

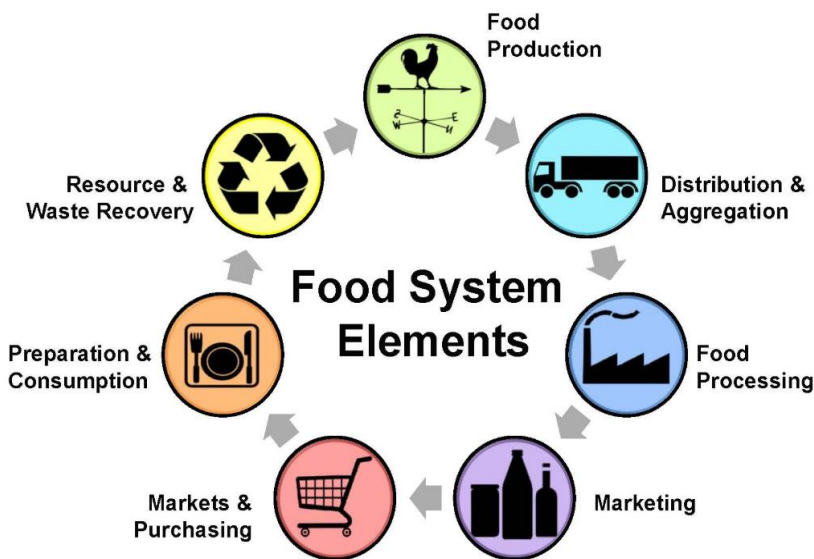
Local Food Program

North Carolina has a rich history as one of the top agricultural producing states in the country.⁴ This commitment to and pride in agriculture primes the state to support robust local food systems. Industry estimates indicate that sales of local food have almost doubled between 2008 and 2014.⁵ Increasing the capacity for local food systems can support farm profits, access to healthy food, and community vitality across the state.

Cooperative Extension has shown their support for local food systems by creating the Local Food Flagship Program in 2012. The North Carolina Cooperative Extension Local Foods Program is a statewide initiative designed to facilitate the production, marketing, and consumption of locally grown food. The Program integrates all Extension Program Areas (ANR, CRD, 4-H, and FCS) to support local food efforts across the food system.

The Local Food Program joins NC Cooperative Extension’s legacy of utilizing applied research, education, and outreach to build capacity for local food systems across North Carolina. Additionally, the Local Food Program Team, established in 2016, brings together approximately 85 County Agents and Specialists to create resources and provide trainings on topics across the food system.

Food Systems Overview



*Adapted by Christy Shi, Center for Environmental Farming Systems.
From: Wilkins, J. and Eames-Sheavly, M. Discovering the Food System; An experiential learning program for young and inquiring minds.
Cornell University, Departments of Nutritional Science and Horticulture. <http://www.discoverfoodsys.cornell.edu/>*

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Local Food in North Carolina

8.7%¹ of NC farms sell directly to consumers, another 2.0% sell direct to institution, retail, or regional aggregator.

The value of food sold directly to consumers per farm went up **142%**¹ between 2012 and 2017.

There are **238**² farmer’s markets in North Carolina.

Local Food Program Areas of Impact

Improve health outcomes

.....

Increase food security

.....

Foster vibrant, resilient, viable food and farming systems

.....

Facilitate regional economic development

¹2017 Ag Census
² NCDA Farm Fresh
³ 2017-2018 LFPT Annual Report
⁴USDA ERS
⁵ Vilsack, 2015

Local Food Program Areas of Work



Local Food Program Team

In 2017-2018 **6** work groups made up of **85** specialists and agents produced **19** programming resources and counted **655+** agents engaged in trainings.

The Local Food Program Team was formed in 2016 with a mission to identify and assess priorities, build capacity and mobilize resources to support Cooperative Extension in leading and fostering stakeholder and community efforts that enhance local food systems in North Carolina. A primary purpose of the program team is to strengthen the link between campus and county offices. In 2017-2018, the Team was comprised of 85 campus specialists and county agents across all Extension program areas focusing on projects in six focus areas:

1. Farm to Food Banks and Food Pantries,
2. Economic Impacts of Local Food and Agriculture,
3. 4-H Farm to Fork Camps,
4. Farm to School,
5. Growing Farm Capacity, and
6. Local Food Preparation.

In 2019 the Team welcomed a new focus area, Farm to Early Childcare Education.



Building Capacity for Local Food Systems

In the past two year the Local Food Program has provided direct support for **6** grant funded projects.

The Local Food Program supports the expansion and vitality of local food systems across North Carolina. To help build capacity for these systems the Local Food Program:

1. explores new market opportunities for farmers,
2. encourages community and home food production and preparation, and
3. supports local food infrastructure.

To identify innovative approaches to these capacity-building activities the Local Food Program collaborates on grant funded local food projects. A current example is engaging farmers and County Extension Offices in the USDA funded Fork to Famer Project that focuses on creating new marketing channels for farmers.



Online Courses

Since 2015, **81** participants have taken the courses. In Summer 2019 **19** students are enrolled.

NC State offers three online local food system courses. These courses were developed from a graduate level course at NC State. The topics of the courses are:

1. Foundations of Local Food System Development,
2. Farm to Fork: Foundations in Local Food Supply and Value Chains, and
3. The Bottom Line: Economic Realities & Other Considerations of Local Food Systems.

While geared towards NC Cooperative Extension Agents, the courses now get participants from multiple states and from various institutions. It is expected that the course will be available two times each year. The participants are given four months to complete the self-paced courses. It is recommended that they take the first course before proceeding to the other two. Visit localfoodcourses.org for more information.



Technical Support for Agents

The Local Food Portal has **107** pages of information and resources about local food and agriculture.

There are **38** Agent Resources available on the Local Food Portal.

The Local Food Program provides training and support for County Local Food Coordinators and other Extension Agents engaged in local food work. Resources and information are available on the Local Food Extension Portal, localfood.ces.ncsu.edu. Additionally, the Local Food Program provides the following training opportunities:

1. direct technical assistance in areas such as asset mapping, community engagement, grant writing, and other tasks;
2. in-person trainings;
3. online trainings; and
4. an online communication network.

Success Stories



Local Food Program Team

Food Bank & Food Pantry Work Group: Morgan Marshall,
FCS Area Agent

The Food Bank & Food Pantry Working Group, housed under the Local Food Program Team, provided educational resources to Extension agents and other stakeholders about how to best engage with food pantries through poster sessions, conferences presentations, and webinars. We also published 12 mini-lessons and an overview document to guide food pantry connections and taste tests.

91% reported gaining knowledge in programming opportunities to work with food banks/pantries; 77% said gained knowledge about how to establish relationships, how to facilitate local food donations, & how to engage youth to support food banks & pantries. 100% said that the training met their expectations & they would recommend it to others. The Healthy Food Pantry Toolkit has received 686 site visits since it launched at the State Conference in November 2018.

Around the State

Cabarrus County: Renee Goodnight, Nutrition Program Assistant, 4-H & Lauren Hill, Horticulture Agent

With the desire to educate children of Cabarrus County about where their food comes from, we visited NCSU's commercial research farm so students could see many different aspects of agriculture. They saw cows being milked, where the food was made for the cows from silage, farm equipment, row crops including soybeans, horticultural crops including strawberries, blackberries and tomatoes. Then we visited a local farm's produce stand to select and purchase fresh local foods to prepare the next day in day two of the Fun With Foods 4-H camp. We not only wanted to show the children where their food comes from and how it is grown but also wanted to give them time in the kitchen to prepare their food with healthy recipes to prepare at home.

Of the 12 children who attended the camp, only one had visited a working farm before. The children were most enamored by the way cows were milked, educating every participant on exactly where their milk comes from!

Around the State

Madison County: Elizabeth Ayers, Agriculture Agent

Madison County small farms are diversifying their production as well as their end products by adding value to agricultural commodities, thus increasing profitability and marketability. Facilities and equipment such as these are quite expensive and for a small farmer could be an investment they could never repay.

Madison County Cooperative Extension has developed a Value Added Center to assist farmers in this area. This facility houses several pieces of equipment such as a bean sheller, walk in coolers and freezers, ice machine, vegetable grade and pack line, commercial dehydrators and an inspected kitchen. Within this center Madison County Extension conducts educational trainings on use of equipment, marketing of products, and value adding. Additionally, the facility is utilized for bulk orders of supplies (ex: non-GMO feed, organic amendments, glass packing jars and wax boxes).

The Value Added Learning Center increases in its usage each year and 2018 was no different. Over 100 clients have taken the opportunity to use this facility in 2018 to assist in their farming business. The total cost saved by farmers using the shared-use facility is \$21,000.



Online Courses

Participant Testimonials:

"[The training] has helped me to design more structured and efficient programming/efforts to reach specifically identified goals of the population I serve."

"This course is helping me overcome a learning curve of being new to the food movement... I think this course will help me get up to speed to be able to get more involved in community food systems activities..."

"I feel more confident in my ability to connect with stakeholders and understand the different goals in the room."

"I think that the different mediums for providing content (short and long videos, interactive case studies, text, periodic questions that I had to consider and answer...) were helpful in keeping me engaged in the subject matter. I also felt like the flow of the course built in a nice way to help me better understand a local food project in my community that I was previously unaware of."