

- Hosted multiple focus groups and did research in partnership with Mecklenburg Soil & Water Conservation District around the idea of the county adopting a Voluntary Agricultural District ordinance.

- Catawba Farm & Food Coalition (SC):
  - Engaged with their local governments on Comprehensive Plan updates to improve their language around agriculture, land use, transportation, and community health.
  - Engaged local candidates who were up for election in 2018 by giving them an opportunity to answer farm and food related questions developed from Carolina Farm Stewardship Association's 2018 Questions for Candidates.

Western Region:

- Asheville-Buncombe Food Policy Council:
  - Led by their Food Access Cluster, used robo-calls to inform community members about SNAP and Double-Up Food Bucks.
  - Supported the transition of the Double-Up Food Bucks program out from its start up at the council to regional leadership & management at Mountainwise - an important move as the council has made a commitment to not running "programs" but incubating ideas.
  - Held an event "Putting Resilience to Work: Food Policy in Action", which was a day-long convening that brought community organizations together to collaboratively tackle the ideal of an equitable, resilient food system.
  - Exploring establishing a local Ag Development and Farm Preservation Trust Fund using PUV program deferred taxes.

- McDowell County Local Foods Advisory Council:
  - Hosted a 2018 Candidate Forum, allowing food council members and over 100 members of the public to bring farm and food related questions to candidates running for office.

- Watauga County Food Council:
  - Launched a Food Policy Working Group
  - Successfully advocated for adoption of a resolution by their Board of Commissioners formally recognizing the food council and inviting the council to give regular food system recommendations to the Board.
  - Were asked by the Town of Boone to provide recommendations on how the Town can support the local food system.
  - Explored establishing a local Ag Development and Farm Preservation Trust Fund using PUV tax dollars paid back to the county as property leaves the PUV program.

The Watauga County Food Council hosted several public meetings as they launched their Food Policy Working Group.

There are many inspirational actions taking place in every part of the state around many different food system issues, and each step taken moves the network toward its food system goals. Connect with other councils directly if anything here is of particular interest to you and your work.

Keep watching this blog and our listserv foodpolicycouncils@ncsu.edu for more information and opportunities for collaboration on statewide and local issues. Sign up here.