

Local Food and Farming Fact Sheet

There has been a steady decline in the number of farms since WWII, although data from more recent years shows a leveling of this trend. Since the 2002 Census of Agriculture, 291,329 new farms have begun operation.¹

North Carolina has seen a steady decline in the number of farms from 81,706 in 1978 to 52,913 in 2007. However, the number of small farms that earn less than \$2,500 a year in sales has been increasing over the years.²

Small farms that earn less than \$250,000 in sales a year account for 91% of all farms in the U.S. Most of the small farm growth from 2002 to 2007 came from small farms that make less than \$10,000 a year.³

A little over 1 million acres belongs to farmland in WNC. Raising animals for food and dairy is one of the main uses for farmland in the region. The region is home to 12,212 farms, close to one quarter of North Carolina's total. Small farms predominate in the region, with more than half of all farms operating on fewer than 50 acres. Average farm size in WNC is 85 acres, approximately half the state average and one quarter of the national average farm size. Twenty-two of the twenty-three counties in the WNC region are considered rural.⁴

The region's consumers spend \$2.1 billion buying food each year, primarily from outside the region. Only \$3.1 million of food products (0.6%) are sold by farmers directly to consumers. Demand for local products in the WNC region has been estimated to be over \$450 million.⁴

In 2000 there were over 13,243 farmers in WNC, about 1% of the total population in WNC. The number of farmers has been on the decline in the past few decades.⁴

In 2012 there were 104 CSAs in North Carolina, up from zero in 1999. There are currently 92 farmers' tailgate markets in WNC.^{4,5}

Current spending on local food in WNC amounts to \$14 million a year and consumers, businesses and institutions report that they are willing to spend significantly more.⁶

According to the 10% Campaign website, more than \$20 million has been spent on local food by individuals and businesses in NC since July 2010.⁷

There are 7,864 farmers' markets in the U.S., a 9.6% increase from 2011, and there are 202 farmers' markets in North Carolina.⁸

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2. U.S. Department of Agriculture, National Agricultural Statistics Service. *2007 Census of Agriculture: State Level Data, North Carolina: Table 1. Historical Highlights: 2007 and Earlier Census Years (2009)*. Accessed August 31, 2012 at http://www.agcensus.usda.gov/Publications/2007/Full_Report/Volume_1,_Chapter_1_State_Level/North_Carolina/.

3. U.S. Department of Agriculture, National Agricultural Statistics Service. *2007 Census of Agriculture: Small Farms (2009)*. Accessed August 31, 2012 at http://www.agcensus.usda.gov/Publications/2007/Online_Highlights/Fact_Sheets/Farm_Numbers/.

4. Laura Kirby, Charlie Jackson, and Allison Perrett. Growing Local: Expanding the Western North Carolina Food and Farming Economy. *Appalachian Sustainable Agriculture Project*. (2007).

5. *Local Food Guide*. Appalachian Sustainable Agriculture Project (2012). Accessed September 1, 2012 at <http://www.buyappalachian.org/>.

6. *North Carolina Competitive Grant Portfolio Summary*. Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (2012). Accessed on September 1, 2012 at <http://www.southernsare.org/SARE-in-Your-State/North-Carolina>.

7. *The 10% Campaign*. North Carolina State University (2012). Accessed September 1, 2012 at <http://www.ncsu.edu/project/nc10percent/index.php>.

8. Sparks, Gwen. "USDA Directory Records More Than 7,800 Farmers' Markets: National Resource Helps More American Connect with Local Farmers." United States Department of Agriculture (2012). Accessed September 1, 2012 at <http://www.usda.gov/wps/portal/usda/usdahome?contentid=2012/08/0262.xml&contentonly=true>

