This Regional Initial Food System Review is a collaborative research work of many concerned community members and stakeholders that have committed time and effort to building the local food economy of in the Piedmont Triad Region of North Carolina. The information gathered can help the overall community understand how a regional food council has the ability to help expand the local food economy of the Piedmont Triad Area.

This review will help to implement a thorough assessment of this region, as well as highlight this area’s agricultural assets by utilizing information gathered from the past work of organizations like Piedmont Together, Piedmont Triad Regional Council, Community Food Strategies, Piedmont Grown, and the Center for Environmental Farming Systems.

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All of the Attendees of the 2017 Piedmont Triad Food Council Gathering
The Piedmont Triad is located in the southeastern US, in the central part of North Carolina. We are located halfway between New York and Florida and halfway between Washington DC and Atlanta, GA. We are a 12 county region serving 1.6 million people. Twelve counties and 61 municipalities comprise the Piedmont Triad Regional Council. The Piedmont is the area lying between the Atlantic Ocean and the Appalachian Mountains. The Triad is named for the three largest cities in the region: Greensboro, Winston-Salem, and High Point. The region boasts excellent transportation and educational facilities, making the region a hub for commerce along the mid-Atlantic region.

Among the 12,000 miles of roadways in the region are Interstates 40 and 85 which bisect the region east to west and Interstate 77 running north/south. Two new interstates, I-73 and I-74, are already completed in most areas and under construction in others. Piedmont Triad International Airport is located in the center of the region and 8 additional airports handle both commuter and corporate aircraft. There are 13 colleges and universities in the region with a total enrollment exceeding 60,000.

In addition, 9 technical and community colleges serve an additional 50,000 students. The region’s economy has historically been tied to textiles, furniture, and tobacco, but new growth industries are emerging rapidly, including distribution, logistics, bio-technology, and aviation & aerospace.
**Food system Defined**

Food system refers to all aspects of producing, buying, selling, eating, and disposing of food. This includes production, processing and aggregation, distribution, marketing, consumption, and food waste recovery. A local food system encompasses a network of all of these components, is place-specific and relationship based. It can encompass a county, region, or the whole state.

**What is Food System Infrastructure?**

Food system infrastructure covers everything needed in the supply chain of activity between the consumer and the producer, be that a farm, fishery or community garden. The supply chain involves such businesses and resources as seed, feed and compost suppliers; equipment repair and fabrication services; food processors; distributors; retail outlets; professional services such as logistics managers and waste handlers; surplus food rescue; and financial, workforce, civic, and land and energy resources. An inadequate food system infrastructure is like an inadequate transportation system of vehicles, roads and bridges - it is difficult to get where you want to go in food and farm markets without reliable food supply chain facilities and services.

The Piedmont Triad has prioritized its natural assets as it has grown, protecting its waters, best farmland and forests, and most sensitive habitats. Farms are highly productive and farmers are well-connected to regional markets. Local food production, processing, and distribution facilities enable residents to get healthy foods conveniently from local farmers. Our region’s tourism industry is strong and growing. The region has invested in a green infrastructure network that supports both healthy ecosystems and a regional greenway, blue way and trails system that draws outdoor enthusiasts from both within and outside the state.
Regional Food System Strengths
The Census of Agriculture, taken only once every five years, examines land use and ownership, operator characteristics, production practices, income and expenditures. In the latest census which was completed in 2012, it was found that this region has 1,081,709 acres of farmland and 10,373 farms, which over half of those farms are animal farms. Since the 2007 census, the region has seen an increase in Agritourism as a source of revenue for local farmers with 223 farms utilizing Agritourism and recreational activity.

For over 25 years, Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) has become a popular way for consumers to buy local, seasonal food directly from a farmer. In the Piedmont Triad at least 97 farms sell produce through the use of CSA which is up 28% since 2007. In contrast 989 farms are able to sell directly to the consumer and have seen a gross revenue of $4,589,000. Farmers markets are an integral part of the urban/farm linkage and have continued to rise in popularity, mostly due to the growing consumer interest in obtaining fresh products directly from the farm. Farmers markets allow consumers to have access to locally grown, farm fresh produce, enables farmers the opportunity to develop a personal relationship with their customers, and cultivate consumer loyalty with the farmers who grows the produce. This region includes 125 farmers markets, roadside stands and produce markets.

The Piedmont region, like much of the United States, is experiencing an extended period of low employment and under employment. At the same time, there is a renewed interest in local foods to foster healthier North Carolinians and protect and preserve the rural landscape. There exists a great potential for the production, aggregation, processing and sale of local foods to further public health and land preservation goals while promoting sustained economic recovery and fostering resilient local economies.
These infographics provide a visual interpretation of the 2007 & 2012 Census of Agriculture data, which is collected and maintained by the U.S. Department of Agriculture for all 100 counties in North Carolina. The infographics are intended to provide each county and council of government region with a simple, clear snapshot of local agriculture and the many ways in which it impacts local economies.

Agriculture as Economy in the Piedmont Triad Region
This 492-acre working farm features active livestock and horticultural production, making it possible for N.C. A&T to honor the land grant university mission of learning, discovery and engagement with the farming community.

Fulfilling that mission is crucial for North Carolina, where agriculture is worth $71 billion a year and is the state’s largest industry, employing more than 17 percent of the workforce.

The University Farm at N.C. A&T plays an important role in maintaining the viability of the agricultural industry. Here, we educate tomorrow’s agricultural professionals, research new agricultural products and practices, and advise farmers on methods to improve productivity.

The University Farm is a working, producing farm that raises crops and livestock, including dairy and beef cattle, poultry, swine, horses, meat goats and sheep. Students and faculty in the College of Agriculture and Environmental Sciences use the farm for research and education. The campus Cooperative Extension Program uses the farm to test and demonstrate new crops and farming practices before introducing them to the state’s farming community.

Feed crops for the farm’s livestock are raised here, as well as new vegetable and specialty crops. The farm is also the site of research on sustainable agriculture and natural resources conservation, including swine waste research and soil conservation.

In the early days of N.C. A&T, the farm provided much of the food for the campus cafeteria. Nowadays, farm products such as hogs, milk and beef cattle are sold to wholesalers. The proceeds are returned to the University’s general fund, or are returned to accounts that support the Agricultural Research Program. Vegetable crops are often donated to local charities that feed the needy, such the Society of St. Andrew.
The roots of today’s Foster-Caviness Foods trace back to 1902. Two families, Foster and Caviness, began a small fruit and vegetable business in Greensboro, North Carolina. In 1974, current owner Paul Lieb and his father started Best Wholesale Foods in Greensboro, a distributor of high-quality ethnic and specialty foods to local restaurants. Having lived in North Carolina for most of his life, Paul believed in building relationships with local restaurants and the communities they serve by providing fresh quality produce. In 1985, Paul purchased the original Foster-Caviness.

Within the national discussion about the importance of sustainability, local farmers do not often come to mind. But for the economy of North Carolina and its citizens to thrive, the support of local agriculture is imperative. Foster-Caviness believes that a strong local growing community means a higher quality product to our various market partners, and also a stronger agricultural community. That is why they have started the Friends of Farmers™ program, which works to build strong, lasting relationships with local farmers. The end result is a supply of fresh, seasonal produce that not only helps the customers deliver deliciously fresh food, but also helps the community grow into a more prosperous, agricultural region.
The RCC mission is to create a democratically owned and controlled grocery store in Northeast Greensboro that provides all of Greensboro with healthy foods at affordable prices and has a commitment to locally sourced foods, community education and dignified jobs.

Working with the City of Greensboro, Self-Help Ventures Fund, Fund for Democratic Communities, Uplift Solutions, Lakeshore Food Advisors, Cooperative Development Services, Community Foundation of Greater Greensboro, Cone Health Foundation, Shared Capital Cooperative, The Working World, Regenerative Finance, and the Northeast Greensboro community, the Renaissance Community Coop (RCC) is on track to open a 10,530 square foot full-service grocery store in the Renaissance Shops at Phillips Avenue Plaza in 2016.

The RCC will alleviate an 18-year food desert and bring good jobs, healthy living options, and community wealth to a neighborhood that struggles with obesity, diabetes, unemployment, and poverty. With RCC as a community-centered anchor, the shopping center will become a thriving example of community-based economic development.
Regional Food System Challenges
For many small farmers in the Piedmont Triad region, farm income is a supplemental, yet crucial, part of their household economy. According to the NC Department of Commerce, State of the North Carolina Workforce report, rural areas of North Carolina are continuing to lose employment opportunities, and “middle jobs” that supplied a family-sustaining wage for workers with little formal education are disappearing rapidly. For many of these families, small farm operations can provide much needed household income to supplement low-wage job earnings.

Small farming operations also present opportunities for partially- or fully-retired growers, as well as opportunities for producers who are on their way to building larger, full-time farm businesses. Generally, growers that fall into these categories do not have the physical infrastructure or marketing capacity to sell to institutions or buyers that can pay a good wholesale price for their products. While some farmers that fit this classification have indeed achieved success selling at farmers markets or roadside stands, not all growers are interested in, or have the time or resource capacity for, selling to such markets.

There is a tremendous untapped opportunity for selling locally grown produce to institutional buyers, particularly for small growers that cannot market their produce directly to consumers because of other job or family responsibilities. Developing this aspect of the local food system will result in more fresh, local food reaching the plates of North Carolinians as well as providing much needed income for rural farming households in the Piedmont Triad region and additional revenue streams for small businesses that act as the aggregation sites.

Much of the resources and focus for the promotion of local foods development over the past decade has gone to supporting mid- and larger-scale farms within North Carolina. markets and food access programs. Working with larger farmers and distributors could make a more quantifiable difference in the prevalence of local foods relative to the number of farmers in a given program. However, as the food system has matured, there is more room—and more need—for further differentiation within growers and aggregators in the Piedmont region to engender greater resiliency to both the regional economy and the food system at large. Resiliency is a function of a systems ability to return rapidly to a sustainable state of being following distress or disturbance.
As the local food system develops, the existence of chronic economic stress in rural and urbanized areas of the Piedmont region present specific issues and opportunities. Currently, there are a number of projects, programs, and initiatives geared toward assisting small- and mid-scale farmers who wish to enter mainstream markets such as grocery stores and schools. However, many Piedmont farmers—especially those addressing chronic economic stress within their household through supplemental income earned via small or micro-scale farming—have production and marketing capacities well below what is necessary to utilize these programs.

The time involved in research, marketing, and developing the relationships necessary for participation is oftentimes too much for a low-resource farmer to take on, especially if farming is an occupation that is undertaken in addition to a full-time job. Many of these farmers currently sell at informal roadside stands, directly from their trucks parked at strategic locations, or through another informal market. While it is not necessary that they replace these activities with another type or form of farm produce marketing, there is an opportunity to grow their farm income with minimal additional inputs through selling some farm products to aggregators and distributors they currently do not have access to. These small and micro farmers, many of whom are low-resource, can benefit greatly through the addition of wholesale sales of some of their produce.

Likewise, the regional food economy would benefit from the increased supply of local foods supplied by these farmers and introduce a greater resiliency, sustainability, and integration within the overall community and economy.
The cost of an 8x10’ cold storage unit, installed, is typically between $4,000 and $10,000. For many farmers that entered the farming profession after retirement, or who have substantial off-farm income or access to capital, this is not an overwhelming cost, and they choose to build their own on-farm cold storage units.

However, this amount of capital is not accessible for many low-resource farmers. Additionally, as a farmer tests the possibility of expanding into aggregated sales, it is often not prudent to make these large investments until their market share is established. Furthermore, on-farm cold storage is not generally conducive for multi-farm aggregation.

While most farmers see some benefit in aggregating a week’s worth of harvest into one delivery (made possible by cold storage), much greater benefits are obtained by aggregating produce from multiple farms into delivery sizes that are comparable to larger distribution chains. Having climate-controlled cold storage space that is well maintained, available for a reasonable lease, and located in a central and convenient location to both farmer and distributor will fill a current gap in food system infrastructure available to small and micro scale farmers.
Piedmont Triad Regional Food Council
What is a Food Policy Council?

A food policy council (FPC) consists of a group of representatives and stakeholders from many sectors of the food system. There are generally five accepted sectors of the food system that include production, consumption, processing, and distribution and waste recycling. Food Policy Councils seek to identify and propose innovative solutions to improve local or state food systems. They do so through the development of local economic development and helping to guide local food systems onto a more environmentally sustainable and socially just avenue. As a result, the work of food policy councils consists of food system research and the development of policy recommendations. Research indicates that insufficient economic development capacity is often more prevalent in rural and small communities and that often, the more rural the area, the wider capacity gap in terms of financial resources, expertise, and professionalism.

Why Do We Need a Regional Food Council?

Applying a regionalist approach to food systems will help protect the local food economy from issues such as natural disasters, climate change, declines in industry, and changes in workforce. This would have significant economic impacts regionally and locally in developing a more resilient and sustainable food system. Goals of a regional food council have been identified as a better connection between growers and buyers, considering supply chain infrastructure at a regional level; regional approach to a food system; identifying gaps in infrastructure, working towards regional collaboration and solution; coordinated approach to outreach and education and programming, and potentially funding. A regional food council for the Piedmont Triad region represents a number of potential projects and research opportunities.
Regional Local Food Council Focus

Caswell County Local Foods Council

Thirty food councils now exist across North Carolina covering 36 of the 100 counties. These food councils are mostly organized by county, and some are more regional. Seven of which are located in the Piedmont Triad Region.

CCLFC is a group of like-minded individuals that have a passion for food and community and are willing to do what it takes too make things happen. We are Volunteers, Farmers, Craftsmen, and Families.

The Caswell County Local Foods Council (CCLFC) has three current projects. Caswell Local Foods Council received a Make More Happen grant to expand the Country Store Farmer’s Market by creating a certified kitchen, the Eat Well in Caswell brand and beginning a SNAP Double Bucks and Kids Market Bunch Program.

Soups on 2nd Wednesday is a free monthly lunch in Yanceyville to provide a healthy meal and an opportunity for fellowship. We have an inspected community kitchen located in Semora that can be used to produce value-added goods that can sold in N.C. In addition, we also operate two weekly farmers’ markets in Yanceville and Semora.

Caswell Farmers’ Market - Yanceyville
2256/58 NC Hwy 86 N
Yanceyville, NC 27379

Caswell Farmers’ Market - Semora
4807 NC-57, just west of 119N
Semora, NC 27343

Inspected Community Kitchen
14771 NC Hwy. 119 N, just north of 57
Semora, NC 27343
Alamance Food Collaborative
“AFC is an initiative created by Healthy Alamance in partnership with Impact Alamance to focus on policy, networks, and access that support food access in Alamance County.”
http://healthyalamance.com/healthy-living/
Contact: Ann Meletzke, Ann.Meletzke@conehealth.com

Caswell County Local Foods Council
https://www.facebook.com/localfoodincaswell
CaswellLocalFoods@gmail.com, lesliezimmerman1@gmail.com

Davidson County Local Food Network
“Building an equitable and resilient food system for the health and economic welfare of our community.”
http://davidsoncountyfood.wordpress.com/
https://www.facebook.com/davidsonfoodnetwork
Contacts: Grace Kanoy (gkanoy@gmail.com), Cary Kanoy (cary@geocorefilms.com)

Forsyth Community Food Consortium
“FCFC envisions a food system that is environmentally, economically and socially just; promotes local control and ownership; embodies food and farm policies for health and equity; and connects, includes, and serves stakeholders throughout the region.”
http://forsythlocalfood.org/
https://www.facebook.com/ForsythFood/
Contact: Marcus Hill, marcus@forsythlocalfood.org

Greater High Point Food Alliance
“GHPFA will strive to coordinate and improve the effectiveness of entities in greater High Point focused on alleviating hunger by creating and executing citywide and neighborhood focused initiatives to develop more just and sustainable food systems.”
http://www.ghpfa.org/
https://www.facebook.com/GreaterHighPointFoodAlliance/
Contact: Carl Vierling, carl.vierling@unitedwayhp.org

Guilford Food Council
“GFC is a collection of individuals, organizations, and agencies working to build a better food system in Guilford County, NC.”
http://www.guilfordfoodcouncil.com/
https://www.facebook.com/guilfordfoodcouncil/
Contact: Marianne LeGreco, guilfordfoodcouncil@gmail.com

Rockingham County - Emerging Local Food Council
Contact: Joseph Peele, joseph.peele@ncphf.org
Regional Assessment Advisory Council
Marianne LeGreco- UNC-G
Tanya Bass- NC DHHS, Cultural and Community Health Initiatives
Leslie Zimmerman- Caswell County Food Council
Grace Kanoy- Davidson County Local Food Network
Joseph Furstenberg- PTRC-Planning
Bob Cleveland- PTRC-Aging
Paul Kron- Foothills Planning
Marcus Hill- Forsyth Food Consortium

Infrastructure Advisory Council
Jason Kampwerth- Foster Caviness
Eric Hallman- PFAP
Becky Bowen- NC Cooperative Extension
Rick Cecil- Piedmont Triad Farmers Market
Carl Vierling– Greater High Point Food Alliance
Donna Guffey- Winston-Salem Planning/ Inspections-Urban Agriculture
Kyle Laird- Piedmont Authority for Regional Transportation
Jon Jones- President, Renaissance Community Co-op
Matthew Dolge- Piedmont Triad Regional Council

Community Health, Food Access, and Local Produce Expansion Advisory Council
Tembila Covington- NC Cooperative Extension
Ann Meletzke– Cone Health
Peggy Robinson-Second Harvest Food Bank
Mark Jensen-Wake Forest University
Niesha Douglas-Guilford Food Council
Gary Gay- NCDA- Farm to School
Dennis Quaintance- Quaintance- Weaver Hotels and Restaurants- Farm to Table
Krista Morgan-Lowes Foods, Locally Grown
Next Step Suggestions

◊ Widely Advertise the upcoming establishment of the Piedmont Triad Regional Food Council
◊ Nominate Board Members
◊ Establish the Piedmont Triad Regional Food Council as an organization (501c3 or a subsidiary
◊ Enlist Official Members
◊ Host a Regional Gathering for Members and Nominate Food Council Positions
◊ Recruit a year-long part time intern
◊ Hire one staff member to handle all subjects related to food access, sustainable communities, and health that would be lead coordinator for the regional food council
◊ Begin assessment after the updated Census of Agriculture data is released
◊ Decide whether the assessment should be a baseline assessment or a comprehensive assessment
Resources

**NC Local Food Infrastructure Map**
This inventory was compiled through the North Carolina Growing Together project (ncgrowingtogether.org), in collaboration with the North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service’s Local Foods Flagship Program, with the intention of cataloging businesses that serve as intermediary steps in local food supply chains. The inventory contains user-generated content pertaining to the storage, aggregation, and processing of local foods, including meat, seafood, produce, and dairy. Food hubs, commercial kitchens, processing centers, cold storage, incubator farms, and multifarm CSAs are also represented.

http://ptrc.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=f62735865c1c4dof83ad40baeb66d864

**The Census of Agriculture**
The Census of Agriculture is a complete count of U.S. farms and ranches and the people who operate them. Even small plots of land - whether rural or urban - growing fruit, vegetables or some food animals count if $1,000 or more of such products were raised and sold, or normally would have been sold, during the Census year. The Census of Agriculture, taken only once every five years, looks at land use and ownership, operator characteristics, production practices, income and expenditures. For America’s farmers and ranchers, the Census of Agriculture is their voice, their future, and their opportunity.

https://www.agcensus.usda.gov/

**Center For Environmental Farming Systems**
CEFS is one of the nation’s most important centers for research, extension, and education in sustainable agriculture and community-based food systems. It is recognized as a national and international leader in the local foods movement, and celebrated for its work in building consensus around policies, programs and actions that facilitate a vibrant local food economy.

https://cefs.ncsu.edu/about-us/

**Community Food Strategies**
Community Food Strategies helps community-based coalitions organize to improve their food system. Our multi-organizational team provides networking opportunities and technical support to communities interested in food council development across North Carolina.

https://communityfoodstrategies.com/

**NC A&T State University Cooperative Extension**
Through various delivery modes, the North Carolina A&T Cooperative Extension Program provides research-based educational programs and information regarding critical issues to individuals, families and communities. Cooperative Extension’s educational programs and outreaches also emphasize improving the quality of life for individuals and families without the financial resources.