

INSIGHT 07

SMALL FARMS ARE A DESIRED SOLUTION BUT STRUGGLE WITH VIABILITY.

Small farms were one of the most prominently mentioned solutions to the current food system. For use in this report, we use the USDA's definition of small farms: a farm that has a gross cash farm income under \$250,000. Within that definition, there are commercial and noncommercial small farms.

The shift to a direct-to-consumer model during the COVID-19 pandemic was seen as a positive shift that resulted from the crisis. Although small farms were discussed as a potential solution, participants recognized that they can struggle to make a profit. One participant mentioned that small farmers often work extra jobs to stay afloat. Especially when they are first starting their businesses.

Similarly, some participants expressed **frustration** that big agricultural industries and farms receive a larger share of state and local funding, leaving small farms and those in rural areas under funded and under supported.

Farmers and growers also expressed the need for consumers to become more educated about eating locally. Understanding the seasonality of North Carolina's agricultural system is a key part of consumer education. Direct-to-consumer models of buying local food need to be a long-term commitment, not a trend or a short-lived interest.

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, participants expressed **tensions** about small-scale operations abruptly shifting and trying to meet large-scale demand. This leading insight was similar to that of taking capitalism out of food due to the continued duality of monetizing food/agriculture and the shift toward viewing food as a right.

"If we're going to have a true food system that supports small farmers, it can't be a lifestyle and it can't just be selling into wealthy markets. People have to be buying from local markets because it's better, it's fresher, it's closer, it's easier for them to do than buying from wherever."

- YOUTH

"Farming profitability and farmer stress are big issues now – among systems, places, small and big farms. The farmers right now aren't making profits; it's an untenable situation. In a conversation just this morning, one farmer who would appear successful noted he is considering hanging it all up because he's not making any money."

- RURAL



Calls to Action:

Supporting the viability of small farms requires direct action. Specific actions include:

- Investing in and financing regional food systems infrastructure.
- Including small and minority business owners in decision making about that financing.
- Creating more capital for food-oriented development.
- Encouraging contracts with small farmers to provide food for local institutions.
- Increasing access to education on how to maintain farmland for small farmers.
- Promoting the increased awareness and support for buying local after COVID-19.