

FarmsSHARE Strengthens the Local Food System and Advances Nutrition Security



FarmsSHARE, a program of Carolina Farm Stewardship Association (CFSA), brings together farmers, food hubs, and community partners to distribute locally sourced, healthy food to individuals experiencing food and nutrition insecurity.

Originally launched in 2020 to assist small farms and displaced hospitality workers during the COVID-19 pandemic, **FarmsSHARE has since expanded, supported by USDA LFPF funding through the NC Department of Agriculture to serve food-insecure households statewide.** The funding is distributed to food hubs that purchase local farm products at competitive prices, assemble CSA-style boxes, and partner with community organizations to deliver them at no cost to households experiencing food insecurity.

Understanding FarmsSHARE's Impact



\$4.6 million reinvested in NC's food system, including \$3 million paid directly to 312 farms, driving a **total economic impact of \$7.9 million.**



Nearly **9 in 10 FarmsSHARE farms** are classified as **small-scale** by the United States Department of Agriculture's Economic Research Service.



178 community-based organizations strengthened, many expanding capacity and creating 10x greater impact across North Carolina.



1.2 million pounds of farm-fresh food distributed in 112,216 boxes to households experiencing food and nutrition insecurity.



Consistent access to fruits and vegetables improved household food security status, supporting better self-reported health outcomes and **chronic disease management.**

All stakeholders consistently identify FarmsSHARE as the "best choice" – the most effective, trusted, and impactful model.



This project was supported by LFPF funding, which was distributed to food hubs by the North Carolina Department of Agriculture & Consumer Services (NCDA&CS) through the USDA Agricultural Marketing Service cooperative agreement.

5 Key Impacts of the FarmsSHARE Model in North Carolina

FarmsSHARE demonstrates transformative impacts across North Carolina by strengthening farm economies, building food system infrastructure, and improving community nutrition security.

The program provides farmers and food hubs with consistent markets and fair prices, driving significant revenue growth, infrastructure investment, and job creation.

The program enhances both household nutrition and systemic reliability, with participants self-reporting improved health and many noting better management of chronic conditions like diabetes and hypertension. Findings from participant surveys and focus groups highlight five key impacts of FarmsSHARE:



Boosts economic vitality in the production system

- 91% of farmers and 100% of food hubs experience a direct increase in revenue
- Acts as an incubator for farms and food hubs, supporting sell-readiness and the ability to scale to new markets



Strengthens local food system infrastructure

- 90% of farmers report hiring staff and retaining experienced workers, creating a 'snowball effect' of growth
- Improving efficiency: high tunnels, cold storage, and equipment investments.



Builds trust and resilience through local partnerships

- 94% of food hubs expand farm partners with rural, first-generation, and women-owned
- Strengthening trust through predictable sales, prompt payments, and consistent support



Improves food and nutrition security

- 91% of recipients experienced better food security status
- CBOs increased their reach, many by more than 10x
- Recipients rate food a 5 out of 5, describing it as "better than any other food aide"



Drives healthy diets and health outcomes

- 92% of recipients self-report better dietary quality
- 83% self-report better management of chronic health conditions
- Improved mental and economic well-being through reduced financial stress

"Because of [FarmsSHARE], I hired an apprentice, a disabled veteran .. the extra set of hands more than doubled my capacity to work ... that allowed us to increase the number of customers we could take on, which increased our revenue, which we then invested into a building that allows us to operate more efficiently.

So [FarmsSHARE] really set us up for this exponential growth"

~ Rural Western NC Farmer

"It has really helped us build trust with farmers. For farms still figuring out crop planning, volume, and wholesale readiness, we can work with them. FarmsSHARE gives farmers room to grow ... acting as an incubator while strengthening our relationships with them."

~ Central NC Food Hub Leader

"My diabetes is being managed better. I am now off my insulin. It is really incredible"

~ Eastern NC FarmsSHARE Recipient

Data provided from the 2024 FarmsSHARE Program Evaluation

Grounded in a multi-year research study, this study conducted a systems-based, mixed-methods evaluation of North Carolina's 2024 LFPA-funded FarmsSHARE program. Led by Appalachian State University and Resourceful Communities in collaboration with the Carolina Farm Stewardship Association, the evaluation examined program outputs, economic impact, stakeholder experiences, organizational capacity, and the program's influence on recipients' perceived nutrition and health outcomes.

Sustaining FarmsSHARE

Advancing Impact

FarmsSHARE is a powerful **model** for **strengthening North Carolina's food system, advancing food and nutrition security, and supporting small and mid-sized farms.**

To preserve and amplify its impact, strategic growth includes securing diverse funding, expanding health system integration, and investing in operational capacity, such efforts hinge on strong statewide coordination and regional implementation.

Strengths of the FarmsSHARE Model

- **Economic Stability & Market Support for Small- and Mid-size Farms**
 - Reliable markets with fair pricing and predictable demand for farmers
 - Supports growth, crop diversity, and expanding the growing season
 - Strengthens farm viability through infrastructure and human capital
- **High-Quality, Nutrient-dense foods**
 - Delivers nutrient-dense, and culturally relevant foods that meet community needs
 - Quality described as "better than any other food aide"
 - Recipients give FarmsSHARE food boxes a 5 out of 5 rating
- **Health Impact for Communities**
 - Improves management and treatment for chronic health conditions
 - Recipients self-report better health and overall well-being



Partnerships Power FarmsSHARE's Success

- **Statewide agencies**, like the Carolina Farm Stewardship Association, provide essential centralized **leadership**, ensuring program consistency, data collection, and strategic direction.
- Regional **food hubs serve as the backbone of local implementation** by sourcing from a diverse network of small- and mid-size farms, offering trainings and business management, and coordinating logistics.
- **Community-based organizations** and **farmers** are essential partners, bringing deep local knowledge, trusted relationships, and on-the-ground capacity.

Opportunities to Grow & Innovate

- **Expand Infrastructure & Capacity**
 - Increase cold storage for farmers, food hubs, and CBOs
 - Improve technology for inventory tracking, food sourcing, and data management
- **Integrate with Healthcare Systems**
 - Establish partnerships with healthcare partners for screenings and referrals
 - Measure health outcomes that can be directly linked to program participation
- **Increase Awareness across Stakeholders**
 - Create consistent branding about FarmsSHARE within the community
 - Strengthen marketing to ensure funders and partners recognize the FarmsSHARE brand
- **Enhance Financial Stability**
 - Diversify funding streams beyond one-year grant cycles
 - Balance farmer support for long-term program growth through advance payments

Key Actions to Move FarmsSHARE Forward

The FarmsSHARE model offers multiple advantages by leveraging local food systems and community-based organizations to create broad economic, social, and health impacts.



Secure Sustained and Diversified Funding

Coordinate funding proposals and advocacy for **multi-year investments** and innovative financing strategies such as state appropriations, philanthropy or healthcare contracts.



Deepen Healthcare Partnerships

Formalize partnerships with hospitals, clinics, and insurers to **integrate FarmsSHARE into Food is Medicine initiatives**. Demonstrate FarmsSHARE's role in reducing healthcare costs and improving patient health and well-being.



Invest in Infrastructure and Farmer Capacity

Support food hubs, CBOs, and farmers with cold storage, distribution logistics, and business development. Provide **advance payments to small- & mid-size farms** to ensure financial stability.



Build Awareness of FarmsSHARE

Develop consistent branding and storytelling to ensure the **FarmsSHARE brand is clearly recongized across communities** and stakeholders to showcase its unique impact.



Expand Research and Policy Impact

Amplify FarmsSHARE's success through documenting best practices to further **position FarmsSHARE as a replicable model** to strengthen farm economies and improve helath outcomes in NC and beyond.



"We must secure consistent funding that allows farmers to plan ahead, strengthen healthcare partnerships that link the program to health outcomes, and build broader awareness of FarmsSHARE's brand."

-FarmsSHARE
Food Hub