

Lumberton Listening Session Condensed Summary

February 1, 2013

Partners: Center for Community Action, Feast Down East, Robeson County Cooperative Extension

NC Legislature members present: Senator Michael Walters; State Rep. Charles Graham; and State Rep. Garland Pierce.

More than 50 people attended. Audience members included a wide range of expertise: City and county staff, NCDA&CS, NC Real, NC Support Center, Robeson County Community College, Robeson County Cooperative Extension, UNC-Pembroke, and others.

NC Local Sustainable Foods Council members present: Mac Legerton, Center for Community Action; Debbie Hamrick, NC Farm Bureau Federation.

Education of new farmers. Took me a year to find out what I needed to do: Tax requirements, no one source. There are college courses on all sorts of businesses, car wash, hair dressers. What about me for farming? How do you educate someone who wants to do it? One of the classes I attended...farm and taxation. I found out I was the only farmer in the room, everyone else worked for a tax company like HR block. While farm oriented, it didn't mean anything to those folks because they didn't know what kind of questions to ask. Orient it to farmers. *NC Real developed curricula and do hands on action learning...to walk through specific parts of business planning for agriculture. Because of specific requirements that farmers find and their obstacles we got Tobacco Trust Fund grant to develop specific curricula.*

Assistance in selling to local markets/retailers. Is there a database of local merchants within 60 mi of my farm? *NCDA&CS has market specialists for retail and food service. G.W. Stanley. Also, <http://www.lumberton-nc.com/> Visitors website, valuable resources. Growers are listed, agritourism is included. Inventory of produce outlets is an outcome of the Community Transformation Grant Region 8.*

Local purchases standard. Local school bidding process: There is no distinction between the cheapest ground beef the school can buy and high quality ground beef, but there is more flexibility in frozen pizza a major university wanted to buy, sent sample product and farmer got an email from a large distributor because the buyer said they have to bid through major supplier. Change rules or regulations to allow

state organizations to have some flexibility in contracting and how that works. The wholesaler will take 15% and they put more restrictions on us. Our beef is somewhat more expensive....5%, 10%, 2%....part of something is better than a lot of nothing. Not massive change, but flexibility. The system as it works discourages us from participating because the way the contracts are set up and the opportunities are limited. Link it to jobs, putting people to work. Economic opportunity and the possibility of using local produce. What about a discretionary 5% of budget to buy local foods. The state needs to lead with our tax dollars. About \$10 million in food being bought by Robeson County.

Food Safety. If you sell to school or to the institution, the product has to be GAP certified. We don't have a GAP auditor in this part of the state.

Economic Development Support for Ag. Look at the state's economic development board, Ag isn't even listed. Where is the proper role for public support going forward.

Availability of Regulatory Assistance by Phone/Egg Law. Small poultry farm. Started in 2010 with chickens and eggs. When we started processing we had to have people check. I have a background in food service, no big deal. Problem: If I call one person and that is *the* person on the Egg Law and ask them questions they send me to someone else, you don't need this, but you do need that. I do it all by myself. I don't have time to sit and wait for someone to call me back for 4 weeks.

Farmers market managers. There's a gap in the training of a lot of the market managers. Need some money to put behind those positions. Train those managers. No start-up funds to keep manager position going...even though people want to start markets. Farmers don't have the time. Need dollars to put behind this. *NCDA&CS person in audience mentions Farmers market training. 2/22, 3/8 Smithfield 3/13 at WNC Ag Center. BCBS grant is helping NCDA&CS get training out there and marketing materials.*

Organic farming. People don't like to pay the prices in Robeson County. One farmer, certified organic since 2005, goes all the way to Pittsboro to sell.

Labor. It's hard to find labor to work on the farm. They may come for 1 day. Then they say they want to work on a farm but they don't like the hard work.

Transitioning land. Idea...folks who are ending their career in farming and their children don't want to come back to farm the land. If they could donate their land to a foundation to be used to start an incubator, teaching farm instead of being purchased at rock bottom prices.