



Regional Food Marketing Interview Results April 2016

1. Summary

- Interviewed 5 region contacts out of 6 contacted; interviewed 3 outside region contacts out of 5 contacted
- Point-of-purchase marketing, visibility and constant reinforcement, and brand consistency most important
- Helping producers thrive economically is typically the primary goal, along with maintaining and preserving the existing cultural identity of a region
- Streamlining communication and enhancing coordination efforts between producers, which usually have little time, to the buyer was identified as a major priority
- Farmer/producer directories or guides were identified as being successful
- A lack of quantifiable evaluation tools to measure effectiveness of marketing efforts and objectives, return on investment, consumer preference and purchasing behavior was a reoccurring concern
- “The consumer doesn’t ‘give a rip,’ they want it to be convenient; if it is not convenient, affordable, and accessibility and aggregation and processing systems are not in place, it ultimately won’t be that successful; most don’t want to take effort to search”
- Institutional outlet receptivity is dependent upon having a “champion” in management, flexible company policy, and ability for local food system to achieve an appropriate scale of production and aggregation
- Taste the Local Difference campaign in Michigan provided the most revealing information
 - Summarized an organizational shift that went from an apologetic pitch to aligning local food with the for-profit interest of the business and instead said: “You need our market, you can make even more money selling local products”; “let us show you how to make money by selling local food”;
 - They changed the narrative, going from “you should support the local community” to “lets make money together”
- Make buyers realize that local food is not a burden, but an under-utilized asset
- Appalachian Sustainable Development has an interesting program called the “Roadshow,” which includes ASD’s van visiting a site every week, mostly farmer’s markets, accompanied by media/Facebook announcements, and different activities each week promoting local food and giveaways at farmer’s markets

2. Interviewees

- Ray Pickering, Director, Fauquier County Agricultural Development
- Kenner Love, Unit Coordinator, Rappahannock County Office of Virginia Cooperative Extension
- Jessica Palmer, Buy Fresh-Buy Local Coordinator, Piedmont Environmental Council
- Leigh Mawyer, Tourism Director, Orange County
- Missy Vesuna, Special Events Coordinator, Culpepper Renaissance
- Jenny Biché, Planner, RRRC
- Eric Bendfeldt, Project Coordinator, Shenandoah Valley Farm-to-Table, and Virginia Cooperative Extension Agent
- Bill Palladino, Project Director, Taste the Local Difference (Michigan)
- Kathlyn Terry, Executive Director, Appalachian Sustainable Development
- Charlie Jackson, Executive Director, Appalachian Sustainable Agriculture Project

3. Interview Results

3.a. Within the Rappahannock-Rapidan Region

Fauquier County Agricultural Development

1. *What local food marketing and outreach programs is your organization currently working on?*

- We work on the following: Fauquier Fresh brochure, directory, sticker program.
- This year we are working on a regional pork marketing program targeted at DC markets.

2. *What do you consider to be the most effective messaging channels (point of purchase, media, posters, free stuff, farm guides)?*

- The directory and brochure are the most popular.
- The “Fauquier Fresh” stickers, which are provided to farmers market vendors, have not been that popular. They are typically only used, for free, at farmer’s markets

3. *Who are your most important stakeholder groups? Target markets?*

- Everyone and everyone.

4. *Have you tried to partner with community programs (health, environmental, economic development) that already exist?*

- No.

5. *What is the biggest challenge/barrier to local food marketing and outreach in this region? Opportunities?*

- The biggest challenge is the lack of producers because most pursue DC markets.

- The lack of an aggregation system is a major problem in coordinating a more cohesive effort, especially when addressing the issue of volume required by major institutions and retailers (such as Wegman's, which demanded a product stream that could not be met).
- Institutional success with hospitals and school is dependent upon the willingness of the director and budgets. In order for local food to be included in institutions, the state would likely have to get involved.

6. *What efforts and outcomes would you like to see from a regional approach?*

- Have a focus on producer to market to more local places. Producers also need to grow more varied products; they need more than just to produce vegetables. The bottom line is to focus on helping the producers.

7. *What potential benefits or issues do you think a regional brand might create?*

- Cultural and shared identity amongst the RRRC area may be an issue.
- The brand would also need constant attention and promotion, which means a constant stream of effort and resources that may be lacking.

Virginia Cooperative Extension, Rappahannock County

1. *What local food marketing and outreach programs is your organization currently working on?*

- We did all of those things (i.e. posters, ads, \$10 dollar a week campaign, market maker) and have helped PEC – “you would assume that there would be a larger [local] movement””I think we’ve reached the apex of local food demand at this point”
- Not one campaign stands out over the other – they have all been piecemeal
- We already have great food system that works (we can get food from anywhere globally); however, the problem is local food lacks the scale of production and distribution that the larger food system has
- How do you replace the integrated global system with a local system?
- How are you going to get food to plate locally?
- We are lacking aggregation and processing at the local level – can’t have a successful local food campaign without systems in place
- The consumer doesn’t “give a rip,” they want it to be convenient. If it is not convenient and available it won’t be successful; ultimately, successful long-term marketing won’t happen without systems in place to support it
- It gets back to convenience and affordability and having aggregating and processing in place; most people don’t want to take effort to search

2. *Who are your most important target markets?*

- Most of our products go to DC area, so while you are trying to have a local food, most is going up there

- However, while most of the food goes out of the region, DC folks don't come all the way down here just to shop for food, (typically just winery, apples, and agri-tourism)
- Everyone around DC try to market to DC (PA, MD, DE, WV); how do you already break into the DC market? The DC market is limited and constrained
- Should look at niche markets and ramp up enough to meet demand (CSAs, farmer markets, restaurants); can't do large scale institutions and grocery stores

3. Have you tried to partner with institutions?

- Institutional buyers such as schools; we supply Rappahannock County schools with apples
- The main issues are: convenience, cost, ability to prep, and availability, lack of scale, consistency, travel, resources
- We do not have the aggregation and production capacity of the Harrisonburg area and the Valley
- Have to have a champion within the institution and have people in the community to make it work
- Institutions don't know where to start: don't know the farmers, where to get products, and they need help with that

4. What is the biggest challenge/barrier to local food marketing and outreach in this region? Opportunities?

- The five-county area seems too small to create a brand; seems like you would need to have a general "Piedmont" brand; it is too micro
- A brand, and marketing, have to saturate the market and be constantly visible, it's always in your face when you are in the store, you are bombarded everywhere
- How do you do that with a local, regional five-county brand?
- Not try to do everything at once: focus should be on apples and wineries and the potential for local grass-fed beef

Piedmont Environmental Council

1. What local food marketing and outreach programs is your organization currently working on? a. In the past? b. What do you think made these efforts succeed or not? Any lessons learned?

- Everything currently being worked on is on the website, to include: farmers to chef express, buy fresh, buy local
- It is hard to say what effort has been "most successful": The food guides have a distribution of 73,000; however, while we can measure outputs, we can't measure outcomes
- We cannot measure which effort is most effective and can only assess through individual encounters
- The guide is already being done and is already going to every household in the county; how can we collaborate? How can we ensure they are going to right places?

These are questions we cannot answer at this point do to a lack of gauging effectiveness

2. *What do you consider to be the most effective messaging channels (point of purchase, media, posters, free stuff, farm guides)?*

- The Farm Guide that is mailed and is effective in distribution; however the website may be the most effective, but again, there is no outcome measurement in place

3. *Who are your most important stakeholder groups? Target markets?*

- The current a target market is a general audience; however probably should be more focused.

4. *Have you tried to partner with community programs (health, environmental, economic development) that already exist?*

- Yes. We try to avoid duplicating effort when possible, however more could be done to align like-minded efforts.

5. *What is the biggest challenge/barrier to local food marketing and outreach in this region? Opportunities?*

- Farmers have to sell their product (market structure)
- Buyers don't necessary have to buy local
- Resources

6. *What efforts and outcomes would you like to see from a regional approach?*

- More connections between buyers and sellers
- Larger scales with institutional buyers and more dedicated restaurant and retail buyers
- More collaboration in the area

7. *What are some future projects you may be working on?*

- The Culpepper tourism office to do farm tours and we hope to do some promotion

RRRC, Tween Rivers Trail

1. *How would you characterize Tween Rivers' involvement/future involvement with local food promotion?*

- The regional area is in a "donut hole" both from a food system and cultural affiliation (is it NOVA or central VA?)
- Trying to brand a region that does not have as distinct of an identity as, for instance, the Shenandoah Valley
- We want to have a niche but don't want replicate existing brands – there's a balance
- Tween Rivers has not done anything with local consumer education
- Are reaching out to farmers/producers to buy in the trail and advertise for tourist

2. *What do you consider to be the most effective messaging channels (point of purchase, media, posters, free stuff, farm guides)?*

- Do stuff but don't analyze or measure. Hard to gauge which is most effective between channels between all of these
- Thinking of coming up with surveys for people ask about their opinion on the trail.
- Current channels include: magazines, websites, pop up ads, brochures in welcome centers, trail sites include brochures, county tourism has links and brochure, events with table presence

3. *Who are your most important stakeholder groups? Target markets?*

- Agri-artisans most difficult to identify (defining what is "local" and what they are; does their products represent the region or use only locally-based stuff?)
- New connections need to be made and communicating the vision of the Trail
- The target market, geographically, is from Southern Maryland to Richmond

4. *Have you tried to partner with community programs (health, environmental, economic development) that already exist?*

- We have worked with specific producers to work with events, but it has not been under the Tween Rivers umbrella

5. *What is the biggest challenge/barrier to local food marketing and outreach in this region? Opportunities?*

- Awareness, time, and hard to get all the stakeholders together
- Coordination between producers
- Trying to gain the attention of tourists
- Advertisers want plans that foresee things months in advance, so it is often guesswork
- Hard to get the tourism directors together do to their schedules; additionally, all of them also maintain dual roles as the economic development director – their time/attention is limited
- Maintaining the producers' attention because they have little time and communicating with them the regional vision

6. *What efforts and outcomes would you like to see from a regional approach?*

- The main goal is to have money coming into the region supporting farmers and foresters (producers) so they can have year-round income

7. *What potential benefits or issues do you think a regional brand might create?*

- Duplication – just one more name to have and include
- Elevating the region as a "farming community" to maintain the rural integrity and culture of the region and articulate a clear regional difference from NOVA; and to also protect from the encroachment of possible NOVA development
- Position the regional identity as something that should and needs to be protected and preserved (e.g. Yosemite is a revered place that no one wants to build over);

much of the region's identity is based on being the antithesis to the suburban monoculture of NOVA

- The region may have conflicting identities and lack of identity cohesion – what is it? NOVA, Central VA, and does each county relate to its neighbor?
- What does “Piedmont” mean? It is much larger region outside of RRRC's five counties
- Defining what “local” means and dealing with only being limited within five counties
- Trying to convey that the regional brand is not a fad or gimmick
- Need to quantify how much local food outlets contribute to the local economy to build a convincing argument for not only consumers, but producers and buyers
- Other regional networks may not be happy; for instance, the state-wide Artisan Trail Network, a state-wide network, was not happy initially with Tween Rivers (but that was the only one)

Orange County Tourism (via email)

1. What local food marketing and outreach programs are you currently working on to help educate/inform the public about the importance of local food?

- Orange County is not currently specifically marketing local foods. We are marketing to tourists to come eat at our fabulous restaurants as part of our marketing to get tourists to come to Orange County

2. What do you consider to be the most effective messaging channels (point of purchase, media, posters, free stuff, farm guides)?

- Online marketing through food related publications, farm guides, and free giveaways

3. Who are your most important stakeholder groups?

- Tourism Advisory Committee and businesses in our Tourism community as well as our regional partners

4. Have you tried to partner with community programs (health, environmental, economic development) that already exist?

- We are working with the Orange County Department of Economic Development on holding educational seminars regarding agri-tourism for the tourism community as well as the public

5. What is the biggest challenge/barrier to local food marketing and outreach in your region?

- Identifying all the local food entities and making sure that all are included equally.

6. What efforts and outcomes would you like to see from a regional approach? (Similar branding, partnerships across jurisdictions, etc.)

- Regional partnerships, coop affordable marketing plan

7. *What potential benefits or issues do you think a regional brand might create?*

- People don't see county borders so the benefit is that a regional brand will help all the smaller businesses with marketing on a larger scale with more offerings regionally

3.b. Outside the Region

Shenandoah Valley Farm-to-Table

1. *What local food marketing and outreach programs is your organization currently working on? a. In the past? b. What do you think made these efforts succeed or not? Any lessons learned?*

- Promoting both local agriculture and regional and state (diversifying economic development)
- Dollars are floating and local food businesses and producers are not capturing
- Study in Valley consumers are spending 1.2 billion and most of that money is moving outside of the region
- Emphasis on local economy and make change from 1 – 2 % to 10% would be huge
- Quantifying talking points with hard numbers that emphasize importance of local food
- Buy fresh buy local bumper stickers are important but translating into actual purchases are difficult

2. *What do you consider to be the most effective messaging channels (point of purchase, media, posters, free stuff, farm guides)?*

- Consistency is the most important attribute of a messaging campaign, whether it is color scheme and tone, and having a consistent message
- "Hyper-local," even more local than state, is viewed as more preferable than Virginia grown

3. *Who are your most important stakeholder groups? Target markets?*

- Start with producers that are doing direct-to-consumer sales or intermediated sales with restaurants, stores, and institutions
- Independent stores would be (restaurants and independent grocery stores) with stickers are also important
- Focus on high visibility areas in communities and finding partners to develop signage; mural or signage
- Buy fresh buy local is not "targeted" but appeals most to younger educated families with children, young professionals, and 50 and ups "granolas"; some cases it depends on what product you're trying to sell
- 18-30s maybe best entry point and because they are more attuned with social, environmental community initiatives

- Low-hanging fruit is dependent business (locally owned restaurants, farmers markets, food stands) and building upon current efforts already existing; early adopters and innovators
- Balance between bringing people from outside (DC) vs what is there and maintaining cultural character

4. *Have you tried to partner with community programs (health, environmental, economic development) that already exist?*

- Working with city schools and institutions; type of institution means it's variable
- Independently operated is better than national food service chains because they have more flexibility for local/regional procurement
- Consistency and quality and scale is a barrier for institutions; insurance is a barrier for local buyers

5. *What is the biggest challenge/barrier to local food marketing and outreach in this region? Opportunities?*

- People want convenient and efficient and aren't used to anything that may appear to be "unconventional"
- Some cases its transportation
- Building momentum and finding champions within the community
- Must create like-minded relationships with community entities
- Getting some baseline data on what businesses are currently doing in order to show and quantify growth once the local food campaign begins

6. *What efforts and outcomes would you like to see from a regional approach?*

- Producers to have an increase in sales would be the primary goal; producers to retain their independence and the region to maintain its character that has a high quality of life to be admired
- Local business success is another priority
- Increase diversity of agricultural operations (not just a certain set of products)

7. *Any other campaigns you think are good references?*

- Charlie and Emily Jackson at Appalachian Sustainable Agricultural project ("Appalachian Grown") in Asheville

Michigan Taste the Local Difference

1. *What local food marketing and outreach programs is your organization currently working on? a. In the past? b. What do you think made these efforts succeed or not? Any lessons learned?*

- Products (see website): the best are the farm and food guide (sell advertising in it), and the online presence backed up with the retail community
- The current emphasis is on workshops, matchmaking, and networking
- We eventually realized the need was generating the consumer side of the market, not generating the producer side

- There was a lack of a pull from the market; there was a lack of consumer interest outside farmer's markets and coops
- The organization changed direction 3 years ago and instead of cultivating producers it went to strictly marketing; there was a lot of branding but not a lot of implementing the brand through marketing
- The main shift was going from creating a "brand" to direct marketing in stores; this involved creating innovative ways to get people to identify local food in the stores
- The key was to differentiate local food in stores from all of the rest of the food
- Best place is to hit them in the store (point-of-purchase) and back it up (billboards, ads, posters, to back that up with one unified brand)

2. *What is local? What is the brand recall?*

- Originally started with 5 counties, then 10 counties for 10 years; just begun to expand state wide
- Although the campaign currently represents Michigan, it is designed to represent regional local food
- Definition of local changes depending on where you are
- We define "local" by miles; we allow the consumer to decide what is "local" by giving them information on where it was made (use a mileage indicator and let the person decide); philosophy is to provide as much information as they can (transparency)

3. *What are some different marketing techniques?*

- We have 30-40 different point-of-sale techniques in order to offer a "menu for options" to present to retailers to choose from
- This includes different materials (for instance, displays of different sizes, packaging for beverage bottles, signage from the ceiling, stickers on the floor, specifically for produce, twisty tags, etc.)
- This also includes the placing of materials in the store
- In order to decide what was best, we worked with the retailers for two years and asked "what would work in your stores?"

4. *How did you get the stores on board?*

- Marketing for the local food community is a challenge financially
- You are trying to generate a transaction, but the problem is relational and building relationships
- Traditionally, the narrative of local food promotion is "very apologetic" (i.e. "please carry local food because it helps the local economy and producers")
- During the shift 3 years ago they realized that it was about the way they were asking retailers to carry food in local stores – they decided not to be "apologetic"
- They went from an apologetic pitch to aligning local food with the for-profit interest of the business and instead said: "You need our market, you can make even more money selling local products; "let us show you how to make money by selling local food"
- The problem is food retailers have to make a profit, and they view local food as more of a burden to "deal with"

- “Investment is shallow because they want to make a profit, so they are at a whim with local food”
- The retailers now pay them to bring local food into the store, and they are making money
- They changed the narrative, going from “you should support the local community” to “let’s make money together”
- When dealing with local retailers, you need to think: who is at top and how can we get their buy-in? and whose job is on the line and how can you make them realize that local food is not a burden, but an under-utilized asset
- Can’t be a burden, have to show you are an asset – it’s a cyclical thing, they may take you on, and your risk, but if they don’t see the value, they back out
- The key is to remove hurdles and show them direct value

5. *How do you capture metrics?*

- They make producers sign a contract that says they will be transparent so people can find out about the product (i.e. where, how, the product was produced)
- Their main way to capture metrics is by collecting sales data from food retailers
- They make retailers sign a contract about being transparent and require them to share the numbers about their local food sales – it is the easiest way to collect data since the retailers are already doing it
- Since the change 3 years ago, their numbers from retailers show a 20% difference in overall sales retailers
- They also conduct focus groups and surveys to gauge consumer preference of marketed materials
- Each retailer is different and materials/metric change from store to store - you must be flexible with every store

6. *What do you consider to be the most effective messaging channels (point of purchase, media, posters, free stuff, farm guides)?*

- Depends upon the audience
- Farm guide is best for tourists
- Overall, the best place is point-of-purchase, (needs to be big, and bold, and fast)
- Spend a lot of time designing materials for immediate visibility at walk-in

7. *Who are your most important stakeholder groups? Target markets?*

- Everyone is required to build relationships
- Start with farmers and connecting them with people that will buy their food (build trust with farmer base first and find a way to connect them to everything)
- Provide a communication channel (farmers don’t have time)
- Start with the inputs for farms, then work with farmer’s, farmers markets, then wholesalers, institutions, retailers, and eventually food waste
- Each one demands a specialize approach (hospitals, schools are different than restaurants) and it’s taken a while to develop the language

Appalachian Sustainable Development (Rooted in Appalachia Campaign)

Located in Abingdon, VA; Covers Central Appalachia

1. What local food marketing and outreach programs is your organization currently working on?

- Mostly farmer's markets, accompanied by media/Facebook announcements, and different activities each week promoting local food and giveaways at the farmer's markets
- The "Roadshow" is just starting and we hope it goes well, which includes ASD's van visiting a farmers market every week to highlight that venue. Includes cooking demonstrations, activities, giveaways, etc.
- We have been working a lot with farmer's markets
- Many of our programs are well received, such as the garden box and grow your own program, but our main problem is having enough hands on deck
- See website; the big project right now is the "Roadshow,"

2. What do you consider to be the most effective messaging channels (point of purchase, media, posters, free stuff, farm guides)?

- We utilize traditional marketing methods, like farm guides, social media, and press releases, but it also comes down to building relationships with producers, markets, and consumers
- It is also important to know which market demographic to target

3. Who are your most important stakeholder groups? Target markets?

- When we first started our main goal was helping the producer; one we had the producers on board other stakeholder groups were easier to find and bring on board
- We started with producers, now we have workshops educating producers on networking and brokering distribution – it's a building block process

4. What is the biggest challenge/barrier to local food marketing and outreach in this region? Opportunities?

- Again, it comes down to finding volunteers
- Scalability, some of our programs are small-scale and time intensive; our resources prohibit from making them accessible to more people
- Farmers are risk-adverse; while we have workshops on transitioning to organic or selling local, any setback may make them turn away
- Getting new farmers, a new generation of young folks, to take up farming, is critical; we need to find ways to encourage and incentivize a new farmer base

5. What efforts and outcomes would you like to see from a regional approach?

- There's so much competition out there, it would be great if we could all work on the same page with a stronger brand that has region-wide recognition to consumers

- For instance, if a green house decides they want to start producing and selling their own vegetables on-site instead of at the farmer's market, that creates competition with the farmer's market
- Things like this can cause tension amongst producers and sellers
- While we have a program that addresses the aesthetic quality and look of products, this continues to be a hurdle for local producers getting their food into bigger retailers

Appalachian Sustainable Agriculture Project (Appalachian Grown Campaign)

Located in Asheville, NC; Covers Southern Appalachia

1. What local food marketing and outreach programs is your organization currently working on?

- We originally had volunteers create a buzz; we bombarded radio, print, and signage to create a word-of-mouth; we set up information stands at farmer's markets
- "With promoting local food, I've found the public almost always says, 'I'm in.' Where do I find it?"
- One of their first initiatives was to create a Local Food Guide
- We have shifted a bit from aggregation and promotion to education
- The Business of Farming Conference was founded to teach farmers how to market their products to local and regional customers; that we have the Farm to School Conference, and we host many one-time workshops throughout the year for farmers, farmers market managers, teachers, students, and anyone interested
- While in 2011 we started the Local Food Research Center to study the localization of food production and to test the idea that localizing food systems leads to positive economic and social change

2. What do you consider to be the most effective messaging channels (point of purchase, media, posters, free stuff, farm guides)?

- Consistent, regular information and relations through local media outlets - We originally created a great relationship with local media and engaged them on a regular basis to create trust
- As part of this, we provided a weekly "Fresh at the Farmers Market" report, first through the local newspapers and then on the local public radio, to highlight food as it became available at farmers' markets throughout the growing season; we would write the news release and often the organizations would just run the entire thing
- Our food guide remains popular, with over 100,000 copies circulated annually now
- Also, with more restaurants selling local food, consumer demand is increasing
- We really benefit from having Asheville in our back yard
- Attitudes are changing; we conducted consumer preference surveys 15 years ago that said freshness and quality were a priority; today 8 out of 10 said they bought locally to contribute to the local economy and support local farms

- Our branding materials often include farmer profiles, which have photos of the farmer, farm, animals, crops, and a brief story; we provide the design and the retail outlet pays for the materials and printing
- We've found that having branded labeling on individual items, along with displays that reinforce the brand, is the most effective

3. Who are your most important stakeholder groups? Target markets?

- Everyone; we are the facilitator; we don't create anything, we just bring connect people together and enhance those personal relationships

4. What is the biggest challenge/barrier to local food marketing and outreach in this region? Opportunities?

- Getting institutions on board, while we've had success, remains a barrier
- Also getting food to larger markets and retailers

5. Any last thoughts?

- The normalization of local food, while continuing to gain acceptance, also at the same time has a long way to go
- Be patient; relationships form over time