



Growing a Robust & Resilient Region

Framework For Ongoing Food System Collaboration



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August 2014

This document is a framework for ongoing food system collaboration for the CONNECT Our Future communities. It is intended to set the stage for increased interaction between food councils and municipal and county planning efforts, to provide information on routes for regional and statewide food system collaboration, and to provide resources and information on food system planning tools.

“CONNECT Our Future” is a process in which communities, counties, businesses, educators, non-profits and other organizations work together to grow jobs and the economy, improve quality of life and control the cost of government. This project will create a regional growth framework developed through extensive community engagement and built on what communities identify as existing conditions, future plans and needs, and potential strategies.

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CONTENTS

Food Systems Planning for Healthy Communities	4
“CONNECT Our Future” Food Systems Background	5
Current Food Council Activity in the Region	6
Framework for Continued Regional Food System Collaboration	8
Ongoing Regional Food System Communication	9
Recommendations	10
Resource List	11

Food Systems Planning for Healthy Communities

The health of our communities requires healthy, sustainable food systems. In June 2010, The Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics (formerly the American Dietetic Association), American Nurses Association, American Planning Association, and American Public Health Association met to develop a set of shared food system principles. According to this group, a healthy community food system is health promoting, sustainable, resilient, diverse, fair, economically balanced and transparent.¹

There are many tools that communities and planners can employ to support local and regional food systems. Farmland Protection Plans, Voluntary Agricultural Districts, and preferential local purchasing policies are all ways that communities can support local food producers. However, food production is but one important piece of a very large, complex system. This system includes a long chain of activities, actors, processes, and sectors that are each affected by multiple layers of policies and regulation. It is important that communities and planners consistently work to create and reevaluate policies and regulations to ensure that they are working to support healthy community food systems.

Planners play a vital role in the development of local and regional food systems that enhance the overall health of our communities. Food policy councils, or food councils, also play an important role in the development of healthy, sustainable food systems. Communities across the country are developing food councils and learning about the many ways that planners and food councils can work together to find innovative solutions to community food system challenges.

Food councils provide a unique opportunity for community planning by bringing together different segments of the community that work in the food system. Councils are typically made of representatives from across a broad variety of sectors, including economic development, agriculture, tourism, emergency food access, education, conservation, public health, etc. By drawing on the knowledge and experience of people from all segments of the community food system, a food council becomes a source of information for the planners and the policy makers in government. A council can also help government agencies see how their actions affect the overall community food system.

According to Mark Winne, one of the foremost authors and researchers on food councils, these groups fill an important role because no state or city has a “Department of Food”. The councils can look for those areas among government agencies where food issues intersect. Food councils can also be a bridge between the public and private sectors on community food system challenges and they can be a primary source of food education for the citizens at large.²

Food councils also provide a space to foster communication and collaboration between the grassroots and the government. They present a way for citizens to help shape the community food system through an open process involving both local organizations and government entities. Food councils provide an opportunity for democratic input on the community food system while at the same time building a community network dedicated to finding collaborative food system solutions.

It is clear that challenges and solutions around food, health, economy and agriculture are complex by the vast number of activities and actors within a community food system. Likewise, efforts to strengthen a community food system are also complex. Unlike simple issues, where cause and effect is clear and outcomes are predictable, multiple causes connect to multiple consequences here, and outcomes are often unpredictable. Therefore, taking action to strengthen a community food system requires a whole systems approach.

¹ “Principles of a Healthy, Sustainable Food System.” American Planning Association. Accessed Aug 15, 2014. <https://www.planning.org/nationalcenters/health/foodprinciples.htm>

² Mark Winne, “Doing Food Councils Right: A Guide to Development and Action.” Accessed June 1, 2014, <http://www.markwinne.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/FPC-manual.pdf>

For this reason it is important to understand and explore multiple approaches toward food system solutions. Research on food systems development has been performed by many sectors, including public health, planning, economic development and agriculture. Many guidelines have been created on how to support healthy community food systems. There is no one-size-fits all approach to food system planning and development, which is why it is important to know and understand the many tools that exist in the food system planner's box. A complete list of guidelines for food system planning is listed at the end of this document in the Food Systems Planning Resources section.

“CONNECT Our Future” Food Systems Background

In 2013, the [Appalachian Sustainable Agriculture Project \(ASAP\)](#), the [Center for Environmental Farming Systems \(CEFS\)](#), and the [Carolina Farm Stewardship Association \(CFSA\)](#) partnered with the [Centralina Council of Governments](#) and the [Catawba Regional Council of Governments](#) to support ‘CONNECT Our Future’, a three-year initiative funded through a grant from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Sustainable Communities Regional Planning Grant Program. The ‘CONNECT Our Future’ project aims to promote regional economic development, including the local and regional food system, in order to grow jobs, strengthen the economy, and improve quality of life. The ‘CONNECT Our Future’ project area includes a 14-county bi-state region including Anson, Cabarrus, Cleveland, Gaston, Iredell, Lincoln, Mecklenburg, Rowan, Stanly, and Union counties in North Carolina; Chester, Lancaster, Union, and York counties in South Carolina; and the Catawba Indian Nation.

During 2013 and 2014 the ASAP / CEFS / CFSA food systems team worked collaboratively with community members, public and private partners, and non-profit organizations to conduct a regional food system assessment, develop an action plan for food system work, and foster the development of a network of community food councils in the Charlotte region. The food systems team was directed and given input by the Food Systems Working Group (FSWG). This stakeholder group consists of one or two delegates from each county in the ‘CONNECT Our Future’ region, primarily representatives from the agriculture and public health sectors. The FSWG met consistently over the course of the food systems portion of the ‘CONNECT Our Future’ initiative.

The food systems team provided technical assistance and support to Cooperative Extension Services and to the food councils and groups participating in the FSWG. The team provided facilitation and guidance around assessment and action planning, organizational development, fundraising, event planning assistance, network development, and regional collaboration. A total of almost 500 people attended public meetings and forums that were hosted by FSWG members across the region. These forums were held to share the ‘CONNECT Our Future’ assessment and action plan results, to discuss current community food council activities, and to gain community input on community food system challenges and solutions.

Cooperative Extension Services in Cleveland, Lincoln, and Union (NC) Counties also partnered with the food systems team to host targeted community meetings to discuss forming new food councils. The Catawba Farm and Food Coalition specifically focused time and energy on learning about food councils and subsequently voted to become the first official food council in South Carolina. The group is currently working on their processes and structure and on strengthening their networks. Energy is continuing to build around food councils in these communities and other counties in the region. Lincoln and Cleveland Counties are moving forward with public forums in October 2014 to invite community members to join task forces that will work on developing formal food council structures. The ‘CONNECT Our Future’ food systems process has helped to generate this energy and has given communities in the region the resources and connections needed to develop food councils in a strategic and informed manner.

Current Food Council Activity in the Region

Food councils are emerging all across North and South Carolina and are increasingly working together to adopt best practices and align efforts. State level councils are also meeting in both states, as well as Virginia, and have begun efforts to network around food system issues across state boundaries. The following passage describes current food council efforts in the 'CONNECT Our Future' region and at the state level in North and South Carolina. Significant interest in food council development has also been expressed in Iredell, Rowan and Union (NC) Counties. Planners in the region are encouraged to reach out to each of these food councils to further engage with them and work together to solve food system planning challenges. Food councils are encouraged to continue to engage with regional planning entities like Centralina and Catawba Regional COGs and to work closely with the county and municipal planning departments in their respective communities.

Cabarrus Farm and Food Council (formerly Cabarrus County Food Policy Council)

Founded: 2010

Website: www.cabarrusfpc.org

Contact: Trish Cramer, Chair, trit@carolina.rr.com

Structure: Any Cabarrus County, NC resident can apply to be a member of the council, which is a recognized county body. The Council has working groups that meet monthly with Cabarrus County residents and organizations to find collaborative solutions to different community food system challenges. Working group meetings occur before the monthly Council meetings.

Number of Current Members: 15+

Current Activities and Strategic Goals: The Council is in transition with the recent loss of county funding for administrative support and meeting space. The working groups are encouraging collaboration and networking between local food system stakeholders, while the Council as a whole is working to support local community garden efforts, holding convening meetings between restaurants and food producers, and working to align school system efforts around food and nutrition.

Catawba Farm and Food Coalition

Founded: 2010

Website: www.catawbafarmandfood.org

Contact: Ben Boyles, Co-Chair, boyles2@clemson.edu

Gloria Kellerhals, Co-Chair, gkellerhals@truvista.net

Structure: This 501(c)(3) organization is the Community Food Council for Chester, Fairfield, Lancaster, Union and York Counties in SC. The Coalition exists to support and strengthen both the local food economy and the health of the local community. The leadership team consists of representatives from each county and meets regularly.

Number of Current Board Members: 6

Current Activities and Strategic Goals: The council is supporting farmers market and community garden efforts as well as coordinating and managing Catawba Farm Fresh, an online farmers market serving the region through multiple community drop off sites. The group also supports the annual Ag+Art Tour that recently had 7,000 visitors across all four counties over a weekend in June 2014.

Charlotte-Mecklenburg Food Policy Council

Founded: 2010

Website: www.cmfpcc.org

Contact: Erin Brighton, Executive Director, cltfoodpolicy@yahoo.com

Structure: This council is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization that is governed by an Executive Board of Directors. In the summer of 2012, the Executive Board established an Experts Panel to assist in bringing forward ideas that relate to the purpose and mission of the organization. The

group continues to convene the Panel for input and collaboration. A paid part-time Executive Director supports the Council and their vision. The group is also moving to an open membership model as a way to raise funds to support council efforts and to encourage citizen participation.

Number of Current Board Members: 6

Current Activities and Strategic Goals: The council is currently reorganizing its structure, working on a plan for strategic fundraising and further developing the FPC relationship with the Experts Panel. They will also be co-hosting a FoodCorps volunteer in the coming year to help with their healthy school efforts.

Cleveland County

Founded: A public forum to form a food council task force is scheduled for Oct. 2014

Website: N/A

Contact: Tammy Bass, CTG Catalyst Coordinator, tammy.bass@ncphf.org
Greg Traywick, Cleveland County Cooperative Extension Director, gbtraywi@ncsu.edu

Structure: N/A

Number of Current Members: N/A

Current Activities and Strategic Goals: There is broad community support to form a food council in Cleveland County.

'CONNECT Our Future' Food Systems Working Group (FSWG)

Founded: 2012

Website: N/A

Contact: Blair Israel, Centralina COG Regional Planner, bisrael@centralina.org

Structure: This council is an open public group to share concerns and progress on programs and initiatives that are related to the food system in the 'CONNECT Our Future' project region.

Number of Current Members: 12-24

Current Activities and Strategic Goals: Providing a forum for regional collaboration and cooperation of food policy councils of the 'CONNECT Our Future' region and serving as an ongoing resource for these councils.

Lincoln County

Founded: Public forum to form a food council task force will be held Oct. 2014

Website: N/A

Contact: Leigh Guth, Lincoln County Cooperative Extension Agent, ltguth@ncsu.edu

Structure: N/A

Number of Current Members: N/A

Current Activities and Strategic Goals: There is broad community support to form a food council in Lincoln County.

Local Food Council of North Carolina (formerly Sustainable NC Local Food Advisory Council)

Founded: A task force is currently working on forming the new statewide council

Website: N/A

Contact: Christy Shi Day, Current Facilitator, ceshi@ncsu.edu

Structure: N/A

Number of Current Members: 10-15

Current Activities and Strategic Goals: A task force is currently working on membership criteria, governance and structure. The group is also hosting a Food Issues Forum in late 2014 for community food councils across the state.

South Carolina State Food Policy Council

Founded: 2006

Website: www.agriculture.sc.gov/scfoodpolicyscouncil

Contact: Dave Lamie, Clemson University, Chair, dlamie@clemson.edu

Structure: Member forum to share concerns and progress on related programs and initiatives that are related to the food system in South Carolina.

Number of Current Members: 9

Current Activities and Strategic Goals: The purpose of the organization is to provide a forum for South Carolina's food policy stakeholders to network, collaborate, and share ideas in order to identify issues, develop policies, build consensus and provide information and advocacy services necessary to the well-being and sustainability of South Carolina's food sector enterprises.

Upper PeeDee Farm and Food Council

Founded: 2012

Website: www.upffc.org

Contact: Shannon Johnson, Interim Co-Director, sjohnson@albemarleddowntown.com
Sean Hatley, Interim Co-Director, sahatley1121@gmail.com

Structure: A Council of five representatives from each county (Anson, Montgomery and Stanly) meets monthly. Council seats represent the following categories from each county: farmer, government official / economic development, public health / medical representative, education representative, interested individual, and one non-voting representative from Union County.

Number of Current Members: 16

Current Activities and Strategic Goals: The group is currently working to educate the community about the value and availability of local food and about the council in general. The group is working to understand the current processing and distribution infrastructure in the area in the hopes of better connecting local producers with local consumers. The group is working to expose youth and younger adults to agriculture as a viable career. The council is also working to raise funds to hire a Director for ongoing leadership of UPFFC.

Framework for Continued Regional Food System Collaboration

A practical plan for food councils in the 'CONNECT Our Future' region should involve further development and support for new and existing councils at the community level. In this context, "community" primarily (but not exclusively) refers to countywide areas. The ultimate goal should be to create and foster opportunities for regional collaboration between community food councils. Efforts to support food council development in both states are focusing on providing resources, information and training to help community-level food councils adopt best practices and align their efforts. The Center for Environmental Farming Systems (CEFS) is leading these efforts through their [Community Food Strategies](#) initiative. The Carolina Farm Stewardship Association has also partnered with CEFS to support these efforts. Aligning structure, practices and communication will enable community level food councils to collaborate and communicate at the regional level.

Food councils are place-dependent and community context should determine a council's geographic scope. Sometimes working across a multi-county region can be challenging because of the difficulty of getting people and organizations to work outside of their own 'backyard'. Such hyperlocalism presents a real challenge to regional work of any type. This has also proven a challenge for the FSWG; it has been difficult for people across the region to find time to travel and meet in person for FSWG meetings.

There are many different ways in which regions are defined, each having an inadvertent effect on food systems. The NC Regional Council of Governments (COG) regions differ from health department regions,

which differ from Cooperative Extension regions. A council that forms regionally may actually limit its ability to fully participate in initiatives that are defined by these various external boundaries.

Counties are already established as units of the state. Data tracked by agencies tends to be available at the county level, not at municipal levels. County level staff in departments such as Cooperative Extension, Soil & Water Conservation, Public Health, and Social Services are important voices to include in council work, and are often working on county-level strategies and plans. However, choosing a county level scope does not remove the possibility of strong regional partnerships. In fact, councils with a similar structure and process can provide an opportunity for strong cross-county and regional collaboration.

The rationale behind the Community Food Strategies approach to statewide action planning and collaboration involves strategic support for food council development at the community/county level. By providing the same resources and training and by encouraging these councils to use common structural features, operational values and organizational processes, common goals and opportunities are starting to emerge across individual communities. These community level goals will be key to collaborating across regions and working as a single body for statewide action and cooperation.

The Local Food Council of North Carolina is encouraging regional and statewide collaboration by providing opportunities such as the upcoming Food Issues Forum to be held in late 2014. This event is being planned as a way to share what's happening locally across North Carolina, foster connections among and with local councils and statewide council members, and strengthen local efforts with content that supports local councils' priorities. The South Carolina State Food Policy Council is also working on ways to support local council development and identification of priorities. Moving forward, these statewide groups hope to further connect community food council efforts with technical assistance support, resources, and education.

Ongoing Regional Food System Communication

Continued communication across the region is essential to developing a network of community food system collaboration. A listserv, called CONNECTFoodSystem, was set up for The 'CONNECT Our Future' Food System Working Group (FSWG) by the Carolina Farm Stewardship Association. The original purpose of the listserv during the project period was for communication concerning meetings and events associated with the 'CONNECT Our Future' FSWG. The listserv is now open to anyone interested in collaboration and information sharing and will be maintained by the Carolina Farm Stewardship Association until at least January 2016, depending on listserv activity.

To be added to the listserv, please visit:

<http://lists.carolinafarmstewards.org/listinfo.cgi/connectfoodsystem-carolinafarmstewards.org>.

To post to the listserv, please email: CONNECTFoodSystem@lists.carolinafarmstewards.org.

Rules for the ConnectFoodSystem listserv:

1. The listserv is intended for continued updates on 'CONNECT Our Future' efforts.
2. The listserv is intended for continued FSWG communication.
3. The listserv is intended to share information about food system educational and networking events in the 'CONNECT Our Future' region.
4. The listserv is intended for continued collaborative food system efforts in the 'CONNECT Our Future' region.
5. The listserv is intended to share potential food system resources and opportunities in the 'CONNECT Our Future' region.
6. Please refrain from direct fundraising requests.

Recommendations

Continued collaboration and convening of the FSWG and the CONNECT Regional Forum is largely dependent on funding. Centralina and Catawba Regional Council of Governments are both committed to continued support for regional food systems collaboration with public and private partners; however, there is currently no funding to continue facilitated in-person meetings or events. To contact Centralina COG about food system collaboration, please email Blair Israel at bisrael@centralina.org. To contact Catawba Regional COG about food system collaboration, please email Cole McKinney at cmckinney@catawbacog.org.

The food systems team recommends that existing and new food councils in the 'CONNECT Our Future' region continue to stay connected through the CONNECTFoodSystem listserv. The team recommends that planners and others working in the food system join the listserv conversation as a way to stay connected to regional food system efforts. Continued mutual education and sharing of knowledge around food system solutions is critical to increase regional food system collaboration.

Groups working to support community food system planning are encouraged to continue to coordinate efforts with Centralina and Catawba Council of Governments, and to continue to stay engaged with the Appalachian Sustainable Agriculture Project (email Katie Descieux at katie@asapconnections.org), the Center for Environmental Farming Systems (email Christy Shi Day at ceshi@ncsu.edu) and the Carolina Farm Stewardship Association (email Jared Cates at jared@carolinafarmstewards.org)

The food systems team also encourages food councils to continue engaging with the Community Food Strategies team and to attend the Food Issues Forum in North Carolina in December 2014 as a way to continue to learn and network. For information about this forum, please email Teisha Wymore at tlwymore@ncsu.edu.

Actions and efforts that can be taken by food councils, planners and local government are described at length in the recommended readings below. Important actions that can be taken to improve community food systems are described in the [*Action Plan For Food Systems Improvement*](#) (January 2014) that was released as part of the 'CONNECT Our Future' food systems efforts. A must-read introduction to food systems planning is the American Planning Association's [*Plan: Planning a Healthy, Sustainable Food Systems*](#). This two-page document outlines key elements of food system planning and also provides links to many more APA resources.

Resource List

A Community and Local Government Guide to Developing Local Food Systems in North Carolina (2014) – Center for Environmental Farming Systems - www.cefs.ncsu.edu/publications/guide-to-developing-local-food-systems-in-nc.pdf

A Roadmap For City Food Sector Innovation and Investment (2013)– Urban Sustainability Directors Network - www.sf-planning.org/ftp/files/Citywide/Food_System_Policy_Program/foodsys_Roadmap_City_Food_Sector_Innovation_Investment.pdf

Community Based Food System Assessment and Planning – Facilitator’s Guide Book (2011) – NC State Cooperative Extension, University of Wyoming, Virginia Cooperative Extension, Virginia State University, Virginia Tech - www.pubs.ext.vt.edu/3108/3108-9029/3108-9029.pdf

Doing Food Policy Councils Right: A Guide to Development and Action (September 2012) – Mark Winne Associates - www.markwinne.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/FPC-manual.pdf

Food Policy Councils – Food System Briefing Paper (2011) – American Planning Association - <https://www.planning.org/nationalcenters/health/briefingpapers/pdf/foodcouncils.pdf>

Planning to Eat? Innovative Local Government Plans and Policies to Build Healthy Food Systems in the United States (September 2011) – Kaliee Neuner, Sylvia Kelly and Samina Raja - www.foodsystemsplanning.ap.buffalo.edu/wp-content/uploads/2012/08/planningtoeat5.pdf

Planning for Food Access and Community-Based Food Systems (November 2012) – American Planning Association - www.planning.org/research/foodaccess/pdf/foodaccessreport.pdf

Whole Measures for Community Food Systems: Value Based Planning and Evaluation (2009) – Center for Whole Communities - www.seattle.gov/neighborhoods/ppatch/documents/WholeMeasuresCFS.pdf