



Local Food Program

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NC STATE EXTENSION

NC FarmLink

## Local Farms & Food Profiles

### Discussion Points

The Local Farms & Food Profiles highlight selected data points from the 2017 and 2012 USDA Ag Census in a visual infographic. Our goal was to make the information readily available to elected officials, local government professionals, local agriculture advisory boards, teachers, and of course, the general public. By reviewing the infographic, users can quickly gain information on how important agriculture is to our local economy and how agriculture contributes to our local and regional food system.

We have also made it easy for the regional multi county Councils of Government to use the regional aggregates information on agriculture in their respective member counties. In this manner, agriculture and its importance to each level of government can be readily addressed, shared, and reviewed at any meeting, workshop, or gathering that highlights the Council of Government activities and mission.

The Local Farms and Food Profiles are designed to be easy to share, print, and utilize in a number of different settings for a variety of audiences, including elected officials, advisory boards, planners, economic & community developers, small business developers, and other entities. The profiles were designed to serve as a starting point for larger discussions around the development of local food systems among a variety of stakeholders.

### Sharing This Information with Local Governments

These resources are intended to help local governments and communities understand the changes in the agricultural economy as reflected in the 2012 and 2017 USDA Agriculture Census. By using this resource and the [Local Food Program Tools](#) communities can implement projects and policies to bolster their local food and agriculture economies. At the state level, the Local Food Program can communicate trends in local food economies to community partners, identify trends affecting farm viability, and develop additional community-based projects and statewide programming that promote production, marketing, and consumption of food caught or grown in North Carolina. To support local projects, Extension can provide measurement tools, assistance accessing free or low-cost technical assistance, and utilizing resources to judge the cost and feasibility of many farm and food projects, helping communities save valuable time and resources. Some potential partners for food system development include:

- Planners
- Economic & Agricultural Developers
- Councils of Government
- Boards of County Commissioners
- Agriculture advisory boards
- Soil & Water Conserv. District Boards
- Farmland Preservation Boards

### **Talking Points for Community Groups and Broader Audiences**

The infographics are useful for discussions about local and regional food systems and enable the nontraditional partners and community groups to be involved in food councils or food security initiatives. Some of these partners and their affiliated projects might include:

- Health departments hosting and promoting farmers' markets
- Schools sourcing from local farms
- Institutional partners such as hospitals or correctional institutions increasing local food purchases
- Food pantries and food banks increasing access to fresh foods
- Other community nonprofits and civic groups

### **Talking Points for Economic Development, Government Agencies, & Councils of Government**

The profiles are useful for county and region level food system discussions among participants who make decisions about the local food economy.

Some "starting point" questions may be:

- How can these components of the local agriculture economy and food system be influenced by local and intergovernmental policies and plans?
- How can you include agricultural stakeholders in strategic planning processes?
- What do the trends in these profiles demonstrate? What assets exist? What are the gaps?
- Are there opportunities for the CoG and other entities to provide institutional support for initiatives to encourage growth and prevent loss relative to these data points?

### **Talking Points about the "Nuts and Bolts" of the Food System:**

The profiles are helpful in describing the food economy in your county and region. Direct-to-consumer sales, for example, are one of the strongest indicators of a healthy farm-to-fork system because they indicate a direct connection between farmers and consumers. Some USDA data even suggests that those farms and local food businesses with high direct-to-consumer sales survive and grow at a higher rate than other small businesses. (reference below).

Similarly, a new pair of parameters in the 2017 Ag Census indicated operations and sales for intermediated food sales that are sold through food aggregators including retail markets, institutions, and food hubs for local or regionally branded products. Another example considers the number of animal farms and the value of animal products, which can provide significant economic impact, but may require more processing and storage infrastructure. This may present an opportunity for your local government to become involved. They can also create the opportunity to consider and discuss larger issues of environmental sustainability and land use.

Other questions you may want to ask about the nuts and bolts of your local food economy might include:

Where are the products in fruit, nut, berry, and vegetable sales being sold? If they're mostly fresh produce, is there an opportunity for processing infrastructure, such as freezing or chopping, that could open additional institutional markets such as hospitals or schools?

If direct-to-consumer sales are down and there are few or no farmers' markets nearby, consider exploring why previous efforts for local farmers markets, if any, were not successful and consider new market

locations. Public health departments can be great partners, especially with SNAP EBT promotion and double buck programs.

Many NC counties show a rise in the economic impact of agritourism, which emphasizes direct farm impact and land preservation. Consider ways to enhancing impact from agritourism sites, such as farm stands, catering events, partnerships with other tourism sites, as well as integration with Chamber of Commerce marketing efforts.

### **Missing Data, Missing Change Arrows, or Declines**

If your county has a data point stating “insufficient data,” that indicates there was not enough data to publish based on USDA rules. No matter your role in the local farm and food system, please encourage farmers to participate in the 2022 census survey. Until then, consider conducting your own county- or town-level farmland inventory to better understand where farms are located, what they grow, and what their primary market channels are.

Similarly, you may notice downward pointing arrows depicting decreases in the data from 2012 to 2017. While our profiles cannot provide specific reasons for those losses, it may help to look back over time to see if there are obvious reasons that could contribute to the decline. For example, if a large farm has closed down, been sold into development, or been passed on to younger generations who are no longer farming at full capacity, the overall county values may reflect this loss. Other issues, such as volatility in labor, farm commodity markets, farm product exports, along with development pressure in peri-urban areas may be underlying causes of those declines. Each county in North Carolina is home to a [North Carolina Cooperative Extension](#) office. Each NCCES office serves as an excellent local resource for more in-depth information about your local food economy.

### **Additional Information**

The Local Food Program also provides additional [resources](#) for communities and governments interested in developing local food economies, including videos, webinars, case studies, a local government planning & economic development toolkit, a local food supply chain infrastructure map of the state, and business development resources for farmers and food entrepreneurs.

[The Local Food Economies](#) initiative provides resources, tools, and information to non-agricultural agencies across the state that are working to build economically viable local food systems. LFE supports the work of local government and economic development agencies as they seek to expand the capacity and potential of businesses within the local food value chain.

This material is based upon work supported by NC State Extension [Local Foods Program](#), NC State Extension [FarmLink](#), and the [EmPOWERing Mountain Food Systems Project](#) of the [Center for Environmental Farming Systems](#). For more information, contact Hannah Dankdar, Local Food Program Manager, NC Cooperative Extension, [hannah\\_dankbar@ncsu.edu](mailto:hannah_dankbar@ncsu.edu).

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