

“Local Food: NC Highlights” - Dr. Richard C. Reich, Assistant Commissioner, NCDA&CS
NC Sustainable Local Food Advisory Council Meeting –2/2/10

My comments will provide background with some history of activities related to local food initiatives. Most of this information was compiled from websites of the organizations involved.

In December The *Institute for Food and Development Policy/Food First* published a report (No.21) titled Food Policy Councils: Lessons Learned. I will begin with some excerpts...
“The first Food Policy Council started in 1982 in Knoxville, Tennessee. Since then Food Policy Councils have been established at state, local and regional levels across the country. Some have remarkable success stories. Others have failed, disbanded, or spun-off into other service and non-profit organizations.” This report reviews lessons learned from “North America’s three-decade experiment in formulating local food policy...”

Food Policy Councils (FPCs) began as a way to address the food system as a whole, often bringing the weight of local, county or state government behind grassroots initiatives...a group of representatives and stakeholders from many sectors of the food system...

“Councils generally have four functions:

- To serve as forums for discussing food issues,
- To foster coordination between sectors in the food system,
- To evaluate and influence policy, and
- To launch or support programs and services that address local needs.”

According to the report, “There is no one right way for a council to be structured, but there are trade-offs for each variation...The lack of staff is a key challenge for many councils, and can cause councils to dissolve. Half of state level FPCs are government agencies, and some of those that are not actually part of government were created by government action. On the other hand, most county and local level FPCs are entirely independent of government.”

“Food Policy Councils range from informal groups without steering committees; to more formal groups with a chair and executive committee. These... groups sometimes include several subcommittees that specialize in researching and making recommendations in a certain area.”

“There is no one secret to success for Food Policy Councils. There are however some common needs. In order to change food policy, FPCs need to be taken seriously by the governmental bodies and other institutions they hope to influence.” We need to maintain balance and credibility to receive support and move forward. “Attempting to influence government policy without these relationships is likely to be quite difficult. FPCs embedded in government may have an easier time getting access to (at least part-time) paid staff, and other resources like meeting space.”

From 2001 through 2003, North Carolina had a State Food Policy Council. Membership included representatives from many of the same groups that are here today (Food Bank, Farmers, DPI, DOC, DHHS, Agribusiness, NCDA&CS, etc.) For various reasons, this effort slipped away, but now we have an extraordinary opportunity to succeed.

The South Carolina Food Policy Council, managed by the SC Department of Agriculture, is a forum for food, health and agricultural stakeholders to share ideas, collaborate on solutions and research, investigate and report on the state’s food systems, the sustainability of agriculture in the state and how agriculture affects the people of SC. They held their first “Sustainable SC Local Food Systems Workshop” January 29 in Columbia (100 people participated). SCDA manages three regional state Farmers Markets; they have about 85 community based farmers markets.

North Carolina is very fortunate to have a number of organizations, activities and resources that help to address our purposes to promote local food and improve nutrition:

Eat Smart, Move More NC - a statewide movement that promotes increased opportunities for healthy eating and physical activity wherever people live, learn, earn, play and pray. A multi-disciplinary team composed of statewide partners works to increase opportunities for healthy eating and physical activity and oversees the implementation of the Eat Smart, Move More NC movement to Prevent Overweight, Obesity and Related Chronic Diseases Building on what has already been done; half-way through their five-year plan (2007-12)

The Physical Activity and Nutrition (PAN) Branch formed in 1997, is housed within the NC Division of Public Health, NC Department of Health and Human Services. PAN Branch works to promote increased opportunities for physical activity and healthy eating through policy and environmental change.

The North Carolina Fruits & Veggies Nutrition Coalition formed in 1996, provides a forum for members to share ideas and resources to better plan and implement fruit and vegetable programs at the state and local level. Members come from government, academia, industry, media and other non-profit and private organizations.

NC Dept. of Public Instruction - The Child Nutrition Programs impact the nutrition, health, and the physical well-being of children in public and nonpublic schools, residential child care institutions, and charter schools. More than 800,000 children on average per school day benefit from the National School Lunch Program and more than 260,000 per day participate in the School Breakfast Program. Also includes: National School Breakfast Program, Special Milk Program, USDA Fresh Fruit & Vegetable Program, Afterschool Snack Program, and Seamless Summer Food Service Program.

The UNC Center for Health Promotion and Disease Prevention addresses pressing health problems by collaborating with communities to conduct research, provide training, and translate research findings into policy and practice. The Center seeks to reduce health disparities through an emphasis on community-based participatory research. The CDC selected HPDP to be one of its first three Prevention Research Centers in 1985. Now comprised of 33 academic institutions, the PRC program is an interdependent network of community, academic, and public health partners that conduct prevention research and promote practices proven to promote good health.

The North Carolina Department of Commerce is the state's leading economic-development agency. The department's mission is to improve the economic well-being and quality of life for all North Carolinians. The mission is carried out by a wide range of activities. Among them are: serving business and industry, marketing North Carolina and its brand; supporting workforce development; and strengthening communities.

NC State Grange - a non-profit, family oriented organization founded in 1875 and dedicated to community service. This organization has a special interest in agriculture that dates back to its historical roots. The Grange promotes agriculture as an essential industry for our economy and promotes the wise conservation of natural resources and the environment.

NCFB - North Carolina Farm Bureau Federation, Inc. is a private, non-profit, grassroots organization that has been actively promoting farm and rural issues since 1936 through governmental relations, marketing, field representation, agricultural education, member services and other programs.

The North Carolina Farm Transition Network seeks to ensure that working farms remain in agricultural production by assisting retiring and aspiring farmers in the effective transition of farm businesses. NCFTN was organized through the cooperative efforts of a diverse group of state government and non-profit organizations concerned about the continuing loss of family farms in North Carolina, and the numerous costs and burdens this loss brings to our state's economy, environment, and the health and well being of its all North Carolina citizens.

ASAP –Appalachian Sustainable Agriculture Project helps create and expand local food markets that will preserve our agricultural heritage, give everyone access to fresh, healthy food, and keep our farmers farming. Their mission is to collaboratively create and expand regional community based and integrated food systems that are locally owned and controlled, environmentally sound, economically viable, and health-promoting. Number of programs: Appalachian Grown, Farm Promotion and Support, Local Food Guide, grant opportunities, Family Farm Tour, etc.

CFSA - Carolina Farm Stewardship Association's mission is to promote [sustainable agriculture](#) in the Carolinas by inspiring, educating and organizing farmers and consumers. CFSA [events](#) include Farm & Garden Tours, On-Farm Dinners and our annual Sustainable Agriculture Conference. CFSA envisions a regional food system that is good for our farmers, good for our families, and good for our land.... See their searchable food guide to help us find local foods.

Community Supported Agriculture is an international movement that is providing people with an alternative to the global food system. During the past 25 years, several thousand CSA's have formed in the United States. CSA's are a popular way for consumers to buy local, seasonal, fruits and vegetables directly from a farmer. In states like NC where development has been rapidly occurring, CSA's help many small farms remain viable and help to assure there will be agricultural land, green space, and locally grown food for years to come. The CSA program seeks to restore direct contact between farmers and consumers, putting a human face on agriculture and our food supply.

The Land Loss Prevention Project (LLPP) was founded in 1982 by the North Carolina Association of Black Lawyers to curtail epidemic losses of Black owned land in North Carolina. LLPP was incorporated in the state of North Carolina in 1983. The organization broadened its mission in 1993 to provide legal support and assistance to all financially distressed and limited resource farmers and landowners in North Carolina. Activities include “promoting sustainable agriculture and environment.”

RAFI - The Rural Advancement Foundation International - USA cultivates markets, policies and communities that support thriving, socially just and environmentally sound family farms. While focusing on North Carolina and the southeastern United States, they also work nationally and internationally.

The Center For Community Action – a community-based nonprofit organization in Lumberton, N.C. - is working with other community and institutional agents to develop and implement proactive strategies to address the job losses in Robeson County. For 24 years, the CCA has been a base for both grassroots, multiracial community action and empowerment programs. Its mission

is to organize and empower individuals, families, communities, and institutions in order to improve the quality of life and the equality of life in their community.

Food Banks / Feeding America Network - we have seven members in the NC network. Food Banks are non-profit organizations that provide food to people at risk of hunger in counties across North Carolina. Food Banks distribute millions of pounds of food through partner agencies including soup kitchens, food pantries, shelters, and after school programs for children.

Sadly, hunger remains a serious problem in North Carolina. Over 2.2 million people in the Food Bank's 100-county service area struggle each day. Many of the people served by the Food Bank's network are children and the elderly. Many of the families served are the "working poor" – people who work hard and still have to choose between eating and other basic necessities such as medicine and housing.

CEFS – the Center for Environmental Farming Systems was established in 1994 by [N.C. State University](#), [N.C. A&T State University](#), and the [N.C. Department of Agriculture & Consumer Services](#) to serve as a center dedicated to sustainable agriculture research, extension, and education. CEFS develops and promotes food and farming systems that protect the environment, strengthen local communities, and provide economic opportunities in NC and beyond. Over the past year, CEFS and its partners gathered information from across food system sectors, conducted regional meetings, facilitated targeted working issue teams, and hosted a statewide summit last May. The outcome of this process is a **Statewide Action Guide for Building a Sustainable Local Food Economy in North Carolina** with action ideas for policy makers, educational institutions, government agencies, etc. (expected soon.)

NC CHOICES - NC Choices promotes sustainable, local food systems that enhance the economic, environmental and nutritional health of North Carolina. This group supports farmers, extension agents, and processors with information, technical training and networking opportunities to improve production and increase access to new business opportunities. They also research production practices; develop partnerships, business models and marketing programs to enhance consumer access to local, high-quality, sustainably raised foods, and promote the value of community-based food systems.

SARE or Sustainable Agriculture Research and Extension, started in 1988 - NC Cooperative Extension Service (jointly managed by NCSU and NCA&TSU), in collaboration with farmers, governmental and non-governmental organizations will educate and train extension workers and other agricultural advisors in concepts and practices that support agricultural sustainability.

Growing Small Farms is a website that began in 2002 after a survey revealed that approximately 95% of local farmers regularly used the Internet. The site has since grown to over 300 pages and receives up to 10,000 visitors each month. Wide range of resources on production, marketing, training, conservation, "buy local guide", etc.

EFNEP – Federally funded cooperative program of NCA&TSU and NCSU. "Helping families stretch food budgets and improve nutrition for 40 years." The Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP) provides a specialized program, which is designed to help Pregnant Adolescents to have healthy babies with a strong focus on nutrition education.

North Carolina State University's Department of Food, Bioprocessing and Nutrition Sciences (FBNS) makes significant contributions to the state and nation's food processing industries. In

North Carolina food processing has grown, diversified, and become a vital economic force by providing jobs and adding value to raw agricultural commodities. Extension faculty and staff play a significant role in providing assistance through educational programs and applied research.

NCMarketReady - N.C. State University's Program for Value-Added & Alternative Agriculture became N.C. MarketReady in October. The new name, N.C. MarketReady, communicates the scope of the program's work, including providing business tools and resources, training, etc. and a value-added cost-share program funded by the Tobacco Trust Fund Commission.

In addition, the Golden LEAF Foundation's recent "Local Foods Initiative" has been gratefully acknowledged...

North Carolina Sea Grant provides research, education and outreach opportunities affecting the North Carolina coast and its communities. Since 1970, North Carolina Sea Grant has been a valuable resource for scientists, educators, local officials, government agencies, coastal businesses and the public to find unbiased, scientifically sound information about the state's coastal ecosystems. Initiatives and projects include: fisheries, seafood science and technology, water quality, aquaculture, community development, law and policy, and coastal hazards.

North Carolina Rural Economic Development Center – created in 1987 the Rural Center's mission has been to develop, promote, and implement sound economic strategies to improve the quality of life of rural North Carolinians. The center serves the state's 85 rural counties, with a special focus on individuals with low to moderate incomes and communities with limited resources. The center manages a multi-faceted program that includes conducting research into rural issues; advocating for policy and program innovations; and building the productive capacity of rural leaders, entrepreneurs and organizations.

NCDA&CS provides a number of key programs supporting local foods and improved nutrition:

The Food Distribution Division has been addressing the "nutritional well being" of our citizens since 1950's. The program began with surplus USDA commodities, now includes food for 362 agencies: public schools, residential child care, emergency feeding organizations, soup kitchens, Indian program, summer feeding, etc. totaling \$52 million. The division has two warehouses and 47 people who manage and move these products every day.

They also work with our marketing division to operate the statewide "Farm to School" program. Since 1997, this program has transported fresh fruits and vegetables directly from NC farms to schools across the state from August to June and has grown to 19 items and almost \$700,000.

Goodness Grows in NC, since 1980's – 2000+ member companies and grower members

Got to Be NC is our statewide marketing initiative identifying products grown, produced, and manufactured in state. Consumers identify products produced in state at retail, restaurant, and direct market outlets by looking for the label. This program educates and encourages consumers to ask for NC locally produced products on menus across the state. Got to Be NC also conducts the "Best Dish Contest" and provides the local dish cooking show every week on WRAL. This program offers five segments throughout the day to alert consumers of the availability of NC farm products in season, and provides enticing recipes to drive them to direct markets and retail stores to purchase local products.

Flavors of Carolina shows link NC products directly with retailers, restaurants and institutional outlets. These shows, hosted by NCDA, have been key events to market products produced in state to buyers from across the southeast. Buyers meet directly with growers and local companies. Hundreds of products have gained market share as a result of this program. Surveys of participants have shown increasing sales results in the millions of dollars.

NC Farm Fresh – direct marketing from NC farmers to consumers

Certified Roadside Markets – about 130 local growers across the state

NCDA&CS operates five regional farmers markets and supports farmers markets statewide, including many of them on the Department’s website, listed by county... Food stamps are accepted at some Farmers Markets.

NC is one of 38 states with the WIC Farmers’ Market Nutrition Program (FMNP) which is associated with the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children, popularly known as WIC. The WIC Program provides supplemental foods, health care referrals and nutrition education at no cost to low-income pregnant women and to infants and children up to 5 years of age, who are found to be at nutritional risk. The FMNP was established by Congress in 1992, to provide fresh, unprepared, locally grown fruits and vegetables to WIC participants, and to expand the awareness, use of and sales at farmers’ markets.

ADFP - North Carolina’s Agricultural Development and Farmland Preservation Trust Fund was established in 2005 to encourage the preservation of qualifying farmland and to foster the growth, development, and sustainability of family farms. Preserving working family farms continues to be one of Commissioner Troxler’s top priorities.

Our Agribusiness Development staff supports a wide range of marketing support for local food programs and agribusinesses. Upcoming events include: Agritourism Networking Association Annual Winter Conference (February 19), “A Successful Season: A Training Opportunity for Farmers Market Managers & Vendors” (February 26), a new Workshop Series “Food Marketing in the Real World” (beginning March 9)...

USDA Programs “Know your farmer, know your food”, a new initiative reflecting the “critical reconnection between producers and consumers.”

“American farmers feed our nation and the world, but they are all local to somewhere. Get to know your local farmer, and get to know your food. USDA wants to foster the viability and growth of small and mid-size farms and ranches, and we want to create new opportunities for farmers and ranchers by promoting locally produced foods. We also want to build the infrastructure necessary to support a local food system, and we’ll need local partners to do that. Local and regional food systems mean fresh food, vibrant communities, a strong connection between cities and the countryside, and support for this and the next generation of farmers and ranchers...” Examples include: Farm Storage Facility Loans, Value-Added Producer Grants, Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program, AMS, Rural Cooperative Development...

The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act funds in NC have totaled \$1.2 billion for 2485 USDA projects or programs. Recent announcements included:

January 13 – Capital to rural businesses; guaranteed loans >\$20 million, including “My Way Tavern” in Holly Springs (\$204,000) help with startup and 10% local promise...

January 14 – National School Lunch Program; \$816,000 to NC for equipment grants

January 22 – Kerr-Tar Regional Council of Governments \$120,000

USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) has dozens of new programs and new funding for opportunities such as seasonal high tunnels for crops and the Organic Initiative through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP).

Indeed, North Carolina has many committed stakeholders, partners and resources that will help to address the major purposes of our Sustainable Local Food Advisory Council as we seek to improve markets for local food, sustain our family farms, preserve our farmland and improve nutrition for our people.