

**RRRC Food System Public Meetings – Group Discussion Results  
February 3-4, 2015**

**1) By show of hands, how many are:**

- Farmers – 15
- Other ag-related businesses – 6
- Large-scale buyers – 2
- Government – 17
- Other local citizens – 17

**2) What market channels are you currently using to sell/buy your products?**

- Auction
- Backyard
- Commodity sales
- CSA
- Farmers markets
- Food hub
- Grocery stores
- Local aggregator
- Local independent stores
- On-farm
- Online
- Stockyard
- Wholesale

**3) Do you have any interest in expanding your operation? Why or why not?**

- Yes, to increase net profit
- Yes, to make a living wage
- Yes, want to expand by 23%; driven by the increased demand of existing and new customers
- Yes, want to add value-added processing
- Yes, want to increase production intensity
- Yes, want to serve more people in the community
- Yes, increasing production over the next three years to increase profits
- No, do not want to take the risks involved
- No, focus is on providing on-farm education and want to maintain current programs
- No, due to lack of demand
- No, due to lack of labor
- No, due to competition
- No, in order to maintain sanity
- No, due to cost

**4) For producers: Where are your products primary market(s)?**

- Dairy: School systems and other locations within the region, as well as out of state
- Cattle: Pennsylvania and Kansas
- Hay to local farmers
- Within the region

- Albemarle County
- Richmond
- DC metro area
- Expanding into other states
- Exports internationally, especially orchards selling to Europe and Russia

**5) For buyers: By show of hands how many spend 10% or more of their total food budget on local food?**

- 18 people responded yes

**6) What do you see as the barriers to selling and buying food products locally?**

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Buyer need for dependability of food supply</li> <li>• Cheap gas</li> <li>• Convenience</li> <li>• Corporate marketing strategies/lack of transparency (i.e. what is local?)</li> <li>• Cost and time of certifications</li> <li>• Food taxes</li> <li>• High land value</li> <li>• Labor</li> <li>• Labeling confusion</li> <li>• Lack of consumer confidence</li> <li>• Lack of consumer demand</li> <li>• Lack of consumer awareness/education</li> <li>• Lack of infrastructure</li> <li>• Lack of power in market</li> <li>• Lack of student education (i.e. cooking skills and ag education)</li> <li>• Inconvenience (i.e. farmers market only open one day/week)</li> <li>• Lack of subsidies to help farmers scale up</li> <li>• Lack of supply</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of time</li> <li>• Lack of variety in available local foods</li> <li>• Liability</li> <li>• Logistics</li> <li>• NIMBY attitudes</li> <li>• Price of local foods</li> <li>• Producer education</li> <li>• Production costs, especially farm equipment</li> <li>• Regulations (food safety, zoning)</li> <li>• Scale</li> <li>• Socio-economic differences               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i) Low-income consumers tend to buy food based on price and convenience</li> <li>ii) Low-income consumers are not buying produce anywhere; instead buying processed, convenience foods</li> <li>iii) Taking SNAP benefits at farmers markets has not made a difference</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Stringency of organic standards</li> <li>• Unprocessed food usually sold based on price, quantity and appearance, instead of quality/taste</li> </ul> |
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## **7) What are the opportunities?**

- Can piggyback on increased interest in organic foods
- Demand for education
- Economic development potential
- Educating existing buyers of other opportunities (i.e. making connections)
- Families are driving increased interest in healthy eating and food safety
- Farmers markets provide a great opportunity for tastings/samples and informal education
- Food clubs are experiencing more success than CSAs
- Grocery stores are featuring local products
- Improve efficiency to achieve full-field harvest; can process seconds and thirds or send to food banks
- Increased interest in local foods among university students
- Increase in funding opportunities
- Increasing farm-to-school can improve consumer awareness and foster new farmers
- Potential to correct undervaluing of livestock due to commodity marketing
- Prices farmers receive from aggregators can improve if seconds and thirds are used
- Proximity to ethnic markets with high demand for local foods
- Proximity to the federal government
- Proximity to urban centers (large markets with high income)
- Local foods usually have fewer preservatives which can be marketed to health conscious consumers
- Restaurant sales
- Rise in participation of new markets such as meal subscriptions and online groceries
- School gardens are great opportunity for education and tastings

## **8) What resources/incentives if provided would help you sell or buy more food locally?**

- Attract farm input businesses (e.g. equipment manufacturers, seed companies, etc.)
- Changes to local ordinances that are prohibitive to processing facilities
- Changes to local school purchasing policies to make sourcing local easier or even encouraged
- Cheap labor
- Collection/storage of value-added products
- Consumer education
- Expansion of the cost-share program for high-tunnels

- Farm incubator, including land, equipment, training and mentors
- Financial and farm planners
- Grants, especially those with less cumbersome applications and a tighter timeframe between application and award
- Grant writers and a database of available ones
- Increased transparency, including point of sale information for local foods
- Increased farm-to-school programs/purchasing
- Logistics channel, including central pick-up locations
- Marketing materials
- Monetary incentives
- More farmers market days
- Processing facility for meats
- Processing facility for dairy
- Public education
- Publish a list of VA Tech and VSU resources, and in a user friendly-format (e.g. linked to program websites/publications, searchable database)
- Regional co-op to find vegetable sales
- Regional staff person to assist with marketing
- Solar incentives

**9) What would you most like to see come out of this project?**

- Advertising
- Carver Center running
- Champion(s) to keep the effort moving
- Deeper understanding of current situation and potential; weed out lifestyle farmers
- Education for seasonal eating
- Evaluate consumer commitment to local
- Food promotion plan such as the Eat 5 – Buy \$5 program
- Increased access to local food
- Increased buyer loyalty
- Increased community support
- Keeping more dollars locally

- One success story that is profitable/sustainable
- Projects that encompass more than farmers markets, and with a regional focus
- Regional food council
- Sustainable agriculture economy for the next generation of farmers
- Transition conventional farmers to organic

**10) Any additional comments?**

- Cloud funding could be used to help fund projects
- Local media should be utilized to increase public awareness of the effort and local food

**Food System Focus Group Discussion Results**  
**April 2, 2015**  
**RRRC Agritourism Symposium, Culpeper**

**1) By show of hands, how many are:**

- Farmers – 10
- Other ag-related businesses – 4
- Large-scale buyers – 3
- Government – 7
- Other local citizens – 0

**2) By show of hands, how many sell:**

- Fruits and vegetables – 2
- Meat – 3
- Dairy – 1
- Grains – 1
- Other – 0

**3) By show of hands, how many farm:**

- Less than 50 acres – 3
- 50 to 200 acres – 3
- Greater than 200 acres – 2

**4) What market channels are you currently using to sell/buy your products?**

- Internet
- Farmers markets
- Commodity markets
- Restaurants
- Retail

**5) What do you see as the barriers to selling and buying food products locally?**

- Lack of convenience (both buying and selling)
- Marketing
- Distribution
- Insufficient quantity for large-scale buyers
- Cost of processing
- Food safety regulations
- Zoning regulations

**6) What are the opportunities/advantages in our region?**

- Support from local chamber of commerce
- Awareness of local food
- Long growing season plus extended season potential
- Market access
- High demand, including tourists
- Social media is a great tool for marketing

**7) What resources/incentives if provided would help you sell or buy more food locally?**

- Include agritourism and related farm businesses in welcome kit to new citizens and make it available via realtors in addition to via local governments
- Local Agricultural Directory
- Regional agriculture clearing house
- Inventory of local assets
- Producer co-op
- Facilitate coordination between buyers and sellers
- Aggregation
- Distribution assistance
- Marketing assistance
- Media involvement
- Promotional functions, including those similar to garden club tours
- Infrastructure for small/alternative producers
- Processing facility (mostly an interest in meat processing)
- Cannery

**Rappahannock-Rapidan Regional Commission  
Institutional Food Buyers Focus Group Meeting  
Discussion Results  
April 28, 2015**

*Five people were in attendance, including two representatives of public schools, two from private schools, and one from a local community services agency. Following are their responses to facilitated discussion questions.*

**1. Tell us about your operation and it's needs:**

**a. How many people does your institution regularly purchase food for?**

- 400 high school students plus 50 faculty and their families, at 3 meals/day; 90% of food is prepared in-house
- 350-400 Headstart to grade 7 students for lunch and 200 for breakfast, plus 354 high school students
- 70 K-5 students plus 100 preschool students, both lunch only
- 364 individuals at 5 county senior centers (congregate meals), where all food is prepared in-house; plus 189 individuals with home delivered meals (HDM)

**b. What facilities, equipment and staff do you have to prepare meals?**

- Full commercial kitchen, with cooks, bakers, and table staff
- Full commercial kitchen with cooks; also have a farm-to-table program coordinator
- Full commercial kitchen with one staff plus part-time volunteers for kitchen staff
- Full commercial kitchen

**c. What is your maximum budget per meal?**

- \$5.00/meal [lunch]
- \$3.00/meal on average with a yearly budget
- \$3.00/congregate meal [lunch]; for home delivery \$3.65/frozen meal and \$3.45/shelf-stable meal

**2. What channels/vendors are you currently using to buy your products? Are you required to purchase from those vendors solely or at a certain percentage?**

- US Food Service
- Staunton Foods
- Performance Food Group
- Standard Produce
- Merchants Foodservice
- Virginia Distribution Centers
- Sysco



- GA Foods for frozen meals
- Schenk Foods
- Galliker's Dairy
- Charlottesville Food Hub
- Thornton River Orchards
- Donations
- On occasions when small quantities are needed, we go to Walmart
- Does not have any contracts with food vendors, instead purchases from local groceries stores as needed, especially Wegmans, as well as farmers markets
- All but one institution represented had flexibility in determining how much to purchase through each vendor, though some had more flexibility than others

**3. What percentage, if any, of your institution's food budget is spent on local food? What types of products are being locally sourced?**

- 5% - mostly during local foods week; includes fruit and some vegetables, plus meat during local food week
- 1% - mostly cured meat plus some vegetables, dry goods, syrup and eggs
- 1% - fruits and vegetables
- Less than 1% - fruits and vegetables

**4. What local products are not offered, or not in adequate quantities, by existing vendors that you would like to see offered?**

- No issue with availability, but with price
- Nothing specifically, but we do need things in bulk; most interested in getting seconds that would otherwise rot in the field onto the table
- Not an issue

**5. Are there other purchasing constraints dictated by your institutional or government policy, or other barriers to local sourcing, which we have not discussed?**

- Price is the main constraint
- Seasonality is a big issue when buying local products for schools who are off for most of the growing season
- Food safety is a concern, as well as meeting state nutrition guidelines
- Food safety is not currently an issue because we only use one local provider and have been using them for a long time without problems
- Time constraints/ease of use is the biggest issue
- Public schools' food services have to follow USDA guidelines

- Many kids will not eat the healthy food offered; when foods like kale were offered the number of lunches purchased decreased
- Usually have to do more cleaning and stemming with local foods

**6. Are there any opportunities or successes you have experienced regarding local sourcing?**

- Have good relationships with local farmers who want to support the schools in their community
- We post in the newsletter when local items are to be used in meals to keep parents aware; it is mainly the parents who care, not the students
- It is a mainly a feel good thing for the school to get farmers products to the students, plus it is fresher and healthier
- Young kids think local is cool, especially if you can tell them specifically where it came from

**7. Does your institution conduct any educational programs regarding local food or agriculture? Would you be open to participating in a region program, if developed?**

- We bring in local farmers during local food week, and have school gardens where grades 5-7 and high school students help and the food is used in the cafeterias
- We hold field trips to local farms, and received a grant for the students to grow something and use it in a meal
- No programs currently
- No programs currently, but we need credentialed people to educate and counsel seniors on nutrition; lack of labor pool
- Three responded that their institutions were interested in participating in a regional local foods educational program, while one responded maybe if it meets state nutrition guidelines

**8. Do you have any interest in expanding your purchase of local food? What resources/incentives if provided would help you buy more food locally?**

All responded yes, though with the following needs:

- More variety and availability (seasonality is an issue)
- Quality
- A platform for ordering (time constraints shopping for local foods is an issue)
- Pricing is the main issue, needs to fit within our budget
- Need to meet USDA recipe requirements
- Need quantity, not large but for 50 people