

Rappahannock-Rapidan Regional Food System Planning Project



Demand for Local Foods

Local Food Systems: Concepts, Impacts, and Issues (USDA, 2010)

- Local food markets account for a small but growing share of total U.S. agricultural sales.
- Production of locally marketed food is more likely to occur on small farms located in or near metropolitan counties.
- Consumers who value high-quality foods produced with low environmental impact are willing to pay more for locally produced food.
- Federal, State, and local government programs increasingly support local food systems.

+

Opportunity for the Rappahannock-Rapidan Region



Local Food Markets

Direct-to-consumer: Transactions are conducted directly between farmers and consumers



**Madison
EATS**
Local Food Club



Local Food Markets

Direct-to-retail/foodservice: Direct sales by farmers to restaurants, retail stores, and institutions





What Is a Food System?

- A collaborative network that includes everyone involved in putting food on our tables, whether that table is located in our homes, a restaurant or our kids' cafeteria.
- A system that integrates:
 - Food production
 - Processing
 - Distribution
 - Consumption
 - Waste management
- A sustainable food system enhances the environmental, economic and social health of the region.

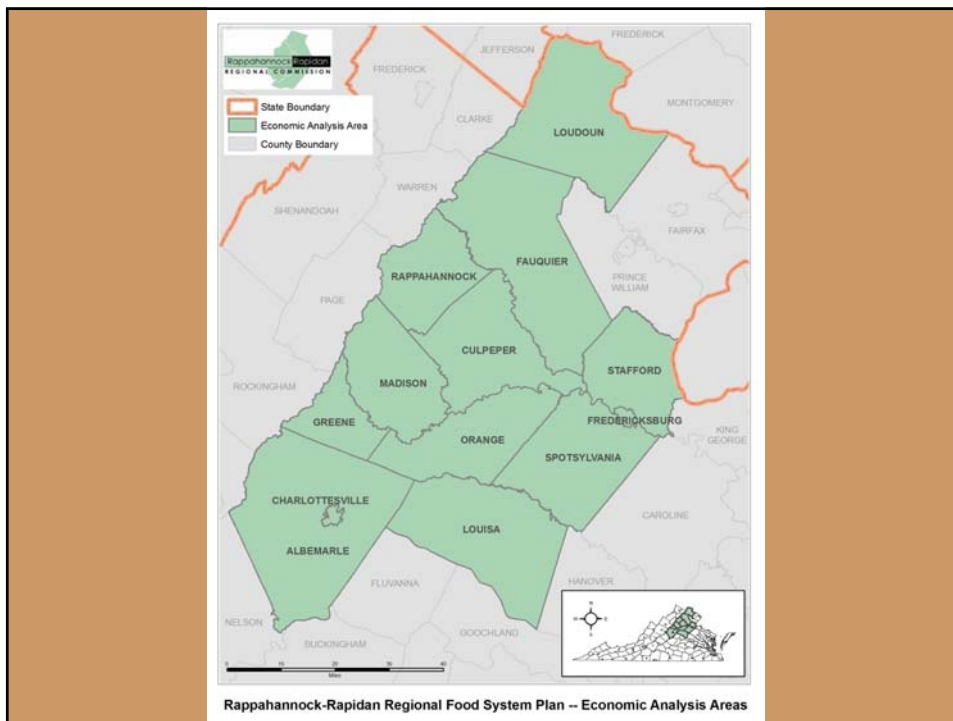


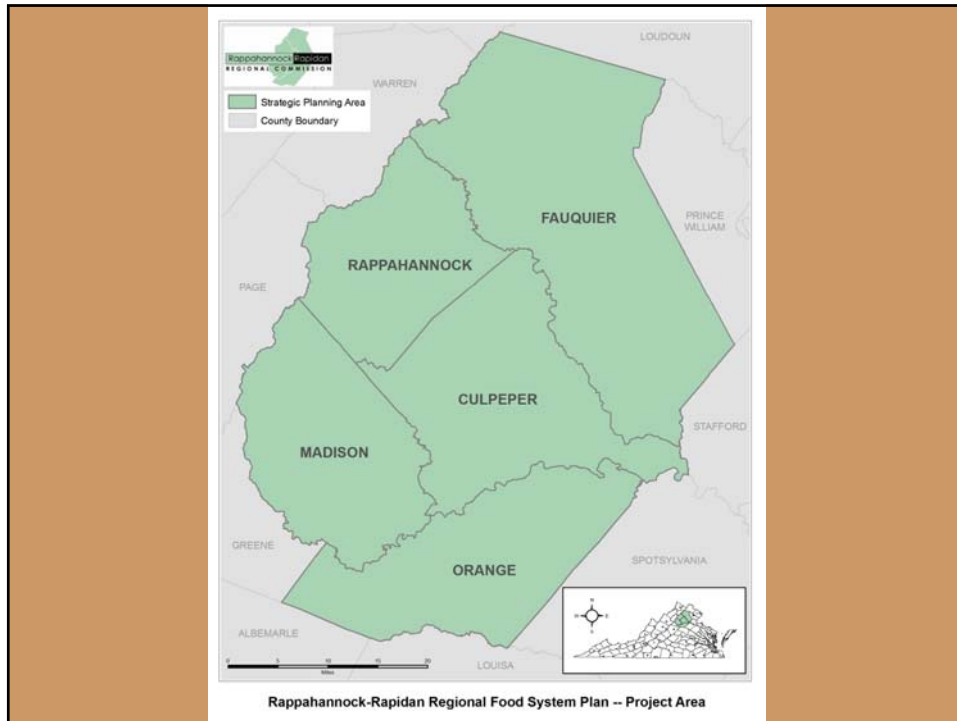
What Are the Goals of This Project?

1. To conduct an economic analysis of the region's food system
 2. To conduct surveys of the local agricultural community to fill any gaps in existing data found during the economic analysis.
 3. To develop a regional food system plan based on the economic analysis and survey results.
- By strengthening the local food economy, more local dollars can be retained within the region, while promoting citizens' health, encouraging preservation of local farmland and enhancing farmers' quality of life.

Food System Analysis

- Gap analysis: consumption vs. production/sales
 - Compile economic and production data concerning the conditions in the local farm and food economy
 - Utilize existing data available from federal and state sources
 - Excludes equestrian operations and non-edible plants
 - Includes commodities and wineries
- Inventory of existing local assets (programs, facilities, organizations, funding sources, etc.)
- Goals:
 - Provide a better understanding of existing conditions
 - Quantitatively pinpoint issues with the local food system
 - Establish a baseline to measure progress
 - Assist local stakeholders to identify strategic priorities for community economic development as we progress to developing a regional food system plan





Agricultural Community Surveys

- Local surveys sent via mail and email
 - Supplement data gathered from national sources via the economic analysis
 - Gauge local producers' needs and constraints
 - Include small farms, direct farm sales and other items of critical regional importance missing from available data sets
- In-depth interviews of local producers



Regional Food System Plan

- A strategic plan, which creates a list of goals and priority projects for improving the region’s agricultural economy
- Based on food system analysis and survey results
- Developed through a series of stakeholder meetings and focus groups
- Provides an avenue for multiple groups and individuals to work together to:
 - Find common goals
 - Form partnerships
 - Focus efforts
 - Avoid duplication of efforts
 - Pool resources



Regional Food System Plan

Food system planning can include the following:


- Building partnerships and consensus with non-planners and food system stakeholders
- Visioning, goal-setting, and prioritizing
- Local and regional assessments and mapping
- Plan-making
- Creating standards, guidelines, recommendations
- Regulating, codifying, and clarifying to eliminate barriers
- Marketing, outreach, and education
- Supporting pilot projects, demonstrations, and educational research to inform the general public
- Targeting public and private investments

(American Planning Association)



Regional Food System Plan

- Recommended projects may include:
 - Publicly funded facilities
 - New or expanded education and marketing programs
 - Policy and regulatory changes
 - Opportunities for private investment
- By participating in this process, stakeholders :
 - Ensure their needs and priorities for the region’s food system, are incorporated into the regional plan
 - Show decision makers local foods and a sustainable agricultural economy are top priorities for their community
 - Encourage funders and government officials to support plan implementation



Food System Planning Examples

- Similar food system assessments have been completed throughout Virginia, including:
 - Shenandoah Valley
 - VA Beach
 - Martinsville & Henry County
 - Cumberland Plateau PDC & Washington County
 - Eastern Shore (VA & MD)
- Fauquier County Agricultural Impact Study
 - Measures the impacts of the local agricultural economy and identifies regional industry trends and needs
 - UVA Weldon Cooper Center contracted to conduct the analysis
 - Included a survey of local farmers
 - Conducted this spring 2013 and to be completed by mid-2014



Food System Planning Examples

Virginia Farm-To-Table Plan (2012)

www.virginiafarmtotable.org

- Identifies issues facing farmers, innovators in the food system, and communities across the state, and suggests how those can be addressed to strengthen Virginia's overall food system.
- 38 recommendations were developed; 3 actions steps were developed for each of the top 8
- Based on research and information gathered from farm-to-table summits, forums, listening sessions, an online survey, and focus group meetings conducted by the VA Farm to Table Team and VA Food System Council



Food System Planning Examples

Greater Philadelphia Food System Study & Plan www.dvrpc.org/food

- Established indicators to measure success (i.e. acres in production, farm profitability, water quality, ag wages, dollars spent on local fruits and vegetables, obesity rates)
- Top Recommendations
 - **Maintain affordable land for farmers** by addressing the retirement needs of farmers, identifying opportunities to transition preserved land into food production, and creating investment vehicles for long-term agricultural production on preserved land.
 - **Natural resource protection through markets:** Develop technical assistance programs or market-based solutions that enable farmers to protect natural resources.
 - **Agricultural enterprise development:** Create or expand new and specialized programs to reduce the barriers of entry for new food entrepreneurs and new, beginning, and minority farmers, and encourage value-added activities (training programs and loan funds)



Food System Planning Examples

Greater Philadelphia Food System Plan Top Recommendations cont.


- **Healthy food awareness and access:** Promote the use of new technology and community-based communication outlets by all partners—government, private sector, and nonprofits—to educate people about healthy food.
- **School system solutions:** Integrate all aspects of Farm to School programs into a robust and comprehensive education program.
- **Regional convening and increased collaboration:** Continue to convene the Greater Philadelphia Food System Stakeholder Committee and encourage shared efforts.



Food System Planning Examples

Multnomah Food Action Plan www.multnomahfood.org

- 15-year plan being now being implemented by over 500 organizational and individual supporters.
- Includes 65 community and 40 citizen actions
 - Create a Regional Food System Development Commission
 - Establish a linked industry economic development cluster
 - Develop incentives for food producing land
 - Establish a local food hub
 - Promote communitywide health campaign
 - Increase acceptance of SNAP/WIC
 - Strengthen local processing and distribution capacity
 - Reinstigate fully functional school kitchens
 - Prefer food produced in-state within school and institution food service contracts



Project Status & Next Steps

- Received initial project funding from the VA Dept. of Housing and Community Development
- Held first steering committee meeting in Oct.
- Next steps
 - Continue steering committee meetings, broadening membership
 - Develop economic analysis scope
 - Continue to gather community input and raise awareness
- Related RRRRC Projects
 - Prime Ag soils mapping
 - Agro-artisan Trail Project



Contact information

Michelle Edwards, Environmental Planner
 Rappahannock-Rapidan Regional Commission
 420 Southridge Parkway, Suite 106
 Culpeper, VA 22701
 (540)829-7450; medwards@rrregion.org ; www.rrregion.org

Next steering committee meeting
 Nov 18, 1:30pm – 3:30pm at RRRRC office

Project Sponsors:







Discussion

- Are there any data gaps you are aware of, or quantitative information that you think the economic analysis/surveys should include?
- What issues do you see with the food system/ag economy that this effort might address?
- Questions or comments about this process?