

LOCAL FARM & FOOD PROFILE DISCUSSION GUIDE

Agriculture is an [\\$111.1 billion](#) industry, including those employed in farming and agriculture, in North Carolina. Statewide market value of agriculture products as reported by USDA 2022 Agriculture Census is \$18,692,574,000. This economy is made up of producing a variety of grains, fruits, vegetables, meat, eggs, fish, nuts, and other food, fuel, and fiber products. Agriculture is something to celebrate in North Carolina. That means it is an industry we must intentionally plan for as the state continues to gain people and other businesses. Farmland and agriculture are strategically important assets to communities across the state. Farming and agriculture contribute to tax revenue to support local government. This information can be found in the [Farm Production Expenses](#) table of the 2022 USDA Ag Census. Once farmland is developed for other purposes, the loss becomes permanent. Communities can prioritize agriculture and local food systems through farmland and comprehensive land use plans, supporting local food markets such as farmers markets and institutional purchasing, and incorporating agriculture into tourism strategies. Planning for food and agriculture can encourage smart growth and development to help sustain local government budgets and create places where people want to live and work.

The Local Farms & Food Profiles highlight selected data points from the 2022 and 2017 USDA Agriculture Census in a visual infographic. Our goal is to make the information readily available to farmers, agriculture professionals, elected officials, Extension staff, local government professionals, local agriculture advisory boards, teachers, and the general public. By reviewing the infographic, users can quickly gain information on changes in significant elements of agriculture, including production, farmland loss, farmer demographics, and specific agricultural sector fluctuations.

The Local Farms and Food Profiles are available for the state of North Carolina, each county in the state, and each of the 16 Council of Government (CoG) regions. These profiles are designed to be easy to share, print, and utilize in different settings for a variety of audiences, including elected officials, advisory boards, planners, economic & community developers, small business developers, and other entities. The profiles were designed to serve as a starting point for larger discussions focusing on the development and support of local food systems within communities.

We have made it easy for the 16 multi-county Councils of Government to use the regional agricultural information for their respective member counties by their region. In this manner, agriculture and its importance to each level of government can be readily addressed, shared, and reviewed at any meeting, workshop, or gathering that highlights the Council of Governments' focus in the agriculture sector.

How to Use Profiles Within Communities

These resources are intended to help local governments and communities understand the changes in the agricultural economy as reflected in the 2022 and 2017 USDA Agriculture Census. By using this resource and [other food and agriculture planning resources](#), communities can explore and implement projects and policies to bolster their local food and agriculture economies.

Planning for and support of strong local food systems is a community effort. The table below describes how different community actors may use the Local Farms and Food Profiles. Cooperative Extension can be a supportive partner at state and local levels. Extension staff can help provide and analyze data, facilitate planning processes, provide other types of technical assistance, and help connect communities with expertise and resources across the state. Each county in North Carolina is home to a [North Carolina Cooperative Extension \(NCCE\)](#) office. Each NCCE office serves as an excellent local resource for more in-depth information about your local food economy.

Some potential partners for food system development include:

- Planners
- Councils of Government
- Boards of County Commissioners
- Economic & Agricultural Developers
- Farmland Preservation Boards
- Soil & Water Conservation District Boards
- Agriculture Advisory Boards

Community Agency	How To Use This Profile
Food Councils	Food councils focus on various community food and farming needs. The infographics can support: • strategic planning • tracking changes in direct-to-consumer sales, • assessing infrastructure needs, • focusing on farmland preservation • improving and recognizing agritourism resources • support for young or veteran farmers When food councils seek local government support or allied participation, the data in the infographics supply information supporting increased or new funding, reasoning to develop new policies, and increased council participation.
Community Groups, Health Departments, Extension Advisory Boards, etc.	The infographics are useful for discussions about local and regional food systems and enable nontraditional partners and community groups to be involved in food councils or food security initiatives. Some of these partners and their affiliated projects might include: • health departments hosting and promoting farmers' markets • schools sourcing from local farms • institutional partners, such as hospitals or correctional institutions increasing local food purchases • food pantries and food banks increasing access to fresh foods • other community nonprofits and civic groups
Economic Development, Government Agencies, & Councils of Government	The profiles are useful for county and region-level food system discussions among participants who make decisions about the local food economy. Data from these profiles can support: • community engagement • comprehensive land use planning • rezoning decisions • farmland and open space planning • economic development planning • regional planning

Discussion Points about Your Local Food System:

The profiles help describe the food economy in your county and region. Direct-to-consumer sales, for example, are one of the strongest indicators of a healthy farm-to-fork system because they indicate a direct connection between farmers and consumers. Some [USDA data](#) even suggests that farms and local food businesses with high direct-to-consumer sales survive and grow at a higher rate than other small businesses.

The data points showing operations and sales for intermediated food sales that are sold through food aggregators, including retail markets, institutions, and food hubs for local or regional products, are an important indicator of more localized supply chains. Another example considers the number of animal farms and the value of animal products, which can provide a significant economic impact, but may require more processing and storage infrastructure. This may present an opportunity for local governments to address infrastructure needs. They can also create the opportunity to consider and discuss larger issues of environmental sustainability and land use.

Other questions you may want to ask about your local food economy might include:

- Where are the products in fruit, nut, berry, and vegetable sales being sold? If they're mostly fresh produce, is there an opportunity for processing infrastructure, such as freezing or chopping, that could open additional institutional markets, such as hospitals or schools?
- How can a local food council address some of the opportunities and concerns highlighted in the county profile? Or does the local food council need more participation from decision makers to move programs and policies forward?
- How can the local government address farmland conservation? What policies are in place and what are opportunities for new attention to this issue?
- If direct-to-consumer sales are down and there are few or no farmers' markets nearby, consider exploring why previous efforts for local farmers markets, if any, were not successful, and consider new market opportunities or locations. Public health departments can be great partners, especially with SNAP EBT promotion and double bucks programs.

Many NC counties show a rise in the economic impact of agritourism, which emphasizes direct farm impact and land preservation. Consider ways to enhance impact from agritourism sites, such as farm stands, catering events, partnerships with other tourism sites, as well as integration with Chamber of Commerce marketing efforts.

Additional Information: Missing Data, Missing Change Arrows, or Declines

If your county has a data point stating "insufficient data," that indicates there was missing or insufficient 2022 data to publish a value based on USDA statistical guidelines. If there is no arrow indicating change from 2017 to 2022, there may be missing 2017 data. Help avoid missing data; no matter your role in the local farm and food system, please encourage farmers to participate in the 2027 census survey. Until then, consider conducting your own county- or town-level farmland inventory to better understand where farms are located, what they grow, and their primary market channels.

Similarly, you may notice downward-pointing arrows depicting decreases in the data from 2017 to 2022. While our profiles cannot provide specific reasons for those losses, it may help to look back over time to see if there are obvious reasons that could contribute to the decline. In some counties, there might be a

decline in number of operations but an increase in sales for the same item, and possibly indicating a stronger overall impact on the local economy. In other counties, if one or more large farms have closed down, been sold into development, or been passed on to younger generations who are no longer farming at full capacity, the overall county values may reflect this loss. Other issues, such as volatility in labor, farm commodity markets, farm product exports, along with development pressure in peri-urban areas, may be underlying causes of those declines.

Additional Information: Supporting Resources

NC State Extension also provides additional [resources](#) for communities and governments interested in developing local food economies, including videos, webinars, case studies, a local government planning & economic development toolkit, a local food supply chain infrastructure map of the state, and business development resources for farmers and food entrepreneurs.

The Center for Environmental Farming Systems (CEFS) works along the entire local food supply chain and with communities, businesses, and institutions to grow North Carolina's local food economy. We do so by increasing awareness and demand for local foods, creating connections between consumers, local farmers, and local food entrepreneurs across North Carolina through the work of [CEFS Food System Initiatives](#).



This material is based upon work supported by NC State Extension [Local Foods Program](#), NC State Extension [FarmLink](#), and the [EmPOWERing Mountain Food Systems Project](#) of the [Center for Environmental Farming Systems](#). For more information, contact Noah Ranells, NC FarmLink Eastern Director, NC State Extension, nnranell@ncsu.edu; Laura Lauffer, EmPOWERing Mountain Food Systems Project Director, Center for Environmental Farming Systems, lwlauffe@ncsu.edu; or Hannah Dankbar, Local Food Program Manager, NC Cooperative Extension, hannah_dankbar@ncsu.edu.

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