

FARM & FOOD SUSTAINABILITY PLAN COMMUNITY MEETING
JULY 9, 2012
FRED T. FOARD HIGH SCHOOL

WHAT ARE ENCOURAGING TRENDS?

- Increased farmers market availability
- Farm-City/Chamber activities
- Rising energy costs encouraging local production
- Small educational farms
- Ag in classrooms
- AG District signage
- Environmental friendly, i.e. no GMO, organic
- Internships
- This meeting & the plan (convenient time/location)
- Farm fresh tour
- More awareness and interest in local agriculture
- Farmers markets
- Return to local
- Organic/natural growing
- People more health conscious
- Organic farming
- VAD
- Have farms
- Don't need to go to supermarkets –teach kids they can grow and make money
- More variety in crops/food products
- Better prices
- Small farms work together to sell gamut of products
- Hobby farms increasing; 5-7 acres
- More farmers markets
- New technologies available due to internet – can learn from others
- Publicity – newspapers covering more about farmers/farming
- People want more fresh food; farm to table
- Young, ambitious farmers – need to encourage them
- Agritourism farms
- Local buying, CSAS, u-pick
- Broiler operations
- Established & new farmers markets
- Square bale hay for horses
- Growing export opportunities
- Connection between nutrition & fresh food
- Consumers knowing source of food
- Biomass crops
- Organic foods
- Food processing cluster not recognized as part of agri-business
- Commodity process

- Local farmers markets
- Information availability
- Consumer awareness: food
- Technology

WHAT ARE LIMITATIONS?

- More intervention by government vs. help
- Lack of diversity in Ag education- high schools differ in quality of program
- Operating capital – have to be “rich” “friendly” to farm
- Communication and neighborhood awareness of local agriculture
- Farmers unaware of social media and new tools
- Bucking trend of big government
- Supply and demand- limitations when competing with “big” suppliers
- Increase real estate values
- Nutritional value education
- Need to define “local”
- Access for producers to package and ship product
- People used to just buy canned food
- People buy from grocery and come to farmers market to browse
- USDA inspections
- Safe food GAP Certification
- Central processing facility needed
- People need education on how to prepare food
- Need stores to sell “box” of produce from 5-8 mile radius
- All stores should have local strawberries when in season (not shipped in)
- Could reduce farm tax; credit needed for 10 acres to 5 acres
- Financial pressure to consolidate acreage
- Understanding what agriculture is
- Having adequate workforce
- GAP Certification
- Distribution of food other than farm markets
- Funding for young farmers
- Unsure where to go to get help/resources
- Urban expansion into farm land
- New industry/biomass
- Incentives for restaurants/stores
- Organic food cost
- Organic production- pests etc
- Regulations – local/state/national
- Land cost
- Artificial depression of farm labor rates
- Affordable food and adequate for farmers
- Infrastructure – distribution. Processing
- Fresh food not accessible to all
- Availability of capital for businesses and farmers

- Water availability
- Land availability/price/use
- Financing/capital
- Labor
- Government/corporate regulations
- Competing viewpoints on agriculture/segments
- Acceptance of various segments
- Education & training
- Can't find land to rent
- Money to help support farming
- Access to equipment
- Family land – can be sold; don't want to farm or know what can be done
- Need more local outlets to sell especially cattle
- Can't irrigate here; don't have large farm ponds
- Farm supply stores for specialized supplies
- Financial – need loans, other sources
- Need to address County regulations that limit agriculture or agriculture supported businesses – i.e. setbacks for animal hospital



WHAT ARE OPPORTUNITIES THAT WE NEED TO EXPLORE?

- Picture of farmer with farm
- Cooking booths/demos at markets
- Need to teach agriculture in schools (every student)
- Adjust property tax system to encourage farming
- Need increased cooperation between crop/livestock
- More internet usage
- More consumer tours
- Grants/funding
- Creation of "middle" man to connect farmers/consumers
- Funding for agriculture projects and competition
- Teach food preservation to young people
- Clearinghouse for funding opportunities
- Farmer mentor program
- Give/take blog for farmers in Catawba County
- Tolerance for non-important "cosmetic" issues
- Canning plant (i.e. Startown Cannery)
- Community/commercial kitchen
- Educate producers on how to package/sell product
- Internet opportunity
- Help farmers get GAP Certified
- Help farmers adapt to find product that's feasible
- Educate public on healthy eating
- Give school children taste of vegetables (raw)
- Have one meal/month in schools of local foods

- Identify specific markets and match with specific sales stores in area
- Get word out on veg/meat purchasing opportunities
- County needs a program similar to “ASAP”
- Need facility like Pilot Mtn.
- Need “Just Save”
- Marketing
- Alternative funding for land acquisition
- Coop: Processing/planting/harvesting/distribution
- Water use planning
- Education: youth
- Education: relationship building for agriculture & local government
- Meetings like this one
- Education – farmers, consumers & government
- Marketing assistance
- Value added farm products
- Regional supply chains
- Farmer business training (& technology)
- Connecting new farmers with experienced one – mentoring
- Nutrition education in schools
- Incubator kitchen
- Community supporting each other – farmers support farmers
- Local foods in schools, hospital, prison, etc
- Becap program – biomass crops
- Fuels for school program
- Youth in agriculture – becoming farmers
- Farm labor support to phase out unemployment
- Extend WIC to include elderly
- Federal subsidies to build agriculture infrastructure
- World class greenhouse local to avoid buying from Canada
- Local processing plant – fresher product
- Next generation of promoting farming as career field
- Newer technologies to improve efficiency
- Lab for school-age kids all through school years. Hands-on plus learn business end of it. Beyond “stereotype”.
- Get state funds to do agriculture zone for all schools to use
- Business starts with agriculture should get tax exemption like other new businesses being brought in
- Need kids to be more involved in agriculture need in their heart
- Protect farmland from urban sprawl being fragmented
- Match up young farmers to others who may not be carrying on farming
- Coops like Mennonite communities
- NC State education- great resource- do presentations on newer techniques
- Programs for uniform products – help with education
- More farmers markets- pursue grant funds to establish
- Education – schools – students to farm, foods to schools
- “Local foods lunch Wednesdays”

OPPORTUNITIES IN-DEPTH DISCUSSION

Marketing – Process - Distribution

- Distributors use “Goodness Grows in NC” to find producers. Other states have their own groups.
- Move from commodity to branded products
- Incubator kitchens
- Demand that Charlotte Regional partnership recognizes Upper Valley Agri-Business
- Creating support network for mid-size farmers (50-500 acres)
- Encourage regional cooperatives
- Encourage IFH to source locally (Institutional Food House)
- Monitor performance food group acquisition for increasing local sourcing
- Tap into resources (on line) to connect farmers with restaurant s(Farm Fresh; Realfarm.com) (farmer profiled on products- restaurant can choose farmers – make connection)
- Find ways of using internet to connect producers and buyers (NC Farm Agriculture good list)
- Form co-ops so smaller farmers can group with others to produce/sell large quantities. Co-op would also educate farmers.
- Take abandoned building and open grading facility like Pilot Mtn. Can form co-op later if desired. Market veggies as “Catawba County Green Beans”.
- Need processing facility infrastructure for slaughtering and curing pork and chicken.
- Branding so these processing facilities can market under a Catawba County name (i.e. Bacon processing)
- Encouraging: people going back to wanting natural foods. Canning coming back for those growing vegetables
- Infrastructure huge limitations. Need canning/freezing facilities

Education –Kids-Farmers-Consumers

- Food production – children & adults
- Formal production/training – students/FFA
- Agriculture training/in-service for classroom teachers “Ag in Classroom”
- How to cook/prepare products
- Better appreciation for different philosophies in agriculture
- Watch Food Inc
- All media reports are bad news
- Train producers as ambassadors for the industry
- Education on GMO/technology for general public
- Plan education for smaller “niche” farms
- “Positive” newspaper articles on farms/farmers/operations
- Social media use for farmers
- Agricultural Education Center – open weekdays; farmers come teach/interact with visitors

Mentoring – Farmers' Relations

- Teach agriculture in schools
- Bring students to farms
- Farm tours – various farms, different types
- Open communication
- Foster good will
- Good quality information
- Positive attitude
- Quit negativity

Government Assistance Programs/Tax Relief

- Maintain present use tax value
- Talk to all representatives but especially urban areas
- Reduce red tape
- Ownership should not matter
- If you're promoting agriculture it doesn't matter who owns property
- No need for size limit. Income can be made on smaller acreage
- Tax reform coming in 2013 – timing is right
- Keep heat on local elected officials
- Concern about nuisance zoning/building permits
- Communicate building inspection issues related to farming
- Conflicting regulations particularly with agric-tourism
- Personal assistance for obtaining grants
- Paid consultant vs. government employee – list of grant writers
- Grant brokers
- Pay education loans for kids who go into farming
- Can we keep building inspectors off the farm
- Justify a different standard for agriculture (relaxed)
- Plan inclusion will help communicate and identify this issue
- Government assistance – how do we find it? Who will facilitate? What are the tricks to get approved?

Sprawl/loss of prime farmland

- Conservation fund to acquire land, publicly. Then farmer agreement to farm through conservation easement
- Land in prime farmland taken for development. Need corresponding permanently preserved farmland in another location
- Keep present use tax program for pure "farming". Don't want for all agriculture groups
- Get vacant buildings/businesses back into cities. Don't take farmland
- Incentives to build in cities
- Discourage pay for costs to go out further in County
- Tool to evaluate land before turns into development

- Same ideas for residential development
- Limit sewer/water lines to prime farmland
- If commercial development leaves then put back into farm land
- Roll-back taxes be used for farmland preservation/grant supported activities