

# *A Survey of Local Food Activities*

*in the*

## *Southern Appalachian Region*

Prepared for  
The Appalachian Sustainable Agriculture Project



by

Laura D. Kirby  
Allison Perrett

January 2007

## Introduction

Professionals working to strengthen local food systems are well aware of the difficulty of defining local. For some, local is defined by city or state boundaries. For others, local refers to an area within a radius of 50 or 100 miles from the place where the food is consumed. Still others define their areas using a “foodshed” framework, a term borrowed from the concept of a watershed and used to describe the flow of food from areas where it is grown to places where it is consumed. Using that framework, a local food system may be very small or encompass several states depending on how much food is produced in a particular area.

While important in determining how resources are allocated and where to focus energies, boundaries for local food systems are somewhat artificial. The reality is that each “local” area blends and overlaps with others. Organizations operating in neighboring localities will likely be dealing with an identical or similar set of challenges and may develop identical or similar strategies to address them. Collaboration among these types of organizations is important for several reasons. It allows for reciprocal learning, minimizes unnecessary duplication of resources, and creates opportunities for each organization to accomplish more than it could alone.

As part of a food and farm assessment of Western North Carolina (WNC), the Appalachian Sustainable Agriculture Project (ASAP) investigated similar organizations in neighboring localities through a survey of program directors. The goals of the survey were:

- to identify existing and emerging buy local food campaigns in the Southern Appalachian region<sup>1</sup>;
- to explore interest among like-minded regional organizations in forming a learning community to share ideas and information; and
- to identify barriers and opportunities related to rebuilding strong local food systems in the region as perceived by organizations involved in that work.

A networking approach was used to identify organizations for the survey. North Carolina Cooperative Extension (NCCE) agents representing 100 counties of Southern Appalachia were contacted by e-mail and asked to provide information about organizations or projects focused on promoting local food and farming. At the same time, ASAP developed a list of such organizations it had encountered during three years of operating a Local Food Campaign in the region. Organizations identified through these two avenues were in turn asked to name other organizations working on local food issues in the region. Only organizations for which strengthening the local food system was considered a number one or two priority were included in the survey.

---

<sup>1</sup>The Southern Appalachian region encompasses the southern portion of the Appalachian Mountain chain and includes counties in parts of Georgia, Kentucky, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia and West Virginia. Moving up from local to regional, this is the area ASAP identifies as its project area. A map of the full Appalachian Region and its counties is available from the Appalachian Regional Commission ([www.arc.gov](http://www.arc.gov)).

## The Organizations

A total of 22 organizations concerned with rebuilding their local food systems were identified and interviewed for the survey.<sup>2</sup> Their activities range from public education and promotional work to policy advocacy to grower education and assistance. The list includes nonprofit organizations, farmer cooperatives and university-based groups. It includes organizations that cover one or two counties as well as those that cover entire states or larger regions. Appendix 1 provides an overview of the organizations and their work as described by program directors. While an effort was made to include as many organizations in the region committed to strengthening local food systems as possible, it is unlikely that this list includes all such organizations in the Southern Appalachian region. NCCE agents in particular are not included here because of a separate survey to that group as part of ASAP's comprehensive research project assessing the food and farm economy of Western North Carolina.<sup>3</sup>

## Local Food System Barriers

Program directors were asked to describe gaps or barriers related to rebuilding strong local food systems in the region. A total of 66 barriers were named and are listed in Appendix 2. From the responses, several themes emerged. The majority of comments fell into three broad categories – *the structure of the national/global food system; infrastructure; and grower education and support* – which are discussed in detail below.

A number of program directors also cited the need for more public education and awareness about local food, mostly in terms of helping consumers know where to find local food and knowing how to differentiate it from non-local food. A few recognized limitations related to the region's climate and geography including, for example, the fact that most fruit and vegetables produced in the region cannot be grown during winter months. Three respondents named the aging of the farm population and the need for replacement farmers as critical issues affecting the future of local food systems in the region.

### Structure of the National/Global Food System

This category was used for high-level issues such as national farm policies or the structure of the predominant food system which favors large, corporate producers. Comments ranged from “the way the farm economy works” to “the distribution system that does not favor local food” to “corporate agriculture.” Also included here were comments referring to poor food access for low income communities, the lack of resources for organizations working to rebuild local food systems, and financial pressures facing farmers. These issues are grouped together partly in recognition of the fact that they are larger problems that will require interventions beyond the local level. Two thirds of all Program Directors made a comment of this type, suggesting that local organizations need to be devoting more attention to policy advocacy efforts.

---

<sup>2</sup> ASAP was included as one of the organizations interviewed.

<sup>3</sup> see [www.asapconnections.org/special/research/index.html](http://www.asapconnections.org/special/research/index.html) for a description and more information.

## Infrastructure

More than half of all program directors named infrastructure as a barrier to strong local food systems. According to survey respondents, infrastructure includes physical things – like trucks, cooling, processing and packing facilities – as well as less tangible elements of food production and distribution. The shortage of independent facilities for meat and poultry processing was emphasized, although difficulty entering the mainstream food distribution system was named as a barrier for small farms in general. One program director described infrastructure as “everything from processing through distribution through even a culture that looks locally for food.” A number of organizations described interventions aimed at reducing infrastructure barriers, including the development of shared-use commercial kitchens and incubators, mobile processing units, and helping to establish an independent, government-inspected poultry processing facility in North Carolina.

## Training, Education and Support for Farmers

When referring to the need for farmer training, education and support, several respondents made comparisons to the type of support that has been provided to farmers by NCCE for many years. The implication was that NCCE is not providing the same type of technical support in dealing with disease or pest issues for small-scale sustainable farms – which are typically major players in local food systems – as they have historically provided for growers of commodity crops.

Some respondents focused on the need for farmers to have information about market requirements within the local food system. In other words, they need information about packaging requirements, quality standards, delivery parameters and similar characteristics for local markets such as restaurants, food stores and institutions. Other respondents suggested that farmers need actual assistance with marketing their products.

Overall, slightly less than half of program directors made some comment that fell within the broad category of training, education and support for farmers. More than half of the 22 organizations included in this survey currently provide some type of direct assistance to farmers.

## **Local Food System Strengths**

Strong demand was overwhelmingly the top category of asset named by survey participants regarding local food systems in the region. Survey respondents described strong demand from both consumer markets and larger-scale markets. One program director summarized this sentiment by acknowledging that “Demand is high, this is generally not a hard sell.” Another said, “There is a larger market than was originally anticipated – that includes mainstream grocery stores.” More than two thirds of survey respondents made some reference to strong demand for local food when asked to name strengths of the local food movement in Southern Appalachia.

Beyond demand, many survey respondents named characteristics of the region’s farmers as advantageous for local food systems. Almost half of survey respondents included a comment in this category. Examples include “Farmers here are progressive” and “Farmers here have been able to make transitions throughout history – this one should be manageable too.”

Survey respondents also acknowledged that characteristics of the region's farms are advantageous for strong local food systems. In particular, they acknowledged that the region's farmland is suitable for growing a wide variety of crops, that the climate affords a long growing season, and that there is still a significant amount of land in production or with good potential for being in production in the region. Other program directors referred to the beauty of the region's farms and farmland as regional assets in terms of their value for tourism.

Finally, many survey respondents recognized the strong network of nonprofit and university-based organizations working on local food issues as a real strength for the region in terms of rebuilding local food systems. One respondent summarized this by saying "We have many committed, determined people working on it." Specific references were made to NCCE as a source of support for farmers within this category.

### **Opportunities for Collaboration**

Every organization participating in this process indicated an interest in becoming part of a learning community or network of organizations working on local food projects in Southern Appalachia to share best practices, lessons learned and information. When asked for suggestions about how such a learning community ought to function or be organized, responses varied in the extent to which they were structured or informal, and whether or not they required face-to-face interaction by the organizations. The list of the ideas generated by survey respondents includes:

- At a minimum, send each other newsletters and publications announcing activities and events;
- Provide an opportunity for these organizations to get together physically at a workshop or conference on regional issues, with lots of opportunity for informal networking;
- Share models of success through a list-serve or similar web-based format;
- Collaborate on trainings and workshops such that different organizations cover different topics and issues rather than duplicating each others' efforts;
- Break up into designated "Task Forces," where different organizations tackle different issues (policy topics vs. farmer training and support vs. basic public education vs. infrastructure development, for example);
- Form a new coalition of Local Food Campaigns in the Southern Appalachians and meet to establish an agenda and collective plan of action;
- Work within the context of existing regional and national organizations' activities (CFSC, Kellogg, SSAWG, for example);
- Provide a forum for political issues to be discussed, including presentations to political leaders; and
- Use the presentation of ASAP's extensive food system research as a reason for the initial convening of these organizations, with time allowed for discussion and brainstorming around how the groups could work together.

Despite strong enthusiasm for collaborations of this kind, several respondents cautioned that any approach to organizing region-wide food system collaboration must take into account the limited resources (time and money) of the organizations working on these issues. Nevertheless, the

support for a group effort at finding ways to advance the local food system in the region is encouraging. These twenty-two organizations are already engaged in a long list of activities aimed at improving the ability of regional growers to sell food and farm products locally (see Appendix 1). By working to build on current successes and committing to learn from each other, these organizations can make meaningful strides towards addressing many of the barriers named in this report and realizing the vision on which their work is based.

## Appendix 1: Organizations in Southern Appalachian Communities Working to Strengthen Local Food Systems

*Note: The descriptions and activities included in this table came from interviews conducted with each organization's program director and not from any formal review of the organizations or their work. As program directors were simply asked to describe some of their organization's activities and accomplishments, these descriptions should not be considered complete or comprehensive.*

<b>Organization</b>	<b>Geographic Area</b>	<b>Activities and Major Successes</b>
Alabama Sustainable Agriculture Network (ASAN)	Alabama	This organization sponsors farm tours, workshops for farmers, and field days for consumers. The organization works with universities and nonprofits throughout Alabama, providing support in the areas of grant writing and skill building. A primary goal of the organization is linking producers with consumers. Currently, the organization is collaborating with Heifer International on a farmer-to-farmer mentoring program in Alabama.
Appalachian Alternative Agriculture of Jackson County	Southeastern KY	This organization works to build infrastructure for supporting strong, high value local markets in Southeastern Kentucky. Recent successes include conceptualizing and building a multi-purpose agriculture facility with a commercial kitchen, farmers' market, and a mobile processing unit for processing chickens with a USDA inspector.
Appalachian Spring Cooperative	Northeast TN and Southwest VA	This organization provides services to farms and food entrepreneurs including marketing products (primarily value-added), providing business development services and discounted access to things like insurance, product labels and bar codes. They also work to connect local farms to local schools. The farm-to-school program emphasizes produce but includes value-added products as well. They are working to ascertain the feasibility of an all local food store with foods coming from a 3 to 4 hour radius of the store. They currently have an online catalog of local value-added products.
Appalachian Sustainable Agriculture Project	WNC and Southern Appalachia	ASAP is engaged in trying to rebuild a local food system in Western North Carolina and the southern Appalachian region by creating local, high value markets for local farm products. ASAP operates a Local Food Campaign, which involves general public education, distributing a <i>Local Food Guide</i> to locally-grown food and farm products, and other promotional work. ASAP also works in schools with kids, hoping to build the next generation of farmers. And ASAP tries to build the capacity of farmers through workshops, trainings, the development of resource materials, mentoring, one-on-one consulting, and by trying to make connections between farmers and markets that match their capacity. The organization's approach and work is informed by extensive food system research.

<b>Organization</b>	<b>Geographic Area</b>	<b>Activities and Major Successes</b>
Appalachian State University, Sustainable Development Program	Eight counties in Northwestern NC, known as “the High Country”	This is an educational program with a research component, as well as applications for growers in the area. They have a small teaching farm to experiment with sustainable and alternative farming practices while at the same time educating students. Information gleaned from experimentation is also shared with the local farming community. Some of what is grown is sold and some is given to food banks and food kitchens in the area.
Appalachian Sustainable Development (ASD)	Southwest VA and East TN	The mission of this organization is to strengthen locally-based, environmentally sustainable, healthy food and agricultural economies in the region. The organization has two main areas of work: 1) food and agriculture and 2) forest products. Their approach is to respond to supply/demand forces within the food system while at the same time shaping demand for locally produced goods. They are involved at every step along the way “from field to table,” including growing, processing, marketing, shipping and delivering food and forest products. Through this approach they have established substantial and consistent product flow at the same time that they are working to generate demand for the products.
Blue Ridge Women in Agriculture (BRWIA)	Eight counties in Northwestern NC, known as “the High Country”	Their goals are to empower women farmers to take a major role in the agricultural sector and to give a face and a voice to women farmers. They are working to build a network of farmers (some, but not all women) and interested groups. They hold annual conferences on issues facing small family farmers and are currently working on a regional community-based food and farm assessment.
Carolina Farms Stewards Association (CFSA)	North and South Carolina	This organization has been working to establish a sustainable food system (local and organic) in the Carolinas for 25+ years. They emphasize organic based on the fact that it is measurable and clearly defined, compared to local or sustainable. This organization takes on various projects that can strengthen the system or reduce barriers within the system including, for example, the establishment of Eastern Carolina Organics. They also hold a large annual conference to address issues related to organic food and farming.
Community Farm Alliance	Kentucky	This organization provides training, business planning, referral and debt management services to small farmers. They also participate in legislative action and lobbying efforts to mitigate the force of policies that push farmers off the land. They promote agricultural diversification projects that offer viable alternatives to tobacco. They work to expand direct marketing opportunities and institutional buying opportunities for the regions’ farmers. And they are working to develop collaborative marketing, distribution, and processing channels that involve rural and urban citizens, farmers and small entrepreneurs.
Crabtree Farms	Primarily Chattanooga, TN. Also parts of GA and AL.	This organization is an urban farm and nonprofit organization. They have a 5 acre demonstration farm that is organic with 200 kinds of fruits, vegetables, and flowers. They sell locally and also use the farm to provide educational activities and raise awareness about local, sustainably produced food. They also rent plots in the garden to community members to grow their own food. The organization operates with the help of over 200 volunteers and has experienced tremendous growth in six years of operation.

<b>Organization</b>	<b>Geographic Area</b>	<b>Activities and Major Successes</b>
Georgia Organics	Georgia	In the 1970s, this organization was dedicated to providing grower education resources and finding common ground with agricultural agencies like NC Cooperative Extension. The focus of their work has evolved to include promotional work and general public education, as well as policy advocacy. They continue to provide workshops, conferences and educational materials for growers, while also working to advance food system policies in the state of Georgia.
Heifer International (Regional Office)	Mountains of WV, Eastern KY, Southeastern VA, Eastern TN, WNC. The Coastal Carolinas.	Heifer works to bridge the gap between Sustainable Agriculture and Hunger Relief. They hold regional conferences and collaborate with organizations on topics relevant to creating socially just, community-based food systems in the region. A current project is exploring regulatory issues in Carolinas regarding processing facilities.
Jubilee Project	14 counties in Northeast TN and 3 counties in Southwest VA	This organization helped establish a shared-use commercial kitchen and incubator (Cinch/Powell Community Kitchens), which is currently serving about 30 food producers. They also started the Appalachian Spring Cooperative, mostly for marketing value-added products. The organization supports “farm-to-school” initiatives in 9 schools in 2 counties, with plans underway to triple the number of farmers and schools in the near future. They are also working to establish an all-local foods retail store.
Maverick Farms	Area surrounding Boone, NC	This organization is a working farm that operates a CSA program. They also operate a Farm Dinner program, which is both a promotional and marketing opportunity for local farmers, and they sponsor Kids Days at the Farm, which is a way to raise awareness about local agriculture and provide opportunities for children to learn where their food comes from.
North Georgia Technical College – Environmental Sciences Program	Seven counties in North GA: Franklin, Rabun, Habersham, Stephens, Towns, Union, White.	North Georgia Technical College is part of the Georgia Department of Technical and Adult Education. Through their Environmental Sciences program they have implemented a number of activities aimed at promoting sustainable agriculture in North Georgia, including hosting workshops for local growers and setting up a demonstration site for agriculture at the college. They also hold an annual summit on sustainable and local agriculture and are pursuing the development of a local food guide for Georgia.
Partners for Family Farms	Kentucky	This organization works with elementary schools, colleges and restaurants to increase purchases of locally-grown foods. They also support farmers’ markets in their area and sponsor Harvest Festivals featuring local food. They are involved in a number of collaborative relationships/projects with existing agriculture support agencies like NC Cooperative Extension, the Farm Bureau, Kentucky Department of Agriculture and various university groups.

Organization	Geographic Area	Activities and Major Successes
RAFI-USA	Various – some projects are specific to NC and others have wider applicability	RAFI provides tobacco transition assistance for small farmers, including technical assistance on sustainable growing practices and assistance accessing local markets. They work to expand local markets, primarily through labeling programs (labels indicate products that are locally and sustainably produced <i>and</i> produced in ways that ensure fair standards for laborers and others involved in producing the food). They support the development of independent local processing facilities. They work on policy issues and provide expertise on government farm programs. They provide individual farmers with financial planning and business management assistance. They promote biodiversity through research and collaboration with universities, farmers and breeders. And they partner with faith-based organizations to address the needs of the hungry in the context of the local food system.
Rolling Hills Resource Conservation and Development Council	Northwest GA and Eastern AL	This organization established the Cotton Mill Farmers Market and several other farmers markets in their region. They also support a farmer cooperative that sells to restaurants and runs a CSA program.
Rural Resources	Greene County, TN	This organization sponsors a downtown farmers’ market in Greenville, TN. It also operates a mobile farmers’ market for food-insecure neighborhoods and provides activities such as a farm day camp for kids, a chefs training program, and after school gardening and cooking activities for teens – all aimed at promoting awareness and involvement in local food issues.
Sierra Club of Alabama	Alabama	This organization uses a variety of methods to promote basic awareness and education about local food issues through its Buy Local Campaign. Activities include farm tours with local meals, sometimes at restaurants; meetings and seminars for the public; booths at fairs and festivals. The organization also works with educators in Alabama around school gardens, provides farmers’ market support and promotion; and encourages restaurants and institutions to buy locally-grown food.
Southern SAWG	Thirteen states in the Southeast	This organization provides education, networking opportunities, and technical assistance to farmers and others (organizations and entrepreneurs) aimed at making food and farming systems more sustainable. They have helped more than 50 community food projects increase their capacity and effectiveness. In terms of policy, the organization has helped make the USDA SARE program serve the interests of farmers.
Sustainable Agriculture Program of Clemson University	South Carolina	This is a university-based program which provides training to NC Cooperative Extension and other agricultural professionals and provides hands-on opportunities for students to learn about sustainable farming practices and direct marketing of farm products. The organization also sponsors an annual public forum to discuss critical agriculture issues and generate plans for addressing them. A statewide advisory group and smaller, local advisory groups work on activities generated through those forums.

## Appendix 2: Barriers and Strengths of Local Food Systems in Southern Appalachia

Tables 1 and 2 show the categories into which responses were grouped. Frequency refers to how many comments fit within each category. Beneath the tables, actual responses are included.

**Table 1: Codes for Barriers named by Program Directors**

Code	Description	Frequency
A	Grower Education and Support. Includes technical education and support, like information on how to grow new crops using sustainable practices. Also includes information about how to approach different markets, understanding requirements of different markets. Also includes actual assistance for farmers in reaching local markets, like a person or organization playing a broker role, or a marketing co-op.	12
B	Infrastructure. Includes processing facilities, cooling facilities, packing facilities. More generally, it includes “everything involved in getting food to consumers.”	18
C	Public Education and Awareness. This includes general education about why buying local food makes good sense (for consumers, for farmers, the region). Also includes information for consumers about where to find local food and how to recognize it as local (labeling).	10
D	“High-level issues.” This category is used for references to the predominant food system; the fact that nonprofits don’t have enough resources; the fact that low-income communities have poor access to food; the fact that farmers are not able to earn a fair price in traditional markets.	19
E	Production issues. This category is used for references to the fact that WNC is significantly affected by seasonality, and that the region’s (small) farmers may not be able to produce a sufficient, steady supply of some crops for some markets.	7
F	Aging of the farm population and replacement farmer issues. Includes pressure for farmers to retire (development pressures).	3
	Total number of responses	69

**Table 2: Codes for Strengths named by Program Directors**

Code	Description	Frequency
A	Strong markets. Both strong demand from consumers and good restaurant, organizational, institutional markets.	19
B	Characteristics of farmers/residents. Adaptable, loyal, strong character, etc.	14
C	Characteristics of farms. Includes references to good soil, climate. Good crop diversity. Also includes references to the natural beauty of the farm landscape.	15
D	Strong support system for the local food movement – includes references to nonprofits, university groups and extension. (ie, “A lot of good folks working on these issues”)	10
E	Infrastructure. Respondent noted that some infrastructure already exists in the region that can be adapted for local food system.	1
	Total number of responses	59

**Actual Responses (Gaps and Barriers):**

- The lack of community ownership of distribution, wholesale, and retail of local food products. In expanding beyond direct selling to consumers into regular patterns of retail purchasing, it is difficult to maintain the commitment to local food and local food for a fair price by wholesale/retail entities.
- The infrastructure is not there with consolidation and centralization in the food system.
- No technical assistance (i.e., business planning) from universities or the Department of Agriculture.
- The way the farm economy works.
- Low income communities lack access to healthy foods.
- Policy: the sustainable agricultural movement has been terrible about addressing and understanding policy.
- The absence of independent processing facilities. In the state of North Carolina, for example, there are only eight independent poultry processing facilities. North Carolina farmers need resources to further process food products, they need cooling facilities, packaging facilities, etc.
- The lack of capital for new farmer enterprises that will serve local sustainable agriculture.
- Labeling: consumers need a way to identify the values they want to support. We need to be thinking more regionally with food systems.
- The distribution system that does not favor local food.
- The focus of universities and academics: universities need to focus their dollars and resources more on issues relevant to local communities and local food systems.
- Market mechanisms: we need more market-based mechanisms in place to aid farmers, from the organizing of cooperatives to help with the coordination of selling to large retail chains.
- The lack of practical farming knowledge in terms of people who have land and want to farm but don't have the know-how.
- There is a gap between production and markets in terms of meeting the demands of particular markets. There are issues related to distribution and the criteria that markets require: packaging, quality standards, logistics like refrigeration, delivery, etc.
- Educating eaters/consumers to understand where food comes from and what the effects of the industrial food system are.
- Infrastructure: the consolidation and centralization of marketing, transportation, storage and processing is a barrier.
- Marketing systems for farmers. For farmers it's all they can do just to produce. They need education and training in better entrepreneurial marketing techniques. And for farmers that are not going to market their product, they need to be paired with partners who will do the marketing of their products, i.e., coops.
- Public awareness.
- Accessibility issues: the ability to access the markets themselves. For example, the school system in their area has not been supportive of local (although parents are). Food also needs to be accessible in terms of location—food needs to be where the public shops.
- Accessibility to local food for low income community members.
- Changing lifestyles: we need to access children as they are growing up and developing habits; we can impact lifestyle most dramatically early in life.
- The resources to identify who's growing food and what they are growing; there is a gap in knowledge about what's being grown by whom in the region.

- So many nonprofit organizations competing for same resources.
- Main challenge is helping people find out where they can buy local, sustainably produced food.
- Need more research/education for farmers as far as switching to sustainable practices.
- Sometimes it's a challenge to fill CSA shares or meet a restaurant's needs given the small number and small size of farms in the region.
- Affordable access to sufficiently large retail markets.
- "Moms and pops" are easy, but farmers can't sell to big grocers and get a reasonable price.
- Infrastructure of supply/distribution, especially regarding institutional buying.
- Funding (not enough).
- Need for research to show economic impact and catch attention of those in power/with money.
- Most of the farmers in this area are small family farmers. Major challenges for them are infrastructure-related (transportation, distribution, etc.) because they are generally dealing in smaller quantities than commodity farmers.
- Institutional markets are poorly developed for local farmers because generally institutions don't think it's worth the effort to work with local farmers and/or they don't perceive demand from their customers for local food.
- Need more infrastructure. One type is physical infrastructure, like processing facilities and trucks -- need more for produce, but also desperately need it for meat/poultry. A second type is service or support infrastructure like the type of support that Cooperative Extension has always provided for traditional crops (esp. tobacco) – this includes research into disease/pest issues, new crops, technical/educational support, publications, workshops, etc. geared toward sustainable farming.
- Production -- need a year-round, consistent supply.
- Need to professionalize the production and distribution side of the equation.
- Infrastructure – poultry processing. Also need to consider vegetable processing centers.
- Inputs – livestock feed situation (organic grain in particular).
- Need statewide sustainable agriculture survey and strategic plan.
- Corporate agriculture.
- People no longer cook.
- Difficulty accessing local foods (grocery stores).
- Convincing tobacco farmers to grow food instead of tobacco.
- Encouraging farmers to grow a greater variety of foods.
- Farmers selling farms.
- Processing facilities (particularly meat).
- Food security issues involving low-income communities.
- Need for more community organizing, grassroots groups.
- Awareness: local farmers are not aware of market potential. They need that kind of awareness so that they will utilize the land to grow things to sell locally. They need also to understand the benefit of local branding. Farms need to diversify their crop base because there is big gap in what is produced locally and what is consumed locally.
- Transportation.
- Pricing: competitive in the marketplace but also fair to farmers.
- Tying crop production to tourism.
- They lack necessary infrastructural components like trucks to move produce from farms to retail outlets and also an adequate central location designed to house produce for farmers to take their produce before it goes into the market stream.

- They have no money for a marketing director to mediate between farmers and various food outlets.
- Another concern relates to the next generation of farmers. Development pressure is tremendous.
- Making local healthy food accessible to all population segments; we can't have a "yuppified" local food system.
- We have lost a lot of the infrastructure to support local, which includes everything from processing through distribution through even a culture that looks locally for food.
- Consumers want locally-grown food, but it's hard to get it to them and hard to identify it as local so farmers are getting the true value of local.
- Our market is flooded w/ cheap food that is faceless and placeless; we need to put face and place on food for consumers.
- Access to land; prices are going up.
- Age of farmers -- replacement farmers is going to be a big issue.
- Local market infrastructure creates uncertainty for local farmers.
- Funding for our organization has been a major hurdle.
- Supply: the number of farmers in the area is small and the size of the farms is small; they are not able to meet the demand for locally produced food especially for large institutional buyers
- People want a year round supply and locally produced farm goods are seasonal.
- Infrastructure: the absence, for example, of warehousing facilities. This is where the bottleneck lies.
- Development pressure.
- The difficulty of making locally-grown food available to all income levels and not just higher income levels -- this gets into larger issues like the living wage, the expectation of cheap food which doesn't reflect what it costs to grow food, and the price we all pay somewhere down the line.

### **Actual Responses (Strengths):**

- The Appalachian culture.
- There is a growing awareness and understanding of the corruptness in the system.
- Neighborliness and people who care about their communities.
- The natural resources—soil and climate—of our area. We can grow a wide variety of vegetable crops especially and can supply a larger quantity of our own food.
- A traditional ethic of hard work and ingenuity. Small businesses can thrive with some business and technical assistance.
- We have a lot of effective NGOs in our area with strong missions and visions.
- We have a good base of modest size farms.
- We still have a lot of independent grocery chains.
- We have a lot of natural resources and a solid environmental base.
- In the state we have a lot of regional differentiation so that we can have a year round supply of food and lots of food variation.
- Tremendous economic opportunity for farmers -- growing urban centers with upscale residents and lucrative markets that are close also to agricultural areas. The demand for local is high and land is still relatively inexpensive in some areas.
- Capacity and weather: we have a long production season.
- A growing awareness among consumers that are thinking about food issues, where food comes from and the impacts of food production. Consumers are ready to embrace alternatives.

- We have lots of farmer's markets.
- In some areas there is a strong co-op tradition.
- Dedicated growers that are not only interested in growing food but also raising awareness and educating the public. Many are also approaching farming and marketing creatively.
- Places to grow food.
- A core group of followers; many are only one generation removed from the farm and its easy to tap into that and reconnect people with agriculture.
- Many committed, determined people working on it.
- Agricultural extension agents here are very helpful to farmers who want to learn new marketing skills, etc.
- Demand is high – this is not a hard sell, generally.
- There is a lot of demand out there for locally-grown.
- Good farmland, can grow a wide variety of vegetables and ground fruits.
- Tradition of hard work.
- Farmers able to make transitions throughout history; this one should be manageable too.
- Interest level is high among both activists, or those working in the field, and the general public.
- We have some great success stories and examples that show that it's possible for institutions to buy locally, just takes a little extra time and communication to set it up.
- We have many active and interested farmers.
- There is a larger market than was originally anticipated a few years ago. That includes mainstream grocery stores. There is a lot of public awareness and demand.
- We have a very strong market – lots of demand for local, organic food.
- Great climate for growing. We're number three in the nation as far as the diversity of crops.
- Great network of nonprofits.
- We have good partners in the land-grant institutions, community colleges, etc.
- Farmers here are progressive.
- People of North Carolina care about the state and are genuinely good and cooperative people.
- A fair amount of land still in production and equipment for farming.
- Growing awareness about diet and health problems.
- Appalachian Sustainable Agriculture Project.
- Regional nonprofits working on these issues.
- The beauty of the area:
- Historical and cultural background of the area, e.g., small towns and festivals.
- Their area is only a day trip from Atlanta.
- There are many lakes in their region which attracts recreational activities (boating) and people who want second homes.
- A lot of educational resources for growers and entrepreneurial farmers.
- A good relationship with secondary schools that have great agricultural programs.
- Enthusiastic and passionate farmers.
- Viable niches farmers can move in to, e.g. garlic and broccoli.
- Universities as resources and as sources for a new generation of farmers.
- We have farms that are able to transition to different kinds of agriculture -- their small scale means that they are not so tied to one particular commodity, they are not so heavily invested in one kind of production and are able to respond to new markets easier.
- Identifiable region that has qualities that can be tied to land and agriculture as far as marketing the region and creating a sense of locale.
- We still have some infrastructure that can be adapted to accommodate local.

- High demand here for local.
- Number one economy is dependent on scenic landscape that includes farms; that is also a challenge right now but it has a lot of potential.
- We have a head start in responding to national trends toward healthier foods and foods tied to place. We are ahead of the trend that values local.
- Variety in the landscape.
- Work ethic of the people.
- Sense of community.
- The nature of the terrain; they can grow a variety of crops in different micro-zones.
- There is still a farming base in the highlands despite development pressure—which is also a barrier.
- New development caters primarily to second home owners; second home owners are the ones who have the income and can afford to pay higher prices for local food.