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## Executive Summary

The people of North Carolina have launched a new initiative to support the development of local and regional food systems. A *food system* is all the processes involved in feeding people—growing, harvesting, processing, packaging, distributing, marketing, consuming, disposing and recycling. North Carolina is well positioned to lead the nation in this endeavor. Our assets include a diverse agricultural economy, a superior educational system, an adaptable workforce and an ever-expanding and diverse set of dedicated partners. Our challenge is to build a *sustainable* food system that strives to be economically viable, environmentally sound and socially just.

Consumer interest in local, organic and sustainably produced foods continues to increase despite the recent downturn in the economy (see page 24 for a discussion of these terms). National sales of organic foods have almost reached the \$25 billion mark,<sup>1</sup> and local food sales are expected to reach \$7 billion by 2011.<sup>2</sup> Direct-market venues continue to increase in popularity as consumers seek healthy foods that allow them to support agriculture and fisheries in their local communities. Our state is home to 3,712 farmers selling directly to

consumers, for a total value in direct sales of over \$29 million.<sup>3</sup> North Carolina has an estimated 200 farmers' markets<sup>4</sup> and an estimated 100 Community-Supported Agriculture programs (CSAs).<sup>5</sup>

In 2009, North Carolinians spent approximately \$35 billion on food.<sup>6</sup> If all North Carolina residents spent 10 percent of their food dollars on local foods (\$1.05 per day), approximately \$3.5 billion would be available in the local economy every year, and part of that would flow back to farmers and food businesses.<sup>7</sup> Greater spending on local foods increases economic activity at the community level, which can translate into job opportunities. Our state's population is rapidly increasing. By supporting the development of local food and farming businesses, we can harness consumer spending to support North Carolina producers, including those in rural and urban-fringe communities. We can revitalize our agricultural heritage by strengthening consumers' connections to the land and to the farmers who grow our food.

**"Y'all are red hot. You are beginning to change the tide, directing the links between local agriculture, jobs and the economy. Finally people across the state and the country are beginning to realize you are red hot."**

N.C. Gov. Beverly Perdue, Farm to Fork Summit, May 2009



We also have the opportunity to build local and regional food systems that help improve health outcomes and reduce health care costs. In 2003, health care expenditures for chronic diseases in North Carolina were \$40 billion,<sup>8</sup> the majority of which, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), was for the treatment of preventable chronic diseases.<sup>9</sup> Diet plays a significant role in many of these diseases. Increasing access to and encouraging consumption of fresh, healthy foods are important ways to address disease incidence and health care expenditures, particularly in underserved communities throughout our state.

In 2008, the Center for Environmental Farming Systems (CEFS) launched its Farm to Fork initiative, "Building a Sustainable Local Food Economy in North Carolina." The intent was to

- articulate shared values and components of sustainable local food systems,

N.C. Gov. Beverly Perdue, Farm to Fork Summit, May 2009

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- identify and promote collaboration among existing local and regional organizations,
- learn from existing initiatives and identify best practices and potential models, and
- develop and prioritize actions at the state and local levels, including needed policy recommendations and program initiatives.

**We can revitalize our agricultural heritage by strengthening consumers' connections to the land and to the farmers who grow our food.**

More than 1,000 North Carolinians participated, including those working in the fields of agriculture, commercial fishing, community organizing, education, faith, finance, nutrition, philanthropy, planning, public health, public policy, state and local government, and youth outreach.

The Farm to Fork initiative identified nine major issue areas as challenges to be addressed. These are:

**1) Engaging decision makers in strategic food-systems planning and implementation.** Food is essential for life. Yet unlike other enduring necessities—water, air and shelter—food has not



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been considered a priority for planning by state and local officials and decision makers. Engaging state and local governments in food-systems issues can be accomplished through food policy councils. Such councils can establish goals and benchmarks for improving food-system sustainability and conducting food assessments to gather baseline data. A total of 17 states have or are developing food policy councils.

**2) Coordinating food-systems policies and regulations.** Our current regulatory environment for food is best described as a thicket: complex, sometimes irrational and often difficult to maneuver. Lack of coordination among federal, state and local agencies with authority over food-related issues can impede innovation in food and farming sectors. This confusion relates to the sheer number of agencies involved. It also stems from the fact that food production, processing and sales are regulated differently by different agencies depending on the type of commodity, the scale of production, the degree of processing and the market channel used for distribution.

**3) Growing new and transitioning farmers and securing prime farmland.** North Carolina is rapidly losing its agricultural base, as the average age of farmers reaches 56. Farms owned by black farmers and families are being lost at an even faster rate than farms owned by their white counterparts. Prime farmland is being replaced by real-estate development, threatening the disappearance of high-quality soils needed for food production. Those producers who remain face numerous risks when tackling new markets, including lack of access to affordable land, working capital and risk-management strategies.

**4) Expanding local market opportunities.** Retail, food-service and institutional markets typically source very little food specifically from North Carolina producers, particularly smaller-scale producers. This tendency is not necessarily because of a lack of commitment on the part of larger-scale buyers, but because the support systems and infrastructure for aggregating, storing, processing and distributing food to these markets have been established over multiple years to operate most efficiently at the national and often global level. Expanding access to these markets requires addressing a host of issues, including the need for food-systems infrastructure, businesses and public/private partnerships.

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### 5) Cultivating community gardens statewide.

Community gardens include gardens in neighborhoods, housing facilities, faith communities, schools, businesses, public agencies and other places. Well-tended community gardens and urban farms can produce healthy food, build soil quality and protect public green space. Maintaining community gardens and urban farms can be challenging. They often fail, not because of plant loss, but a lack of organizational resources on the part of community residents.

### 6) Strengthening local government initiatives.

North Carolina has 100 counties and 548 municipal governments. State law provides local governments with broad authority to engage in activities related to economic development. Historically, agriculture has been perceived as antithetical to economic development, particularly in rural areas. Building a local food economy creates new opportunities for local leaders to help solve pressing economic challenges.

### 7) Addressing public health and food access disparities.

North Carolinians face a number of health challenges related to our food system. One is the incidence of diet-related chronic diseases, including obesity and diabetes, which are associated with consumption of nutrient-poor, high-calorie foods. At the same time, we are experiencing food insecurity, which exists when an individual or family lacks adequate or consistent access to the foods necessary to lead an active, healthy lifestyle. Increasing consumption of and access to fresh, healthy foods is a major challenge. In addition, a tremendous amount of food is wasted in the state, including fresh, perishable foods left unharvested.

### 8) Increasing consumer education and outreach.

While in some regions of North Carolina there is strong and growing consumer interest in fresh, local, sustainably produced and organic foods, there is not yet uniform demand or emphasis across the state. There are a few organizations and agencies operating effective public-education and marketing campaigns, but these efforts are moving forward separately and often with limited knowledge of each other.

### 9) Promoting farm-to-school programming and engaging youth.

Children's health and well-being are connected to diet, nutrition and food security. Access to an ample quantity and variety of fruits and vegetables at school, at home and in the community is critical. Access is especially

important for school-age children, given that poor dietary habits can linger or worsen into the high school years and adulthood. In addition, youth on the brink of adulthood will be our future leaders. They need in-depth knowledge of the food system, which can be gained through engagement in activities such as leadership development and mentorship.

**Increasing access to and encouraging consumption of fresh, healthy foods are important ways to address disease incidence and health care expenditures, particularly in underserved communities throughout our state.**

The Farm to Fork initiative was designed to engage a broad cross-section of interests and also to advance a collective sense of priority actions. Identifying priorities in this context can be challenging, primarily because what we are trying to influence is a *system*, in which the success of the whole depends on proper functioning of interrelated parts. Working toward a more sustainable food system in North Carolina requires that we scale up our supply of (and increase access to) fresh, local, sustainably produced and organic foods, which involves *simultaneously* addressing the needs for

- more producers, who in turn need access to affordable and productive land and risk-management strategies, as well as
- access to larger-scale markets that demand consistent, affordable, high-volume food supplies, which requires
- new “middle” businesses that can aggregate, process and distribute food, which depend on having
- a supportive regulatory environment and
- strong consumer demand, which requires
- outreach to the public and decision makers.

We include here a logic model (see Fig. 1) which identifies the numerous interrelated issues, strategies and outcomes inherent to building a sustainable food economy in North Carolina.

# Building a Sustainable Local Food Economy in North Carolina

**VISION: North Carolina has a strong local food economy where all North Carolinians regularly consume fresh, healthy foods that are grown, raised, caught, processed, distributed and marketed sustainably by local producers and businesses.**

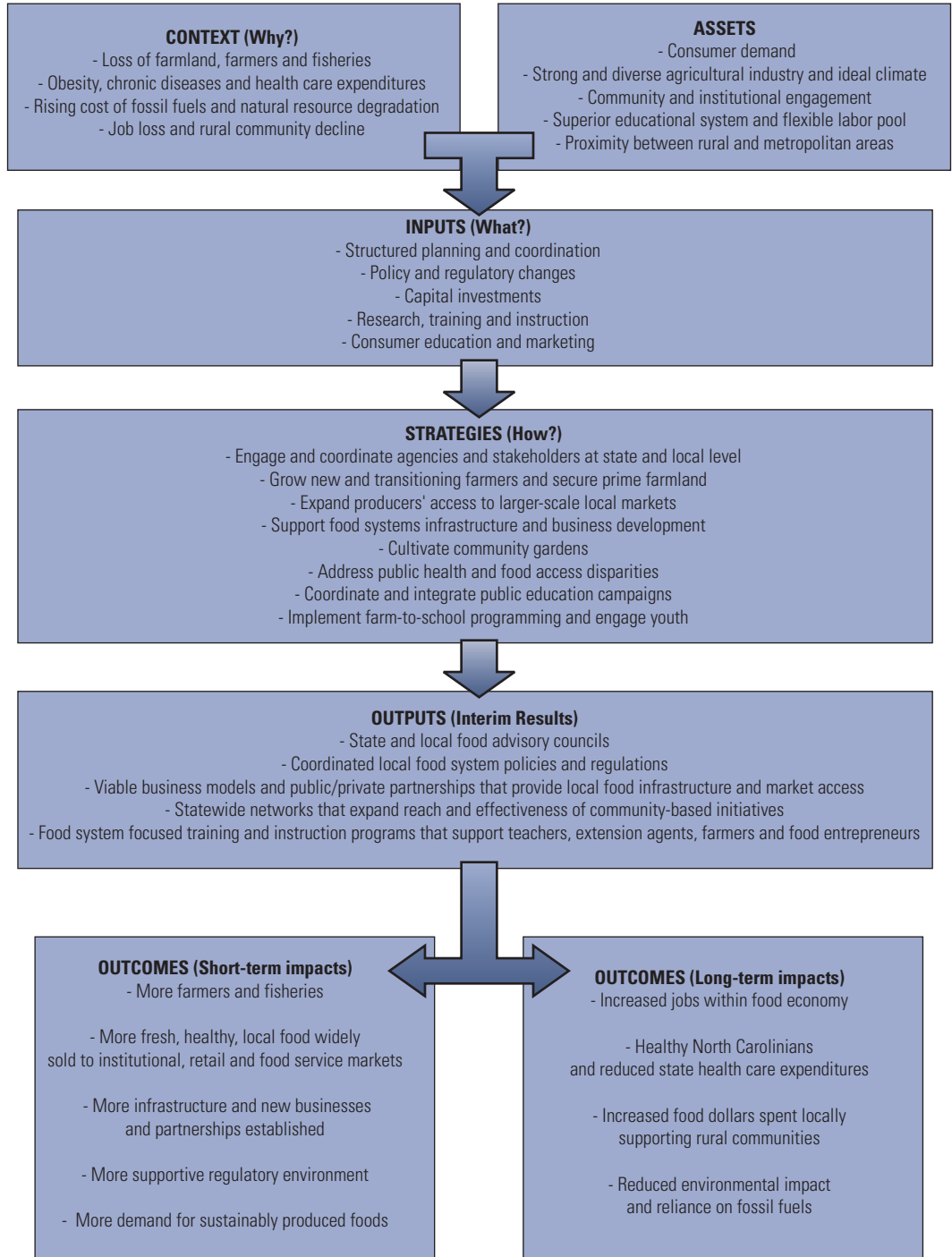


Fig. 1. Logic Model for Building a Sustainable Local Food Economy in North Carolina.

To prioritize action ideas, the Farm to Fork initiative focused on identifying recommendations that help us move forward at the state level, and in many cases, strengthen locally driven efforts. This process involved 11 different time-limited, topic-specific Working Issue Teams (WITs) (see Spotlight 1). Each WIT included a small group of experts with experience in the particular issue who were charged with identifying at least one “game changer.” Game changers are ideas considered to be *important* to implement at the *state level* and *doable* within a *short time frame* (one to two years). Each WIT also identified possible local action ideas.

On May 11-12, 2009, CEFS hosted “From Farm to Fork: Building a Sustainable Local Food Economy in North Carolina,” a statewide summit held at the McKimmon Center in Raleigh. The summit was an exciting and energizing event attended by more than 420 people. WIT leaders presented their game changers and local action ideas to the participants, and these ideas were further discussed and fine-tuned in breakout sessions. Speakers at the summit included notable politicians, academic leaders and industry representatives.

The following is a brief description of the 11 game-changer ideas for immediate action:

**1. Establish and implement a statewide food policy council.** Significant progress has been made toward this game changer. As an outgrowth of the Farm to Fork process, Senate Bill 1067 was passed in the state legislature in August 2009. It established the N.C. Sustainable Local Food Advisory Council, which began meeting in February 2010. It is CEFS’ intent that this guide, including the identified game changers, be considered a starting point for Council deliberations.

**2. Appoint a state-level food-systems ombudsman.** A new state-level position is needed to act as an intermediary between state agencies and stakeholders. This individual would work at a high level, across agencies and departments, to streamline food-system regulatory approaches and licensing requirements at the federal, state and county levels. An ombudsman would provide multiple services, especially in two critical areas: providing a centralized source of information for small-scale diversified farmers, food entrepreneurs and others, and harmonizing different rules governing food and farming sectors. At least three other states have created similar positions.



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**3. Dedicate permanent and significant funding for the N.C. Agricultural Development and Farmland Preservation (ADFP) Trust Fund.** In order to protect valuable farmland and support new agricultural enterprises, the North Carolina legislature should establish a permanent source of funding for the ADFP Trust Fund of at least \$30 million per year. The ADFP Trust Fund is administered by the N.C. Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (NCDA&CS) to support agricultural development and farmland preservation, with a focus on funding the purchase of conservation easements and agricultural development projects, including enterprises to market farm products, develop agritourism and create value-added products.

U.S. Congressman Bob Etheridge, Farm to Fork Summit, May 2009

**The Farm to Fork process was designed to engage a broad cross-section of interests and also to advance a collective sense of priority actions.**

**4. Help network direct-marketing initiatives statewide.** Marketing food directly from farmers to consumers (e.g., through farmers’ markets, CSA programs, food-buying clubs) is fundamentally a local activity that does not require statewide oversight. However, there is increasing interest in strengthening local efforts by creating better mechanisms for networking across the state (e.g., formation of a statewide farmers’ market association). Benefits include shared learning, collaborative fund-raising, and enhanced training and education efforts.

The full report is available at [www.cefs.ncsu.edu](http://www.cefs.ncsu.edu).

## Spotlight 1

### CEFS Farm to Fork Working Issue Teams (WITs)

- Community Gardens and Farms
- Consumer Outreach and Marketing
- Direct Markets
- Expanding Institutional, Retail and Food Service Markets for Small and Medium-Scale Farmers
- Farm-to-School Programming
- Formalizing the Initiative: Foundations and Baselines
- Land Use and Local Government Initiatives
- Processing and Other Food Systems Infrastructure
- Public Health and Food Access Disparities
- Support for New and Transitioning Farmers
- Youth and Social Networking

(See Appendix B for a complete list of WIT participants.)

**5. Establish goals for state procurement of local food.** Establishing goals to encourage state agencies and local governments to purchase local foods gives these institutional food buyers the opportunity to support North Carolina's farmers and the local food economy. A number of other states have already adopted policies that give preference to the purchase of local foods. One approach that may work well in North Carolina is to use Executive Order 156, which directs state agencies to make "best value procurement"

decisions that take into consideration the need to protect natural resources, conserve energy, eliminate waste and emissions, and reduce environmental and human health impacts.

**6. Develop a model farm-to-institution program that addresses barriers to procurement for institutional markets.**

"Feed the Forces" is such an initiative. It seeks to utilize eastern North Carolina's

vast agricultural capacity to meet the food, fuel and fiber needs of nearby Fort Bragg. By 2015, Fort Bragg is expected to support as many as 40,000 residents. Project partners who seek to help local farmers overcome barriers to accessing institutional markets by developing systems and protocols regarding packaging, pricing, distribution logistics, food safety and product liability. Funds from the Golden LEAF Foundation were recently awarded to support this effort.

**7. Fund a statewide coordinator and other activities of the N.C. Community Garden Partners (NCCGP).** As of November 2009, at least 94 community gardens had been identified across the state. The NCCGP, a statewide network of more than 25 public and private organizations, seeks to expand this number to include every community in the state. Support needs include personnel to manage the network and to map existing gardens, and support for existing gardens to become models and "hubs" for outreach, education and peer support.

**8. Expand and strengthen North Carolina's SNAP-Ed programming.** Public/private partnerships are needed to address food insecurity in low-income communities. A priority is better coordination of and support for statewide marketing, distribution and gleaning efforts. This includes leveraging federal benefits programs as a way to reach limited-resource consumers with both nutrition education and increased healthy food access (e.g., SNAP and WIC) while contributing to small-farmer viability through the use of electronic benefits transfer (EBT).

**9. Launch an "Eat 10% Local, Sustainable Food Campaign."** Grant funding from the Golden LEAF Foundation was recently awarded to conduct an interactive statewide advocacy campaign to engage North Carolina residents, as well as institutional and retail outlets, in achieving the goal of purchasing 10 percent of their foods from local sources. An outgrowth of the Farm to Fork process is a commitment from the N.C. Cooperative Extension to host a Web portal that would serve as a hub for the campaign. This portal would serve to coordinate educational, promotional and data-collection activities. In addition, Cooperative Extension would designate local-food coordinators in every county to support the campaign.

**10. Develop a model farm-to-school pre-service teacher instruction program.** In order to reach students, teachers need to be trained in farm-to-



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school programming. Instruction needs to happen before teachers start teaching (i.e., pre-service) and incorporated into existing teacher-training programs. The focus is to integrate into the N.C. Standard Course of Study experiential nutrition education, school gardening and farm field-trip lessons. This pre-service program would prepare the next teacher vanguard to be equipped to address math, science, language arts, healthful living and other curricular subjects with exciting and experiential farm-to-school learning strategies.

**11. Develop a teen-focused social network around food systems.** A statewide teen-focused network is needed to bring together organizations interested in and/or run by youth and young adults. Peer-to-peer connections, as well as social networking (e.g., Facebook and Twitter), would increase youth engagement and maximize opportunities for youth and young adults in our food system.

The Farm to Fork process proved that all of us can foster better connections with local farms and food in places of work, recreation, study, service and worship. The following list includes examples of actions that individuals can take to make a difference in their own communities:

- Cook with fresh, local and seasonal ingredients.
- Buy from your local farmers and food businesses.
- Start or participate in a community garden.
- Advocate for healthy foods at your child's school or day care.
- Organize a farmers' market, CSA or food-buying club.
- Build food-system partnerships.
- Promote transparency in packaged foods.
- Support the development of community farm and garden trusts.
- Join local food and farming organizations.
- Monitor statewide food-system developments.

CEFS offers *From Farm to Fork: A Guide to Building North Carolina's Sustainable Local Food Economy* as a framework for making progress now and in the future. Our intent is for this action guide to show the groundswell of grassroots engagement and creativity surrounding food-systems issues in North Carolina. Our next step is to leverage this activity in support of new partnerships and focused statewide action.

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## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Organic Trade Association, "The Organic Industry," 2008, <http://www.ota.com/pics/documents/Mini%20fact%201-08%20confirming.pdf> (accessed January 28, 2010).

<sup>2</sup> *Local and Fresh Foods in the U.S.* (Rockville, MD: Packaged Facts, May 1, 2007), <http://www.packagedfacts.com/Local-Fresh-Foods-1421831/> (accessed January 28, 2010).

<sup>3</sup> "Table 2. Market Value of Agricultural Products Sold Including Landlord's Share and Direct Sales: 2007 and 2002," *2007 Census of Agriculture: North Carolina State and County Data* Volume 1, Geographic Area Series, Part 33 (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Agriculture, National Agricultural Statistics Service, updated December 2009) [http://www.agcensus.usda.gov/Publications/2007/Full\\_Report/Volume\\_1,\\_Chapter\\_1\\_State\\_Level/North\\_Carolina/st37\\_1\\_002\\_002.pdf](http://www.agcensus.usda.gov/Publications/2007/Full_Report/Volume_1,_Chapter_1_State_Level/North_Carolina/st37_1_002_002.pdf) (accessed January 28, 2010).

<sup>4</sup> This estimate is based on a review of farmers' markets listed by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, <http://apps.ams.usda.gov/farmersmarkets/default.aspx> (accessed April 6, 2010), the N.C. Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, <http://www.ncfarmfresh.com/farmmarkets.asp> (accessed April 6, 2010), Appalachian Sustainable Agriculture Project, <http://www.buyappalachian.org/filter/group/tailgate> (accessed April 6, 2010) and Local Harvest, <http://www.localharvest.org/search.jsp?st=35&ty=1&nm> (accessed April 6, 2010).

<sup>5</sup> Debbie Roos, "North Carolina Community Supported Agriculture Farms," Growing Small Farms Web site, <http://chatham.ces.ncsu.edu/growingsmallfarms/csafarms.html> (accessed January 28, 2010).

<sup>6</sup> U.S. Department of Agriculture, Agricultural Marketing Service, "North Carolina: Population Profile," Transportation and Marketing, 2004, <http://www.ams.usda.gov/AMSV1.0/getfile?dDocName=STELPRDC5058244&acct=stmktrfl> (accessed January 28, 2010).

<sup>7</sup> Calculated using data from U.S. Department of Agriculture, Agricultural Marketing Service, "North Carolina: Population Profile," Transportation and Marketing, 2004, <http://www.ams.usda.gov/AMSV1.0/getfile?dDocName=STELPRDC5058244&acct=stmktrfl> (accessed January 28, 2010) and "North Carolina," State and County Quick Facts, U.S. Census Bureau Web site, <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/37000.html> (accessed January 28, 2010).

<sup>8</sup> "Milken Institute Chronic Disease Index," Milken Institute's An Unhealthy America: The Economic Burden of Chronic Disease Web site, n.d., <http://www.chronicdiseaseimpact.com/ebcd.taf> (accessed January 28, 2010). Chronic diseases include cancer, diabetes, heart disease, hypertension, mental disorders, pulmonary disorders and stroke.

<sup>9</sup> *The Power of Prevention: Chronic Disease... the Public Health Challenge of the 21st Century* (Atlanta, GA: National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2009), <http://www.cdc.gov/chronicdisease/pdf/2009-Power-of-Prevention.pdf> (accessed February 4, 2010).

The full report is available at [www.cefs.ncsu.edu](http://www.cefs.ncsu.edu).

## Recommendations at a Glance

### **ENGAGE Decision Makers in Strategic Food-Systems Planning and Implementation**

- 1.1. ► Establish and implement a statewide food policy advisory council.
- 1.2. Establish local and/or regional food policy councils.
- 1.3. Develop statewide food-systems procurement goals and baseline assessments.

### **COORDINATE Food-Systems Policies and Regulations**

- 2.1. ► Appoint a state-level food-systems ombudsman.

### **GROW New and Transitioning Farmers and Secure Prime Farmland**

- 3.1. ► Dedicate permanent and significant funding for the N.C. Agricultural Development and Farmland Preservation Trust Fund.
- 3.2. Amend tax policies to create incentives for farmers and revenue for local governments.
- 3.3. Provide risk-management and disaster-assistance programs for farmers to close gaps in coverage.
- 3.4. Fund programs to conduct farmer health care education and outreach.
- 3.5. Expand and provide greater support for farmer training and mentorship programs through N.C. Cooperative Extension.

### **EXPAND Local Market Opportunities**

- 4.1. ► Help network direct-marketing initiatives statewide.
- 4.2. ► Establish goals for state procurement of local food.
- 4.3. ► Develop a model farm-to-institution program that addresses barriers to procurement for institutional markets.
- 4.4. Conduct an assessment of local food-system infrastructure needs.
- 4.5. Invest in business planning and management support for local food and farming enterprises.
- 4.6. Provide “patient capital” to food and farming enterprises.
- 4.7. Expand local-food job-training opportunities.
- 4.8. Adopt legislation to support contract fairness for producers.
- 4.9. Advocate at the federal level to support small-scale, diversified farmers in the adoption of food-safety protocols.

### **CULTIVATE Community Gardens Statewide**

- 5.1. ► Fund a statewide coordinator and other activities of the N.C. Community Garden Partners (NCCGP).

### **STRENGTHEN Local Government Initiatives**

- 6.1. Formalize policies that dedicate vacant land to promote farm, garden, market and infrastructure development.
- 6.2. Develop a county agricultural economic development and farmland protection plan.
- 6.3. Employ agricultural economic and food-systems development staff.
- 6.4. Invest in needed processing and other food-systems infrastructure.
- 6.5. Address land-use and zoning ordinances.
- 6.6. Purchase conservation easements to protect farmland.
- 6.7. Promote local food system businesses and special events.
- 6.8. Buy locally produced and locally processed food.

### **ADDRESS Public Health and Food Access Disparities**

- 7.1. ► Expand and strengthen North Carolina’s SNAP-Ed Programming.
- 7.2. Support and expand EBT use at direct-market venues.
- 7.3. Coordinate and enhance statewide emergency food distribution opportunities.
- 7.4. Coordinate existing nutrition education programs.

### **INCREASE Consumer Education and Outreach**

- 8.1. ► Launch an “Eat 10% Local, Sustainable Food” Campaign.

### **PROMOTE Farm-to-School Programming and Engage Youth**

- 9.1. ► Develop a model farm-to-school pre-service teacher instruction program.
- 9.2. ► Develop a teen-focused social network around food systems.
- 9.3. Expand 4-H curriculum to include a focus on sustainable food systems.
- 9.4. Support youth leadership development.

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