

## **Forsyth County Listening Session Summary Condensed**

**February 12, 2013**

**Partners:** Forsyth County Farm Bureau, Forsyth County Cooperative Extension, Forsyth Futures.

About 40 people attended. The meeting began immediately following the Forsyth County Elected Officials breakfast. In addition to many farmers, and others engaged and interested in local foods, several elected officials at the local, state and national levels (Representative Virginia Foxx) stayed for a portion or all of the listening session. Additionally, Dean Bill Randall, NCA&TA participated in the meeting. Expertise from the state was present including representatives of NCDA&CS Marketing Division, multiple county extension agents and local level regulatory and zoning experts.

***Facilitated by Shivaugn Rayl, Carolina Farm Stewardship Association***

**NC Sustainable Local Food Advisory Council members present: Nancy Creamer, Center for Environmental Farming Systems and Debbie Hamrick, NC Farm Bureau**

- Education: NCA&T has been very helpful in the region with practical, on-farm assistance. NCA&AT University approved the first degree granting program in Urban and Community Ag in the United States in December 2012. Davidson County extension and others have a Piedmont Farm School with 50 students. There is still a waiting list. It is in year 2. Other counties would like to have similar farmer training programs.
- Profit. Very expensive to buy health insurance. There has to be systems in place to offset the cost of what it takes to exist.
- Children. Reaching out to children is important to teach them about how food is produced and to make the connection between healthy food choices and farming.
- Local foods in schools. NCDA&CS pointed out, the NC Farm 2 School Program started in 1997 and distributed 1.5 million # of produce last year. The program operates 23 weeks out of the year, 3 weeks in the summer, 20 crops. This year the program added chopped kale and bagged salad. 85/117 districts participated, >1million children served. Schools would like more weeks of delivery, but to do so requires more trucks and drivers.
- Food Safety. GAPs certification training, how can more farmers be trained? Discussion of increased recordkeeping requirements placing more burdens on

farmer time. One person expressed concerns about regulations about processing herbs and food safety.

- Farmland preservation. Planning boards are interested in a large tax base and more productive use than farmland
- Organic. Organic food separates farmers...just because you are organic you are not better. Focus on raising good economic food for people and stop talking about organic. Another speaker, organic can be an excellent marketing tool. It doesn't have to divide people.
- Egg Regulations. Changing the law is an uphill battle in a state where the poultry industry is very strong.
- Don't compete. State sponsored initiatives should not compete with entrepreneurs.
- Marketing assistance for farmers. One cattle farmer would like assistance connecting to potential end users/consumers for local meat.
- Food Hub. Can the Cobblestone Market in Winston Salem become a food hub by leveraging the Forsyth Futures Local Foods Assessment study? The Assessment study writers heard many times about the need to help farmers with marketing. Another added, in the larger conversation about food hubs, it's important to keep a spotlight to make sure the growers stay profitable.
- Non-farmer product aggregation. "One of the things that I see is the aggregation of product from multiple growers...I'm not sure that's good for the growers..." Produce Box, Lowe's/Pilot Mountain Pride..."it may be good for large growers, not sure if it's good for small farms. As all of that gets rolled up my sense is that the profits go to the marketing folks and not to the farmers."
- Local buying target. Can the 10% Campaign become statewide policy?
- Discussion of consumer promotions. NCDA&CS Got2BNC, Piedmont Grown. Got to create demand. Not sure how to get there, but a lot goes w/consumer education. Not sure there's a lot of that going on. It's not just making a culture that values local foods but also making local food purchases a norm.
- Farmers Markets. Winston Salem has 11 farmers markets, some are very small. When you go to Portland, or SFO you go to "a spot," when you have 11 (some very small), it's hard to create culture...a singular spot that is well managed. Folks drive 3-4 hours to sell; people should have a destination to shop. You need to concentrate the demand and if you can do that you will make it worthwhile for the farmer to show up w/a lot of product. One long-time farmer complained that the city of WS closed the downtown market, which was a destination for downtown workers on lunch break.