



**FARMS, MARKETS & FOOD SYSTEMS
FOCUS GROUP MEETING
DECEMBER 7, 2016**

Assistance developing the
focus group stakeholder list and meeting summary
provided by



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BACKGROUND

In 2015, Charlotte City Council asked staff to examine farmers markets and their role as community assets, creating entrepreneurship opportunities and addressing food access issues. In response to this request, staff assembled an interdepartmental team to examine this subject through a Farmers Market Study (Study).

As an initial step, staff researched markets in Charlotte and across the country. This information was presented to community stakeholders at the December 7, 2016 focus group meeting. A PowerPoint slide deck of the research conducted is available online at <http://charlottenc.gov/NBS/CE/Pages/Farmers-Market-Study.aspx>.

FARMERS MARKET PROJECT TEAM

The Farmers Market Project team consists of representatives from City and County departments including:

- Neighborhood & Business Services (N&BS)
- Charlotte Department of Transportation (CDOT)
- Planning Department
- Charlotte Area Transit System (CATS)
- Mecklenburg County Health Department

MISSION

The mission of the Study is to develop a recommendation for a Charlotte market system that supports farmers, entrepreneurship and food access while building community and place throughout Charlotte and the region.

GOALS

The goals of the Study are to identify opportunities and develop strategies that will help inform the City's role in markets and strategies that improve:

| Goal | Why this is important: |
|-----------------------------|--|
| Retail Market System | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Retail farmers markets contribute to the local economy• As much as \$7.80 of every \$10 spent remains in community supporting local jobs & businesses |
| Wholesale System | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• According to the recent CONNECT Our Future study, the Charlotte region's residents spend \$662 million on fresh produce from elsewhere that could be grown locally• Little supply-chain infrastructure exists in our region to support this opportunity to increase local food production |
| Food Access | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Approximately 14% of Mecklenburg County residents live in poverty (2015 American Community Survey)• Lack of access to healthy food can negatively impact a person's health and therefore their quality of life |

Community and Place

- Markets build community pride and sense of place
- More social interactions occur at markets compared to grocery store visits, thereby building stronger community connections

FOCUS GROUP MEETING

Stakeholder input is critical in helping the City identify the questions to be asked and where issues and opportunities exist. On December 7, 2016 a focus group meeting was held to help inform the Study's path forward, and to ultimately inform the scope of work that a consultant will be asked to perform. Suede Onion consulting was engaged to help develop a list of local stakeholders active in regional farming, markets, and the food systems arena to participate in this meeting.

- Fifty-Three attendees participated in the meeting including representatives from government agencies, non-profits, food access & security advocates, market managers, local farms, restaurants, and distributors.
- Attendees included 18 people focused on food access, 12 farmers, 15 representatives from institutions and restaurants, and 8 people representing area markets.

Each of the above referenced groups (farmers, market managers, restaurants, food access & security advocates) participated in a facilitated dialogue to answer the following questions:

- What is currently working well?
- What challenges are you experiencing?
- What questions would it be helpful to have answered?
- What information/research would be helpful to have?

Each group wrote their responses on large flip charts, and then reported out to all participants thereby providing an opportunity for all attendees to hear a summary of the conversations occurring in each group.

The dominant themes identified by Suede Onion consulting that emerged from the meeting included:

- Awareness of importance of local, healthy foods is increasing
- Education – Consumers, Farmers, Government
- Collaborations and Partnerships
- Funding sources
- Project Ownership

- Employment/job creation/talent retention/economic opportunity
- Connectivity
- Transportation
- Trust and Accountability
- Racial Prejudice/Segregation impact on food access & security
- Grocery Stores and other amenities in underserved communities
- Small farms, small markets challenge connectivity and coverage
- Cost of food, cost of establishing a small business, cost of staying in business
- The absence of a local food hub and aggregator
- Mapping the current ecosystem of markets, farms and organizations; keeping this information current and accessible to the public
- Understanding future trends to be able to plan effectively

Concerning the questions that the various groups identified that it would be helpful to have answered, the common themes identified by Suede Onion include:

- What is being done successfully at markets and with food-related infrastructure in other places that have qualities similar to Charlotte and the Piedmont Region?
- How can we re-ignite the excitement around shopping and purchasing local food?
- What realistically can the City of Charlotte do to assist with building solutions?
- Who will own and deliver on the results of the Study and are the resources available to carry out those findings?
- How do we address the issues around transportation and access to local markets, particularly related to the issue of equity, access and food security?
- How do we attract grocery stores to our underserved areas and what kind of grocery stores will they be?
- Who is doing what and how can we better communicate?

A summary of what each group identified as successes (what is working well), challenges, questions we should be asking, and information/research it would be helpful to have is included in Appendix A.

NEXT STEPS

The feedback from the focus group meeting will be used to inform a proposed scope of work for a future consultant. In early 2017, the Farmers Market Team will issue a Request for Proposal (RFP) seeking a professional consultant to perform the scope of work, and specifically to help the City identify what role it and its partners can play in helping to strengthen the regional market system, support local farms, farming and markets, and examine the role of markets in food access and security.

APPENDIX A

Below is a summary of responses compiled by Suede Onion from the farmers, market managers, restaurants and food access & security advocates to the following questions:

- What is currently working well?
- What challenges are you experiencing?
- What questions would it be helpful to have answered?
- What information/research would be helpful to have?

FARMERS

What is currently working well:

- Marketing directly to chefs and local restaurants during peak growing seasons, and through the CSA (Community Supported Agriculture) model of selling directly to consumers through weekly or bi-weekly food boxes where consumers pay up front.
- Successes with various markets. Specifically, markets that are incorporated into other businesses as well as having a retail component to them.
- Markets that are part of a greater project- either through a strip center/shopping center or as part of a larger development such as a mill or mall tend to drive more sales and volume for farmers. Marketing and awareness for farmers tends to be much greater at markets that are part of a larger scale project.
- Selling directly to consumers allows farmers to sell their products at retail pricing.
- Yorkmont market has highest foot traffic available.
- The Davidson Market is an example of a profitable market for farmers for several reasons
 - 1) Vendors are required to apply- so numbers are limited and competition is controlled
 - 2) The market brings in outside attractions to drive more volume through the market such as music, festivals and guest chefs
 - 3) The market has more of a family and festive atmosphere than others.

What challenges are you currently experiencing:

- Serious concerns about how the markets are marketing themselves and the farmers.
- Appears to be too many markets available; markets lack vision and a draw for the necessary number of customers. Markets can cannibalize each other.
- "Too big to be small and too small to be big."
- Long hours cut into farm productivity.
- Most farmers are torn between direct sales with retail pricing (small production & more variety) and selling through a middleman/wholesaler (larger production & less variety).
- Serving farmers markets drives the need for more variety and less volume growing, which drives farmers further away from producing for wholesalers.
- Distribution is a challenge, and part of the reason farmers haven't pushed for a distribution hub or wholesale center. Farms need to be able to capture distribution dollars for ourselves (farmers).

- CSAs could become even more successful for farmers if SNAP were an accepted form of payment.
- More farmers and more qualified laborers are needed to meet the current and future local demands.
- Better educate consumers about the importance of eating healthy and eating local.
- Better understanding of what consumers want so they can better manage their own time and resources and become more profitable.
- Getting customers to market and parking efficiently.
- Aggregation is missing.
- Navigating trends such as farm-to-fork.

Questions it would be helpful to have answered:

- What is a farmer (define)?
- What do future farm models look like?
- How can Charlotte build interest in farming as a career?
- How much land is needed to address the \$662 million dollar opportunity for local food production?
- Buyers - what are the barriers to entry to buy local food?
- How can we re-ignite the excitement around local food?
- How can government incent restaurants to buy more local food?
- Could the city commit to buy local food - 20%? Lead by example.
- How can we encourage institutions to buy local?
- What would even the playing field?
- How can city/county help farmers reach consumers (marketing)?
- What can the city do in partnership with the state market?

Information/research it would be helpful to have:

- Be clear about goals. For example, does Charlotte want a market that is a tourist attraction, or does Charlotte want to be a venue for small/medium markets?
- Time table from city to implement recommendations.

FARMERS MARKETS

What is currently working well:

- Charlotte markets are plentiful and managed by experienced and capable individuals.
- Dedicated customers show up on a regular basis to support vendors.
- Most of the markets in Charlotte are committed to showcasing and supporting locally grown and locally made products, though depending on the number of days they need to be open or other factors the locally sourced items or local vendors are supplemented with products sourced regionally or globally.
- Diversity in the vendor base is a mixed bag, depending on the location of the market.
- Some efforts to cooperate and collaborate among vendors to extend hours or product offerings have been met with mixed success.
- Cooking demonstrations and sampling are effective ways of increasing customer traffic.

- Good, informative signage has also proven to be very helpful both in increasing sales and educating consumers.
- Planning and hosting events either featuring vendors or in partnerships and collaborations with organizations in the community generally increase customer attendance and engagement (e.g. Hippie Fest).
- Programs and activities for children also encourage attendance.

What challenges are you currently experiencing:

- Space constraints limit the number of vendors/tents that can be included, which sometimes limits selection and variety.
- For markets that rely on tents, weather can strongly impact the success and viability of market operations on a weekly basis.
- Limited number of farms in the Piedmont region who are available to attend markets. When a new market emerges they are working to pull from that same pool of farmers which can hurt existing markets.
- If farmers try to attend more than one market, there are often challenges with consistent attendance due to staffing issues.
- Better collaboration among markets, and possibly a City or County effort could be made to do a better job of educating consumers about where markets are located and what is available at those markets.
- There has been less education and emphasis in the last few years around what is local, why it is important to source local as much as possible, and how to identify local products.
- Loading space for vendors and customer parking are issues; lack of capacity affects attendance.
- For markets that operate more than a few hours on a Saturday, the need for storage and refrigeration are consistent issues.

Questions it would be helpful to have answered:

- What is a Farmers Market (define this)?
- What can the City do to help?
- How can CATS/LYNX accommodate farmers markets?
- How can we get fresh food in Charlotte Mecklenburg Schools?
- How can we make selling to institutions easier?
- What are available Farmers Tax breaks? How can City advocate for more?
- Can anything be done to get grocery stores in lower income areas?
- How do we keep up with population and food demand?

Information/research it would be helpful to have:

- Updated list of market network to help make vendor referrals
- Tent restrictions and regulations

RESTAURANTS / ENTREPRENEURS / DISTRIBUTORS

What is currently working well:

- Increasing demand for fresh, local "Piedmont Cuisine" food.
- Culinary culture in Charlotte and local flavor profiles are becoming more recognized throughout the Southeast (e.g. Piedmont cuisine). This rise attracts culinary talent as well as new residents to the city.
- Consumers are becoming more educated on the value of the foods/products they are eating.
- Social media has helped build interest and education around food.
- Connectivity between farmers, institutions, restaurants and the consumer is improving, and allowing for better experiences across the board.
- Good variety of farms and growing options exists; farmers are growing different products and offering produce during micro-seasons.
- Availability of products to the consumer.
- Regulations are requiring better restaurant accountability; farmers are learning and understanding regulations.
- Opportunity exists to leverage Piedmont Culinary Guild to help with education.
- Good growth policies have been implemented that have resulted in Charlotte becoming a destination city (e.g. uptown area, Charlotte airport, etc.).

What challenges are you currently experiencing:

- A lot is broken in the system.
- Supply, need/demand, cost and lack of a food hub or distribution center. A food hub would help to drive down the costs of fresh and/or local foods, would allow for more consistent product, and would enable larger restaurants to purchase more locally sourced products at wholesale prices.
- The costs, including time, associated with buying fresh and/or local produce can be prohibitive – which leads to purchasing from regional or national suppliers.
- Farms tend to run out of product easily, making it difficult for small restaurants to source local produce on a consistent basis. This means that chefs/restaurants have to spend a lot of time locating product and picking up product from numerous places. This causes restaurants to have to turn to larger companies like US Foods versus buying local foods, even if they don't want to have to do this.
- Restaurants want to source food locally and publish this on their menus. Inevitably find that they cannot find local foods at a given time due to unforeseen circumstances (weather impacting crops, etc.). As a result, those restaurants source the food elsewhere, but "local" still appears on the menu – not because the restaurant is deceitful, but this is another impact of how hard it is to source locally on a consistent basis.
- The needs and demands of restaurants tend to ebb and flow making it equally as difficult on small farmers.
- It's important for restaurants to commit to a local farm so that the farm can be confident committing to the restaurant, and vice-versa. But many things can disrupt this commitment.
- Lack of education and communication between restaurants, farmers and distributors.
- Teaching the farmer the importance of supply.
- Teaching students and parents how to cook and shop for healthy foods.

- Need a better, more cohesive, metropolitan infrastructure for local food economy.
- Difficult for institutions to fund programs geared toward culinary.
- Transporting the product; meats are typically frozen; special refrigeration trucks cost money.
- Lack of culinary incubator space or commissary-type space.
- Absence of local food hub/aggregator is a significant gap in system.
- Markets are not strategically placed; no consideration appears to be taken about where the need exists, where other markets already exist.
- There are too many small markets.

Questions it would be helpful to have answered:

- How will government bridge gap between farms and food insecure communities?
- How can restaurants & farmers build partnerships?
- What are the comparable cities/markets to Charlotte? What are other similar markets? Are there success stories?
- Best practices: What did other markets try, fail at, and why did they fail? What was success attributed to? Were outcomes what they thought they'd be? How are they being financed?
- What is the projected future look like for the local food industry? Need to know this so that strategies will position us for that future.
- What other stakeholders need to be at the table? Healthy Charlotte, ULI?
- What do comparable markets attribute the success of the food system to?
- For markets in comparable areas that failed, what do they attribute that failure too?
- Are there better locations for markets in Charlotte?
- Can Charlotte replicate more of the successful local markets in the region?
- How can the region finance the recommendations of the Study? P3?
- Are there national distributors sourcing local food? If yes/no, can a local market / farmer still capitalize on that market?
- What do the farmers need to be more successful?
- Who is going to help lead the charge? City? County? Non-profit?
- Engage local stakeholders in identifying what strategic recommendations get made, as well as in implementation of those recommendations. For example, if it is determined that a cooking stage is needed, contact PCG.
- Important to not start from scratch – must recognize that there is a robust system of existing organizations.
- Identify how supporting local foods – which generally translates to unsubsidized local family farms and the high costs associated with growing – aligns with food insecurity. Be transparent about the disconnect (higher costs needed at a lower income level).

Information/research it would be helpful to have:

- Better, understand the demographics of the region; Comparable data of regions and markets.
- Statistics on days/week and hours that are more profitable.
- How much will City/County allocate to implementing a viable food system?
- What funding is available? What space is available? What resources are available?

- Identify how system is proposed to change in the future. What are expected trends? Need to know this so that strategies will position us for that future.
- Information on available space and if/how it can be utilized (City/County owned property being made available and assistance with zoning/ code requirement to reuse property). Engage the Joint Use Task Force in this conversation and make sure they understand the significance of finding solutions for local food systems.
- Map the existing non-profits and other local organizations that drive the mission around food. Who are they? What do they do? How can partnerships be established? Keep this updated as a resource. NOTE: Piedmont Culinary Guild has been having conversations about creating this; still in early stages of convo or perhaps just a recognition of the need to do this.
- How committed with the City/County be to developing robust public/private partnerships, and particularly honoring the organizations that have been active in this space for years?
- How will existing local organizations that are already active in this space be acknowledged and supported? These organizations have human resources and are extremely knowledgeable, but lack funding. Examples: Food Policy Council; Piedmont Culinary Guild (PCG)
- Who will own/sustain this project?
- Prelude to a food hub is the need to aggregate demand: understand needs of large institutions, number of farms, etc.
- There is lots of existing information on food hubs: USDA; Wholesome Wave; Wallace Center.

FOOD ACCESS AND SECURITY

What is currently working well:

- People are recognizing that there is an issue.
- Bringing education to schools, and forming successful partnerships.
- Identifying issues through community engagement and engaging experts in the field of nutrition.
- Brought combinations of people to the table who have been open to talking to each other and listening.
- Local and visiting artists have been engaged as a catalyst for change.
- Grants on the horizon that can help move things forward.
- Providing nutritional meals for elderly.
- Feeding adults and childcare – would like to expand into Title One schools.
- Quality of Life dashboard.
- Bringing ideas to schools.
- Partnerships are at an all-time high.

What challenges are you currently experiencing:

- Education, empowerment, equity, economy, connection, and transportation were the primary themes heard during the food access discussion.
- Acknowledgement of inequities between economically advantaged and disadvantaged communities in regard to quality of life, access to affordable and high quality food, and “full participation” in our local economy, from employment to consumer opportunities.
- Cost of fresh food and transportation is an impediment to access.

- Transportation to connect communities in need with markets and other fresh food sources.
- Frustration about the inability to trust the powers that be.
- Demand for increased accountability by the leaders of government and other influential institutions.
- CMS policies that create barriers to introducing more fresh, local food into school cafeterias
- Educating kids around where food comes from and giving them the opportunity to work on farms and in school gardens.
- Farming clearly needs to be supported and reintroduced as a viable career path on a variety of scales, from small urban farms to more rural farms growing on multiple acres with significant production, which will require attention to farmland conservation.
- Provide better nutrition options for our elderly, particularly in our underserved communities.
- Frustration exists around perception that government asks what communities want but then doesn't listen.
- Diversity of a community does not always mean that it is inclusive.
- Racial segregation.

Questions it would be helpful to have answered:

- Who's analyzing the data being collected?
- What is the best way to gather information from those in the community?
- What does it take to move chain grocers into needed communities?
- Why don't grocers donate excess or rejected foods?
- What have been our past failures from the community's perspective?
- Are Charlotte stakeholders willing to fund these solutions?
- How can local farmers be supported?
- How can we prevent food waste? How much food do we throw away?
- How can we get the community to take ownership of these projects?
- Would raising the minimum wage in Charlotte increase the buying power necessary to purchase local food?
- What do underserved communities need?
- What is the goal of the market system?
- What do neighborhoods want? Be sure to ask neighborhoods what they want instead of "building" something and then telling them about it.
- Do we want to keep ownership local?
- Can we improve relationships between community & food business owners?
- Where are people spending their food dollars?
- How can we improve economic opportunity through improved market system?
- How can we create awareness of historical context?
- How can we get beyond the fear of community led, bottom up projects?
- What has worked nationally from farmers markets?
- What are the policies/rules?
- Who are the providers and where are they located?
- Will there be support for increasing black farmers, non-white farmers, growers, ranchers, producers, distributors?

- Best way to go about gathering information?
- How to engage community?
- Create policy that will help people make the right choices.
- What is the farm to cafeteria opportunity?
- Remember lessons from our past. For example, in the 1970s-1980 Bumgardnon (sp), U-pick gardens, Elizabeth Ave Co-op, etc. What changed the customer attitude?
- Connecting farmers and land.
- Needs to be a multi-tiered approach and not just about Charlotte or individual neighborhoods.
- Consider human-centered design: people with the problems have the solutions Farm to Cafeteria.
- Ask the underserved what they want.

Information/research it would be helpful to have:

- What are the policies/rules?
- How do we work together to create policies that help people be able to make the right choices?
- How much food gets thrown away?
- What are the utilization rates (where people shop)?
- What is the projection of the current rate of the death of farming? (farming sustainability).
- What has worked nationally?
- What budget does the County have for this particular issue?
- Research on the food system overall, but specifically including black and non-white farmers, growers, ranchers, producers, distributors.
- Collect an inventory of what is already happening, what organizations are active already, what each does, etc.
- Who are the providers and where are they located?
- The history of white supremacy should not be ignored in food access and security issues and the process of creating solutions.
- Connecting farmers and land.

APPENDIX B

MEETING RSVP LIST

FARMS, MARKET & FOOD SYSTEMS MEETING RSVP LIST: DECEMBER 7, 2016

| Table 1 | Table 2 | Table 3 |
|---|--|---|
| Food Access & Security | Food Access & Security | Market Administration |
| Dennis Lacia - Mecklenburg County | Nicole Carruth - McColl Center | Elliott Royal - Rosa Parks |
| Erin Brighton - Food Policy Council | Maggie Bean - Friendship Trays | Amie Newsome - State Farmers Market |
| Lucy Bush Carter - Friendship Trays | Zack Wyatt - Carolina Farm Trust | Samantha DeRosa - Atherton |
| Kristin Davis - Agricultural Cooperative | Mary Newsome - Urban Institute | Theodore Williams - Eastland Open Air |
| Alysia Osborne - Center City Partners | Marcus McFarland - Food Corps & CMFPC | Geoff Bragg - Cotswold |
| Katherine Metz - Elemental Research | Erin Smith - Mecklenburg County | Jennifer Stanton - Retail Advisory |
| Dr. Philip Otienoburu - JCSU | Megan Gude - Center City Partners | Dan Murrey - 7th Street |
| Leah Hindel - Food Corps & CMFPC | Anna Zuevskaya - Seeds of Change | Chris clouden - 7th Street |
| Nadine Ford - Mecklenburg County | Katrina Young - Table Moderator | Elliott Royal - Table Moderator |
| Alberto Gonzalez - Table Moderator | | |
| | | |
| Table 4 | Table 5 | Table 6 |
| Farmers | Farmers | Restaurants/Distributors |
| Lee Menius - Wild Trukey Farm | Bernard Singleton - Local Farmer | Beth Mack - UNCC Food Procurement |
| Katherine Pair - Friendship Gardens | Thomas Moore - Carolina Farm Stewardsh | Salem Suber - Southminster |
| Sam Fleming - 100 Gardens | Sara Jane - A Way of Life Farm | Jesse Ledbetter - Fresh List |
| Jamie Davis - A Way of Life Farm | William Lyons - Blue Bird Farm | Rachel Martin - Rachel Martin Designs |
| Rohan Gibbs - Small City Farms & Hope Ha | Kim Shaw - Small City Farm | Amy Bowen - CPCC Hospitality |
| Robin Ross - Bell's Best Berry Farm | Judy Carpenter - Lucky Clays Farm | Robert A. Walter - Gordon Food Service |
| Sammy Koenigsberg - New Town Farm | Amy Foster - Gilcrest Natural Farm | Brenton Ebersold - Blue Barn Bistro |
| Dean Mullis - Laughing Owl Farm | Jesse Leadbetter - Freshlist | |
| Jason Lawrence - Table Moderator | Johanna Quinn - Table Moderator | Lori Lencheski - Table Moderator |
| | | |
| Table 7 | | |
| Restaurants/Distributors | | |
| Tara Diamante - Blue Barn Bistro | | |
| Matt Gilbert - Wells Fargo | | |
| Kris Reid - Piedmont Culinary Guild | | |
| Angela Gray - Rick's Market Co-Op | | |
| Thomas Carrig - Personal Chef | | |
| Anne Jacks - Grassfed & Root Down | | |
| Jim Bowen - CPCC Hospitality | | |
| Gail Whitcomb - Table Moderator | | |