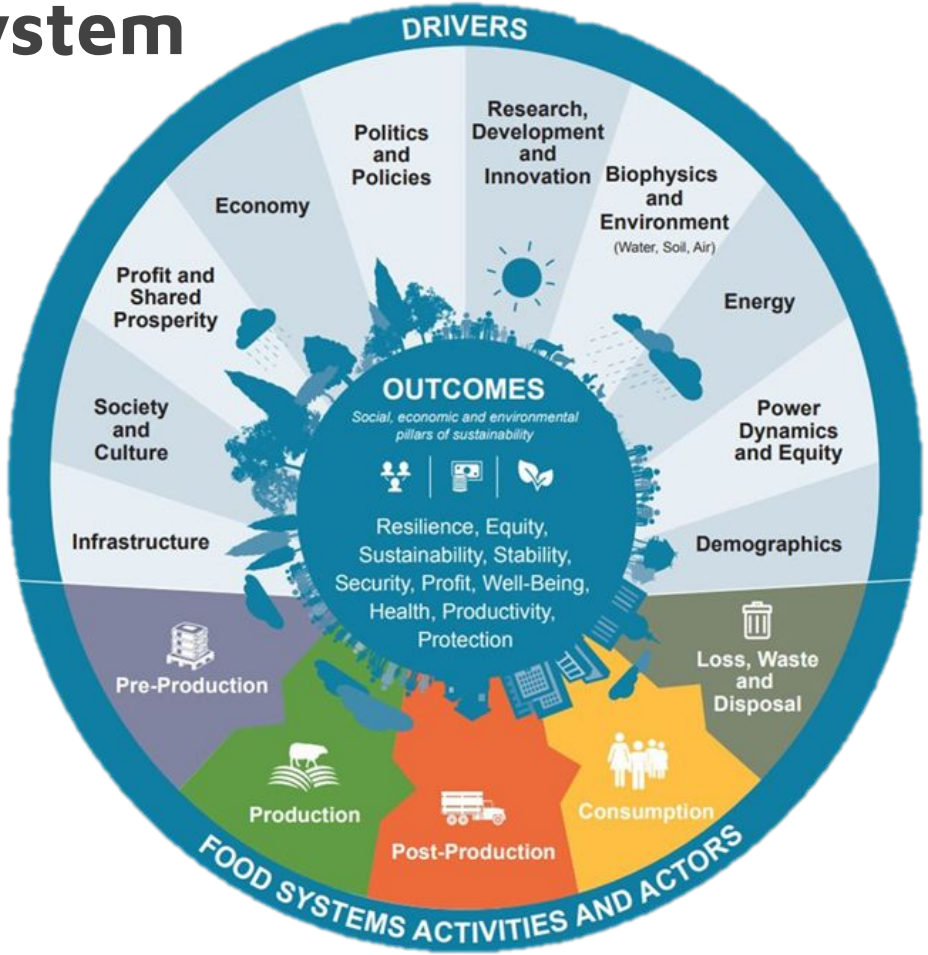
Tri-COG FEEDS (Food Ecosystem Economic Development Strategy)

Upper Coastal Plain, Triangle J, Kerr-Tar Councils of Government
Presented By: Mary Jane Lyonnais

The Food System

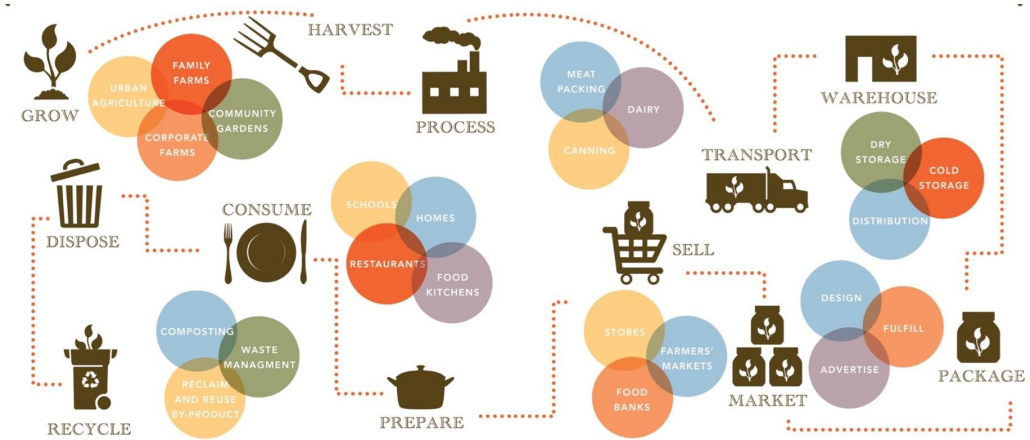


Graphic: International Institute for Sustainable Development

Project Overview

A regional food planning initiative to shorten supply chains, drive economic development, create quality jobs, enhance resilient practices, and foster equity in the greater region's food system.

- Collect quantitative and qualitative economic data to provide evidence and support for already existing, and future, work in the region around food systems
- Increase collaboration and understanding between food system sectors and players
- Identify means for local governments to participate in and support food system initiatives
- Intentionally integrate equity into proposed solutions



Tri-COG FEEDS

Background:

- Food System Recommendations to increase Rural-Urban Connectivity in each region
- The Triangle J, Kerr-Tar, and Upper Coastal Plain Councils of Governments (COG) joined together in an unique 17 county partnership to help fulfill and leverage multiple opportunities emerging from continued and growing interest in economic development in the local food sector.
- Funded under the Economic Development Administration's (EDA) Economic Adjustment Assistance (EAA) Program and the Kate B. Reynolds Charitable Trust
- Big Picture:
    a. What does current food system look like in this region?
    b. What could a potential for the food system look like?
    c. What are the potential economic impacts of supporting food system strategies?
    d. How do we get there as a region?

What are the intended short term goals?

1. Develop a shared understanding of the Tri-COG Region's food production and demand
2. Evaluate strengths and challenges of food system infrastructure for farm and food entrepreneurs of varying sizes, models and stages of development
3. Review policies, programs and investment mechanisms for building up the regional food system, while prioritizing equitable food value chains
4. Highlight opportunities and resources for small, minority, and underserved farmers to access diversified supply chains
5. Amplify diverse urban-rural and cross sector partnerships to maximize the growth and resilience of the food sector

Project Process

Baseline Assessment

Work with regional partners to review existing data on the regional food system and identify barriers to and solutions for increasing connectivity between urban and rural counties via supply chains, with a focus on creating equitable outcomes for small and beginning farmers and farmers of color

Economic Impact Modeling

Conduct economic impacts analyses of food system strategies that increase connectivity of the region and support economic development (i.e. quality job creation, living wages, farm and food business retention and expansion, ownership, etc.)

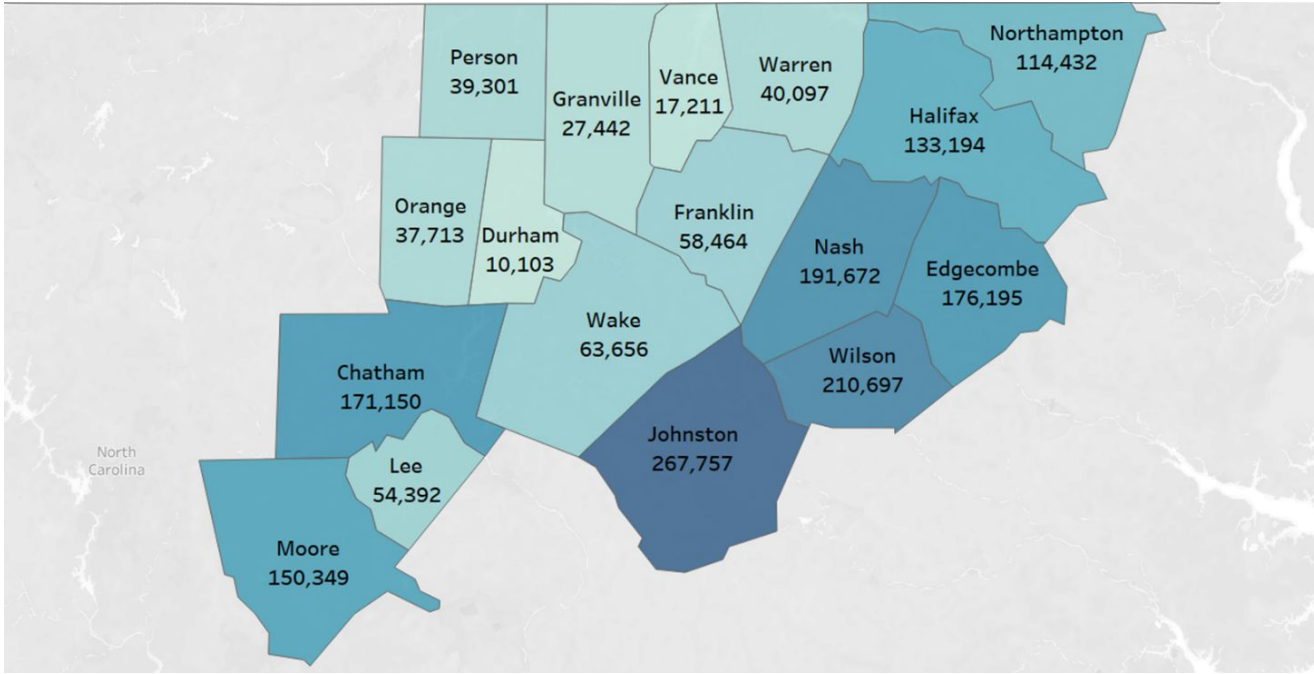
Policy Impact Approach

Review local and state policies, programs and investments that increase connectivity, who they are benefitting and elicit reactions from stakeholders and policymakers. Create a space for decision makers, food system practitioners and community members to share knowledge and needs

The Tri-COG Region

Counties: Chatham, Durham, Edgecombe, Franklin, Granville, Halifax, Johnston, Lee, Moore, Nash, Northampton, Orange, Person, Vance, Wake, Warren, and Wilson.

- Tri-COG Region Total: $1.8 billion sales in agricultural production (14% of state's overall production by market value)
- **< 1% ($13.9 million)** of product is sold direct-to-consumer or intermediated out of total market value of **$1.8 billion** in the Tri-COG region according to the 2017 Census of Agriculture
- **How can we capture the dollars that are being spent on food in this region so that they stay in the region?**



Market Value of Agricultural Products Sold ($1,000), 2017
Tri-COG Region

Expert Input & Insights

- **Voices at the table**
  - Long-term, historically marginalized groups in food & ag have been left out of the conversation, need to be intentional about hearing underrepresented voices to reduce potential negative impact
  - Need to move beyond the “usual suspects” and build trust
- **Public attention and momentum towards food systems work**
  - Pandemic hit food entrepreneurs and farmers hard, but generated more public attention towards food systems - Important to show opportunity to get buy in
  - New federal resources are available but how do we best use them?
- **Land use & capital challenges**
  - “Barrier fatigue,” need to move towards actionable solutions
- **Need to work regionally, cross traditional geographic and county boundaries**
  - Geographic and economic disconnect between urban Triangle and Northeastern, Eastern rural counties - Project should reflect rural partners as equal partners
  - Barriers between farmers, producers, distributors, buyers, other food entrepreneurs, final consumers

Economic Impact Modeling

Focus Group Insight: *Everything doesn't rise to the level of an NRCS grant ($10,000). A farmer may only need $700 for a piece of equipment. Is there a way to have a small, quick-turnaround loan or grant program? Many people don't have the time or patience for paperwork like a 20-page application for $2,000.*

→ Model economic impact of investments, policies, and priorities based on input-output modeling and social accounting matrix framework (IMPLAN), use custom economic impact multipliers that were built specifically for the local and regional food system sector

Scenario example: $1,000 equipment grant for every farm of up to 100 acres in 17 counties in Tri-COG region

- $5.6 million dollar investment in the program above would yield an estimated **$9.1 million** economy-wide impact for the Tri-COG region
- If we ran the program for five years ($28 million investment), we would see an economic impact of **$46 million**

Intervention Points For Actionable Policies*

Production	Intermediary	Consumption
● Land Use ● Workforce Development ● Production Practices/Crop Selection ● Equipment & Resources ● Capital ● Labor	● Logistics ● Marketing ● Financials ● Infrastructure ● Labor ● Transformation	● Certification Policies ● Incentives/ Disincentives ● Cost ● Convenience ● Staffing ● Access

***Equity: Increasing access and opportunity to all of the above**

Supply Chain #1: Industrial Agriculture

Large Scale Commercial Agriculture

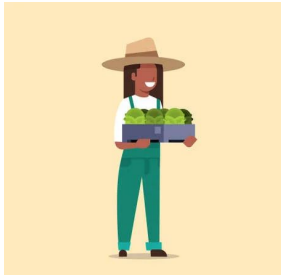
Large Scale Processor

Large Scale Distributor

Large Food Purchaser

Consumer

Supply Chain #2: Direct-to-Consumer Local Food



Small Scale Farmers

Local Farmers Market

Consumers

Supply Chain #3: Regional Aggregation

Farmer Cooperative

Local Food Hub

Local Distributor

Smaller Retailer

Consumer

Discussion Questions

1. Are there local or state policies, programs or specific investments that would help our region to capture more of the money that is spent on food?
2. What are tangible ways that we can we ensure that local, regional supply chains are equitable and increase participation along the dimensions of race, ethnicity, and geography (rural/urban)?
3. If you are a food grower or food business, could you see yourself participating in this third supply chain? Why or why not?
4. What other local and regional supply chains should we explore as a region?
5. What resources that local government could provide would be needed along the supply chain to meet the demand?

Successes/Lessons Learned: Member Government Survey Insights

Survey respondents: ~ 21 Commissioners, Economic Development, Elected Officials, Workforce Development, Staff, Citizens, Non-Profit (50% UCP, 30% Kerr-Tar, 20% Triangle J)

- 30% of respondents are either somewhat or very familiar with the food system in our region
- 95% of respondents believe that strengthening local and regional food systems in North Carolina is either somewhat or very important
- 53% of respondents were aware of some food system policies and practices, but not many & 10% were aware of quite a few and 22% were not aware of any or were not sure
- 47% currently support food system initiatives
  - Of the respondents that did not support, 63% were not sure how to support such efforts
  - Of the respondents that did not support, 37% could not because of internal constraints
- **<u>72% of respondents were interested in economic development opportunities in the food system and 72% were interested in how local governments can get involved</u>**

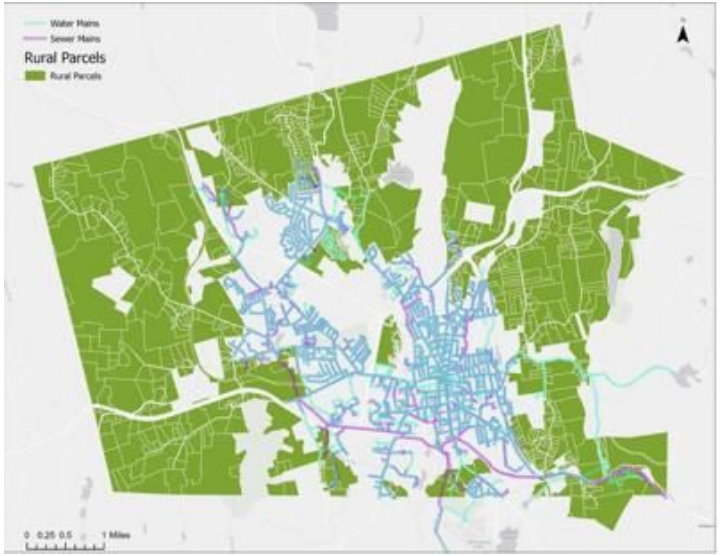
How can the COG help?

1. Assistance with securing funds for food system initiatives (76%)
2. Facilitating food system conversations with non-government actors along the food-value chain (70%)
3. Education on food system policies and practices around the state and country (65%)
4. Facilitating cross-county or regional collaboration across governments (65%)

How do we put this into practice?

What influences supply chain factors?

- Land Use Plans, Comprehensive Economic Development Plans
- Dollar Allocations
- Production and Purchasing Policies
- Agricultural Education, Workforce Exposure



Who has influence over these factors?

- Local Government
- County & City Planners
- Economic Development Officials
- Workforce Practitioners
- Food System Practitioners
- Citizens

What is the intended long term impact?

1. Increased Economic Prosperity
2. Enhanced Focus on Equity in the Food System
3. Resilience and Recovery from Future Economic Shocks
4. Improved Public Health Outcomes
5. Better Environmental and Sustainable Practices

Questions?

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