



Vibrant Communities
- Robust Region

OUR LOCAL FOOD AND FARM SYSTEM AT A GLANCE

2013





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INTRODUCTION

This summary is drawn from a comprehensive local food system assessment for the CONNECT Our Future project. This research included a thorough inventory of existing food production and consumption data by county, as well as investigations into regional food system assets including infrastructure, markets, accessibility, and the food waste stream. The full assessment identified the significant data indicators for local food systems throughout the CONNECT Our Future project region, and can be used as a resource for the region's communities to conduct their own, more detailed assessments based on specific needs. This paper summarizes major findings from the assessment research and discusses key opportunities and actions for the region based on these findings.



FINDINGS

OPPORTUNITIES

ACTIONS

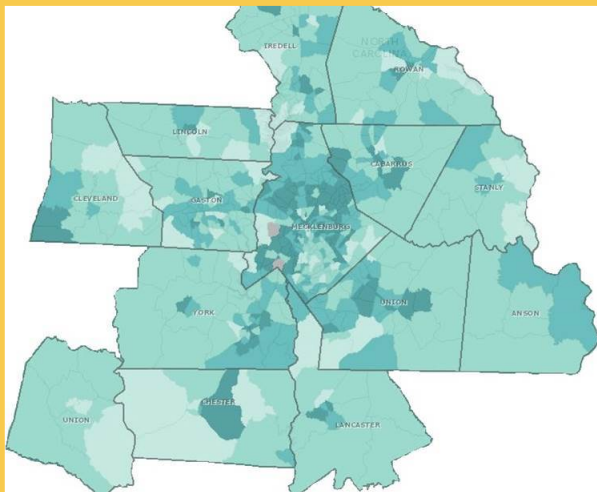


FINDINGS

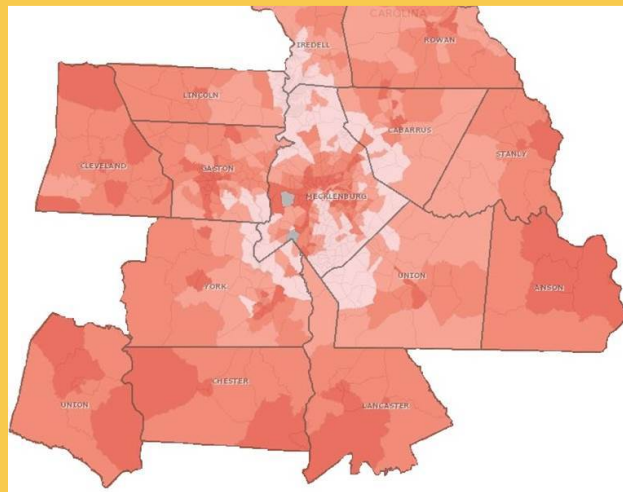
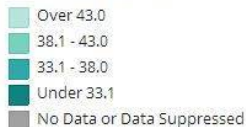
The Region at a Glance

Approximately 80 percent of residents in the project area live in urban areas and 20 percent live in rural areas.

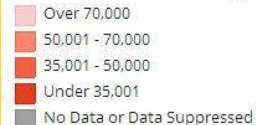
Compared to the nation, the CONNECT Our Future project region has a higher rate of diagnosed diabetes (9.7 percent compared to a national average of 8.5 percent), a considerably lower rate of obesity (27.7 percent compared to the national average of 35.7 percent), and, though a regional average is unavailable, the counties in the region generally exhibit higher rates of diagnosed high cholesterol compared to the national average of 33.5 percent.



Median Age by Tract, 2007-11



Median Household Income by Tract, 2007-11



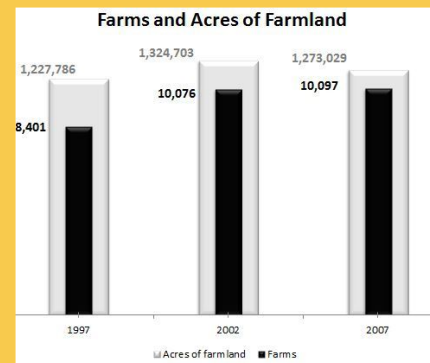
FINDINGS



Local Food Production

The CONNECT Our Future project region is home to 10,097 farms and 14,642 farmers. Small to mid-sized farms between 10 and 180 acres are the most common, accounting for 84 percent of all farms. Between 2002 and 2007 overall farmland acreage and average farm size both decreased (-3.9 percent and -4.5 percent respectively).

Total agricultural receipts reported for the region in 2007 totaled over \$1.2 billion, a 29 percent increase from the nearly \$928 million reported in 2002. However, across both years far more farms in the region reported low sales figures than reported high sales figures. The vast majority of farms in the region had sales of less than \$10,000 in 2007 (83 percent). In 2007, the total number of farms reporting net cash income gains was 3,662 while the number reporting net cash income losses was nearly twice as high at 6,435.



Only 5.2 percent of farms in the region are growing fresh fruits and vegetables, however they do produce a wide variety including the 22 types of fruits and vegetables that account for over 53 percent of those most commonly consumed by the region's residents.

FINDINGS

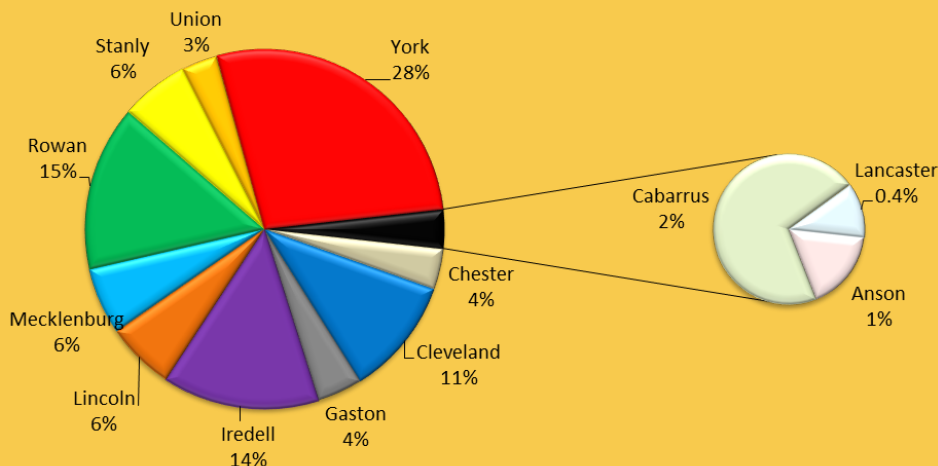
Resident Food Consumption & Spending

Based on 2012 population estimates, the residents of the CONNECT Our Future project region spend \$5.8 billion per year on food: \$3.4 billion on food consumed at home and \$2.4 billion spent on food consumed away from home.

In the same year, residents spent \$763.2 million dollars (about 13 percent of total food purchasing) on fresh fruits and vegetables that can be grown locally. In comparison, farms in the project region produced an estimated retail equivalent of around \$100 million dollars of the same fruit and vegetable products.

Each year, Charlotte's residents spend an estimated \$156 million on fresh fruits and vegetables, which is more than three times the retail value of all fruit and vegetable products sold by producers of the CONNECT Our Future project region combined.

\$3,654,000 in Direct Sales by County (2007)



FINDINGS



Equity in the Food System

An estimated 16 percent of the population in the CONNECT Our Future project region lives in poverty.

According to the USDA and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 28 percent of the residents in the region have low food access and 79 percent have inadequate fruit and vegetable consumption.

Seven of the ten worst paid jobs in the United States are in the food industry.

The average annual wage for residents as a whole in the project region is \$27,500 compared to farmworkers and laborers in the region who earn \$22,590 per year, animal slaughter and processing workers who earn \$23,140 per year, and food preparation and service workers who earn \$20,830 per year.

87 census tracts in the CONNECT Our Future region (15 percent of all census tracts in the region) have been identified as “food deserts” by the USDA’s Food Access Research Atlas.



The North Carolina Department of Environment and Natural Resources estimates that Mecklenburg County, as North Carolina's most populous county, generates more food waste than any other county in the state at approximately 108,781 tons of municipal solid food waste per year. Food waste is estimated to constitute as much as 15 percent of the total municipal solid waste disposed in Mecklenburg County.

According to the County's 2012 Solid Waste Management Plan, Mecklenburg County has already achieved an overall waste reduction rate of 40 percent from its baseline year of FY 1998/1999.

OPPORTUNITIES

Food systems are cross-cutting, reaching into public health, economic development, and agriculture. By creating a strong community-based food system we foster vibrant farms, healthy people, strong communities, healthy ecosystems, and thriving local economies, all of which lead to overall prosperity for every community in our region.

Local agriculture is an economic driver

2011 Gross receipts, sales, commissions, and income from trades and businesses, as reported on annual business income tax returns



The CONNECT Our Future project region's farm economy is in a period of transition. To some extent, change is being driven by a global push for the consolidation of the food system. Other shifts are occurring simultaneously. In the decade between 1997 and 2007, the region experienced a 67 percent increase in farms producing fruits and vegetables. Direct Sales - the USDA category used to describe transactions directly between farmers and consumers - have almost doubled and are expected to continue growing, bolstered by strong demand for locally grown food. ***For the project region, the research finds a \$662 million gap between the amount of money residents spend on fresh fruits and vegetables that can be grown in the region, and the retail equivalent sales of these same fresh fruits and vegetables produced by local farms.*** In this context of transition, the potential for expanding local markets for local farm products is significant.

OPPORTUNITIES

Local food builds community health

A balanced diet high in fruit, vegetable, and lean protein consumption is associated with lower rates of chronic disease, and overall improved health.

Evidence of the correlation between local food and positive health impacts can be seen in recent research studies. In her Master's thesis, Lindsey Mayes conducted a study of shoppers at ten farmers markets in Kentucky and found that farmers market shoppers consume more fruits and vegetables per day on average than 75.6 percent of Kentuckians as a whole.

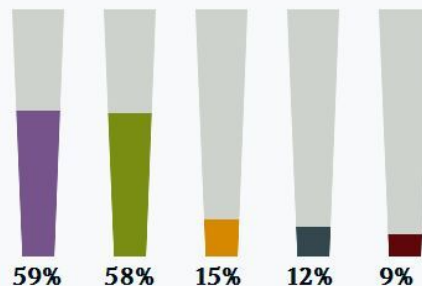
In the economic modeling study "Local Food Impacts on Health and Nutrition," researchers looked at national data and found that for each additional farmers market present in a county, obesity and diabetes rates decrease by 0.07 and 0.03 percent, respectively.

North Carolina foods span the school meal tray

WHAT KINDS OF LOCAL PRODUCTS ARE YOU BUYING?

- Fruit
- Vegetables
- Fluid milk
- Baked goods
- Meat or poultry

59% said fruit
followed by vegetables at 58%



From the USDA's Farm to School Census

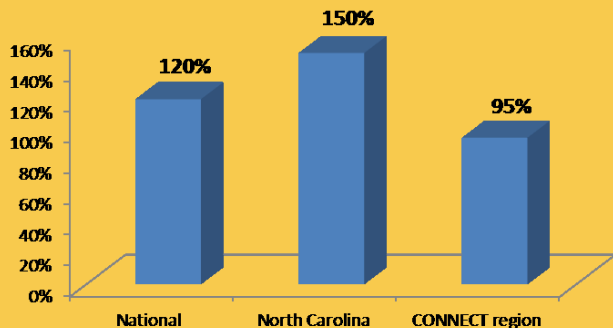
OPPORTUNITIES



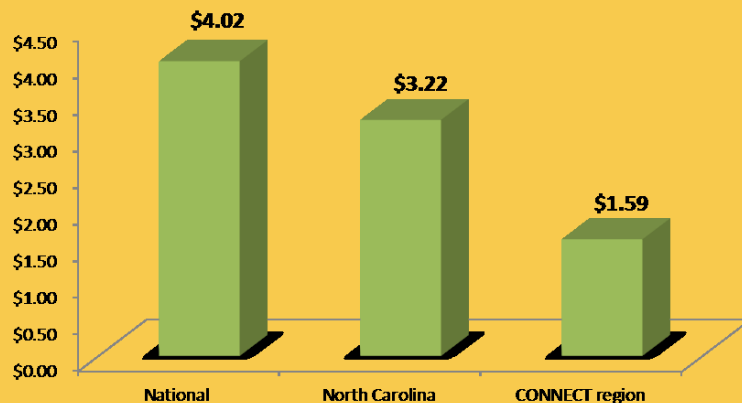
Demand for local is growing

Across all markets - from direct to consumer to the largest regional grocery chains - there is growing demand for local food sourced from local farms. With targeted promotion and outreach, and improvements in local infrastructure to accommodate more local products, there is ample room to grow markets as well as welcome new farmers.

Growth in Direct Sales 1997-2007



Per-Capita Spending on Local Food (2007)



OPPORTUNITIES

Local food programs are already up and running

Several regional branding programs already exist in the area to add value to local farm products, such as the North Carolina Department of Agriculture's "North Carolina Farm Fresh" program, Hillsborough-based Piedmont Grown NC's "Piedmont Grown" program, or the SEED Foundation of North Carolina's "Buy Fresh Buy Local" program.

The CONNECT Our Future region is already home to several annual food and farm events (e.g., the Charlotte area's Know Your Farms Tour, the Statesville Pumpkin Fest, the York County Ag+Art Tour) and to active Farm to Institution programs.



SATURDAY ONLY

PROFFITT FAMILY FARMS
SHELLEY AND BRIAN EAGAN,
STEVE AND DIANE PROFFITT
150 OLD HOME PL, KINGS MOUNTAIN
From I-85 take Exit 108 west on US-74 4
mi, exit Oak Grove Rd right 0.2 mi

Proffitt Family Farms raises 100% grass-fed beef. The farm is Animal Welfare Approved and is an American Grass Fed Association producer. The farm store will be fully stocked with all beef cuts. Come see where your meat is grazed, walk through certified organic pastures, and pet the horses.

704-739-1666 | proffittfarms.com

STOWE DAIRY FARMS
TIM AND GWEN STOWE
169 STOWE DAIRY ROAD, GASTONIA
From I-85 take Exit 17 south on Hwy 421
4 mi, right on Crowders Creek Rd 4 mi,
right on Stowe Dairy Rd

This third generation heritage farm raises all-natural, grass-fed beef and offers it for sale. Sorghum cane is harvested in the fall and made into syrup using old time processes. The Christmas tree farm opens the day after Thanksgiving! Farm activities for the young and young at heart.

704-228-9826 | stowedairyfarms.com

LEWIS FARM
ROBBIE & CATHY LEWIS
330 LEWIS RD, GASTONIA
From I-85, take Exit 20 north on New Hope Rd 1.2 mi, right on Austin Rd, right on Acapulco Dr, left on Monterey Park Dr, right on Lynn Rd

This fourth generation family farm uses sustainable farming practices of the 1930s-40s. Grass-fed beef, pastured pork, brown eggs, and produce for sale. Enjoy free samples of beef, pork, and eggs, as well as hay rides, pony rides, and barnyard animals. Kids can play on a hay mountain complete with slide!

704-842-1208 | lewisfarm.org

MAPLE SPRINGS FARM
PATSY LINDBERGER
906 DALLAS STANLEY HWY, DALLAS
From I-85 take Exit 20 north on New Hope Rd (Hwy 279) 4 mi, right on Dallas Stanley Hwy (Hwy 279) 1 mi

This seasonal family farm has berries, fruits, and pumpkins, both you-pick and ready-picked. The farm stand offers motley produce, snack foods, jams, salsa, pumpkin bread, fall décor, berry cider, and slushes. Take a wagon ride tour, and let your children enjoy pumpkin picking, the learning center, nature trail, and playground.

704-748-1488

APPLE ORCHARD FARM
ART DUCKWORTH
640 MAKIPOSA RD, STANLEY
Off NC-27 4.3 mi on the right

This self-sustaining farm uses environmentally sound practices to raise beef cattle, pastured pork and free range laying hens. Learn about composted manure, a solar-powered well and reed saving from heirloom vegetables, including a green bean variety in his family since 1792.

704-263-2635 | appleorchardfarm.com

Smoke will be on-site at Apple Orchard Farm

Smoke
SMOKE
ATTOR COWEN

VEHICLE PASSES AVAILABLE ONLINE AT WWW.KNOWYOURFARMS.COM



There are at least 67 farmers markets in the 14 counties (one farmers market for every 37,451 residents) providing local food to local community members.

The 14 counties experienced a 103 percent increase in direct sales from 2002 to 2007, going from \$1.8 million dollars to nearly \$3.7 million dollars.

ACTIONS

Through the research, strategies to "support local" have been identified. The following pages include key areas for action to support local food systems development in the CONNECT Our Future project region.

Bring Food System Issues to the Forefront of Regional Planning

- Engage in innovative agricultural policymaking to create supportive environments for farming.
- Review regulations already in place that may be hindering the production or sale of locally produced farm products
- Ease the burden of creating and maintaining community gardens by offering property tax exemptions to established plots or can examine laws that may prohibit residents from engaging in other agricultural pursuits (e.g., keeping chickens or bees) within city limits.



ACTIONS

Support Farmers and Local Food Production

- Support farmers' efforts to satisfy local demand by providing training and assistance to market their products to local consumers as well as retail and institutional buyers.
- Collaborate with groups that already have the resources and knowledge needed to help new and beginning farmers, and find ways to help them expand their capacity and reach more individuals.



ACTIONS

Connect Residents to their Food System



- Support direct marketing channels by promoting existing outlets, assisting with their expansion, or by providing workshops and training for farmers on relevant topics—salesmanship and display, best food safety practices, food regulation, marketing and promotion
- Increase consumer knowledge and awareness of where food comes from, how it is produced, the impacts of the food system on communities and the environment, and the relationship between food and personal health through hands-on events like farm tours, farmers markets, farm festivals, public gardens, and public awareness campaigns.
- Partner with local media (television, radio, newspapers) and marketing agencies to promote what is being grown in the area and where it is being sold to community members.

ACTIONS

Address Equity and Access in the Food System

- Address the lack of equity in the food system by shifting to solutions based on lifting people out of poverty while continuing to address the immediate needs of people in hunger.
- Investigate methods for increasing the accessibility of local fresh foods by making these foods more available in the places where low-income community members already shop.
- Conduct community outreach about the availability of local food options .
- Increase awareness of where low income community members can use their SNAP benefits to purchase local foods.
- Organize opportunities to help less mobile residents access the transportation they need to shop for food.



ACTIONS

Conduct Additional Research



- Conduct additional research in the region to understand how residents define local, to identify the messages and values that resonate most with them, and to determine the communications channels they use most often.
- Partner with local media to deliver clear and consistent messaging that mirrors the values and benefits residents associate with buying local food and supporting local farms as revealed in the research findings.
- Further research needs to be conducted to understand how food is moving around the region, what the capacity and opportunity is for these existing pieces of infrastructure to make room for local food distribution, processing, etc, and where gaps exist that may be barriers to further local food system development.
- Conduct further research to determine ways to improve the efficiency of food waste disposal in the region.

ACTIONS

Foster Communication and Collaboration Among Diverse Area Stakeholders

- Collaborate with leaders of the smaller communities within the CONNECT region from the very beginning.
- Engage stakeholders, e.g., farmers, food entrepreneurs, food industry buyers, decision makers, agriculture specialists, health and human services representatives, in formative planning processes. This step will promote project buy-in and simultaneously identify sources of unknown local knowledge, capacity, and resources.
- Let local stakeholders know that their efforts with this particular project will give them a means to increase their own abilities to work effectively in their local communities and access residents' desire to support local farms and the local economy.





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