

**RRRC Food System Public Meeting – Group Discussion Results
February 4, 2015
Madison Cooperative Extension Office**

1) By show of hands, how many are:

- Farmers – 7
- Other ag-related businesses – 2
- Government – 5
- Other local citizens – 8

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

- Farmers market
- CSA
- On-farm
- On-line
- Wholesale
- Auction
- Food hub

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

- 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, 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)?

- Within the region (Madison, Culpeper and Orange Counties)
- Albemarle County
- Richmond

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

- 10 people responded yes

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

- Barriers to expansion: state regulations and cost of certification
- Inconvenience (i.e. farmers market only open one day a week)
- Lack of product variety at farmers markets

- Lack of consumer awareness
 - Lack of transparency in labeling/marketing (i.e. where is food grown and processed, what is “local”)
 - Lack of understanding of farming methods
 - Lack of understanding of value of local food to the local economy
 - Many consumers, especially low-income, no longer know what good food tastes like
- Unprocessed food is usually sold based on price, quantity and appearance, instead of quality/taste
- Food safety regulations
- Lack of student education (i.e. cooking skills and ag education)
- Price
 - Some items at farmers same as grocery store, but others much higher
 - Are consumers willing to pay what it costs to produce local?
- Socio-economic differences
 - Low-income consumers tend to buy food based on price and convenience
 - Low-income consumers are not buying produce anywhere; instead buying processed, convenience foods
 - Taking SNAP benefits at farmers markets has not made a difference
- Local Zoning, particularly in Fauquier County
- Production costs, especially farm equipment
- Lack of widespread interest in local food

7) What are the opportunities?

- Restaurant sales
- Increasing farm-to-school can improve consumer awareness and foster new farmers
- School gardens are great opportunity for education and tastings
- Farmers markets provide a great opportunity for tastings/samples and informal education
- Grocery stores are featuring local products
- Educating existing buyers of other opportunities (i.e. making connections)

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

- Increased transparency
- Increased farm-to-school programs/purchasing
- More farmers market days

- Publish a list of VA Tech and VSU resources, and in a user friendly-format (e.g. linked to program websites/publications, searchable database)
- Marketing materials
- Collection/storage of value-added products
- Provide point of sale information for local foods

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

- Keeping more dollars locally
- Transition conventional farmers to organic
- Increased access to local food
- Food promotion plan such as the Eat 5 – Buy \$5 program
- Get Carver Center running