

FARM & FOOD SUSTAINABILITY PLAN COMMUNITY MEETING
JULY 24, 2012
BUNKER HILL HIGH SCHOOL

WHAT ARE ENCOURAGING TRENDS?

- Desire by chains to support local foods
- Interest in farmers markets & local foods
- Changes in livestock management; managing grazing
- Food safety awareness
- Awareness of farm preservation tools such as Farm Trust
- Technology tools for promoting farming; i.e. websites, Twitter
- People want fresh food (vegs, fruits & meat)
- Increasing awareness of food safety
- Economic downturn has people refocused on gardens
- More farmers markets – allows place to sell
- Agriculture classes are full (overflowing) at high school
- Health related classes also full at schools
- Development of wineries in area
- Upgrade of agricultural programs in high schools, i.e. new greenhouses
- Sentiment of supporting local farmers
- Awareness of nutritional value of foods
- New marketing options, i.e. warehousing
- Farmers markets
- Website information on area farms to obtain certain foods
- Organic food
- Research “Urban Farm” magazine for good suburban ideas
- Websites – carolinafarmstewards.org; asapconnections.org; urbanfarm.com
- Raising corn, beans or grain because need for cattle feed (as opposed to fruit/veg); market exists
- Fields being lost to development
- Community gardens
- Local foods in restaurants, hospitals
- Honey demand
- Interest in tailgate/farmers markets
- Locating sources of local foods
- Food safety concerns/response
- Specialized production (crops, animals, organic, etc)
- Alternative energy – biodiesel, ethanol
- Increase commodity prices
- “Bad Publicity” travels faster and farther now
- Government regulations/testing/record keeping
- Alternative fuels & engine issues
- Farmers markets
- Farm to table
- Policy that gives incentive to develop inside city limits; redevelopments
- Diversification on farms – different crops

- MDI – shippers
- Organic produce
- Wine & grapes

WHAT ARE LIMITATIONS?

- Labor
- Initial investment/cash flow
- Slaughter house for beef, chicken & pork (Cabarrus County, Taylorsville, Lincolnton)
- Processing facility – Do-It-Yourself; rentable (like Rutherford County or Asheville)
- Agricultural Extension used to help process seed for next year
- No home economic or garden classes at every school
- Rules not clear on organic production; sometimes not logical-i.e. treated fence post disallowed organic status
- Family farms hard to survive
- Fruit/veg too labor intensive to harvest
- Need mentoring program to match existing farmers with young people wanting to get into farming
- Smaller families have smaller farms (not enough help)
- Production costs (energy)
- Weather & alternative planning (irrigation)
- Availability of land
- Taxes & regulations; increasing property taxes
- Complicated PUV process
- Lack of interest in agriculture; labor cost, knowledge
- An “uneducated” public regarding agriculture
- Public fear of agriculture – stereotypes, i.e. smell, pollutions etc
- Urban interface – consistency of product – MDI needs to know to promote
- Profit margins
- Policy, red tape- i.e. permits, regulations
- Animal waste disposal – not enough capacity to hold; knowledge to limit problem
- Market – farmers market equals minimal margin of market; serving only a small portion of population
- No processing plant to process food/meat
- Not enough profit
- Diversification at farmers market- can’t have everyone grow tomatoes
- Knowledge of agencies/partner that can help, i.e., NRCS, Soil & Water equals waste disposal
- No local cattle sales
- Fear of commitment/government oversight
- Undercutting from super stores
- Farmers going into debt to be successful
- Urban development pushing out rural community
- Not enough teachers for students in agriculture classes
- Available land for farming (houses being built)
- Land under 10 acres being considered “developable” and not tax present – use eligible
- Growing season is not year round

- High input prices for farmers (gas, fertilizers, etc.)
- Annexation of farmland – taxes increase
- Public has skewed view of what pesticides/spray –free vegs/fruits & meat really means. Not possible – need limitations. Also farmers need education.
- Fair marketing – allow for farmers to sell direct to grocery stores
- Need more farmers market locations
- Ban being looked at to prohibit backyard gardens?
- Imposing regulations intended for large producers on small farms
- GAP Certification necessary for schools etc.
- No general marketing plan or cooperation by farmers
- No large scale refrigeration or storage or processing
- Education’s focus on technology and business rather than vocational education
- Zoning restrictions
- Fewer farmers’ children want to farm; older members pass on and force younger to pay taxes
- Fragmentation of farmland amongst family members try to keep land and use it
- Higher cost of fresh food
- Not enough detail in health classes to make connection to fresh food
- Land value
- Seed types could be too costly
- Vegs/fruit prices set too high in stores and hard to get into stores to market
- Historically, families no longer worked on farm after war; went to work in public jobs
- No work force to pick field crops (kids in neighborhood)
- Uneducated consumers
- Volume & variety – small farms have difficulty producing volume needed for “big” boys
- Availability of markets on differing schedule
- Lack of knowledge by consumers of food preservation technology
- 60 mile being local unfair advantage
- Access to good farmland and financing for “new” farmers
- Lack of interest by new farmers due to economics
- Regulations – environmental
- Food safety issues – i.e. use of chlorinated irrigation
- Competition for labor

WHAT ARE OPPORTUNITIES THAT WE NEED TO EXPLORE?

- MDI – access for new market/larger scale market; creating beyond norms – i.e. value added product, local meat
- Education for community, children & adults; educating about misconceptions
- Curriculum not being utilized
- Conservation easements
- Opportunity to diversity
- Tree farms
- Use of technology, i.e. sending out electronic message that product will be ready in amount of days
- Lynn Sprague, Polk City and Jim Adkins, International Center for Poultry – speaking on garden commodities; consider both of these as speakers at annual Farm Education Seminar

- Help with GAP Certification
- Sell local food to schools & prison
- Ag Ext should help farmers propagate seed for next year
- Educate folks on growing, cooking, storage & organic foods
- Internships
- Co-ops & farmers markets
- County Fair should go back to having chickens, canned goods and demonstrations
- Reduce present value regulation from 10 acres to 5 acres
- Educate public on agriculture
- Educate farmers on available resources
- Identify & explore grant sources; producers
- Production & management research
- “Local foods” interest
- Financially profitable to enter agriculture now?
- Expand marketing to metro
- Consider smaller networks, i.e. egg clubs, CSA’s
- Partnering with grocers; contract as exclusive grower
- Farmer mentor program & land transition
- Sell to school programs, prisons, hospitals, i.e. large public entities
- Need GAP Certification training
- Awareness of government assistance programs, i.e. cost share
- Consumer awareness of paying for what you get (pay more for quality)
- Hidden costs of not buying local & differing
- Quality of local
- Marketing to restaurants i.e. partner with them
- Seasonal marketing
- Open markets for people to sell; need more places
- Help farmers with GAP Certification
- Tie in of benefits of locally grown foods to health related classes (book-Nourishing Traditions)
- Have larger farms be open to allow people to come farm ¼ acre or more; resources are there; can be a co-op.; establish County program to do this
- Students – Farm Days; educate students through seeing what happens on farms
- Produce conglomeration facility
- Offer high school program to participate in farm labor
- Greenhouses to have year round production
- Season extension by producers
- Consider “Niche” marketing ethnic cuisine
- Grant funded processing “portable” or co-op with food distributor as exclusive grower
- Examine subsidies and be flexible
- Cooperative agriculture retail store
- Educate public of what is grown locally, i.e. web page – must be updated!
- Recognize chains who support local
- School interns with farmers
- Expand agriculture program to all schools
- Foster good relations with legislators

OPPORTUNITIES IN-DEPTH DISCUSSION

Grant Sources – Needs?

- Grants to help fund processing plants, i.e. extraction of honey, processing meat
- RAFI – small grant source
- Funding for local food market/farmers market
- Funding for GAP Certification so that farmers can sell to new market, i.e. schools, hospitals
- Funding to build co-ops & CSA
- Commitments from both sides, i.e. timeframe to keep up/maintain, keep going, as pay back
- Looking at not just local agencies, but private sectors
- Money would have to come from private sources so that farmers feel less control by government
- Grants focusing on medium acreage farms

Educate Public

- Educate growers/public on proper usage of insecticides/pesticides so pests are destroyed on meat/plants, food still organic if chemicals used at proper time (before fruit forms and proper time of year for cattle)
- Educate people on distance most food travels to get to table (usually 1500 miles), costly; should try to eat within their “food shed” (50-100 miles); distance requires more chemicals
- Educate public on canning/preserving food
- Getting a presence in grade schools (each quarter or year) by having MDI, farmers market & grocery stores to give presentation/demonstration
- Student to Farm Day so students can experience farm
- Have garden at schools – starting at elementary schools and going through high school; plant/water plants; pick fruit/veg (watch grow); cook & eat produce
- Taste home grown compared to shipped in produce that traveled long distance and is less fresh or contains preservatives
- Set up taste & general education demos in area business cafeterias & break rooms
- Try to partner with companies to cook/use locally grown food in cafeterias
- Community garden mentor program
- Farmer/student job mentor program
- Publicize master gardening program

GAP Certification

- Interest from MDI, Lowes, IGA, Galaxy for local produce
- Cost for certification; cost share/subsidy for certification
- Certification personnel located locally (CES, NCDA)
- More local training opportunities & held at appropriate times

Co-op/Large Farm Into Rented Farmettes

- Web site developed and other outreach (farmers markets, free papers, churches) to advertise farmers interested in making land available

- Allow FFA students the opportunity to learn/cultivate interest in agriculture
- School earthworm farms – take waste stream from cafeteria and paper to use; sell/promote to further programs in schools
- Restoration of old “share cropping” concept
- Have variety of plot sizes
- Value-added opportunities; have local center
- Evaluate re-use of old buildings for local centers
- Canneries – revive
- Initial grants to set up with farm opportunity initially for younger folks
- Equipment – sharing program; all pieces (planters, harvesters)
- Farmers may also have own equipment and can cultivate land for all
- County serve as central resource for land availability, crops needed (w/MDI), school land for educational farm

Rules/Regulations/Policies to be Addressed

- 1 year eligibility for present use value vs. current 3 year
- Estate planning needs longer transition for present use
- Support idea of reducing acreage requirement provided it is a “legal” farming opportunity
- Promote participation in agricultural district and related incentives
- Investigate feasibility of selling development rights to preserve farms