



Western NC Regional Food Council Report



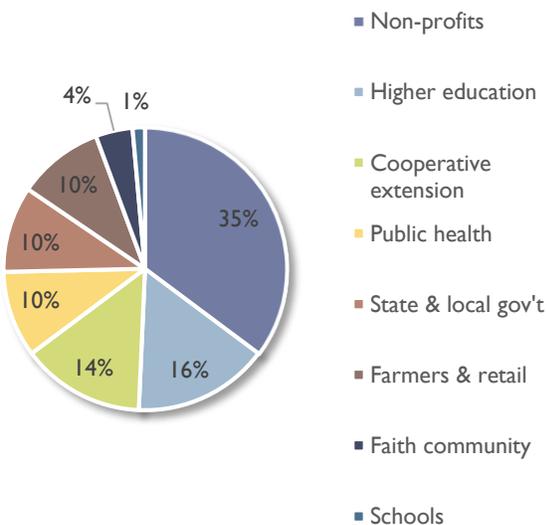
January 29, 2016

Strengthening partnerships to create a thriving, resilient community-based food system

In late January, nearly 90 people from sixteen counties attended the WNC Foodshed Summit to discuss how to best support the local food economy and everyone having access to healthy, local foods in western North Carolina. The Appalachian Foodshed Project co-hosted this regional event with Community Food Strategies (CFS) and the Local Food Council of North Carolina (LFCNC) as an opportunity to unveil their newly released WNC Community Food Security Assessment. These assessments are used by local food councils as baseline data to foster better aligned collaboration and initiatives in food and farming systems. The graph below shows the diversity of sectors present at the event.



Sectors Represented at Summit



Food Council Happenings

Five regional food networks gave brief presentations on their work, sharing current priorities and projects as fodder for later conversations and connections. Below is a listing of the local food councils or networks:

- Hunger Coalition of Transylvania County
- McDowell County Local Food Advisory Council
- Mountainwise
- Polk County
- Toe River Food Security Network

Regional Indicators

Groups of 15 to 25 people worked through a facilitated process using everyone's experiences to better understand the region's assets and needs for growing the local food economy. Community Food Strategies is helping food councils develop regional priorities so that local communities and organizations can better align programs and determine how to best contribute to common goals. The groups each used a similar shared result: *a thriving, sustainable community-based food system in every WNC county*. They developed numerous indicators to track the shift toward that result and ranked the following as priority indicators:

1. ↑ % of population with a livable wage
2. ↑ % of food secure families
3. ↑ % of population with a healthy weight
4. ↑ # of farmland acres in (food) production
5. ↑ in sales of local foods

Each group brainstormed various partnerships, actions, and resources that would help advance this work even further. One of the goals of these networking events is to further connections, ideas, and synergies. Review more data from this process on the next page or the full summary of this event at communityfoodstrategies.org.

"It was exciting to feel the positive energy in the room. The top indicators will be useful in understanding key similarities and differences across the state, in developing region-specific programming, and in leveraging resources specific to regional needs and priorities," noted Joanna Lelekacs, LFCNC representative and Local Foods Flagship Program Manager for NC Cooperative Extension.

Selection of Attendee Data from Regional Visioning Exercise

Shared Result:

A thriving, sustainable community-based food system in every WNC county.

Experience

What you would hear, feel, or see if the shared result were true:

- Healthy, happy people
- Food growing in home & community gardens
- Land-based & food-based enterprises
- Stores sell local products
- People stay in the community
- All people make a livable wage
- Support/value small businesses
- Equitable access to health care
- Diverse leadership
- Better land-use planning
- Resources for farmers - equipment, land, financing, etc
- Farm worker protections via labor laws
- Healthy biodiversity
- Clean water
- Healthy, affordable, accessible food for all
- Greater food literacy
- Minimal food waste

Indicators

What you could measure to track a shift towards the result:

- % of population with a livable wage
- % of food secure families
- % of population with healthy weight
- % of population with chronic disease
- # of farmland acres in (food) production
- \$ of local food sales
- # of households growing their own food
- # of food deserts
- Availability & participation in early childhood intervention
- SNAP \$ spent on local food
- # of pounds of food diverted out of landfills
- % of community members satisfied with leadership and their ability to be heard
- # of pollinator gardens

What's happening

What is already happening in our communities to reach this result:

- Community response from food/health assessment
- Funding opportunities
- Young farmers
- Community collaboration
- Diverse, non-traditional partners
- Farm-to-school and Farm-to-early childcare programming
- Support/value for small farms
- Land donated for farming
- Local food distribution channels
- Strong community college system
- Growing farming community
- Farmland preservation ordinance
- Intentional outreach for SNAP
- Effort toward youth & diverse leadership in community

Greater Impact

What we could do more of to have greater impact:

- Increase support from local government officials and key leaders
- More policies that promote stability, economic sustainability, and a living wage
- Increase in local food purchases and support by institutions, schools, and large employers
- More funding and resources for food systems staff, operations, and programs
- Documentation of and access to regional success stories and best practices
- More fun and excitement at food and farming activities

This is a portion of the ideas generated at this regional gathering. Local food councils plan to continue collaboration at future networking opportunities. View more at www.communityfoodstrategies.org.