



Building a Sustainable Local Food Economy in North Carolina: Farm-to-Fork

We are pleased to announce that over the last year, the Center for Environmental Farming Systems (www.cefs.ncsu.edu) has been funded to reach out across the state and together with our partners ask: What will it take to build a sustainable local food economy in North Carolina?

From the mountains to the coast, various organizations are promoting and implementing exciting initiatives to support our state and communities through sustainable local agriculture. Examples include new farmer's markets, local food policy councils, comprehensive county- or region-based food initiatives, farm incubator programs, farm and/or garden youth education programs, health and nutrition projects focused on local sustainable foods, procurement initiatives by large retail and institutional buyers and schools, and much more.

If each North Carolinian spent 55 cents/day on local food (just 5 percent of the \$4010.00 that we spend on average on food consumption per year), it would mean \$1.7 billion for the state's economy. That money circulates here in the state so has a multiplier effect, rather than going to a corporate headquarters in another state.

Other benefits of a sustainable local food economy in North Carolina include economic development, job creation within farming and food sectors, preservation of open space, decreased use of fossil fuel and associated carbon emissions, preservation and protection of the natural environment, increased consumer access to fresh and nutritious foods, and greater food security for all North Carolinians.

As part of this **Farm to Fork initiative**, CEFS and its partners have been gathering information over the last year from across food system sectors: meetings with our 77 member advisory committee, regional meetings, targeted working issues discussions, and a statewide summit on May 11th and 12th, 2009. Our desired result is a **Statewide Action Plan for Building the Local Food Economy** with specific steps (short- and long-term) that policy makers, Universities, government agencies, environmental organizations, businesses, funding agencies, social activists, NGOs and citizens can take to make this happen.

The first three **Regional Meetings**, held in Raleigh, Burgaw, and Asheville, were very well attended, and because of the high interest, three additional meetings have been added: the Charlotte area, the Triad, and Greenville. The purpose of the regional meetings is to bring together those engaged in all aspects of the food system, to collect information and ideas that will be the building blocks of discussion at the SUMMIT and eventually the core components of the State Action Plan. We want to identify specific regional and local sustainable food systems models that are working and also regional challenges that can be addressed through policies, programs, and funding. These regional meetings will be facilitated listening sessions and provide important input into this process, so we are encouraging broad participation.

The ideas that rose to the surface in the Regional Meetings were compiled, and **Working Issue Teams** were formed around these topics and peopled by individuals who have experience,

training, and passion in these particular areas. Our desire was for these half-day WIT meetings to facilitate in-depth discussion of the current work, complexities, and possibilities in these topic areas and produce specific outputs of suggested “game changer” as well as possible local tool box needs. The leaders of these WIT meetings will present their groups findings at the SUMMIT and help lead the continued discussions of these ideas as we move toward developing the State Action Plan.

In all these efforts, we seek to engage the broad group of those involved with the food system including farmers, suppliers, processors, economic development organizations, distributors, farm and food industry workers, extension and other educators, marketers, financial institutions, Universities and community colleges, elected officials, government agencies, county and city planners, farm organizations, anti-poverty organizers, social justice workers, consumers and consumer groups, granting agencies, health and wellness organizations, environmental groups, food banks, and more.

The end product—the **State Action Plan**—will articulate a shared vision and set of common goals for building a local, sustainable food system and economy in North Carolina. It will:

- 1) describe key elements of our current food system and define key terms;
- 2) identify the diversity of people, businesses, and organizations involved in and impacted by North Carolina’s food system;
- 3) highlight specific efforts and partnerships underway across our state and within different sectors of the food system to achieve greater “localness” in our food system; and
- 4) identify opportunities for action, and propose priorities, both in the short and long term, that will enable us to make progress toward shared goals.

Finally, another key goal of this process is the formation of an ongoing working committee or task force, with broad representation across food system sectors that will focus on facilitating and carrying out action items, provide ongoing networking opportunities, and revise the action plan as needs and priorities change. This intention is already in motion through the legislation submitted in March for a State Food Policy Council.

A “Road to the State Action Plan” listserv has been established to keep participants up to date on activities and progress. Please email amber_polk@ncsu.edu to be added to the listerv. If you or your organization is engaged in a food systems project, please take a minute to fill out the contact information sheet found on the Farm to Fork website for this initiative www.cefsfarmtofork.com describing the nature of the work you or your organization does. This information will be included in a database for all participants, and may also result in further interviews by the project team. If you have questions about the initiative, or would like more information about the State Action Plan, please contact nancy_creamer@ncsu.edu, CEFS Director or any of the Farm to Fork team members listed on the cefsfarmtofork website. For more information about CEFS, see www.cefs.ncsu.edu.

Please feel free to share this **Farm to Fork statewide initiative** information with others who may be interested in becoming involved with this project. *We thank you for your Sustainable, Local Food System interest and efforts!*