

*Stronger Economies Together*

## Strategies for Building New Economic Opportunities

## Sandhills Region – Lee, Moore, and Richmond Counties



# Economic Development Plan

## Green Fields Initiative

2013 - 2018

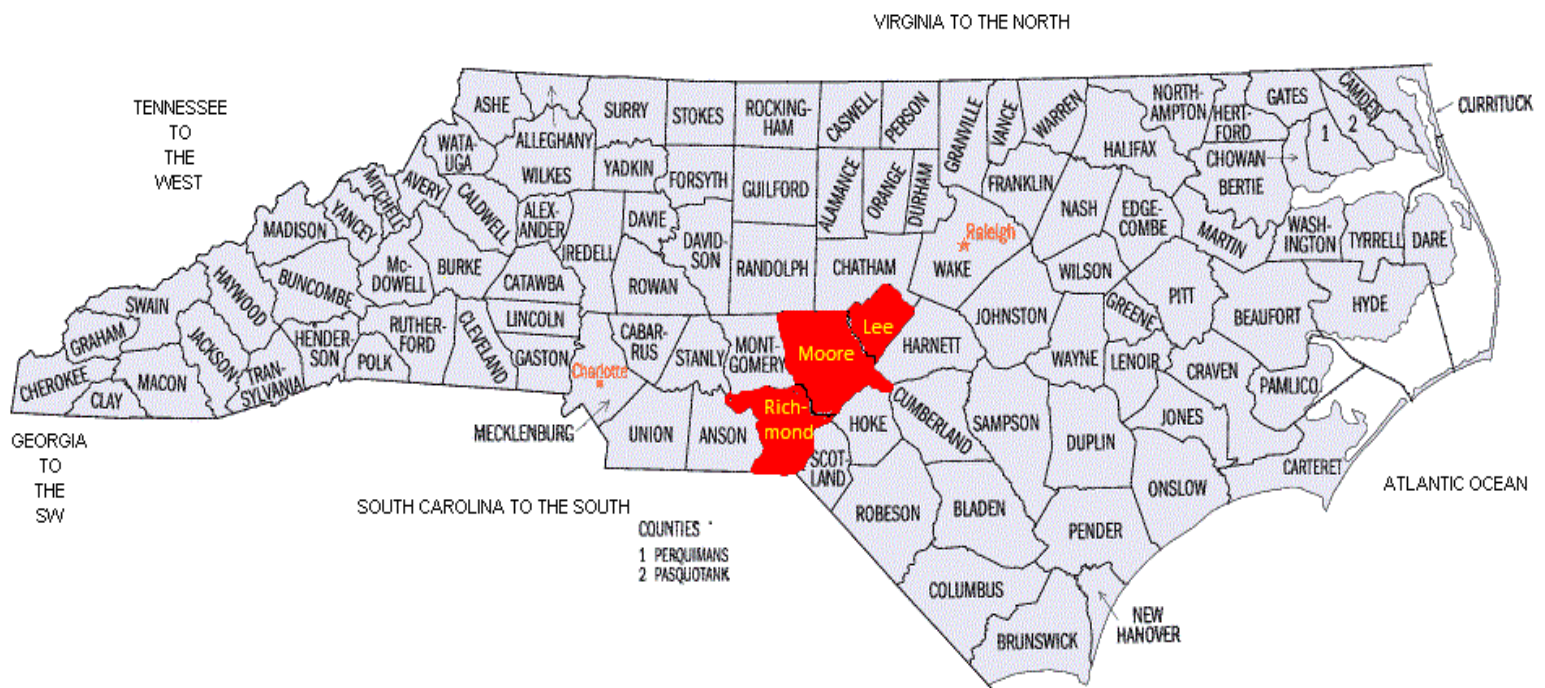
**August 21, 2013, Rev. January 22, 2015**

## Stronger Economies Together Initiative

Launched in 2009 by USDA Rural Development in collaboration with the nation's Regional Rural Development Centers (RRDC) and their land-grant university partners, the purpose of Stronger Economies Together (SET) is to strengthen the capacity of communities in rural America to work together in developing and implementing an economic development blueprint that strategically builds on the current and emerging economic strengths of their region. Important elements of the Stronger Economies Together program include: building collaboration between communities in a region, providing economic analyses that are tailored to help capture the region's current or emerging clusters and comparative economic advantages, and support by technical assistance provided by land-grant university extension systems to the regions over a period of several months including the SET training.

## Sandhills Executive Summary

This Regional Economic Development Plan will serve as the roadmap for the future economic development efforts in the area of sustainable agriculture in Lee, Moore, and Richmond Counties, which counties make up the majority of a geographic area known as the Sandhills Region of North Carolina. Key regional stakeholders embrace a spirit of regionalism to support this initiative. Implementing the action items described within this document will strengthen the ability of the Sandhills Region to secure its economic future and position it as a competitive region. This plan reflects a nine module planning process with active participation from business, civic, and community leaders. Significant research and discussions have led to the development of this plan.





## Sandhills Region Description

Lee, Moore, and Richmond Counties are located in the southern Piedmont region of North Carolina. Part of “Sandhills” country, this region has an ecologically unique topography of sandy, light-textured, and well-drained soils which enjoy adequate rainfall. With its long growing season, the Sandhills Region is perfectly suited for the harvesting and processing of fruits and vegetables, in addition to more traditional row crop production like tobacco. Lee, Moore, and Richmond Counties share a rich history of agriculture and forestry and more recently have built a strong tourism focus, particularly in Moore County. With Lee and Richmond Counties trending towards younger demographics, and Moore County having an older and wealthier population, the Sandhills Region is positioned to build on a viable local food system and abundant working lands to become an economic engine for the continued growth of the region and the state.



## Sandhills Regional Vision

Collaborative economic development efforts in the three-county region of Lee, Moore, and Richmond result in a vibrant agricultural sector that is recognized as a critical component of creating a sustainable and self-reliant community. More healthy local foods are produced and consumed; numerous economically viable, food and non-food, entrepreneurial agribusiness opportunities are encouraged and supported (resulting in the average age of region farmers trending younger), agricultural lands and rural lifestyle are preserved long-term, and the health of community members is significantly improved.

# Introduction

Using the SET initiative guidelines, a region's vision sets the tone for the development of a strategic plan. As one member of the Sandhills Sustainable Ag Working Group said:

"There is great potential for food, forestry, trade, and heritage tourism opportunities in the Sandhills region. With the proper focus and attention, these opportunities may be harnessed into real economic drivers in our communities. This will effect the preservation of our history, culture and land, enabling the region to meet the increasing demand for water, clean air, open space, and recreation opportunities as the area experiences dramatic population growth in the near future."

The final version of the Sandhills Region's vision considers this statement, but focuses specifically on the role agriculture can play in the development of the region's future. Our targeted industry is Ag Business and how it can be a driver for the region's economy, resulting in healthy, vibrant communities throughout Lee, Moore, and Richmond Counties.



## Acknowledgements

The Sandhills Region would like to thank the staff from the United States Department of Agriculture Rural Development, Regional Rural Development Centers, and North Carolina State University Cooperative Extension for support throughout the course of this project. We would also like to show our appreciation to the individuals and organizations listed below, the distinguished individuals that took part in the training sessions, and numerous other individuals, for their invaluable insight and ideas that led to the creation of this plan.

- **Moore County Partners in Progress**
- **NC Department of Commerce**
- **Moore County Extension Advisory Committee**
- **Agricultural Advisory Boards of Lee, Moore, and Richmond Counties**
- **Richmond County Agricultural Advisory Board**
- **Sandhills Farm to Table**
- **Town of Robbins**
- **Robbins Farm Incubator**
- **Center for Environmental Farming Systems**
- **Piedmont Food & Agricultural Center**
- **Food Bank of Central NC**
- **Integrity Systems**
- **Sandhills Area Land Trust**
- **Lee Area Farmers**
- **Gerry Cohen**
- **Carolina Common Enterprise**
- **Sandhills Community College**



## Regional Collaboration

Letters of support for the planning process came from the following individuals and organizations:

- **Richmond County Board of Commissioners**
- **Sandhills Farm to Table Cooperative**
- **Moore County Partners in Progress**
- **Lee County, NC**
- **Richmond County Agricultural Advisory Board**
- **Richmond County Farm Bureau**
- **Moore County Center of the NC Cooperative Extension Service**
- **Lee County Center of the NC Cooperative Extension Service**
- **David's Produce**
- **Moore County, NC**
- **NC Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services**
- **Michael C. Rowland, M.D. (Retired)**
- **First School Garden Program**
- **Lee County Area Farmers**
- **Lee County Agricultural Advisory Board**

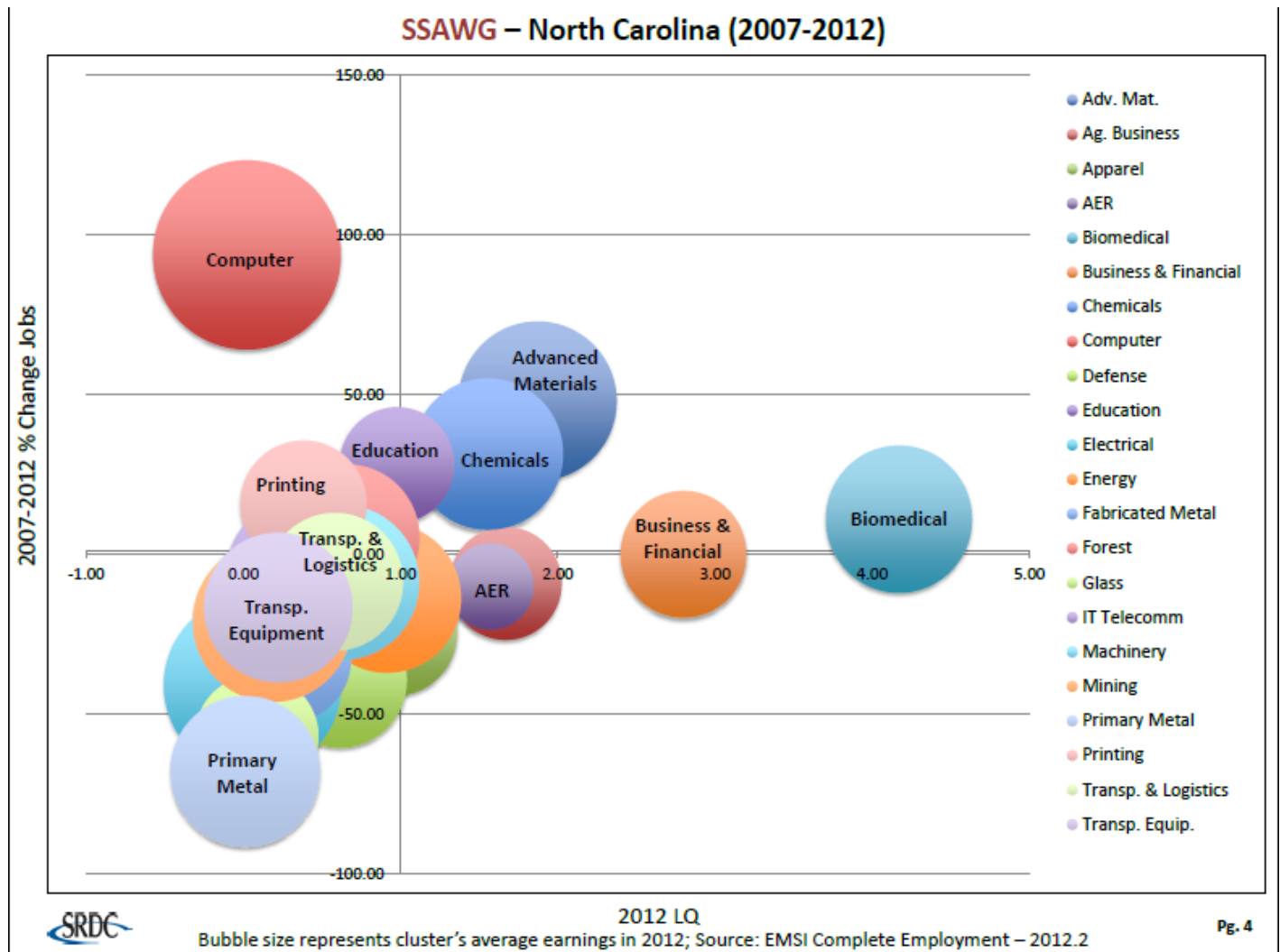
This plan was widely vetted in the Sandhills Region. In the Acknowledgements Section above, sixteen different parties are listed as having input. They range from economic developers (Moore County Partners in Progress, Integrity Systems, Carolina Common Enterprise) to environmentalists (Center for Environmental Farming Systems, Sandhills Area Land Trust), a medical professional, a group working with a major regional grocer (Center for Environmental Farming Systems), the NC Department of Commerce, and educators (Sandhills Community College), in addition to the farming community. The Ag Advisory Boards, which consist of county government appointees in all 3 counties, also vetted the plan. Moreover, the plan was distributed and presented to the public at "Spotlight on Agriculture," an event held at the Pinehurst Fair Barn on September 26, 2013. This event brought together local food producers with regional restaurateurs, as well as funders, conservation groups, economic and business developers, value-added processors, community college educators, local legislators, and others who value agriculture and its economic impact on the region. It also featured local chefs using local foods in tastings sampled by over 200 residents in the area.

In addition, as we have sought funding for action steps under the plan, we have received several letters of support from the local economic development office (Moore County Partners in Progress), a strong regional environmental group (Sandhills Area Land Trust), and a private economic and business consultant (Integrity Systems), clearly indicating their involvement and participation in this Plan. We have also recently been awarded a Rural Business Enterprise Grant from USDA to support many of the strategies identified in this plan.

Moore County Partners in Progress is so pleased with the effort under the plan that they have agreed again to sponsor the Spotlight on Agriculture event next year.

## Regional Economic Goals

Resources explored throughout the Stronger Economies Together process showed the following industry clusters to hold the most potential for stimulating the economy in the Sandhills Region: Biomedical, Advanced Materials, Ag Business, Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation (AER), Chemicals, and Education.





## SSAWG – North Carolina 2007-2012

### Bubble Chart Results

SSAWG	2012 LQ	2007 Jobs	2012 Jobs	07-12 Job Ch.	2012 Avg. Earnings	Type
Biomedical	4.17	10,305	11,436	10.98	\$51,968	Stars
Business & Financial	2.80	7,676	7,676	0.00	\$38,420	Transforming
Adv. Mat.	1.87	3,469	5,133	47.97	\$60,694	Stars
Ag. Business	1.67	5,035	4,575	-9.14	\$30,524	Mature
AER	1.57	4,799	4,314	-10.11	\$17,801	Mature
Chemicals	1.56	3,248	4,267	31.37	\$54,902	Stars
Education	0.98	2,095	2,682	28.02	\$31,753	Emerging
Apparel	0.96	3,493	2,634	-24.59	\$38,256	Transforming
Energy	0.91	2,906	2,506	-13.76	\$53,371	Transforming
Forest	0.66	1,719	1,810	5.29	\$50,864	Emerging
Machinery	0.63	1,894	1,727	-8.82	\$57,316	Transforming
Defense	0.61	2,777	1,681	-39.47	\$43,707	Transforming
Transp. & Logistics	0.58	1,747	1,596	-8.64	\$45,378	Transforming
IT Telecomm	0.40	1,167	1,089	-6.68	\$61,838	Transforming
Printing	0.38	907	1,049	15.66	\$38,853	Emerging
Fabricated Metal	0.28	1,137	766	-32.63	\$39,689	Transforming
Transp. Equip.	0.22	731	609	-16.69	\$53,595	Transforming
Mining	0.19	645	509	-21.09	\$61,862	Transforming
Glass	0.08	545	233	-57.25	\$37,180	Transforming
Electrical	0.06	271	160	-40.96	\$76,668	Transforming
Computer	0.02	32	62	93.75	\$85,824	Emerging
Primary Metal	0.01	97	31	-68.04	\$54,403	Transforming

\*Clusters were ranked in descending order based on their 2012 LQ  
Source: EMSI Complete Employment – 2012.2

After examining these clusters, analyzing the assets in the region, and listening to input from various regional stakeholders, we determined that Ag Business, and in particular, Sustainable Agriculture, would be the focus of this SET economic development plan. The Forestry Cluster, though small, is identified as an Emerging Cluster and is also the focus of this SET economic development plan.

While the SRDC Bubble Chart above categorizes Ag Business as a “Mature Industry” (and shows a 9% drop in jobs from 2006 through 2011), Ag Business nonetheless falls within the top 5 industry clusters based on their 2012 Location Quotients. Moreover, total ag-related business impacts (as a percentage of total value-added) are significant in each of the three counties. The agriculture industry accounts for over 10% of all value-added income and over 10% in jobs in all three counties. In Richmond County, in particular, agribusiness accounts for more than 25% of the value-added income reported in the county and over 20% of all jobs.

The data below was provided by the NC Department of Agriculture in 2011.



Definitions: Dollar-values are *value-added*, which is the production value using inputs from Lee County. *Employment* is full plus part-time employment. Data are from IMPLAN (Mig, Inc.).

#### **Agriculture/Food Industries**

Farming	\$40,860,431
Manufacturing	\$49,421,436
Wholesaling/Retailing	\$73,352,256
Total	\$163,634,123

#### **Natural Fiber Industries**

Farming	\$77,162
Manufacturing	\$35,895,816
Wholesaling/Retailing	\$14,048,805
Total	\$50,021,783

#### **Forestry Industries**

Farming	\$13,275,690
Manufacturing	\$5,909,877
Wholesaling/Retailing	\$3,087,235
Total	\$22,272,802

#### **Total Income**

Total County Value-added	\$2,414,750,655
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#### **Agriculture/Food Industries**

total income	\$163,634,123
share of county value-added	6.8%

#### **Natural Fiber Industries**

total income	\$50,021,783
share of county value-added	2.1%

#### **Forestry Industries**

total income	\$22,272,802
share of county value-added	0.9%

#### **All Agriculture/Agribusiness Industries**

total income	\$235,928,708
share of county value-added	9.8%

#### **Total Agricultural/Agribusiness Employment**

total employment	4864
share of county employment	14.9%

Lee  
County  
Agriculture  
and  
Agribusiness  
Impacts

**Agriculture/Food Industries**

Farming	\$159,960,569
Manufacturing	\$7,273,852
Wholesaling/Retailing	\$113,107,016
Total	\$280,341,437

**Natural Fiber Industries**

Farming	\$0
Manufacturing	\$31,073,814
Wholesaling/Retailing	\$12,756,712
Total	\$43,830,526

**Forestry Industries**

Farming	\$23,058,709
Manufacturing	\$20,551,510
Wholesaling/Retailing	\$5,085,575
Total	\$48,695,794

**Total Income**

Total County Value-added	\$2,544,069,173
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## Agriculture/Food Industries

total income	\$280,341,437
share of county value-added	11.0%

## Natural Fiber Industries

total income	\$43,830,526
share of county value-added	1.7%

## Forestry Industries

total income	\$48,695,794
share of county value-added	1.9%

## All Agriculture/Agribusiness Industries

total income	\$372,867,757
share of county value-added	14.6%

**Total Agricultural/Agribusiness Employment**

total employment	6069
share of county employment	13.4%

Moore  
County  
Agriculture  
and  
Agribusiness  
Impacts

**Agriculture/Food Industries**

Farming	\$133,161,006
Manufacturing	\$37,645,198
Wholesaling/Retailing	\$31,351,946
Total	\$202,158,150

**Natural Fiber Industries**

Farming	\$294,235
Manufacturing	\$37,646,976
Wholesaling/Retailing	\$3,932,687
Total	\$41,873,898

**Forestry Industries**

Farming	\$13,767,120
Manufacturing	\$25,526,075
Wholesaling/Retailing	\$1,060,823
Total	\$40,354,018

**Total Income**

Total County Value-added	\$1,087,940,758
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## Agriculture/Food Industries

total income	\$202,158,150
share of county value-added	18.6%

## Natural Fiber Industries

total income	\$41,873,898
share of county value-added	3.8%

## Forestry Industries

total income	\$40,354,018
share of county value-added	3.7%

## All Agriculture/Agribusiness Industries

total income	\$284,386,066
share of county value-added	26.1%

**Total Agricultural/Agribusiness Employment**

total employment	4324
share of county employment	22.4%

Richmond  
County  
Agriculture  
and  
Agribusiness  
Impacts

More evidence supporting our decision to focus on the Agriculture and Forestry Industry Clusters as the region's competitive advantage is found under the Assets listed for each strategy and under the Regional Economic Data heading in the Evidence Basis of the Plan.

With Ag Business and Forestry as our focus, we recommend the goals set forth below for the Sandhills Region. Strategies supporting each goal will be identified as either a creation (C) strategy, attraction (A) strategy, retention (R) strategy, or expansion (E) strategy.

**Goal 1:**

Over the next 5 years, retain the number of acres devoted to agriculture and forestry at 2007 levels, while increasing the number of people entering farming or forestry by 1% per year.

**Goal 2:**

Produce and consume more agricultural and forestry products in the region, resulting in an increase in average farm income by 20% over the next 5 years and an increase in forestry management plans by 10% over the same period.

**Goal 3:**

Raise the profile of agriculture and timber Industries so they are widely recognized by local and regional policymakers, politicians, community and business leaders, and others as being critical and essential economic drivers. By 2018 the region will be generally recognized as a leader in sustainable agriculture and community development.





## Regional Economic Development Plan

### Goal 1:

Over the next five years, retain the number of acres in agriculture or forestry production in the region at 2007 levels, while increasing the number of people entering farming or forestry as a profession by 1% per year.

*Goal 1 supports our vision by preserving agricultural lands and rural lifestyle and lowering the average age of the region's farmers (which currently is an average age of 58).*

*The figure below shows the loss of farmland in each of the 3 counties from 1997 to 2007. The aim of Goal 1 is to keep the number of acres in agriculture or forestry production at 2007 levels.*

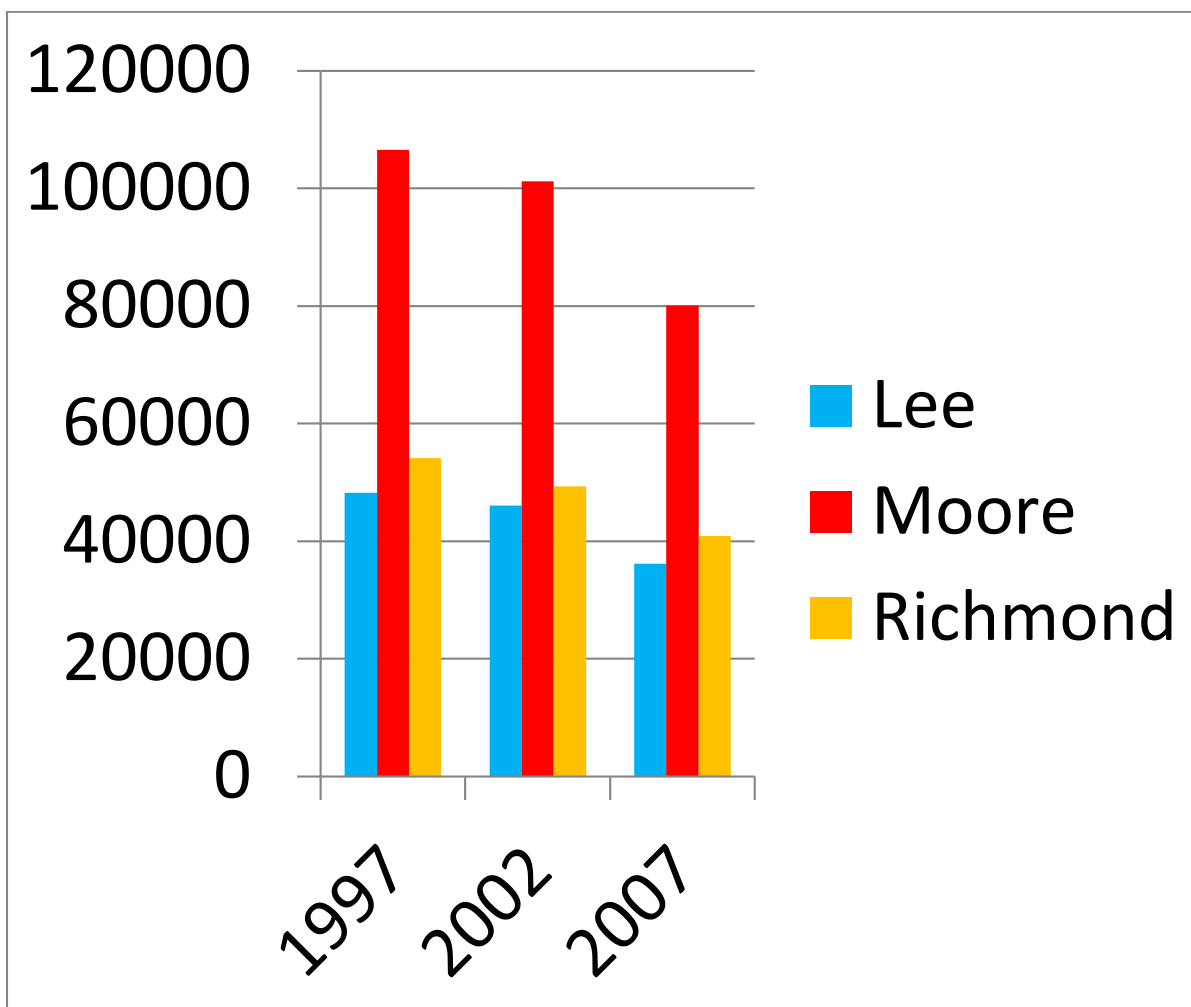


Figure 1.1. Loss of Farmland Acreage, <http://www.agcensus.usda.gov>

## Regional Economic Benefits

Two of the three counties in the Sandhills Region have experienced steady population growth; in some cases, even exponential growth. The third county, having lost population for decades, has now stabilized, but at great cost – loss of agricultural and forested lands throughout the region (Working Lands Protection Plans – Lee, Moore, Richmond Counties). With the growing local food and goods movement and its emphasis on reducing the carbon footprint of the national food and timber industry, it makes sense to grow local produce and utilize timber locally as much as possible.

By keeping our working lands in production, the Sandhills Region will continue the rich history of agriculture and forestry in the region. This history strengthens the cultural fabric that binds the region together. The purpose of Goal 1 is to keep farmers farming, support the timber industry, and attract more people into farming and timber. This will enable the valuable open spaces and rural landscapes of the area to continue to exist.

According to recent national research by the American Farmland Trust, the cost of community services for every dollar of revenue collected is \$1.15 for residential development, \$0.29 for commercial/industrial development and \$0.37 for farm/forest land. It follows that agricultural and forest land that remains in production may therefore help control the cost of community services in counties across North Carolina (Mitch Renkow, Department of Agriculture Resource Economics, N.C. State University).

### Trainings and Educational Materials

National trends indicate a growing consumer movement that demands locally sourced foods and products. Traditional row crop and commodity production is fairly strong in the region, but because of the decline in tobacco production over the past decade, farmers are rediscovering fruits, vegetables, and other alternative crops (nursery stock, Christmas trees, herbs, floraculture, etc.). To ensure profitability in these crops, producers need information not only on the newest production techniques but other resources as well, including business planning and marketing (Strategies 1.1 and 1.2). Lenders and other financiers also need information on these practices to make good loans (Strategy 1.5). Goal 1 strategies address the training and informational needs of producers and the lending community.

### Transition Planning

Because the average age of farmers in the region is over 58, concentrated efforts must be made now to attract younger people into farming. Farmland transition planning is extremely important for farm families as well as the communities in which they live and shop, so that the land which grows our food and our timber is not completely lost to industrial and residential development. Strategy 1.3 includes dissemination of information on farm business succession to attorneys, accountants, and others who advise retiring producers on their options. In addition, Strategy 1.4 recommends the creation of a web-based land referral service to link available regional farmland to emerging or expanding farmers.



### Addressing Barriers

Value-added agriculture is regulated by state and federal agencies, making entry into value-added agriculture by small to mid-size farms difficult because of the paperwork and costs involved. Strategy 1.6 seeks to, at a minimum, identify and address the barriers, and when possible, offer workable solutions.

### Conclusion

The Sandhills Region is defined by its abundant natural beauty. By maintaining current levels of acreage in the region devoted to farmland and managed forests, the region will continue to be an attractive place to live, work, and play, thus enhancing its quality of place factor.

The region is well-suited for fruit and vegetable production and natural amenity enhancement (natural and agri-tourism opportunities). This fact supports a local foods and agribusiness focus to fuel overall economic development in the region.



## Strategy 1.1: *Provide farm business planning trainings to beginning farmers and forestry management plan assistance to landowners.*

Type of Strategy: (C)

### Target Outcomes:

**Short Term:** 25 beginning farmers receive business planning trainings per year.

**Short Term:** 20 timber owners receive forestry management planning trainings per year.

**Intermediate:** 50% of those who take the training complete a business plan or 30% will complete a forestry management plan for their operations.

**Long Term:** After 5 years, 50% of those who complete a business plan will start a new farm enterprise or venture.

**Long Term:** After 5 years, 50% of those who complete a forestry management plan will be managing their forests according to that plan.

**Assets:** North Carolina State University, NC Cooperative Extension, and NC A&T State University have developed and piloted the Piedmont Farm School in Forsyth County, NC, which has increased interest in small farming by new and beginning farmers in that area. Parts of the Piedmont Farm School can be adopted and customized for use in the Sandhills, while regional NCCE agents can also recommend other programming that will be of interest to potential new and beginning farmers in the region.

The NC Forest Service assists landowners in the development of forestry management plans. Strategies to recruit landowners of forested land and timber growers need to be developed in coordination with the NC Forest Service.

CultivateNC, a new program within NC Cooperative Extension at NC State University, will provide direct technical assistance for strategic planning, including grant writing and network development.

### Action Steps:

#### Short Term (within 1 year)

1. NCCE County Directors will create a team to start a "beginning farmer" program (Sandhills Farm School).
2. The Team will collect and evaluate training modules for beginning farmers and farm business planning.
3. CultivateNC will apply for grant funding to develop beginning farmer training.
4. The team will develop and deliver the "beginning farmer" program.
5. Develop strategies to recruit landowners of forested land and timber growers in coordination with the NC Forest Service.
6. Track forest service progress and training and assist as needed.

#### Medium Term (within 2 years)

1. NCCE County Directors will modify the beginning farmer program by incorporating new trainings developed and continue to offer the program on an annual or bi-annual basis.
2. NC Forest Service will recruit timber growers to develop forest management plans.

#### Long Term (within 5 years)

NCCE County Directors will develop and implement a farm mentoring program.



**Stronger Economies Together Participants' Guide**  
**Module Nine: *Measuring for Success***

**Handout 2: Measurement Plan Template**

**Slide 10**

<b>What you want to measure</b>	<b>What information you need</b>	<b>Who has the information</b>	<b>How you will get the information</b>	<b>How often/when you will get the information</b>
<i>Strategy 1.1: Provide farm business planning trainings</i> <i>Participants: Beginning farmers</i>	<i>Names and contact information for beginning farmers</i> <i>Informational materials for trainings</i>	<i>County Ag Agents</i> <i>NCSU – Gary Bullen</i>	<i>Will have sign in sheets at trainings</i>	<i>Annually</i>
<i>Attitudes/Knowledge/Skills</i> <i>25 beginning farmers receive business planning trainings per year.</i>	<i>(Farm School)</i> <i>Trainers</i> <i>Training materials</i> <i>Training Dates &amp; Sites</i> <i># of Participants in trainings</i>	<i>Trainers (including Agents and Gary Bullen)</i>	<i>Registrations and post-training evaluations</i>	<i>Upon completion of trainings</i>
<i>Attitudes/Knowledge/Skills</i> <i>25 forest owners receive forest management planning trainings per year.</i>	<i>Trainers</i> <i>Training materials</i> <i>Training Dates &amp; Sites</i> <i># of Participants in trainings</i>	<i>Trainers (including Agents and Gary Bullen)</i>	<i>Registrations and post-training evaluations</i>	<i>Upon completion of trainings</i>
<i>Behavior</i> <i>50% of those who take the farmer training complete a business plan for their operations.</i>	<i># of registrants with business plans</i>	<i>Software used in Farm School will capture this information</i>	<i>Contact Gary Bullen</i>	<i>Upon completion of trainings</i>
<i>Behavior</i> <i>30% of those who take the forestry management training complete a management plan for their land.</i>	<i># of registrants with management plans</i>	<i>Post workshop evaluations and follow-up</i>	<i>Forest service</i>	<i>Upon completion of trainings</i>
<i>Condition</i> <i>After 5 years, 50% of those who complete a business plan will start a new farm enterprise or venture.</i>	<i>Number and types of new farm enterprises or ventures</i>	<i>County Ag Agents</i>	<i>Alumni events, email survey, and farm school summit</i>	<i>Annually</i>

<b>Condition</b> <i>After 5 years, 50% of those who complete a forestry management plan will be following that plan.</i>	<b>Compliance with forestry management plan</b>	<b>NC forest service</b>	<b>Alumni events, email survey</b>	<b>Annually</b>
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## Strategy 1.2: *Provide continuing education to beginning and experienced farmers in marketing to improve profitability.*

Type of Strategy: (R)

### Target Outcomes:

**Short Term:** 25 farmers per year learn marketing techniques to achieve profitable operations by adapting to changes in production and culture.

**Intermediate:** 75% of the farmers trained use these techniques on a consistent basis for a period of 5 years, thus increasing the market demand for their products.

**Long Term:** After 5 years, 50% of the farmers trained in marketing increase their income to sufficient levels to expand acres planted or other expand their operations by 10% or more.

**Assets:** NC A&T State University, NC State University, and the NC Department of Agriculture have developed programs for marketing agricultural products. The “Retail Ready” program was published by NCCE Extension Associate Gary Bullen and could be foundational to the development of trainings on marketing to both beginning and established farmers. In addition, having a marketing specialist assigned to the Sandhills region to both deliver trainings and provide technical assistance to groups of growers willing to work together will strengthen the region’s brand.

Carolina Common Enterprise, a new cooperative development center for the state, as well as NC Cooperative Extension, can work with groups of farmers on developing marketing and distribution cooperatives.

### Action Steps:

#### Short Term (within 1 year)

1. NCCE County Directors will develop a job description and seek funding for a marketing position to serve the region.
2. NCCE County Directors will also inquire at NCDA&CS, NCSU, and NC A&T SU for the assignment of an agricultural marketing specialist to serve the region.

#### Medium Term (within 2 years)

1. Carolina Common Enterprise will work with NCCE to develop workshops
2. Develop trainings on innovative marketing and production techniques

#### Long Term (within 5 years)

1. Offer trainings on a regular basis
2. Build a web site with training content

**Stronger Economies Together Participants' Guide**  
**Module Nine: *Measuring for Success***

**Handout 2: Measurement Plan Template**

**Slide 10**

What you want to measure	What information you need	Who has the information	How you will get the information	How often/when you will get the information
<i>Strategy 1.2: Provide continuing education to beginning and experienced farmers in marketing to improve profitability</i> <i>Participants: Beginning and experienced farmers</i>	<i>Names and contact information of possible participants</i> <i>Informational materials for trainings</i>	<i>County Ag Agents</i> <i>NCSU, NC A&amp;T SU</i>	<i>Phone calls and emails</i>	<i>Annually</i>
<i>Attitudes/Knowledge/Skills</i> <i>25 farmers per year learn marketing techniques to achieve profitable operations by adapting to changes in production and culture.</i>	<i>(Farm School)</i> <i>Trainers</i> <i>Training Materials</i> <i>Training Dates &amp; Sites</i> <i># of Participants</i>	<i>Trainers</i>	<i>Review participant marketing plans</i>	<i>Upon completion of trainings</i>
<i>Behavior</i> <i>75% of the farmers trained use these techniques on a consistent basis for a period of 5 years, thus increasing the market demand for their products.</i>	<i>Number of participants using marketing skills learned at training</i>	<i>Alumni participants</i>	<i>Survey</i>	<i>Annually</i>
<i>Condition</i> <i>After 5 years, 50% of the farmers trained increase their income sufficiently to expand acres planted, or otherwise expand their operations, by 10% or more</i>	<i>Farm income by farmer</i> <i>Acres added in production</i>	<i>Alumni participants</i>	<i>Survey</i>	<i>Annually after 5 years</i>

## Strategy 1.3: *Provide farmland transition planning and estate planning materials.*

Type of Strategy: (A)

### Target Outcomes:

**Short Term:** Transition planning resources are developed and distributed to 100 estate planning professionals and targeted growers in the region.

**Intermediate:** Twenty professionals agree to offer and advise their clients on alternatives to “selling the farm,” including long-term leases for agricultural production and agricultural worker buy-outs.

**Long Term:** After 5 years, 75% of the targeted growers keep their working land in production.

**Assets:** Mount Olive College has developed coursework on farmland transition planning which could be adapted and applied to trainings provided through NC Cooperative Extension. In addition, Andrew Brannon is an attorney who specializes in estate planning for working lands. NC Cooperative Extension can work with both of these experts to bring this knowledge to the Sandhills.

Each county has also completed a Working Lands Protection Plan which includes a number of different initiatives intended to address the issue of keeping working lands in production. Sandhills Area Land Trust can research these initiatives and collaborate with NC Cooperative Extension to develop farm succession materials in keeping with the WLPP initiatives.

### Action Steps:

#### Short Term (within 1 year)

1. NCCE County Directors will collaborate with Mount Olive College and Andrew Brannon to determine their next steps in delivery of transition planning resources.
2. NCCE County Directors will recruit Sandhills Area Land Trust (SALT) to partner with NCCE to develop farm succession materials.

#### Medium Term (within 2 years)

1. NCCE will identify working lands at risk of commercial development or other non-agriculture use and develop an outreach program with SALT.
2. SALT will distribute farm succession materials.

#### Long Term (within 5 years)

1. NCCE and SALT will create and hold an annual Farm Succession Event.
2. NCCE and SALT will launch online materials on transition planning.



**Stronger Economies Together Participants' Guide**  
**Module Nine: *Measuring for Success***

**Handout 2: Measurement Plan Template**

**Slide 10**

<b>What you want to measure</b>	<b>What information you need</b>	<b>Who has the information</b>	<b>How you will get the information</b>	<b>How often/when you will get the information</b>
<i>Strategy 1.3: Provide farmland transition planning and estate planning materials to retiring growers and estate planning professionals</i> <i>Participants: Experienced farmers, attorneys, tax advisors, and financial planners</i>	<i>Name and contact information of experienced farmers, attorneys, tax advisors, and financial planners</i>	<i>County Ag Agents, Economic Developers, Chambers of Commerce</i>	<i>County Directors will make phone calls</i>	<i>Annually each November</i>
<i>Attitudes/Knowledge/Skills</i> <i>Transition planning resources are developed and distributed to 100 estate planning professionals and targeted growers in the region</i>	<i>Transition planning resources</i> <i>List of names to whom resources are distributed</i>	<i>Mount Olive College</i> <i>Andrew Bannon</i> <i>County Directors/</i> <i>Participants at farm planning workshops</i>	<i>Sign-in Sheets at farm planning workshops</i>	<i>After workshops</i>
<i>Behavior</i> <i>20 real estate professionals agree to offer and advise their clients on alternatives to "selling the farm," including long-term leases for agricultural production and agricultural worker buy-outs</i>	<i>Evidence of agreement</i>	<i>Workshop participants</i>	<i>Surveys</i>	<i>After workshops</i>
<i>Condition</i> <i>After 5 years, 75% of the targeted population keep their working lands in production</i>	<i>Number of participants who have sold or leased their working lands for agricultural purposes</i>	<i>Workshop participants</i>	<i>Track participants through email or phone survey</i>	<i>After 5 years, annually each November</i>

## Strategy 1.4: *Provide tools to connect available regional farmland to emerging farmers, including the possible creation of an interactive website listing properties.*

Type of Strategy: (A)

### Target Outcomes:

**Short Term:** Ag Advisory Boards in Lee, Moore, and Richmond Counties provide input on effective strategies to market working lands.

**Intermediate:** Tools and links are provided to potential new farm operators for purchasing or leasing working lands. These tools will include workshops attended by 25 new farmers and 25 new landowners.

**Long Term:** After 5 years, 50% of workshop participants will enter into written leases or other transfers of working lands to new operators.

**Assets:** The NC Farmland Transition Network pioneered efforts to network available working lands with emerging producers. An opportunity exists to build on that effort. Other partners include Carolina Farm Stewardship Association (Anna MacDonald Dobbs), a non-profit organization that works to support organic farming practices and build local food systems. It currently has an internship program that matches young people interested in organic and sustainable farming practices with farms.

The Sandhills Area Land Trust has expressed an interest in participating in the development of this network.

Each county has adopted a Working Land Protection Plan which contains additional strategies to link emerging farmers with available farmland.

### Action Steps:

#### Short Term (within 1 year)

1. Contingent upon grant funding, SALT will research existing land referral services linking available farmland to emerging farmers, including lease arrangements.

#### Medium Term (within 2 years)

1. SALT and the County Ag Advisory Boards will develop a network to connect emerging farmers with available farmland, including a potential web site.

#### Long Term (within 5 years)

1. Ag Advisory Boards, County Economic Developers, and County Managers will implement County Working Land Protection Plan.

**Stronger Economies Together Participants' Guide**  
**Module Nine: Measuring for Success**

**Handout 2: Measurement Plan Template**

**Slide 10**

<b>What you want to measure</b>	<b>What information you need</b>	<b>Who has the information</b>	<b>How you will get the information</b>	<b>How often/when you will get the information</b>
<i>Strategy 1.4: Provide regional tools to connect available regional farmland to emerging farmers Participants: Selling farmers/emerging farmers</i>	<i>Inventory available farmland Identify emerging farmers and landowners</i>	<i>Realtors Ag Advisory Boards Farm School</i>	<i>Ag Review Personal knowledge Listings</i>	<i>Every 6 months (Feb and Oct)</i>
<i>Attitudes/Knowledge/Skills Ag Advisory Boards in Lee, Moore, and Richmond Counties provide input on effective strategies to market working lands in the region</i>	<i>Feedback from Ag Advisory Boards</i>	<i>Ag Advisory Board members</i>	<i>Survey during Board meetings</i>	<i>Every 6 months (Feb and Oct)</i>
<i>Behavior Tools and resources are provided to potential new farm operators for the purpose of purchasing or leasing available farmland, including workshops attended by 25 new farmers and workshops by 25 new landowners</i>	<i>What tools and resources are available Who are potential participants</i>	<i>NCSU NC A&amp;T SU Ag Advisory Boards Farm School County Records</i>	<i>Research Surveys</i>	<i>Annually each November</i>
<i>Condition After 5 years, 50% of participants enter into written leases or other transfers of working lands to operators</i>	<i>Number of participants who have entered into agreements</i>	<i>Participants</i>	<i>Survey</i>	<i>In November after 5 years</i>

## Strategy 1.5: *Provide resources to agriculture lenders on the value of alternative agriculture enterprises.*

Type of Strategy: (C, R, E)

### Target Outcomes:

**Short Term:** A minimum of three agriculture lenders will provide feedback on what they need to make loans on alternative agriculture enterprises.

**Intermediate:** Tools and resources, including enterprise budgets, risk management plans, and marketing strategies for alternative agriculture enterprises, are developed and distributed to all agriculture lenders in the region.

**Long Term:** After 5 years, there is a 50% increase in the alternative agriculture enterprise loan portfolios of regional agriculture lenders.

**Assets:** NC State University Extension Specialist Gary Bullen has developed trainings on the preparation of alternative agriculture enterprise budgets and has been actively involved in the Piedmont Farm School, on which the Sandhills Farm School will be modeled. NC Cooperative Extension can reach out to Mr. Bullen to develop materials that address agricultural lender concerns. NC Cooperative Extension also has a good relationship with Carolina Farm Credit and will work with it to get feedback on the development of materials that will increase the knowledge of agricultural lenders about alternative agricultural enterprises.

### Action Steps:

#### Short Term (within 1 year)

1. NCCE County Directors will contact Carolina Farm Credit to initiate conversation.
2. NCCE County Directors will contact Gary Bullen at NC State University to determine his interest in gathering feedback from agricultural lenders and developing resources.

#### Medium Term (within 2 years)

1. NC State University will develop resources.

#### Long Term (within 5 years)

1. NCCE County Directors will deliver resources to agricultural lenders and work with applicants on alternative enterprise development.

**Stronger Economies Together Participants' Guide**  
**Module Nine: *Measuring for Success***

**Handout 2: Measurement Plan Template**

**Slide 10**

What you want to measure	What information you need	Who has the information	How you will get the information	How often/when you will get the information
<i>Strategy 1.5: Provide resources to ag lenders on the value of alternative ag enterprises</i> <i>Participants: Ag lenders</i>	<i>Resource materials on alternative ag enterprises</i> <i>Name and contact information of ag lenders</i>	<i>Producers</i> <i>NCDA&amp;CS</i> <i>NCCE</i> <i>NCSU (Gary Bullen)</i> <i>NC A&amp;T SU</i>	<i>Research</i>	<i>January 2015</i>
<i>Attitudes/Knowledge/Skills</i> <i>Conduct a focus group of 3 ag lenders to determine what info they need in order to make loans on alternative ag enterprises</i>	<i>Focus group report</i>	<i>County Ag Agents</i>	<i>Review report</i>	<i>After focus group</i>
<i>Behavior</i> <i>Develop tools and resources on alternative ag enterprises (e.g., enterprise budgets, risk management plans, marketing strategies) and distribute to all known ag lenders in region</i>	<i>List of lenders with contact information</i> <i>Materials on alternative ag enterprises</i>	<i>County Ag Agents</i>	<i>Network with farmers</i>	<i>Annually</i>
<i>Condition</i> <i>After 5 years, there is a 50% increase in farm loan portfolio for alternative ag enterprises in the region</i>	<i>Farm loan portfolios for alternative ag enterprises</i>	<i>Regional Ag Lenders</i>	<i>Phone Survey</i>	<i>Annually</i>



## Strategy 1.6: *Address barriers to value-added agriculture.*

Type of Strategy: (C, R, E)

### Target Outcomes:

**Short Term:** A list of barriers to value-added agriculture is identified and distributed to a targeted list of businesses, educators, regulators, and policymakers in the region for the purpose of increasing their knowledge and awareness.

**Intermediate:** Over the next 5 years, a minimum of three grant or other funding applications to support new value-added enterprises are submitted.

**Long Term:** After 5 years, two new enterprises are developed as models for value-added Agriculture in the region.

**Assets:** It's important that barriers to value-added agriculture be identified in order to educate policymakers and regulators on the impact they are having on local and regional economies. NC Cooperative Extension works very closely with growers, both large and small, and is invested in their success. Agents are familiar with barriers to value-added agriculture but can gain more information through surveys and interviews. This information, combined with research already conducted by the NC Department of Agriculture, can be used to develop an action plan to address barriers.

CultivateNC, a program within NCCE at NC State University, can provide direct technical assistance to the region by seeking grant funding for this purpose as well as preparing surveys and other primary research tools.

### Action Steps:

#### Short Term (within 1 year)

1. CultivateNC will seek grant funding to provide capacity to the counties for gathering feedback and developing action plan.
2. NCCE County Directors will gather feedback to develop a list of barriers to value-added agriculture.

#### Medium Term (within 2 years)

1. NCCE County Directors will engage NCDA&CS and other stakeholders to develop an action plan to address barriers.
2. NCCE will support applicants of grants supporting value-added enterprises in the region by resolving barriers to these enterprises.

**Stronger Economies Together Participants' Guide**  
**Module Nine: *Measuring for Success***

**Handout 2: Measurement Plan Template**

**Slide 10**

<b>What you want to measure</b>	<b>What information you need</b>	<b>Who has the information</b>	<b>How you will get the information</b>	<b>How often/when you will get the information</b>
<b><i>Strategy 1.6: Address barriers to value-added agriculture</i></b>  <b><i>Participants: producers, government agencies</i></b>	<b><i>Names and contact information of producers</i></b> <b><i>List of government agencies involved in value-added processing</i></b>	<b><i>Producers</i></b> <b><i>NCDA &amp; CS</i></b> <b><i>County Health Departments</i></b>	<b><i>Survey</i></b>	<b><i>November 2014</i></b>
<b><i>Attitudes/Knowledge/Skills</i></b> <b><i>A list of barriers to value-added agriculture is identified and distributed to a targeted list of non-profits, educators, regulators, and policymakers in the region to increase knowledge and awareness</i></b>	<b><i>Barriers to value-added agriculture</i></b>	<b><i>Producers</i></b> <b><i>Government agencies</i></b>	<b><i>Focus Groups</i></b> <b><i>Surveys</i></b>	<b><i>March 2015</i></b>
<b><i>Behavior</i></b> <b><i>Over a 5 year period, three grant or other funding applications are submitted from the region for the purpose of creating or expanding value-added enterprises</i></b>	<b><i>Potential grants/funding opportunities</i></b> <b><i>Interested participants</i></b>	<b><i>NCDA &amp; CS</i></b> <b><i>USDA</i></b> <b><i>Other funding sources</i></b>	<b><i>Survey</i></b> <b><i>Workshops, meetings</i></b>	<b><i>Annually in November</i></b>
<b><i>Condition</i></b> <b><i>After 5 years, 2 new enterprises are developed as models for value-added agriculture in the region</i></b>	<b><i>Names and information on new enterprises</i></b>	<b><i>County Ag Agents</i></b> <b><i>Entrepreneurs</i></b>	<b><i>Survey</i></b>	<b><i>After 5 years, in November</i></b>

## Goal 2:

Produce and consume more agricultural and forestry products in the region, resulting in an increase in average farm income by 20% over the next 5 years and an increase in forestry management plans by 10% over the same period.

*Goal 2 supports our vision by increasing the production and consumption of healthy local foods, encouraging the establishment of entrepreneurial agribusinesses, and improving the health of community members.*

## Regional Economic Benefits

By producing and consuming more local agriculture products in the region, the Sandhills Region will create a more regionally supported food system that provides satisfactory family income and a good quality of life to producers as well as healthy food choices for consumers. Increasing the number of forestry management plans will result in better environmental and business management of available timberland, thus increasing income potential for land owners while contributing to the prosperity of the community at large by maintaining the beautiful natural amenities for which the region is known.

Creating a vibrant and diverse agricultural economy supported by the regional market it serves is the focus of Goal 2. Goal 2 strategies build consumer and institutional buyer awareness of the value of locally produced food and non-food goods in the region as well as develop a regional food system supplied by local producers. They further support better management of timber land, thus resulting in a supply of high quality wood and pulp products to regional and global commercial buyers.

### Local Food Benefits

Goal 2 aims over the next five years to generate a 20% increase in both **production** and **consumption** of local produce, meat, and dairy - two sides of the same coin. Farmers cannot and will not grow more food than their customers will demand. To encourage more production of produce, meat, and dairy by the region's growers, Strategy 2.1 calls for more active support of those agencies and organizations already building consumer awareness of the benefits of eating fresh, locally grown food, including improved health outcomes, disease prevention, better taste, seasonal enjoyment, and support of area farms, not to mention a reduced carbon footprint and improved food safety.

In addition to the benefits listed above, a local food system can have a positive economic impact (Martinez, S. et al., 2010) By actively engaging consumers in the conversation about the benefits of local food, the entire region will benefit. Buying local foods will spill over into other local buying habits by consumers thus strengthening the retail sector generally.

A critical action step for this strategy involves brand development of food sourced in the Sandhills Region. By tying local foods to the regional identity, the region itself gains a more cohesive sense of self. A suggestion currently on the table – “ASK for Sandhills,” with the tagline “Agriculture Supplying Kitchens” – as well as other suggestions will be vetted with professional marketers hired to build this brand.

## Food Hub Development

USDA Deputy Secretary Kathleen Merrigan spoke to the importance of food hub development for small and mid-sized farms:

“As I talk to farmers across the country, regardless of what they produce or where, they all share one common challenge: how to best move product from the farm to the marketplace. This is especially crucial for small and midsize farmers who may not have enough capital to own their own trucks, their own refrigeration units, or their own warehouse space. They might not have the resources to develop sophisticated distribution routes, build effective marketing campaigns or network with regional buyers and customers.”

Strategy 2.2 recommends the development of a food hub. A regional food hub is a business that manages the aggregation, distribution, and marketing of locally-sourced food products in the region. The food hub strengthens the ability of local growers to satisfy wholesale, retail, and institutional demand. While there already exists a sophisticated network of direct farm to consumer opportunities in the area (local farmers markets, CSAs, pick-your-own farms, and roadside produce stands), the aggregation, distribution, and marketing of local produce to broader indirect markets, such as restaurants and grocery stores, is a much more complex undertaking that demands planning and cooperation among producers, distributors, and buyers. The Sandhills Farm to Institution project in Moore County is currently in the process of assessing the feasibility of food hub development in the area and is a natural partner for the implementation of this strategy.

Additional benefits of this strategy include the promotion of food processing and other agribusinesses that will naturally develop around the food hub activities, thus leading to entrepreneurship and additional job creation for the region. And, with the region already being fairly strong in tourism (to name just a few -- Sanford in Lee County has a vital downtown heritage district; Moore County's Village of Pinehurst receives global recognition for its golf courses; and Richmond County's Rockingham is home to Rockingham Speedway and Dragway, which, while no longer an official NASCAR track, still holds other cups and races and is a sentimental favorite for many race fans), the opportunity exists to build vibrant food districts serving local fare to tourists visiting the many area attractions.

## Value-Added Opportunities

Strategy 2.3 recommends the identification and promotion of value-added, diversification, and income-patching opportunities. This strategy compliments other economic development efforts in the region by connecting the source of raw materials with a manufactured end product and thus strengthening Advanced Materials, an industry cluster already strong in the region. Similarly, many environmentally-friendly practices, such as conservation easements and trading of carbon credits, can spark the economy by keeping the abundant natural lands intact for the nature tourism industry, another strong industry cluster shown in the Bubble Chart.

For example, while the furniture industry has for the past twenty years outsourced its manufacturing to China and other countries (and as a consequence weakened its positive impact on North Carolina's economy), recent reports suggest that some of the higher quality manufacturers are electing to return to the state for their production needs, including raw materials, a skilled workforce, and available facilities. (Hargreaves, S, 2004, <http://money.cnn.com/2014/02/25/smallbusiness/furniture-manufacture-buzzispace/>). In addition, this strategy ties the region's wood supply to other niche opportunities, like the long leaf pine industry (NC Forest Service, <http://ncforestservice.gov/publications/LongleafLeaflets/LL07.pdf>).

Other evolving industries, like bio-fuels, bamboo products, and charwaste, could also have their raw materials supplied by the region, thus making the area a natural location for the advanced materials industry.



Suggested Branding Concept

# ASK for *Sandhills*

(Agriculture Supplying Kitchens)





## Strategy 2.1: *Engage consumers in the conversation about local food and its value in terms of individual health, community well-being, and regional self-sufficiency.*

Type of Strategy: (C, A, R, E)

### Target Outcomes:

**Short Term:** County Extension offices in the region partner with Center for Environmental Farming Systems, Blue Cross Blue Shield, and other organizations to increase consumer awareness about the value of local foods.

**Mid-Term:** Increase the number of consumers participating in the “10% Campaign” in the region by a multiplier of 4 from 2013 numbers.

**Long Term:** After 5 years, increase the number of consumers participating in the “10% Campaign” in the region by a multiplier of 10 from 2013 numbers.

**Assets:** The Center for Environmental Farming Systems (CEFS) is a partnership among North Carolina State University, North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University and the North Carolina Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services. These partners work closely with state and federal agencies, non-governmental organizations (for example, Carolina Farm Stewardship Association, Rural Advancement Foundation International, North Carolina Farm Bureau Federation), farmers, and citizens to provide agricultural research, extension, and education for citizens of North Carolina.

CEFS coordinates a statewide consumer education Farm to Fork initiative, called the 10% Campaign, which networks local food consumers who pledge to spend 10% of their food dollars on local food purchases. CEFS has also partnered with 4-H to bring FoodCorps to North Carolina. FoodCorps addresses the epidemic of nutrition-related diseases facing children through hands-on nutrition education, hands-on school gardening, and increased local food pathways to school cafeterias.

Blue Cross Blue Shield Foundation provides grant funding for local foods initiatives that address food access concerns and chronic disease prevention and could be a possible funder of this strategy.

Local Chambers of Commerce can provide funding as well as partner with the 10% campaign to promote consumer awareness.

### Action Steps:

#### Short Term (within 1 year)

1. NCCE will contact CEFS for assistance in consumer education as well as identify other potential partners.
2. NCCE will promote the CEFS’ 10% Campaign to chambers of commerce for broader reach in the region.
3. NCCE will work with local chambers of commerce to seek funding for development of branding and marketing materials of Sandhills produce to increase consumer consumption spending.

#### Medium Term (within 2 years)

1. NCCE and local chambers of commerce will develop Sandhills area brand and marketing materials for Sandhills grown food products.

**Stronger Economies Together Participants' Guide**  
**Module Nine: Measuring for Success**

**Handout 2: Measurement Plan Template**

**Slide 10**

What you want to measure	What information you need	Who has the information	How you will get the information	How often/when you will get the information
<p><b>Strategy 2.1: Engage consumers in the conversation about local food and its value in terms of individual health, community well-being, and regional self-sufficiency</b></p> <p><b>Participants:</b> <b>Consumers</b></p>	<p><b>Number of consumers participating in 10% campaign, Sandhills F2T, and farmers markets in the region</b></p>	<p><b>CEFS NCDA &amp; CS Sandhills F2T</b></p>	<p><b>CEFS registration records, F2T registrtrions</b></p>	<p><b>Baseline – November 2014</b></p>
<p><b>Attitudes/Knowledge/Skills</b> County Extension offices in the region partner with Center for Environmental Farming Systems, Blue Cross Blue Shield, and other organizations to increase consumer awareness about the value of local foods.</p>	<p><b>Information on existing consumer awareness programs</b></p>	<p><b>CEFS NCDA &amp; CS Sandhills F2T BCSH</b></p>	<p><b>Phone Calls to Contacts</b></p>	<p><b>Annually in November</b></p>
<p><b>Behavior</b> Increase the number of consumers participating in the “10% Campaign” in the region by a multiplier of 4 from 2013 numbers.</p>	<p><b>Current number of people signed up</b></p>	<p><b>CEFS NCDA &amp; CS Sandhills F2T</b></p>	<p><b>Program registration records</b></p>	<p><b>Baseline and annually in November</b></p>
<p><b>Condition</b> After 5 years, increase the number of consumers participating in the “10% Campaign” in the region by a multiplier of 10 from 2013 numbers.</p>	<p><b>Current number of people signed up</b></p>	<p><b>CEFS NCDA &amp; CS Sandhills F2T</b></p>	<p><b>Program registration records</b></p>	<p><b>Baseline and after 5 years</b></p>

## Strategy 2.2: **Create a regional food hub.**

Type of Strategy: (R, E)

### Target Outcomes:

**Short Term:** A feasibility study is conducted to determine the potential supply and demand for a regional food hub in Moore County.

**Intermediate:** Based on the results of the feasibility study, a food hub is created because sufficient numbers of producers and institutional buyers commit to its launch and continued operation.

**Long Term:** After 5 years, the food hub results in a 20% increase in farm income for those producers participating in the food hub.

**Assets:** Sandhills Farm to Table is a multistakeholder cooperative (consumers, workers, and producers) that has aggregated and distributed local food within the region through a CSA model. Because of the network it has built with growers, it has agreed to support organizational efforts for a local food hub that connects producers with institutional buyers. Plan participants will support its Sandhills Farm to Institution effort through funding and promotion.

Potential institutional buyers include community colleges, schools, hospitals, and local grocery stores in Lee and Moore Counties, as well as nearby Cumberland County, where Fort Bragg is located. This huge army installation, "the Home of the Airborne and Special Operations," with approximately 57,000 military personnel, 11,000 civilian employees and 23,000 family members is one of the largest military complexes in the world.

### Action Steps:

#### Short Term (within 1 year)

1. Sandhills Farm to Table will assess community demand for locally grown products.
2. Partners in Progress will complete the feasibility study on a regional food hub.

#### Medium Term (within 2 years)

1. Sandhills Farm to Institution (Sandhills Farm to Table) will plan a pilot food hub with designated regional institutions.

#### Long Term (within 5 years)

1. Assuming the pilot is successful, Sandhills Farm to Institution will create a regional food hub for institutional purchasing.
2. NCCE will complete a study on the feasibility of value-added processing facilities in the region (flash freezer, light produce processing, slaughter).

**Stronger Economies Together Participants' Guide**  
**Module Nine: Measuring for Success**

**Handout 2: Measurement Plan Template**

**Slide 10**

<b>What you want to measure</b>	<b>What information you need</b>	<b>Who has the information</b>	<b>How you will get the information</b>	<b>How often/when you will get the information</b>
<i>Strategy 2.2: Create a regional food hub</i> <i>Participants: Producers, distributors, buyers/consumers</i>	<i>Needs of consumers and other buyers/chefs, etc.</i>	<i>Participants</i>	<i>Feasibility Study</i> <i>Surveys</i>	<i>Initially and annually to determine needs are being met in November</i>
<i>Attitudes/Knowledge/Skills</i> <i>A feasibility study is conducted to determine the potential supply and demand for a regional food hub in Moore County.</i>	<i>Potential for development of a successful food hub in region</i>	<i>Farmers, chefs, buyers, and consumers</i>	<i>Surveys</i>	<i>Prior to compiling feasibility study</i>
<i>Behavior</i> <i>A food hub is created because sufficient numbers of producers and institutional buyers commit to its launch and continued operation.</i>	<i>Demonstrate farmer/consumer engagement in food hub</i>	<i>Food hub management</i>	<i>Surveys</i>	<i>Annually in November</i>
<i>Condition</i> <i>After 5 years, the food hub results in a 10% increase in farm income for those producers participating in the food hub.</i>	<i>If farmers have gained income created by food hub participation</i>	<i>Farmers participating in food hub</i>	<i>Surveys</i>	<i>Baseline needed (assign a number to each farmer and send surveys – go back 5 years)</i> <i>After 5 years in November</i>

**Strategy 2.3: *Identify alternative crops for the region that lead to environmentally-friendly value-added opportunities. Provide options and information to producers on diversification and “income patching,” including niche or new products, growing season extension, conservation easements, solar farms, carbon credits, and other sustainable revenue opportunities.***

Type of Strategy: (C, A, R, E)

## Target Outcomes:

**Short Term:** Alternative crops and other sustainable revenue opportunities are identified by university researchers and other professionals and promoted to regional growers, other agricultural landowners, and regional economic developers.

**Intermediate:** 125 regional growers will replace or expand their production to include alternative crops, value-added opportunities, or other sustainable revenue opportunities.

**Long Term:** After 5 years, the return on farm and forest land that has been dedicated to alternative crops, value-added opportunities, or other sustainable revenue opportunities has achieved a level that is equal to or exceeds its operating costs.

**Assets:** NC State University is a land grant university that conducts ongoing research in specialty crops, natural resources, and agritourism development. Because of the close ties between Extension and NCSU, this expertise can be channeled to support alternative revenue opportunities in the Sandhills.

The Robbins Farm Incubator Project is a pilot project supported by CEFS in the Town of Robbins in Moore County. CEFS supports sustainable farming practices, including diversification and alternative crop production, and offers a series of workshops focused on sustainable practices. The Robbins Farm Incubator Project will incubate new farmers and offer test site for specialty crop production.

The Sandhills Area Land Trust (SALT) works with private landowners to negotiate voluntary conservation agreements (Conservation Easements) on private property. Since its founding in 1991, SALT has permanently protected more than 11,800 acres of working farms, water supplies, endangered ecosystems, and urban open-space in its six-county service region.

The NC Agritourism Networking Association serves as a statewide proactive advocate for agritourism farmers and as a liaison between and among state-level organizations, field organizations, nonprofits and rural landowners to support and facilitate agritourism.

Carolina Common Enterprise is a cooperative development center that assists individuals and entities in the startup, expansion or operational improvement of rural businesses, especially those that are cooperatively- or mutually-owned. They are a good resource for organizational development of marketing cooperatives and other mutually-owned companies that harness and leverage the energy and resources of collective action.

NC Central Park is housed at STARworks, a former textile mill in neighboring Montgomery County that has been renovated into a creative enterprise center, including farm business entrepreneurs. STARworks can be a resource development of new agribusiness enterprises.

Existing agribusinesses such as the Perdue Roaster Plant should be tapped to mentor new agribusiness ventures. Local economic developers and chambers of commerce need to be apprised of the potential for new revenue streams to farmers and timber owners.



## Action Steps:

### Short-Term (within 1 year)

1. SALT and NCCE will collaborate on research on the availability of resources for non-traditional agricultural production and timber land.
2. SALT and NCCE will collaborate on method of delivery and content of information to be distributed to agricultural and forested landowners.
3. NCCE will work with Partners in Progress on the development of wood waste materials to supply a manufacturing facility at the Mega Park.

### Medium Term (within 2 years)

1. NCCE will collaborate with the Chambers of Commerce to determine how best to support the farm incubators in the region (Robbins farm incubator).
2. NCCE will work with 4-H to expose youth to new/emerging farm and timber product opportunities in agribusiness.

### Long Term (within 5 years)

1. NCCE will collaborate with Moore County Partners in Progress and other regional stakeholders to ensure the implementation of each county's Working Lands Protection Plan strategies.
2. NCCE will collaborate with STARworks on the development of appropriate materials for non-traditional agribusinesses.

**Stronger Economies Together Participants' Guide**  
**Module Nine: Measuring for Success**

**Handout 2: Measurement Plan Template**

**Slide 10**

<b>What you want to measure</b>	<b>What information you need</b>	<b>Who has the information</b>	<b>How you will get the information</b>	<b>How often/when you will get the information</b>
<b>Strategy 2.3:</b> <i>Identify high value alternative crops for the region. Provide options and information to producers on diversification and "income patching."</i> <b>Participants:</b> <i>Producers, timberland owners, economic developers, university researchers</i>	<b>Names and contact information of potential producers of high-value alternative crops</b> <i>Identify high value alternative crops</i>	<b>Names and contact information of university researchers</b>	<b>Personal contacts</b> <b>Workshops</b>	<b>Baseline</b>
<b>Attitudes/Knowledge/Skills</b> <i>Alternative crops and other sustainable revenue opportunities are identified by university researchers and other professionals and promoted to regional growers, other agricultural landowners, and regional economic developers.</i>	<b>Confirmation that information is being disseminated to growers and landowners</b>	<b>Growers</b>	<b>Survey</b>	<b>Annually in November</b>
<b>Behavior</b> <i>125 regional growers will replace or expand their production to include alternative crops, value-added opportunities, or other sustainable revenue opportunities.</i>	<b># of producers growing high-value alternative crops</b> <b># of acres devoted to high-value alternative crops</b> <b>Pre and post surveys</b>	<b>Growers</b>	<b>Survey</b>	<b>Annually in November</b>

## Goal 3:

Raise the profile of agriculture and timber industries so they are widely recognized by local and regional policy makers, politicians, community and business leaders, and others as being critical and essential economic drivers. By 2018, the region is generally recognized as a leader in sustainable agriculture and community.

*Goal 3 supports our vision by developing a vibrant agricultural sector that is recognized as a critical component of creating an economically vigorous region.*

## Regional Economic Benefits

By drawing attention to agriculture as one of the Region's significant industries, the Sandhills Region will promote policies and implement systems that will accelerate its progress toward regional economic self-sufficiency. The promotion of these policies and implementation of these systems will result in a strong and stable agricultural economy and timber industry, a vibrant farming base and a region that demonstrates active engagement in agriculture and forestry through prioritizing purchase of local agriculture products and supporting other local rural agriculture-based economies such as outdoor and agritourism activities.

Sandhills agriculture supports the livelihoods of small and midsize farmers, rural families, and agriculture-related businesses. It also has the potential to supply a larger percentage of the food for the region, thus reducing dependence on cross country shipping systems and imported oil. Perhaps even more important, however, is the fact that locally sourced food and non-food products build community pride, a key ingredient in any community development toolbox.

### Annual Summit

Strategy 3.1 recommends the region host an annual summit on sustainable agriculture and community development practices. Showing leadership and successes in this field will draw the attention of statewide policymakers to build a better North Carolina region by region.

The Sandhills Region also boasts several natural amenities. The topological formation is actually a strip of ancient beach dunes which divides the Piedmont from the coastal plain. Its sandy soils are home to the Longleaf Pine and Loblolly Pine, chief sources of timber, pulp and paper for sawmills. The Longleaf Pine forest is rich in biodiversity and consequently is of particular interest to conservation and environmental organizations. Their desire to preserve these forests is compatible with the region's existing economic development plans, including the recently concluded BRAC study on the proposed Ft. Bragg military base expansion (<http://www.bractf.com/CRGPImplementationTasks.php>). These groups will be natural partners in implementing Goal 3's focus of promoting agriculture and forestry as players in economic development strategies.

### Promotional Tools

Strategy 3.2 recommends building a toolkit for agriculture groups and other grower spokespeople, so that they will become more comfortable engaging in self-promotion. Recent county plans have not recognized agriculture and forestry as economic drivers when data reflects otherwise. Agribusiness value-added income makes up the following percentages of total county value-added: Lee (10%); Moore (14.6%); Richmond (26.1%) and employs the following percentages of the county workforce: Lee (15%); Moore (13.4%); Richmond (22.4%). This oversight by economic development officials must be addressed in the short-term to gain traction with legislative bodies for any needed policy changes (as recommended in the Working Lands Protection Plans for each county).

### Agriculture Literacy

Education is key to change. The recycling movement did not gain real traction until a generation after it began, when our children learned the new version of the 3 R's (Reduce, Reuse, Recycle). Teaching our youth the connection between the region's growers and the food on their tables will increase the likelihood of a successful regional food system, preservation of our working lands, and development of thriving communities within the region. Strategy 3.3 recommends the adoption of an "Agriculture Literacy" curriculum in all schools in the region.

A critical action step involves the recruitment of FFA/4-H students to engage elementary school-aged children in Fun on the Farm Days and other agriculture literacy promotional events. By doing so, the Sandhills Region will be training its future leaders in the implementation of this plan's strategies for sustainable economic development.



### Strategy 3.1: *Hold an annual educational event in the region to introduce the newest thinking on models of sustainable agriculture and best practices in community development.*

Type of Strategy: (C, E)

#### Target Outcomes:

**Short Term:** Growers, economic and community developers, government leaders, educators, and business people in each county (1) network; and (2) increase their knowledge of the relationship between local agriculture and strong communities .

**Intermediate:** The Ag Advisory Boards, which include representatives from the agriculture, forestry, and agribusiness sectors, for each county are included in the board retreats of that county's board of commissioners.

**Long Term:** After 5 years, a majority of the communities in the region see an increase in economic development due to the impact of the agriculture and forestry industry clusters.

**Assets:** Sandhills Area Land Trust (SALT) is a community-based, 501(c)(3) non-profit organization that serves Moore, Richmond, Scotland, Hoke, Cumberland, and Harnett counties in southeastern North Carolina. SALT works with private landowners to negotiate voluntary conservation agreements (Conservation Easements) on private property. Since its founding in 1991, SALT has permanently protected more than 11,800 acres of working farms, water supplies, endangered ecosystems, and urban open-space in its six-county service region. SALT has been very instrumental in the development and implementation of the plan and should continue as a partner in the sustainable agriculture movement in the Sandhills.

Other organizations that were not as closely involved in the development of the plan, including the US Fish and Wildlife Service, the Nature Conservancy, Save our Sandhills, and Sustainable Sandhills, should nonetheless be recruited to support and contribute to an educational event that focuses on sustainable agriculture and development models.

#### Action Steps:

##### Short-Term (within 1 year)

1. SALT will collaborate with Partners in Progress and NCCE to identify potential partners and sponsors of the event (Nature Conservancy, USFWS, Save our Sandhills, Sustainable Sandhills).
2. This team will plan and seek funding for this event.

##### Medium Term (within 2 years)

1. This team will replicate and improve upon prior events to develop a model suitable for future successful events.



**Stronger Economies Together Participants' Guide**

**Module Nine: *Measuring for Success***

**Handout 2: Measurement Plan Template**

**Slide 10**

<b>What you want to measure</b>	<b>What information you need</b>	<b>Who has the information</b>	<b>How you will get the information</b>	<b>How often/when you will get the information</b>
<p><i>Strategy 3.1: Hold an annual educational event in the region to introduce the new evidence-based practices and models of sustainable agriculture and community and economic development.</i></p> <p><i>Participants: General public, thought leaders, environmental organizations</i></p>	<p><i>Hot topics</i>  <i>Key speakers</i>  <i>Budget</i>  <i>Sponsors</i>  <i>Marketing</i></p>			
<p><i>Attitudes/Knowledge/ Skills</i>  <i>Growers, economic and community developers, government leaders, educators, and business people in each county (1) network; and (2) increase their knowledge of the relationship between local agriculture and strong communities and economies.</i></p>	<p><i>New or strengthened network connections</i>  <i>Knowledge of agricultural production and how it contributes to local economy</i></p>	Registrants	Pre-survey of participants upon registration	<p><i>Post-survey after the event and annually will be sent to all registrants</i></p>
<p><i>Behavior</i>  <i>The Ag Advisory Boards, which include representatives from the agriculture, forestry, and agribusiness sectors, for each county are invited to each of</i></p>	<p><i>When boards meet and how do we get on the agenda</i>  <i>What do they want in terms of presentation</i></p>	Board clerks	NCCE County Directors will ask	<p><i>One time only</i></p>

<i>the board retreats of that county's board of commissioners and school board respectively.</i>					
<b>Condition</b> <i>After 5 years, a majority of the communities in the region see an increase in economic development due to the impact of the agriculture and forestry industry clusters.</i>	<i>Number of ag sector jobs in each county</i>	Mike Walden at NC State University	Ask or look at Walden's county reports	<i>Baseline and after 5 years</i>	

### Strategy 3.2: *Provide tools for agriculture groups to enable them to promote agriculture and timber industries at local events.*

Type of Strategy: (R, E)

#### Target Outcomes:

**Short Term:** 125 agricultural producers and timber growers across the region are trained to promote and advocate for local agriculture.

**Intermediate:** Agriculture and forestry industries are promoted at 25 public events and festivals in the region annually.

**Long Term:** After 5 years, regional economic developers, and city and county planners will include agriculture and forestry as economic drivers in economic and strategic planning initiatives.

**Assets:** The NC Farm Bureau 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. NCCE County Directors will contact the Farm Bureau to assist in the development of talking points to promote the agriculture and timber industries. Similarly, Carolina Farm Credit has been serving the credit needs of rural America for more than 95 years and can assist in the promotional efforts.

County Chambers of Commerce will assist the agriculture and timber industries in building a network of regional businesses.

#### Action Steps:

##### Short-Term (within 1 year)

1. NCCE will collaborate with the Farm Bureau and Carolina Farm Credit on researching data to support talking points on how agriculture and health are tied together and how agriculture impacts the economy.
2. This team will then craft talking points and identify advocates of agriculture in county government.
3. This team will develop a web site dedicated to communicating the initiatives under this plan.

##### Medium Term (within 2 years)

1. NCSU will seek grant funding for a CRD position that will serve Lee, Moore, and Richmond Counties.
2. The Team will develop a marketing plan for agriculture in the region, which will include networking opportunities with area chambers of commerce.

**Stronger Economies Together Participants' Guide**  
**Module Nine: Measuring for Success**

**Handout 2: Measurement Plan Template**

**Slide 10**

<b>What you want to measure</b>	<b>What information you need</b>	<b>Who has the information</b>	<b>How you will get the information</b>	<b>How often/when you will get the information</b>
<i>Strategy 3.2: Provide tools for ag groups on how to promote agriculture and timber industries</i>  <i>Participants: Ag groups</i>	<i>Names and contact information for various ag groups</i> <i>Resource materials</i> <i>Names and contact information for events and trade fairs</i>			
<i>Attitudes, Knowledge, Skills</i> <i>125 agricultural producers and timber growers across the region are trained to promote and advocate for local agriculture</i>	<i>Did their knowledge, etc. about local agriculture increase</i>	<i>Participants in training</i>	<i>Surveys</i>	<i>Before and after trainings</i>
<i>Behavior</i> <i>Agriculture and forestry industries are promoted at 25 public events and festivals in the region annually.</i>	<i># of festivals and other events at which ag was represented</i>	<i>CVBs</i>	<i>Festival and Event sign-up sheets</i>	<i>Annually</i>
<i>Condition</i> <i>After 5 years, regional economic developers, and city and county planners will include agriculture and forestry as economic drivers in economic and strategic planning initiatives.</i>	<i>Find out when new plans are being written</i>	<i>NCCE County Directors will talk to economic developers in each county</i>	<i>Conversation and environmental scans (which take place every 5-8 years)</i>	<i>Annually</i>

### Strategy 3.3: *Adopt an “Agriculture Literacy” curriculum into schools and youth programs in the region.*

Type of Strategy: (R, E)

#### Target Outcomes:

**Short Term:** Secure support for ag literacy programming.

**Intermediate:** 200 School-aged children will participate in agriculture literacy programming annually.

**Long Term:** After 5 years, there is an increase in youth exploring agriculture as a college major and career choice because of the increased knowledge of and respect for agriculture.

**Assets:** Kathy Byron of Sandhills Community College is closely tied with Farm to School advocacy and can coordinate the programming efforts of several other organizations dedicated to bringing local, healthy food into school cafeterias in the region. Good Food Sandhills is an entity of Sandhills Community College and is dedicated to strengthening community by empowering its youth and citizens to make informed decisions that will make the future healthier and more sustainable. They link an extensive School Garden Network with Farm-to-School as a NC FoodCorps Site and employ Community Food System Development to equalize access to healthy local food in Moore County. Good Food Sandhills offers a comprehensive approach to connecting good food with good people from seed to table, classroom to community. They are located in Moore County, NC.

The NCCE Master Gardener program enlists volunteers to assist in community gardening projects and as speakers at educational events

#### Action Steps:

##### Short-Term (within 1 year)

1. NCCE will collaborate with the Farm Bureau, Sandhills Community College, and the Soil and Water Districts in a discussion of how to involve school stakeholders in a discussion of agriculture literacy programs and how to identify advocates for the program.

##### Medium Term (within 2 years)

1. This team will introduce an ag literacy program to school boards for adoption.
2. NCCE Master Gardeners will develop school gardens in collaboration with Good Food Sandhills to promote health and well-being instruction in the classrooms.
3. NCCE will enlist 4-H to give presentations at elementary schools.

##### Long Term (within 5 years)

1. The team will evaluate the effectiveness of the ag literacy program in the region.
2. FFA and 4-H will host “Fun on the Farm” Day for school field trips.



**Stronger Economies Together Participants' Guide**

**Module Nine: *Measuring for Success***

**Handout 2: Measurement Plan Template**

**Slide 10**

<b>What you want to measure</b>	<b>What information you need</b>	<b>Who has the information</b>	<b>How you will get the information</b>	<b>How often/when you will get the information</b>
<i>Strategy 3.3: Adopt an “Ag Literacy” program into schools and youth programs in the</i> <i>Participants: School Board, teachers, ag leaders, after school programs</i>	<i>Current usage of Farm Bureau curriculum</i> <i>Objections to curriculum</i> <i>Supportive members of School Board and teachers</i>	Classroom teachers and administrators	School surveys	<i>Annually</i>
<i>Attitudes/Knowledge/Skills</i> <i>Secure support for ag literacy programming</i>	<i>What incentives can we give to ensure teachers will support the program (to be taught by 4-H agents)</i>	<i>Farm Bureau – to adapt and localize what they are doing</i>	<i>Talk to Farm Bureau</i>	<i>Annually after summer workshops</i>
<i>Behavior</i> <i>200 School-aged children will participate in agriculture literacy programming annually</i>	<i>Number of children who participated in the curriculum</i>	4-H Agents	<i>Survey to teachers after trainings</i>	<i>Annually after trainings</i>
<i>Condition</i> <i>After 5 years, there is an increase in youth exploring agriculture as a college major and career choice because of the increased knowledge of and respect for agriculture</i>	<i>Who is pursuing agriculture as a career?</i>	<i>High school guidance counselors</i> <i>Ag teachers</i> <i>School personnel</i>	<i>Food Corps in Moore county</i> <i>Kathy Byron at Sandhills Community College</i>	<i>Baseline and at end of 5-year period</i>

# Evidence Basis for Plan

## Regional Demographic Data

The Sandhills Region consists of the three contiguous counties of Lee, Moore, and Richmond located in the southern Piedmont region of North Carolina. The three counties share the physical and natural attributes of rolling hills, sandy soil, long leaf pines, adequate rainfall, and farmland with small fields. Due to economics, demographics, and even highway systems, there exists a fluid exchange of people, goods, and money across the three counties.

Moore and Lee Counties have experienced an increase in population, while Richmond County has until recently seen decades of decline. All three counties have lost industry (textiles, lumber) and seen a decreasing interest in farming, due in part to a shrinking farm labor pool, the rising cost of agricultural production, land access and affordability, and the encroachment of more profitable urban development. All counties share a desire to bring more jobs and revenue into the region, as well as an appreciation of the economic and cultural value of farm and timberland. Lee has a greater industrial base with many moderate-sized businesses, while Richmond is under the greatest economic stress. Moore has tourism as its primary economic driver and enjoys higher household income levels than the other counties. It is recognized for its high quality golf courses, equine events, and upper-end retirement communities.

Moore has an older population, more highly educated, and wealthier. For purposes of providing a market for local food, it is the anchor for the region. Low land prices and water availability in Richmond County make it ideal for farming as well as advanced manufacturing and processing facilities. Of the three counties in the region, Lee lies closest to the Research Triangle urban area and has the heaviest travel counts on its roads, thus enjoying a greater support advantage to the denser urban population.

Richmond County is a Tier 1 County; Lee County is a Tier 2 County; and Moore County is a Tier 3 County. These designations are announced by the NC Department of Commerce on an annual basis and reflect the level of economic incentives eligible for each county. Tier 1 represents counties with the highest level of economic stress; Tier 3 represents the healthiest economically.

## Regional Economic Data

Agriculture and the timber industry have a strong tradition in the Sandhills Region and remain a viable economic cluster today. Total 2011 farm income for the three counties equaled \$316 million (<http://www.ncagr.gov>). As an industry cluster, Ag Business, though a “mature” industry, has stayed strong, despite fluctuating commodity prices, the tobacco industry decline, and economic downturns. It remains among the top six industries for the region, which also include biomedical, advanced manufacturing, ARE, education, and chemicals.

Agriculture is the industry that feeds the world, yet it is threatened by a myriad of economic and regulatory forces. It is hard work, with long hours, high capitalization costs, and diminishing returns. Not surprisingly, the average age of farmers is trending upward, and part-time farming is becoming more and more the norm in order to make ends meet.

Recent social trends, however, indicate a growing demand for locally-produced goods. Moore County has taken the lead in the region in response to this trend by initiating a 2012 study with recommendations for the development of a food hub in Moore County (Moore County WLPP). New non-food uses for agriculture-based products, including chemicals, biofuels, and cosmetics, also hold promise for growers and dovetail nicely into the other strong industry clusters in the region, particularly biomedical and advanced materials.

While a small farm local food system currently exists in Moore County, through its farmers markets and the Sandhills Farm to Table Cooperative (a multistakeholder commercial enterprise based on a CSA model), potential exists for enlarging it to include institutional buyers and a greater number of consumers through the Farm to Institution initiative currently in development. Data reflects significant trade leakage in terms of where regional grocery stores and supermarkets buy their produce and other food. Opportunity exists to stop the leakage with locally sourced meat, dairy, nuts, fruits, and vegetables.

Total farmland in the three counties has fallen over the past decade, yet significant portions of total county acreage are still devoted to agriculture or woodlands (Lee – 86%; Moore – 85%; Richmond – 90%). (WLPP) Another potential economic driver for the region is agritourism and nature-based tourism, as well as other income-patching opportunities for farmers and other producers.

## Regional Assets

**Natural.** The Sandhills Region is best known for its natural beauty of pine-forested rolling hills and sandy well-drained soils. It is a prime area for the cultivation of horticulture crops, like peaches, melons, and strawberries, because of its excellent drainage, and is also well-suited for the production of garden vegetables, with its exceptionally long growing season, and in some cases, double-cropping. The Region's abundant natural beauty also lends itself to recreational activities like canoeing, cycling, and hiking as well as game lands for hunting.

**Built.** The Region, particularly in Moore County, has excellent medical facilities, hotel and conference accommodations, and restaurants. All three counties have accessible and affordable community colleges and extension offices which can offer needed trainings to new and emerging producers. Moore County is in the process of developing an industrial park (MegaPark), which is currently seeking tenants. Opportunity exists to recruit a biochar facility to process the abundant waste timber in the region.

**Political.** The Sandhills Farm to Table Cooperative, together with the existing farmers markets in all three counties, indicate a current social, cultural and political leaning towards the creation of a local food system in the region. Support of local food systems is also evident at the state level. The NC Department of Agriculture has the NC Farm Fresh web site which provides a directory of pick-your-own farms, roadside farm markets, and farmers markets throughout North Carolina. The Center for Environmental Farming Systems has successfully launched the 10% Campaign (Farm to Fork) and several other initiatives to promote the development of local food systems throughout the state.

In addition to political support currently backing the establishment of local food systems throughout the state, the NC Department of Agriculture also provides support to farmers seeking protection under the NC Agriculture Development and Farm Preservation Trust Fund.

**Human.** The large number of small farms and acres devoted to timberland in the region create a realistic and achievable opportunity for sustainable development provided the next generation of land stewards can capitalize on the collective wisdom of its current care takers. A farmer mentoring program, combined with affordable and accessible financial resources and business support, would provide a necessary leg-up for new producers just entering the industry. The Robbins Incubator Farm in Moore County is an effort to show the possible future of the smaller farming industry in the region.

**Financial.** When the Sandhills Sustainable Ag Working Group was asked to identify financial resources to support the establishment of small, diversified farms that could contribute to the development of a self-sufficient and independent food system for the Region, as well as support the profitability of regional

producers, the list and variety of conventional and non-traditional lenders and grantmakers was impressive. Area banks mentioned included Wells Fargo, Fidelity Bank, and First Bank. Carolina Farm Credit, SBA microloans and USDA coop and specialty agriculture lending programs topped the list as resources for emerging producers. NGOs included Blue Cross Blue Shield, Golden LEAF, Carolina Farm Stewardship Association, the Rural Center, the Tobacco Trust Fund, Sustainable Agriculture Research & Education (SARE), and the Conservation Fund.

**Social and Cultural.** The variety of social networking opportunities available today through social media is especially effective as a tool for attracting small, alternative farming entrepreneurs and linking them directly to potential markets. GoodFoodJobs.org is a national web-based model for networking in the sustainable agriculture industry and can provide a good model for the development of a regional web site performing the same purpose in the Sandhills. Increasing the visibility of available agricultural properties is a high priority for this region's strategic plan and developing this web site while also partnering with local realtors educated in the high value of agricultural properties in the region could provide the linkages potential producers need to both find their land as well as their markets.

Moore and Richmond Counties are also part of the 8 counties that comprise the Central Park region of North Carolina, an economic development region based on heritage and cultural tourism development and outdoor recreation opportunities. Central Park NC began STARworks Center for Creative Enterprise in a former hosiery mill in the small town of Star. STARworks is home to several for profit and not for profit businesses, focusing on renewable energy, sustainable agriculture, and creative arts-related businesses. ([www.centralparknc.org](http://www.centralparknc.org)).

## Potential Barriers and Related Strategies

While the Sandhills Region has a strong asset base for pursuing strategies related to sustainable agriculture as a driver of economic development, there is also a list of significant barriers that must be addressed before serious implementation of the plan is pursued. Chief among these is the independent-minded producer who may not be open to trying alternative or cooperative methods of production, marketing, and distribution. Second is the declining interest in family farming among next generation farmers, the reasons for which will be explained in more detail below. Third is the lack of experience in the lending community on making loans to small farms raising alternative crops. Fourth is the need to modify food safety regulations to allow for small farm operations to effectively compete with larger institutionalized farms. Fifth is the need to provide more on-going technical support to emerging farmers, absentee landowners, and retiring farmers to ensure that the region's working lands remain in production.

**Loss of Farmland.** The loss of farmland to urban sprawl and other commercial development is alarming, as evidenced by Figure 1.1. While economic developers and political officials may consider the growth represented by such development as a positive indicator of a healthy economy, sustained loss of farm and timberland will could have an irreversible impact on our nation's ability to feed itself. Consequently, the conversation on the value of local foods must go beyond the circle of researchers, environmentalists, and farmers into the mainstream. All 3 of the strategies for Goal 3 build that conversation.

**Attitude of Existing Producers.** Profit margins for traditional farming methods are small, while those well-managed small farms that have found a local niche market for their sustainably grown fruits, vegetables, herbs, livestock, or horticultural products have potential for showing greater than average profit margins. The time, desire, and training needed to diversify into alternative markets, as well as adopt collaborative and/or cooperative buying and marketing strategies to break in to these markets, however, can be overwhelming, especially to producers who are comfortable with the way things have traditionally been done.

**Strategies:** Outreach and education are the keys to changing habits. Creating a toolkit and listing of best practices in addition to providing access to experienced practitioners as mentors to those producers willing to try something different will increase demand for more information on new trends.

Putting "Agriculture" back on the map by making it a major talking point among economic development officials will further elevate the public and insider perception of the industry, thus motivating producers to work outside of the box.

**Declining Interest in Agriculture.** With the average age of farmers at 58 and the next generation's general lack of interest in taking over the family farm, it's no wonder there is a farming crisis looming on this nation's horizon. Add to that fact the lack of farm worker supply, the high rate of farm accidents, high land prices, and the mushrooming cost of farm equipment and agricultural production generally, and the future of making a living off the land seems bleak. Yet, there are also contraindicators – the national growing food culture, the rise of the hobby or part-time farmer, the surprising growth in the number of small farms nationally, the re-emergence of cooperatives as a collective commercial power, and the natural attraction of youth to an alternative lifestyle.

**Strategies:** Putting "agriculture" back into the classroom will kindle interest in farming among the Sandhills Region's youth, who may pass that interest on to their parents. Developing a greater appreciation for a local food system within the region can lead to greater consumption as well as contribution of labor from local constituents, thus increasing market demand and reducing the demand for imported labor.

Whether transitioning the farm to the next generation or to a new operator, existing producers need help with their planning needs. The North Carolina Farmland Transition Network was an early attempt to provide an online resource for producers to plan for their legacy. Reviving and enhancing this resource with additional tools, information, and outreach activities will help transition farmland from its existing stewards to



new ones, whether within the family or outside of it.

**Lending Community.** A major barrier to new farmers and alternative agriculture is the unknown value of the alternative crop because of the lack of established markets as well as the lenders' lack of familiarity with alternative crops and sustainable agriculture practices. All lenders will require a business plan as a prerequisite for their lending determination, and the business plan must include financial projections based on the produce value.

**Strategies:** Creating greater access to resources, such as "Enterprise Budgets," in alternative crops will influence the ability of lenders to support alternative producers more readily.

**Food Safety Regulation.** There is an apparent conflict between government food safety regulations and its desire to support farmland preservation, because many of the policies and guidelines are challenging for small to mid sized farms to implement from an economic standpoint.

**Strategies:** Identifying the conflicts is a critical first step towards developing reasonable policies addressing public concerns. This plan recommends the start of a conversation to address challenges small and mid-sized growers face in the regulatory framework.

**Business Trainings.** Farmers run a business, and just like any other business owner, they need to have a plan to start-up, operate, and eventually transfer the farm to a new owner/operator. Over the past several decades, the business model for running a farm has changed dramatically, and in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is still changing in light of the smaller, niche markets that are developing around local food systems. New farmers may lack the skills it takes to develop a business plan that is built around this model.

**Strategies:** Providing farm business planning trainings to beginning farmers will teach producers about various business models and planning. This will prepare producers for when they seek financial help from lenders, thus leading to a greater chance of success for their farm business as well as keeping working lands in production. Beginning and experienced farmers will also have greater access to continuing education in innovative marketing techniques.

# Evaluation Plan

## Key Measures and Strategies to Track Progress:

Tracking the progress on each of the strategies listed in this plan will be accomplished in the manner identified for such strategy in Handout 2 of Module 9, which is shown after every strategy. Evaluation methods used include pre and post surveys, number and kinds of trainings, number of participants, change in number of loan applications, business plans, levels of acreages devoted to farming and forestry management.

## Implementation

The Sandhills Sustainable Ag Working Group has devoted a great deal of time, thought, and energy to the development of this regional economic development plan. In order to ensure the implementation of the various strategies named herein, North Carolina Cooperative Extension has agreed to devote personnel to the task of initiating and/or delegating the action steps identified for each strategy. NCCE will also track progress on each of the strategies by using the measures identified in the Module 9 Measurement Plans that follow each strategy described in this plan.

## Appendix

The Sandhills Sustainable Ag Working Group wishes to thank the individuals identified as Planning Group Members on the attached list. Their dedication and hard work contributed to the successful development of this Regional Economic Development Plan.

The Sandhills Sustainable Ag Working Group also wishes to thank the individuals identified as Training Team Members on the attached list. They facilitated the discussion generated by the Stronger Economies Together curriculum, guided us through the planning process, and assisted us in the writing of this plan.

The Sandhills Sustainable Ag Working Group also wishes to thank the following individuals who participated in the writing of the plan:

Paige Burns, Richmond County Extension  
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Stephen Greer, Moore County Extension  
Susan Kelly, Richmond County Extension  
Susan Condlin, Lee County Extension  
Jesse Wimberley, Sandhills Area Land  
Trust  
Becky Bowen, NC State University, NC Cooperative Extension

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## Sandhills Sustainable Ag Working Group

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Resource Economics  
Brian Queen, USDA

Guest Speakers  
Rebecca Dunning, Center for Environmental Farming Systems  
Noah Ranells, NC A&T State University  
Gerry Cohen

# Spotlight on Agriculture Participants

The Spotlight on Agriculture was held on September 26, 2013 to “roll out” the Green Fields Initiative Economic Development Plan developed through SET process. This event drew 250 attendees and included the following agribusinesses from the region:

Ashten's (Moore County)  
Elliot's (Moore County)  
Blueberry Hill (Lee County)  
Berry Patch (Richmond County)  
Pinehurst Resort (Moore County)  
Triple L Farm (Richmond County)  
Eagle's Nest (Moore County)  
Paradox Farms (Moore County)  
Mrs. Lacy's (Lee County)  
Sonia Middleton/Lila's (Moore County)  
Black Rock Winery  
Cactus Café  
Railhouse Brewery  
AK Griffin (Lee County)  
Rob Vandervort (Moore County)  
Pilson Farm (Moore County)  
David's Produce (Richmond County)  
Riley's Ranch (Moore County)  
Mountaire (Moore/Lee Counties)  
Purvis Farms

In addition, there were several Ag Partners in attendance who had tables on display:

Sandhills Area Land Trust  
Farm to Chef/RAFI  
NC Pinestraw Producers  
Robbins Incubator Farm  
Sandhills Farm to Table  
Good Food Sandhills  
NC Forestry Service  
Moore County Farmers Market Association  
NCSU 10% Campaign  
Sandhills Farmers Green Market/Riley's Ranch  
Mt. Olive college /Lois G. Britt Agribusiness Center

## References

Martinez, S.  
et al. Local Food Systems: Concepts, Impacts, and Issues.  
(USDA Economic Research Service, 2010).  
[www.ers.usda.gov/media/122868/err97\\_1.pdf](http://www.ers.usda.gov/media/122868/err97_1.pdf)).