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?

- Buyer need for dependability of food supply
- Cheap gas
- Convenience
- Corporate marketing strategies/lack of transparency (i.e. what is local?)
- Cost and time of certifications
- Food taxes
- High land value
- Labor
- Labeling confusion
- Lack of consumer confidence
- Lack of consumer demand
- Lack of consumer awareness/education
- Lack of infrastructure
- Lack of power in market
- Lack of student education (i.e. cooking skills and ag education)
- Inconvenience (i.e. farmers market only open one day/week)
- Lack of subsidies to help farmers scale up
- Lack of supply
- Lack of time
- Lack of variety in available local foods
- Liability
- Logistics
- NIMBY attitudes
- Price of local foods
- Producer education
- Production costs, especially farm equipment
- Regulations (food safety, zoning)
- Scale
- Socio-economic differences
    - i) Low-income consumers tend to buy food based on price and convenience
    - ii) Low-income consumers are not buying produce anywhere; instead buying processed, convenience foods
    - iii) Taking SNAP benefits at farmers markets has not made a difference
- Stringency of organic standards
- Unprocessed food usually sold based on price, quantity and appearance, instead of quality/taste

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