

Baseline Assessment of Pitt County's Community Food System

July 2016



Background

This assessment is based on the six different categories of the food system (Justice and Fairness, Strong Communities, Vibrant Farms, Healthy People, Sustainable Ecosystems, and Thriving Local Economies) outlined in the Whole Measures for Community Food Systems framework, which was designed by the Community Food Security Coalition in 2009. This assessment work was part of a series of pilot baseline food system assessments that were completed in 2015 and 2016 by food councils in Alamance, Durham, Chatham, Johnston, Orange, Pitt and Wake Counties with support from Community Food Strategies. Community Food Strategies is a multi-agency initiative that is working to support the developing network of food councils across the Carolinas. The initiative is funded by Blue Cross Blue Shield Foundation of NC and is housed at the Center for Environmental Farming Systems with team partners at the Carolina Farm Stewardship Association, the Appalachian Sustainable Agriculture Project, Care Share Health Alliance and Carolina Common Enterprise. The data indicators in this assessment were chosen to create a baseline measurement of a community's food system. The analysis is meant to provide broad ideas around strengths, opportunities, weaknesses and threats to help inform a community or a food council as it engages in strategic planning around food system development. Overall, this assessment is designed to encourage people to think about food, agriculture, and community health from a whole systems perspective. Please email Carlye Gates (carlye@asapconnections) or Jared Cates (jared@carolinafarmstewardsd.org) if you would like copies of any of these assessments.

Introduction

The Pitt County Food Council Task Force (PCFCTF) is working to establish and maintain relationships among diverse organizations and community members in an effort to strategically shift our food system to one that is more supportive of the local community. Food Councils include representatives from all parts of the local food supply chain, which provides an opportunity to address community food system betterment on a macro level. For that reason, PCFCTF is working to become a community leader in understanding our food system and in creating a charter to establish a food council to serve the Pitt County community.

So, to better understand our community food system, we decided to participate in a pilot project with Community Food Strategies on baseline food system assessments across North Carolina. Olivia Whitt, a student at East Carolina University, under the guidance of the Community Food Strategies team and members of the PCFCTF, completed this assessment in July 2016.

What is a Baseline Food System Assessment?

A baseline food system assessment is a collaborative process that examines a broad range of food system-related data in order to inform actions for improving a community's food system.



The process of conducting a baseline assessment involves identifying the specific quantitative data points to collect, collecting the quantitative data, confirming quantitative data trends with stakeholder interviews, developing a system for organizing the data, sharing the findings, and using the findings to guide future planning and decision-making. Our assessment for Pitt County uses the [Whole Measures for Community Food Systems](#) framework. This is intended to encourage community members to think about Pitt County's food system from a whole systems perspective. The specific data indicators that were collected are organized into the following whole measures: Vibrant Farms, Community Health,

Sustainable Ecosystems, Thriving Local Economies, Strong Communities, and Justice and Fairness. The analysis portion of the assessment outlines strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats facing the different parts of Pitt County's community food system.

A baseline assessment is a relatively quick way to create a shared understanding of the realities of Pitt County's food system. This assessment was not intended to be extensive or comprehensive, but rather, serve as a way to start telling the story of what is going well, what is not going well, what we know, what we do not yet know, and to get a sense of what measures are still needed to tell the story of Pitt County's community food system.

The purpose of this baseline food system assessment was to engage key stakeholders in an analysis of Pitt County's community food system. We believe that this baseline assessment has the potential to result in many positive changes in our community by:

- ❖ Building a common, strategic vision of a more sustainable, resilient, and equitable food system;
- ❖ Fostering an awareness and understanding of our community food system;
- ❖ Identify possible gaps in information;
- ❖ Identify strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats facing our community food system;
- ❖ Creating alignment, build connections, encourage collaboration across multiple sectors that influence our community food system;

- ❖ Guiding priority-setting, strategic planning, and decision-making;
- ❖ Measuring progress, track change, and evaluate impact over time.

What's Next?

- ❖ PCFCTF will review the data and identify whether there is data that does not currently exist/is not currently reflected that is important to tell the story of the community food system. PCFCTF will identify strategies for collecting the needed data;
- ❖ PCFCTF will use the data to collectively shape the council's strategic vision;
- ❖ PCFCTF will set clearly-defined goals and priorities based on the strengths/assets, opportunities, and gaps identified in the assessment;
- ❖ PCFCTF will share the analysis of county's baseline assessment with a broad diversity of stakeholders and engage in strategic conversations with them about how the data can be used to build a more sustainable, resilient, and equitable food system.

Whole Measures for Community Food Systems Baseline Assessment Categories

[Justice & Fairness](#)

[Strong Communities](#)

[Healthy People](#)

[Sustainable Ecosystems](#)

[Thriving Local Economies](#)

[Vibrant Farms](#)

Justice and Fairness

Just and fair food and farms come from food systems deliberately organized to promote social equality, justice, worker rights, and health through all activities. Achieving justice and fairness is an ongoing and evolving process involving many members of a community. It is a process that cultivates appropriate venues to recognize and dismantle unjust systems and that works to create alternative just systems.

A food system that is just and fair:

1. Provides food for all
2. Reveals, challenges, and dismantles injustice in the food system
3. Creates just food system structures and cares for food system workers
4. Ensures that public institutions and local businesses support a just community food system.

Strengths

- 32 official partners of the Food Bank that operate as a food pantry
- >10 community gardens with a number of small gardens located in West Greenville, the most economically poor census tract in Pitt County
- A network of community garden partnerships has been initiated which seeks to include all community gardens in Pitt County and to support them in their efforts towards sustainability
- A community garden technician is in place to provide technical support for community garden start-ups and operation
- 91% increase in SNAP retailers from 2008-2012
- Multiple Faith Organizations that provide resources and opportunities for individuals with low socioeconomic status (SES)
- Pitt County Schools Summer Meals program provides free breakfasts and lunches at 10 school sites to children regardless of income levels
- Pitt County has a federally funded educational program called EFNEP (Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program). Two Cooperative Extension paraprofessionals are in place to teach families with children how to prepare healthy meals using the produce they receive from the Farmers Market, Food Pantries, etc.
- The Pitt County Council on Aging has a Meals on Wheels program which delivers meals to the home-bound elderly, ages 60 and over, who are unable to prepare their own meals and have no one else to do it for them.

Weaknesses

- Limited public transportation
- Food bank and most of their official partners are not open after business hours and on weekends. The working poor are often not able to receive the supplemental nutrition that they need.
- County Farmers Market does not accept SNAP, despite having >15% of the residents of the County using these benefits

- Questions have been raised in public forums regarding reports of the misuse of food acquired from food bank and other organizations
- Lack of official food bank agencies in areas of higher demand (food deserts)
- Healthy foods distributed through food bank are not equitably distributed throughout the community and rely solely on the agency's discretion
- Lack of child centric feeding programs provided by the food bank
- According to Feeding America's "Map the Meal Gap", 76% of people who are food insecure in Pitt County are eligible for government assistance
- Community gardens are still relatively unknown to most county residents. Establishing and sustaining gardens is a challenging task as it relies heavily on voluntary participation in a labor-intensive outdoor environment. Garden sites need uncontaminated soil, access to an inexpensive water source and land tenure with some security.
- The summer meals program for children is limited to those who are aware of the program and are able to get to one of the 10 distribution sites

Opportunities

- Build a mobile farmers market, so there are limited barriers to fresh produce
- Create an organized network with the Faith Organizations to better develop another food bank/partner alternative
- Use Pitt County Correctional Facilities to supply produce for local food bank. Currently, the local food bank sources some produce from correctional facilities in Wake County. This opportunity would not only teach inmates skills in gardening, but would also help supply the food bank with local food.
- Further develop town partnerships with our current and expanded community liaisons/key leaders
- Small urban farms located in food deserts with high unemployment rates can provide job opportunities for individuals with little or no access to transportation
- Create a local food assistance guide to make all available resources for the food insecure, accessible to county residents. The guide could be in print form and an online version maintained on the several governmental and other organizations' websites.
- Incorporate fresh fruits and vegetable dishes in the meals provided to children and the elderly through the various distribution channels

Threats

- Trust within the low SES populations for future projects and initiatives. Previously, when grant money was pulled or the funding otherwise ended, strong community ties were not maintained
- Repeal of legislation providing a tax credit to farmers who donate gleaned food in 2014

Partners Working in this Field

Food Bank of Central and Eastern NC: A nonprofit organization that provides food for people that are food insecure in 34 NC counties. *Lance Barton and Patricia Black*

Vidant Health and Vidant Medical Foundation: Provides medical care for 29 counties in eastern North Carolina. Helps support local initiatives that benefit the health of the community. *Kahla Hall*

East Carolina University: A public research university located in Greenville. Conducts public health and justice related initiatives within the county. *Stephanie Pitts and Ann Rafferty*

Pitt County Health Department: Provides clinical and community services to protect, promote, and assure the health of all people in Pitt County. *John Morrow, Robin Tant, and Allison Swart*

More research needed

- Assessment of organizations outside of the Food Bank and associates that provide or donate food
- Collect qualitative data on barriers to receiving adequate food assistance

Relevant Data

FOOD ACCESS/SECURITY			
Census tracts that are “Food Deserts” (low income and low access at 1 (urban) or 10 (rural) miles)			6
# of people living in food deserts, 2010 (Food Environment Atlas)			14,544 (8.65%)
Food Environment Index Rating		6.1 (out of 10) (NC=6.6)	
% limited access to healthy foods		3% (NC=7%)	
Food insecurity rate	NC: 18.3%	Pitt (2014): 21.1%	Pitt (2011): 22.5%
# of people	1,801,940	36,380	37,150
Child Food Insecurity Rate	26.1%	25.3% (2013)	24.2%
# of children	595,240	9715 (2014)	9,000
Estimated program eligibility among food insecure people	27% >200% poverty 73% <200% poverty	23% >200% poverty 77% <200% poverty	24% >200% poverty 76% <200% poverty

Estimated program eligibility among food insecure children	27% likely ineligible 73% income eligible	29% likely ineligible 71% income eligible	32% likely ineligible 68% income eligible
Average cost per meal	\$2.73	2.86	2.69
Additional Money Required to Meet Food Needs	\$870,957,000	18,360,000.00	\$16,291,900

Strong Communities

Food can be a common and unifying force socially, culturally, and spiritually. A strong food system builds strong communities across class, race, age, education, and other social categories. Cultivating leadership from within a community and forging relationships based on characteristics such as trust, respect, and transparency can strengthen resilience, build capacity and enhance engagement for change toward a shared vision of the whole community.

A food system that builds strong and resilient communities:

1. Improves equity and responds to community food needs
2. Contributes to healthy neighborhoods
3. Builds diverse and collaborative relationships, trust, and reciprocity
4. Supports civic participation, political empowerment, and local leadership

Strengths

- Large Faith community, which not only increases social capital, but also the community engagement efforts within the County
- Policy developers and political leaders are invested in the improved health of the County
- School System is very health oriented, with multiple projects that encourage healthy eating and physical activity
 - Dietitian for the schools of Pitt County
 - Programs such as Taste Explorers, Eat Smart Campaigns, and Summer Food Service Program

Weaknesses

- Currently the task force has limited representation of partners and key informants that live and reside in outlying Pitt County -
- There is no Farm to School program

Opportunities

- Use Faith Organizations to obtain community buy-in for Pitt County Food Council projects and initiatives
- Create interest among new residents of Pitt County in food system issues such as food access and local food initiatives
- There is a new NC Cooperative Extension Director with Food Council experience that that can provide guidance and support for the Pitt County Food Council

Threats

- Growing population: Pitt County experienced a population growth of >25% from 2000-2010. These new residents may not have the same community buy-in or involvement as long-term residents.

Partners Working in this Field

Pitt County Schools Child Nutrition Program: Provides nutrition education to children and families throughout the school year, in addition to a countywide summer feeding program. *Janie Owens and Leann Seelman*

Vidant Health and Vidant Medical Foundation: Provides medical care for 29 counties in eastern North Carolina. Helps support local initiatives that benefit the health of the community. *Kahla Hall*

Pitt Partners for Health: A community partnership with local representatives that are dedicated to improving the health of Pitt County residents. *Alice Keene*

More research needed

- Discover the resident awareness and use of Community Gardens, especially in West Greenville.
- Identify variables and data sources that could serve as indicators of healthy neighborhoods, and strong, community-oriented schools and faith communities
- Determine if there are local school gardens that could act as a focal point for community interest in healthy foods

Healthy People

Community and individual health includes our physical, social, mental, emotional, and spiritual well being. All of these dimensions are intrinsically connected to food and the food systems. For example, engaging with community members at farmers' markets promotes our social connectedness. Learning to prepare our own food contributes to our mental development and enhances our resiliency. Growing food helps develop our physical and spiritual awareness as we connect to larger natural systems. Whole communities need whole people and community food systems that increase access to healthy food while also cultivating broader dimensions of health.

A food system that promotes healthy people:

1. Provides *healthy* food for all
2. Ensures the health and wellbeing of all people residing in Pitt County
3. Connects people and the food system, from farm to fork
4. Connects people to local farms and promotes health and wellness

Strengths

- Vidant Medical Center Foundation funds multiple programs that not only provide food, but also nutrition education
- Pitt Partners for Health is the county-wide collaborative that actively responds to the compelling health needs of Pitt County residents
- Expansive health curriculums that educate health practitioners through East Carolina University and Pitt Community College, many of who remain in eastern NC after graduation
- Through Pitt County's Communities Putting Prevention to Work initiative (2010-2012) community partners implemented and enhanced environmental, policy and system-level changes to lower obesity and chronic disease risk
- Community and faith based initiatives have been established and are currently addressing many local food related needs and issues
- Strong agricultural heritage with significant available land for food farms that support health lifestyles

Weaknesses

- There is a strong cultural preference for "country" foods that are high in calories, fat and sodium. In addition, most celebrations revolve around these foods
- High prevalence of unhealthy cooking practices or lack of knowledge how to cook healthy
- Lack of knowledge regarding the long-term benefits of good nutrition for individuals and families
- Presence of food deserts and food swamps
- Limited public transportation
- Pitt County adult and childhood obesity rate is significantly higher than the state average, with both county and state percentages increasing over time
- Higher rates of nutrition related illnesses among African American residents compared to other races

- Local farmers who grow healthy food have poor access to markets and vendors such as schools, restaurants, grocery stores, etc.

Opportunities

- Explore funding opportunities for grants that exist in addition to Vidant Medical Foundation
- Work within the Faith Community to teach healthy cooking and how to host healthy “potlucks”
- Expand the use of mass media and social media to increase public knowledge about nutrition related illnesses
- Secure increased input from underserved community members through advisory councils, listening session, or other means on food related issues
- Educated and help connect people to existing community resources
- Identify healthcare providers and health champions to advocate for nutrition policy and environmental changes

Threats

- Grant funding that encourages healthy eating may be negatively influenced by the current political environment
- Easy access to unhealthy foods such as fast food restaurants or corner stores, which are often less expensive than local, healthy food
- Growing mistrust of underserved communities with health organizations and advisors

Partners Working in this Field

Food Bank of Central and Eastern NC: A nonprofit organization that provides food for people that are food insecure in 34 NC counties. *Lance Barton and Patricia Black*

Vidant Health and Vidant Medical Foundation: Provides medical care for 29 counties in eastern North Carolina. Helps support local initiatives that benefit the health of the community. *Kahla Hall*

East Carolina University: A public research university located in Greenville. Conducts public health and justice related initiatives within the county. *Stephanie Pitts and Ann Rafferty*

Pitt County Health Department: Provides clinical and community services to protect, promote, and assure the health of all people in Pitt County. *John Morrow, Robin Tant, and Allison Swart*

Pitt County Schools Child Nutrition Program: Provides nutrition education to children and families throughout the school year, in addition to a countywide summer feeding program. *Janie Owens and Leann Seelman*

NC Cooperative Extension - Pitt County: An extension of a state program that offers different opportunities to increase the profitability and sustainability of Pitt County’s food system. *Andy Burlingham, Lauren Dail, Joni Young Torres, and Leigh Guth*

Pitt County Planning and Development: Develops and implements plans and policies related to land development to strengthen the sustainability of the county. *James Rhodes and Alice Keene*

More Research Needed

- Discover where residents are obtaining nutrition education
- Determine how many patients receive nutrition advice or nutrition education at their primary care or hospital visits. Analyze whether patients adapted their diet according to the medical advice.

Relevant Data

HEALTHY PEOPLE		
Children 2-4 years of age	Total % overweight/obese=28.9%	
Prevalence of overweight	13.9% (NC=15.8%) 31 st in state	
Prevalence of obese	15.0% (NC=15.4%) 58 th in state	
Adults who did not consume 5+ F/V a day (Eastern NC)	86.7%	
Adults that participated in 150 minutes (or vigorous equivalent minutes) of physical activity per week (Eastern NC)	45.9%	
Physical Activity outside work Eastern NC	74.1% (NC=76.8%)	
Adult Obesity Rate	37% (NC=29%)	
Diabetes rate	9%	
# of fast food restaurants	2007	2012
	132	156 (+18%)
% of restaurants that are fast food		56%
# of full-service restaurants	102	123 (+21%)
Fast food restaurants make up more than half of restaurants in Pitt County. Additional research: mapping of fast food vs. full service restaurants and where new fast food restaurants		

have been opening.

FOOD ASSISTANCE

SNAP participation	2009: 12.12%	2014: 15.85%
% eligible participating	2008: 65%	2010: 78%
Percentage of pregnant women enrolled in Medicaid who received prenatal WIC program services	71.95% (NC=75.93%)	
Percentage of Children less than 12 months of age enrolled in Medicaid who received WIC program services		
# of children <1 year of age enrolled in Medicaid	1,380	
# of children <1 year of age receiving both Medicaid and WIC services	1,085 (78.6%) (NC=71%)	
Percentage of children 1 to 5 years of age enrolled in Medicaid who received WIC program services		
# of children 1-5 years of age enrolled in Medicaid	5,678	
# of children 1-5 years of age receiving both Medicaid and WIC services	3,561 (60.2%) (NC=56.8%)	
Overall, there is a substantial gap in eligible women and children enrolled in WIC		
WIC FMNP Participating Farmers Markets (http://www.nutritionnc.com/wic/fmarket.htm)	1 (Pitt County Farmers Market)	
FRPL participation rate	54.38%	
SFSP participants	1.11%	
Meals Provided	3,156,741 meals	
Total pounds of food distributed	3,748,630 lbs	
Total value of food distributed	\$6,372,671	
Households served	104,861 households	
Individuals served	223,403 individuals	

Sustainable Ecosystems

Sustainable, balanced ecosystems are built upon interdependent relationships, depend upon clean air and water and healthy soil, and provide the foundation for all life. Developing whole communities and strong and just food systems means honoring this interdependence and enhancing ecological integrity through our actions. A sustainable food system depends upon a sustainable ecosystem and produces, processes, and distributes food in a way that supports and enhances rather than destroys ecological systems.

A food system that supports sustainable ecosystems:

1. Sustains and grows a healthy environment
2. Promotes an ecological ethic
3. Enhances biodiversity
4. Promotes agricultural and food distribution practices that mitigate natural resources depletion
5. Enhance greater production with smaller environmental footprint
6. Promote profitability

Strengths

- Trends suggest that the number of Pitt County farms is decreasing, but the size of farms is increasing
- Policies and Programs that support a sustainable ecosystem
 - Riparian Buffer Policy
 - Federal, State and grant funded conservation programs
- County offers education programs in schools to teach students of all grade levels the importance of Reduce, Reuse, and Recycle and natural resources awareness
- Many existing partners in the PCFC task force support sustainable eco-system, especially sustainable farmland

Weaknesses

- Few farms practice sustainable farming methods such as organic farms, pasture raised animals, and alternatives to farm pesticides
- No official compost program
- Tobacco Transition Payment Program ended in January 2014, decreasing additional financial resources. Now, farmland owners do not have the income to sustain conservation efforts and growers lack the security that leased farms will be retained long enough to benefit from best management practice investments
- Organic farming can have a greater negative soil health issue due to soil tillage
- Large farms have a greater variety of resource concerns over a broader area
- Historical perspective of farming practices

Opportunities

- Encourage all farmers to practice sustainable farming methods
- Develop connections in the restaurant/grocery sector and share eco-friendly business practices
- Assist producers with certifications needed to sell products in more markets

Threats

- Increased development strains local environmental resources
- Higher input costs and variability of commodity prices
- Natural resource depletion

Partners Working in this Field

Pitt County Soil and Water Conservation District: Works with USDA, Natural Resources Service, and other agencies to reduce soil and nutrient loss and drainage problems within the county. *Bryan Evans*

Pitt County Planning and Development: Develops and implements plans and policies related to land development to strengthen the sustainability of the county. *James Rhodes*

Coalition for Healthier Eating: An organization that strives to educate consumers about the benefits of eating healthy and sustainably produced food. *Maxine White*

NC Cooperative Extension - Pitt County: An extension of a state program that offers different opportunities to increase the profitability and sustainability of Pitt County's food system. *Andy Burlingham, Lauren Dail, Joni Young Torres, and Leigh Guth*

USDA – Natural Resources Conservation Service: Provides US farmers with financial and technical assistance to voluntarily implement conservation efforts. *Diana Irizarry, Mandi Stewart, Cathy Holmes, Marie Welch, and Jamie McDaniel*

USDA – Farm Service Agency: Administers farm commodity, crop insurance, credit, environmental, conservation, and emergency assistance programs for farmers. *Dale Leffelman*

More Research Needed

- Determine what sustainability practices restaurants and food supply stores are using
- Inquire with local restaurants about barriers from buying from local producers

Thriving Local Economies

Thriving local economies depend upon the ecological integrity of the earth, its ecosystem, and species living within those ecosystems. Thriving local economies form decisions that ensure the wellbeing of future generations. They account for hidden costs in decision-making and work to build systems that regenerate output (wastes) into input (resources). Thriving local economies may utilize decentralized, participatory, and democratic processes designed to be informed by diverse community members and based upon a community's assets.

A food system that promotes thriving local economies:

1. Creates jobs and builds long-term economic vitality within the food system
2. Builds local wealth
3. Promotes sustainable development while strengthening local food systems
4. Includes infrastructure that supports community and environmental health

Strengths

- People are able to easily grow and sell produce that they grow in the community gardens for supplemental income
- There is an increased demand for fresh, local, and organic produce
- Restaurants in the uptown district are increasingly supplying their restaurants with more local foods and are interested in networking with Pitt County Farmers
- Low cost of living, many of the members of the food industry can make a living

Weaknesses

- 90 Fast Food restaurants per 1,000 people - significantly higher than surrounding peer counties. This competes with the local food industry in both convenience and price.
- Many restaurants do not currently source their products from Pitt County
- Many corner stores in the rural areas of the county do not provide SNAP/WIC

Opportunities

- Create network between local restaurant owners and local farmers
- Many corner stores owners/operators are willing to sell fresh fruits and vegetables and many customers are willing to buy fresh fruits and vegetables. They just need assistance with acquiring certification for SNAP/WIC

Threats

- It is difficult to create economies of scale for the local, small farmer, making local produce sometimes more expensive. It will be important to remind people of the benefit of local food.

THRIVING LOCAL ECONOMIES

Poverty rate, 2010	23.4% (NC=17.2%)	
Child poverty rate, 2012	29.9% (NC=25.8%)	
Income inequality ratio (80 th percentile:20 th percentile)	5.6 (NC=4.8)	
2014 labor force	75,445	
Employed	71,597	
Unemployed	3,848	
Per capita income, 2014	\$23,439 (NC=\$25,608)	
Median household income, 2014	\$42,011	
Employment in Food System Occupations – Greenville (2015 est)	18.8%	
Average hourly earnings of Food System employees - Greenville	\$10.42	
# of grocery stores	2007	2012
	29	24
Grocery stores/1000 people	.19	.14
# of convenience stores	82	95
# of SNAP-authorized stores	75.33	144.17
SNAP-authorized stores/1000 people	.48	.84
# of WIC-authorized stores	32	31
# of fast food restaurants	2007	2012
	132	156
% of restaurants that are fast food	56.4%	55.9%
# of full-service restaurants	102	123
How often in the past 12 months did you buy locally grown F/V? (Eastern NC)	Never = 5.7% A few times a year = 12.9% Once a month = 10% 2-3 times per month = 27.1% One time per week = 35.7% 2 or more times per week = 8.6%	

Vibrant Farms

Vibrant farms are central to the health and vitality of community-based food systems. While diverse in scale, methods, crops and markets, farms that contribute to whole communities often embody practices that eliminate or minimize pesticides, support biodiversity, promote humane treatment of animals, and provide safe, just working conditions. Vibrant farms are often local farms that shorten the gap between farmer and consumer and actively contribute to sustaining and revitalizing regional food systems and economies. The continuation of traditional farms and practices, multigenerational family farms, and support for young farmers and immigrant farmers are essential to the future of farming, and food for all.

A food system that promotes healthy, vibrant farms:

1. Supports local, sustainable family farms to thrive and be economically viable
2. Protects and cares for farmers and farm-workers
3. Honors stories of food and farm legacy through community voices
4. Respects farm animals

Strengths

- Pitt County has a strong agricultural heritage and there is tremendous cultural respect for farming, farmers, and farmland
- Excellent soil and climate for profitable agriculture
- There are several policies that support farming and farmland such as Voluntary Agricultural District and Flood Land Reuse

Weaknesses

- Old drainage systems are under designed for current land use, causing the surrounding land to be wetter and more susceptible to flooding
- Many of crops that are sold are non-consumable or is feed for livestock
 - Only 4.6% of Pitt County farms are dedicated to fruits and vegetables
- Limited diversity exists in the farming industry
- There is a disconnect between small-scale farmers/urban farmers and heritage farmers

Opportunities

- Increase communication and networking between local farmers and local food providers
- Help local farmers capitalize on the growing consumer interest for local produce and meats
- Make local food more available to food insecure/low income people

Threats

- Urban expansion and rural neighborhood development with septic drainage systems diminish quality farmland area

Partners working in this field

Pitt County Soil and Water Conservation District: Works with USDA, Natural Resources Service, and other agencies to reduce erosion and drainage problems within the county.

Bryan Evans, PJ Andrews, and Caroline Sisley

NC Cooperative Extension - Pitt County: An extension of a state program that offers different opportunities to increase the profitability and sustainability of Pitt County's food system. *Andy Burlingham, Lauren Dail, Joni Young Torres, and Leigh Guth*

USDA – Natural Resources Conservation Service: Provides US farmers with financial and technical assistance to voluntarily implement conservation efforts. *Diana Irizarry, Mandi Stewart, Cathy Holmes, Marie Welch, and Jamie McDaniel*

USDA – Farm Service Agency: Administers farm commodity, crop insurance, credit, environmental, conservation, and emergency assistance programs for farmers. *Dale Leffelman*

More research needed:

- What is the most effective way to connect farmers to restaurants, markets, and food programs?

VIBRANT FARMS	
Data from 2012 Census of Agriculture. Census taken every 5 years (years ending in 2 and 7) http://www.agcensus.usda.gov/Publications/2012/Full_Report/Volume_1_Chapter_2_County_Level/North_Carolina/	
Total number of farm operators	583 (most farms have 1 or 2 operators)
Average age of principal operator	56.5 (55.2 in 2007)
Average years on present farm	22.2
Farmers on present farm for 2 years or less	7
Average years on any farm	24
Farmers on any farm for 2 years or less	5
In 2007, there were 13 farmers who had been on their present farm for 2 years or less; in 2012 there were only 7 primary. This indicates a decrease in new farmers joining the occupation/starting farms.	
Farming is the operator's primary occupation	232 (39.8%)
Principal operator lives on farm operated	252

Total number of female operators	136 (23.3%) (93 principal operators)
Principal operator is non-white minority	farms (%)
Spanish, Hispanic, or Latino	2 farms (1,988 acres)
American Indian or Alaska Native	-
Asian	1 (no data)
African American	11 (no data)
Total cropland	131,703 acres
Total harvested cropland	129,519 acres
Total number of farms	391
1-9 acres	6 (1.5%)
10-49 acres	44 (11.2%)
50-179 acres	66 (16.9%)
180-499 acres	58 (14.8%)
500-999 acres	22 (5.6%)
1000+ acres	58 (14.8%)
Median size of farm	84 acres
Family or individual owned	298 farms (76.2%)
Total market value of agricultural products sold	\$215,908,000
Total market value of crops sold	\$111,214,000
Farms with net cash gains	214 (55%)
Farms with net cash losses	177 (45%)
Hired farm labor	1,305 workers (178 farms)
Payroll	\$18,365,000
Migrant workers	555 (43 farms)
Unpaid workers	139 (290 farms)
Crop land treated with:	

Fungicide	21,981 acres
Herbicide	113,694 acres
Insecticides	79,073 acres
Nematicide	29,267 acres
Fertilizer	101,361 acres