LOCAL FOOD SYSTEMS IN NORTH CAROLINA:
ADVANCING AND PROMOTING COMMUNITY ECONOMIC
DEVELOPMENT, PUBLIC HEALTH, AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

by

Helen Dombalis

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Approved by:

Michael Foster, Professor,
Maternal and Child Health Department

Alice Ammerman, Director, Center
for Health Promotion and Disease
Prevention
Abstract

As one of its five aims, the Gillings Sustainable Local Food Systems Project at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill conducted case studies of seven counties using local food systems for community economic development. A local food system refers to a community approach to food production and consumption. With a diversified landscape and demographic and with farms transitioning away from growing tobacco, North Carolina provides an excellent backdrop for studying such local food systems. The case studies use the “community capitals framework” (Cornelia and Jan Flora) for assessing the economic developments realized through the local food systems and how these positive outcomes are achieved. Additionally, the paper highlights challenges in such processes. The findings offer institutions, organizations, and public officials insight into to policies and programs that can promote and conserve such successful local food systems. This masters paper presents one of the seven case studies, the Halifax County case study.

Research question: How are rural (or formerly rural) communities in NC transitioning from tobacco and using local food production systems and distribution networks to create positive community economic development outcomes and to advance public health and social justice? What are the barriers and facilitators?

Keywords: local food system, community economic development, sustainable agriculture, North Carolina, farmers markets, community gardens, public health, social justice, Community Supported Agriculture
Overview of North Carolina

At 560 miles long, North Carolina is the longest state in the U.S. east of the Mississippi River.¹ This distance yields variability in elevation, temperature, and soil type: cooler temperatures and rocky soils in the mountains give way to warmer temperatures and softer soils at the coast.² Thus, the state offers examples of local food systems thriving under various conditions.³ Additionally, the racial and ethnic makeup of North Carolina’s nearly 9.4 million people makes it somewhat demographically unique in the U.S. — nearly 22% of the population is African American and 7% of Hispanic or Latino origin, and these percentages are much higher in some counties in the state.⁴ With a population density of 165.2 people per square mile and 14.6% poverty rate in 2008, compared to the rest of the nation NC is rural with a low socioeconomic status.⁵ Additionally, North Carolina ranks as the ninth most food insecure state in the U.S, which is a measure of when “access to adequate food is limited by lack of money and other resources.”⁶

With an extensive agricultural industry, individuals and organizations including public officials (e.g., county commissioners and Cooperative Extension Service agents), economic development agencies, and 22 land trusts are in various capacities involved with promoting and protecting agriculture and transitions away from tobacco production. In 2007, 2,622 farms grew 170,083 acres and harvested nearly 366 million pounds of tobacco, making it by far the largest tobacco producing state in the nation.⁷ Agriculture remains pivotal to the state’s well being. In 2010, agriculture is the largest industry in North Carolina, accounting for nearly one quarter of the state’s income and 22 percent of the work force.⁸
Overview of Local Food Systems

A local food system connects producers to consumers in a geographic area and includes the processing and distribution processes for getting food from farm and fishery to table. Additionally, public officials and agencies, community leaders and organizations promote, protect, and participate in such systems.

Geographic Areas of Local Food Systems

Words like “organic” and “natural” have become increasingly mainstream in the national food system in recent years. Despite federal regulation, Americans are confused about what these terms mean and how to make informed purchasing decisions. Similarly, buying “local” is ever more popular. However, “local” holds various meanings. For example, the Carrboro Farmers Market (Orange County) only allows vendors to sell products from within a 50-mile radius. Chatham Marketplace in nearby Pittsboro (Chatham County) deems anything from up to 250 miles from the cooperative grocery as “local”. Rice from across the border in South Carolina can be sold as “local”. In the western part of the state, the Appalachian Sustainable Agriculture Project uses a regional rather than mile-specific designation. At the federal level, in the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008 (the Farm Bill) “local” is defined as “less than 400 miles from its origin, or within the State in which it is produced.”

Components of Local Food Systems

At their core, local food systems involve the food producers: farmers, growers, and fishers. Additionally, these systems include not only the consumers but also processors, distributors, and vendors and individuals and organizations advancing the systems.
Producers distribute food to consumers in various ways. First, they may sell directly to consumers through farm and seafood stands, stores, pick-your-own operations, and farmers markets. Some farmers and fishers use Community Supported Agriculture (CSAs) and Community Supported Fisheries (CSFs). In these models, consumers pay for “shares” of the harvest at the beginning of a season. This arrangement helps cover upfront costs the farmer or fisher incurs (e.g., seeds, nets, fuel). Additionally, CSAs and CSFs serve as a safety net for the producers. Regardless of what happens to the harvest, whether a natural distance or a bountiful supply of food, the farmers and fishers are not alone in paying expenses.

Second, producers sell to businesses including grocery stores and restaurants. In more developed systems, distributors link producers to businesses. Processors may add value to products, for example turning fruits in jams and pies. Third, producers market to institutions such as schools and hospitals. Such programs are burgeoning across the nation.

While producers in local food systems frequently sell their harvests, some donate products to those in need. Furthermore, some local food systems include community gardens in which food is typically grown not for selling but for consumption by growers and for donations. Finally, institutions, public officials, organizations, and community leaders are involved in local food systems. Community colleges and universities educate students about the rationale behind producing for and buying from local communities. Cooperative Extension Services, county commissioners, economic development councils, land trusts, and other organizations develop policies and programs that advance and conserve local food systems.
Trends in Local Food Systems

Producing for and purchasing from local food systems is growing in popularity. In ten years, for example, dollar sales doubled for “direct-to-consumer marketing,” from $551 million in 1997 to $1.2 billion in 2007. Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) programs also have blossomed from just two in 1986 to 400 in 2001 to 1,144 in 2005. The number of farmers markets has grown from 1,755 in 1994 to 5,274 in 2009. Farm-to-school programs are becoming more prominent. The number grew from two in 1996-1997 to 400 in 2004 and 2,095 in 2009.

Methods

The methodology for the project involved seven steps. First, we determined the extent of North Carolina’s local food system initiatives. Second, we sorted these activities based on geographic location and also based on defining characteristics (e.g., policy, public health). Third, we determined the unit of analysis for the case studies and fourth selected these locations. Fifth, using a framework for assessing community economic development, we collected primary and secondary data for each case. In the final two steps, we analyzed findings as individual cases and then compared and contrasted these overall conclusions.

Initial Research to Broadly Identify the Local Food Movement in North Carolina

To select counties for case studies, we identified the extent and diversity of local food system activities occurring throughout the state. We used a key informant process and snowball sampling combined with secondary data online research. First, four well-known leaders in the local food movement in the state were contacted: Nancy Creamer, Director of North Carolina State University’s Center for Environmental Farming.
Systems; Charlie Jackson, Executive Director of the Appalachian Sustainable Agriculture Project; Roland McReynolds, Executive Director of the Carolina Farm Stewardship Association; and Charlie Thompson, Director of Duke University’s Center for Documentary Studies. These individuals were asked to recommend other people to interview and projects to explore. Additionally, we asked about the history and depth of their local food systems work. How did your organization start? What positive outcomes were achieved? What challenges did you face?

Then, using snowball sampling methods, more individuals were interviewed. Simultaneously, online research explored NC’s local food movement. In total, we interviewed nearly 30 people and identified over 200 local food system initiatives. The snowball sampling process was terminated when the information being given became repetitious.

Organizing the Descriptive Data – Geographic Location and Defining Characteristics

Following the data collection and with a wealth of information, we selected seven counties for case studies. First, we grouped the over 200 local food system programs and projects by county, and counties with multiple initiatives were identified.

Determination of the Unit of Analysis

Since a local food system is rarely a single city or town, this unit of analysis was too small. In contrast, the research team felt regional case studies (encompassing 20 or more counties) would lack depth. One aim of the case studies was to explore the role public officials play in local food systems related to community economic development. Therefore, although local food systems are rarely limited to county boundaries and are in fact usually regional efforts, we selected the county as the level of analysis.
Selection of Counties for Case Studies

The research team then selected seven counties representing the diversity of the state’s regions and people: Buncombe, Carteret, Chatham, Durham, Halifax, Pender, and Warren. As the following table shows, these counties represent the geographic and demographic diversity of North Carolina.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Counties</th>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Population Density</th>
<th>Socioeconomic Status</th>
<th>Size (Square Miles)</th>
<th>White Persons</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Buncombe</td>
<td>Mountains</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>Tier 3</td>
<td>655.99</td>
<td>90.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carteret</td>
<td>Coast</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>Tier 3</td>
<td>519.84</td>
<td>90.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chatham</td>
<td>Piedmont</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>Tier 3</td>
<td>682.85</td>
<td>83.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Durham</td>
<td>Piedmont</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>Tier 3</td>
<td>290.32</td>
<td>56.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Halifax</td>
<td>Coast</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>Tier 1</td>
<td>725.36</td>
<td>41.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pender</td>
<td>Coast</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>Tier 2</td>
<td>870.67</td>
<td>79.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warren</td>
<td>Piedmont</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>Tier 1</td>
<td>428.7</td>
<td>40.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Regions, Population Densities, and Socioeconomic Statuses of the Seven Case Study Counties

Framework for Data Collection

Having selected a unit of analysis, the project began to assemble information on the outcomes of the food systems. This step involved identifying the key outcomes of local food systems. Following the work of sociologists Cornelia and Jan Flora’s work,25 we organized the outcomes in groups: natural, cultural, human, social, political, financial, and built capitals. These measures are useful in answering questions about a food system’s contribution to community economic development (CED). The following table summarizes these outcomes, collectively the “Community Capitals Framework.”26

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcome</th>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>Measure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Natural capital</td>
<td>Healthy ecosystems with multiple community benefits</td>
<td>Landscape, scenery, outdoor recreation opportunities, soils, air quality, water quality, wildlife, vegetation preserved, conserved or restored; land development policies adopted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural capital</td>
<td>Cultural consciousness</td>
<td>New community festivals, attention to cultural celebrations as part of school and public park activities, use of diverse cultural images, foods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outcome</td>
<td>Indicator</td>
<td>Measure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human capital</td>
<td>Use of the skills and abilities of local residents: critical thinking, innovation, problem solving, initiative, responsibility, innovation</td>
<td>New skills acquired, new training programs established; health care improved; childcare improved; youth and adult education improved; workforce improved; community population and median age changes post-CED effort</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social capital</td>
<td>Networks, communication, cooperation, trust</td>
<td>New groups involved and partners in CED; new groups formed from CED effort; more community cooperation; increased local and non-local participation; local strategic plan formed; new leaders; more effective leaders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political capital</td>
<td>Ability to secure resources through elected officials</td>
<td>New community and government connections at various levels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial capital</td>
<td>Appropriately diverse and vital economies</td>
<td>New financial instruments established, new bond issues passed; outside funding obtained to improve infrastructure and business development; poverty reduction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Built capital</td>
<td>Diverse and vital physical infrastructure</td>
<td>Infrastructure improved and strengthened (including telecommunications, education facilities; government buildings; community buildings; transportation; business district; health care facilities; industrial park; indoor recreation facilities; cultural facilities; housing; churches; city services; energy services, etc.)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Flora’s “Community Capitals Framework”

This diagram depicts what results when the “capitals” combine:

Flora’s “Community Capitals Framework”

*Primary and Secondary Data Collection for the Case Studies*

After selecting case studies, we gathered primary and secondary data for each county. Secondary data through online research provided information about the local food system. We searched U.S. Census data, county websites the Local Harvest (http://www.localharvest.org/), and the American Community Gardening Association site (http://acga.localharvest.org/). Additionally, we searched for each county and the words “local food,” “farmers market,” “community garden,” “farmer,” “fisher,” and “grower.”
For the primary data collection, we interviewed the following stakeholders in each country: Cooperative Extension, county commissioners, the economic development council/commission, organizations, businesses, community college (and when applicable universities), the land trust/conservancy, farmers markets, community gardens, and producers. We asked each interviewee about the local food system in the county. Additionally, to yield a triangulated research strategy and a multi-stakeholder perspective, snowball sampling was implemented to identify any additional individuals to interview. On average, we interviewed about 20 people by phone or in person for each case study. Emails and phone calls were used for any follow-up questions that arose.

Data Analysis and Structure of the Case Studies

Upon completion of data collection, the information was analyzed and organized into case studies, each with three primary sections: the local food system, outcomes, and discussion of the process of forming the system. First, the local food system section outlines the aforementioned components of a local food system. Second, the outcomes section highlights the results of the local food system’s presence. For example, did unique partnerships form or did the county design a logo for specialty crops? With each outcome listed, the relevant measures of “capital” are noted. For example, when partnerships were formed, human and social capital resulted. And if public officials were involved, the partnership also might have had influenced political capital. Third, the analysis section of each case study synthesizes the lessons learned, discussing what had to happen for the local food system to come together, how outcomes were achieved, and challenges faced. Finally, the analysis concludes with a look at the future of the county’s food system.
Case Study Conclusions

Following the case studies, compiles the findings from across the state and explores similarities and differences in the experiences with local food systems in the seven counties studied. What common outcomes are achieved through local food systems in various counties? What challenges are familiar to agricultural and fishing communities throughout North Carolina? Lastly, the conclusion offers an exploration of unique circumstances and differences in the experiences in various counties and aims to flesh out how factors including geographic location and demographics play a role.

Case Study: Halifax County

Located in the northeastern part of the state on the border with Virginia, Halifax County is rural\(^9\) with a relatively low socioeconomic status, a large population of African Americans and Americans Indians,\(^{10}\) and a history of challenging environmental and social injustices.\(^{31,32}\) Midway between Florida and New York along Interstate-95 on the eastern seaboard,\(^{33}\) Halifax refers to itself as the "center of commerce". Agriculture is the focus of economic development.\(^{34}\) Large farms growing commodity row crops like corn, soybeans, and peanuts that are sold outside the county and the region dominate the landscape.\(^{35,36}\) Farmers that grew tobacco have for the most part transitioned to other row crops.\(^{37}\)

In the last few years the local food system in Halifax blossomed and already has generated community gardens that feed the disadvantaged; events, a film, and a museum to celebrate the county's agricultural heritage; marketing through social media; partnerships with regional producers and consumers; and successful efforts to challenge industrial agriculture and protect the community's well being. Empowered communities
and an active public sector emphasize public health and social justice in their food system, create new markets in a regional food system, and form unique partnerships while maintaining ties to the agricultural history.

However, these successes have not gone without challenges. The county's strong ties to industrial agriculture, rural location, limited economic resources, inadequate infrastructure, and aging population make expansion of the local food system difficult. Despite these hurdles, committed leaders have plans to extend the system.

**Halifax County At-a-Glance**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Population (2009 est.)</th>
<th>54,58238</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unique circumstances</td>
<td>• Home to a chicken hatchery and several growers for the national company Perdue Farms40 41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Fourth poorest county in the state42 43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Home to the Haliwa-Saponi Indian Tribe (along with Warren County)44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Over half of the population is African American45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Home of one of the state's prison farm46 47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Interstate-95 passes through the county48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Agriculture is the county's largest industry49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farms</td>
<td>96 farms from 1-49 acres50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**The Local Food System in Halifax County**

Compared to other counties, Halifax's food system is smaller and more limited, with its historical roots in large-scale row crop agriculture playing a large role. Recently, an expanded number of farmers started growing produce for sale locally at roadside stands, stores, and the county's farmers market, which the Cooperative Extension manages. The county is home to the state's only operational prison farm. Finally,
several organizations advocate for social justice in the food system, focusing on sustainable farming practices that are beneficial for the environment and public health and on starting gardens to feed the hungry.

Farmer and Grower to Consumer (Pick-Your-Own, Farm Stands, and Stores)

- For over 20 years, Oak Grove Orchard in the town of Halifax has been raising produce on about 10 acres of land and selling it at a roadside stand.\(^{51}\)
- Happy Acres Farm in Roanoke Rapids sells fresh fruit and raises goats.\(^{52,53}\)
- The owner of Nature’s Manna, a health foods store in Roanoke Rapids, grows produce for himself and “walk-ins.”\(^{54}\)
- Primarily selling roadside, Plants and Things Nursery in Brinkleyville grows hydroponic vegetables in a greenhouse and has pick-your-own strawberries.\(^{55}\)

Farmer and Grower to Retail (Businesses that Buy from the Local Food System)

- Since its start in 1999, David’s Restaurant in Roanoke Rapids in 1999 has been purchasing produce and pecans from Halifax growers on a seasonal basis.\(^{56}\)
- For the last three years, Richard Grant, Jr. has organically grown fruits and vegetables on about an acre of land at his home in Tillery.\(^{57}\) In 2010 he tried selling his watermelons at a locally owned grocery store in Halifax but without much success.\(^{58}\)
- Aunt Ruby’s Peanuts in Enfield sells “Virginia style peanuts that are known for lower fat content, large meaty size, and excellent flavor and texture” across the nation.\(^{59}\) Some of the peanuts come from Halifax farms.\(^{60}\)
- Dockery Group LLC grows specialty crops including East Indian and Oriental vegetables in Hobgood and sells them to ethnic markets in Cary (Wake County).\(^{61}\)
Farmers Markets

- The Roanoke Valley Farmers Market in Roanoke Rapids that has up to 15 vendors in the high season is housed in a building owned by the county and is run by the Halifax Agriculture Extension Agent.62

- Started in 2010, the Haliwa-Saponi Farmers Market in Hollister has an average of four to five vendors from Halifax and Warren Counties and was created by the Indian Tribe living in these two counties.63 64

Community Gardens

- In March 2010, Union Mission of Roanoke Rapids, which provides services for homeless men, started a community garden.65

- In 2009, the First Baptist Church in Scotland Neck had a community garden to feed community members and homeless men at Union Mission and women and children at Faith House in Enfield.66 67

- Open Minded Seniors (OMS) started a garden at the community center in Tillery.68

Community Supported Agriculture

- Halifax County does not have any farms offering CSAs.69

- Located in neighboring Northampton County, Stateline Berry Farm markets its produce to Halifax residents and prides itself on being “the first farm in the Halifax-Northampton County [area] to offer a CSA.”70

Institutions Involved in the Local Food System (Cooperative Extension, County, Community College, and State Prison)

- The Halifax Cooperative Extension Service has several agents for agriculture, including agents for small farm management and horticulture.71
- **Halifax County** owns the building that houses the farmers market and the Agriculture Extension agent manages the market.\(^{72}\)

- **Halifax Community College** in Weldon has a Food Service Technology program in which students are encouraged to purchase locally grown foods.\(^{73}\)\(^{74}\)

- Since 1892, the **Caledonia State Prison Farm** in Tillery served as the state’s prison farm, growing and canning food for 73 North Carolina prisons. Worked by the inmates, the farm grows produce and raises chickens on about 5,500 acres of the Caledonia Correctional Institution’s 7,500 total acres.\(^{75}\)\(^{76}\) In 2010, the farm started leasing some of its land to Halifax farmers.\(^{77}\)

- Halifax does not currently have any farm to school programs.\(^{78}\)

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**Organizations Committed to Promoting, Protecting, and Producing for the Local Food System**

- The mission of **Concerned Citizens of Tillery (CCT)** is “to promote and improve the social, economic, and educational welfare of the citizens of Tillery and the surrounding community area through the self-development of its members”\(^{79}\) and “provides a voice for rural environmental racism issues especially around hog farms.”\(^{80}\)\(^{81}\)

- The nonprofit **Black Farmers and Agriculturalists Association (BFAA)** in Tillery aims to address black land loss and racial discrimination by the U.S. Department of Agriculture.\(^{82}\) See Appendix A for a list of facts about black farmers and land loss.

- **Hollister R.E.A.C.H.** in Hollister “exists to improve and promote the educational, social and economic welfare of the citizens of Halifax and Warren Counties.”\(^{83}\) In 2010, the nonprofit started a garden for the Youth Program.\(^{84}\)
Processing Facility

- In November 2010, Empire Foods broke ground on a food processing facility that will produce for institutional markets including the military. When possible, the company plans to purchase from local farmers and growers.85 86 87 88

Outcomes in the Local Food System in Halifax County

Started Gardens to Financially Support and Feed Disadvantaged Community Members Human, Social, Financial, and Built Capital

In recent years, several community gardens were created to ameliorate food insecurity.

- Open Minded Seniors (OMS) manage a community garden, using produce for weekly meetings and personal use.99

- The garden at Union Mission was founded to address hunger among and provide financial assistance (through produce sales at a roadside stand) for homeless men.90 The garden at First Baptist Church fed homeless men and women and the elderly.91

Created a Film, Events, and a Museum to Celebrate the County’s Agricultural Roots Cultural and Financial Capital

Halifax County celebrates its rich history in agriculture and an ongoing presence in the fields.

- With students at Duke University’s Center for Documentary Studies (Durham County), the Concerned Citizens of Tillery made the documentary film We Shall Not Be Moved.92 It captures the history of the Resettlement community, a “product of a New Deal program offering landless sharecroppers a chance to buy their own farms.”93
• For nearly two decades, each October the county’s Cooperative Extension hosts a **Harvest Day Festival** that displays antique tractors and other farm equipment, showcases heritage agricultural activities, and hosts local vendors.  

• On the same day as the festival, the **Harvest Days 5K** raises money to support the Cooperative Extension’s educational programs.  

• The **Halifax County Agricultural Museum** displays items and photographs from the county’s agricultural past.  

• October 2010 marked the first **SAVE THE LAND: Black Farmers & Landowners Benefit & Rally**, hosted by the Black Farmers and Agriculturalists Association in Tillery “to bring awareness to the continued struggle of black farmers and landowners and to raise funds to build the establishment of a money fund to support them.” **See Appendix A for facts about black farmers and land loss.**

*Marketed the Local Food System through Social Media and the Internet*

*Built and Financial Capital*

People in the county are using **facebook and the Internet** to promote the local food system.

• The Cooperative Extension uses facebook to share information about the county’s farmers market. Explains Agriculture Agent Matt Stevens, “we have a limited budget for advertising so I was just looking for another free outlet to get the word out.”

• Stateline Berry Farm uses facebook to promote its CSA and to communicate with shareholders.
When Matthews searched online for farms in Halifax County and found only a few, he added to ncfarmfresh.com, the NC Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services website for marketing. He also sells products through the farm’s website.  

**Formed Partnerships with Regional Producers and Relationships with Neighboring Consumers**

**Social and Financial Capital**

With a small but increasing number of produce growers, Halifax extended beyond county lines to form its current food system.

- While most vendors are from Halifax, some of the growers at the farmers market are from neighboring counties.  
- After nearly 20 years in operation with a roadside stand, Oak Grove Orchard now sells to residents of VA as well as the northern and coastal regions.

**Successfully Challenged Industrial Agriculture and Created an Intensive Livestock Ordinance**

**Political, Natural, and Social Capital**

Concerned Citizens of Tillery (CCT)’s activities promoted agriculture that emphasizes public health and environmental justice.

- In the early 1990s, CCT successfully challenged an industrial hog farm wanting to locate in Tillery.  
- In 1992, the organization wrote and put into effect the state’s first Intensive Livestock Ordinance. The primary purpose of this ordinance is “[r]egulating and controlling intensive livestock operations in order to prevent, or allow abating of, conditions associated with intensive livestock operations which may be detrimental to the health of the citizens.”
Protected Farmland through an Easement
Natural Capital

The Tar River Land Conservancy works in Halifax County.\textsuperscript{107}

- One cotton grower worked with the Conservancy to create an easement for 75 acres.\textsuperscript{108}

Discussion of Community Economic Development, Public Health, and Social Justice: What We Can Conclude by Analyzing Halifax County’s Food System

The outcomes of Halifax’s food system reflect individual and organizational efforts. Communities are inspired to realize healthy, just food systems and maintain an agricultural heritage. While the Cooperative Extension promotes local products, entrepreneurial leaders create opportunities, forming partnerships, and establishing regional relationships that help extend the county’s food system.

Cooperative Extension Actively Promoting the Local Food System and Educating Growers

Historically, since Halifax is home to large commercial farms, the majority of the produce sold at the farmers market was grown outside the county. Market vendors would often come from neighboring counties or would live in Halifax but travel to the farmers market in the state’s capital city of Raleigh to purchase wholesale produce for resale at the county’s market.\textsuperscript{109,110} Recognizing the market’s “bad reputation” among locals and wanting to support local producers, the county tasked its Agriculture Extension Agent with managing the market.\textsuperscript{111} As Agent Matt Stevens explains, “we had to get farmers back on our side,” showing them how to rebuild the market as a place to buy locally grown produce.\textsuperscript{112} Vendors must now be “certified,” which means that Stevens visits the farm to confirm what is being grown.\textsuperscript{113} Vendors can still “supplement to some degree
from a neighboring farm," since their harvest might not be available for the entire market season.\textsuperscript{114}

Along with transforming the farmers market, the Cooperative Extension serves these growers through education. For example, Oak Grove Orchard uses Extension services for help with testing soil and for purchasing supplies.\textsuperscript{115} Grower Richard Grant, Jr. used the Service for assistance in controlling grass and other weeds.\textsuperscript{116}

\textit{Connecting Today's Local Food System to its Agricultural History}

Those producing for Halifax's food system are especially linked to its rich farming past. Nearly all of the growers interviewed for this case study grew up on a farm\textsuperscript{117} \textsuperscript{118} \textsuperscript{119} or inherited a family farm.\textsuperscript{120} These growers explain that "being born and raised on a farm"\textsuperscript{121} led to their current presence in fields and gardens. Also, the Caledonia State Prison Farm has extensive roots, dating back well over a century. Founded "[w]ith the intent of putting inmates to work," prisoners work the land and contribute to their own food system.\textsuperscript{122} \textsuperscript{123}

The history of Tillery's agricultural land motivates its community members to protect it. Citizens struggle to maintain the land's integrity. In the early 1990s, the Concerned Citizens of Tillery successfully went up against an industrial hog farm wanting to locate in the community and created an ordinance for intensive livestock.\textsuperscript{124}

\textit{Individuals and Organizations Advancing Public Health and Social Justice through the Local Food System}

While traditional row crops produced with commercial fertilizers predominate, a few small-scale growers emphasize the health benefits of local food. Richard Grant, Jr. notes his motivation was health-based: "my mom was sick so I tried to cook healthy...try to keep it as organic as possible."\textsuperscript{125} Similarly, Cecil Pearson, owner of the health foods
store Nature’s Manna, grows produce without pesticides, fungicides, and commercial fertilizers.\textsuperscript{126} The Haliwa-Saponi Farmers Market was started to address chronic health conditions among Tribal members. In the spring of 2009, the Tribe received a Health Disparities Initiative Grant from the NC Health and Wellness Trust Fund to address heart disease and diabetes, $250 of which was used to make signs for a new farmers market.\textsuperscript{127}\textsuperscript{128} Finally, although the county’s Diabetes Action Plan has not historically emphasized local foods, Health Education Supervisor Laura Ellis with the Health Department, said that local foods “could become a priority based on the 2010 results” from the Community Health Assessment\textsuperscript{129} and that they “look forward to partnering with community gardens in the future.”\textsuperscript{130}

Along with public health, achieving social justice was the motivation for food system initiatives. Reverend LaCount Anderson helped form a couple of community gardens to feed and financially support homeless men, women, and children and the elderly.\textsuperscript{131} The community organization Hollister R.E.A.C.H. started a garden for its Youth Program.\textsuperscript{132} At the policy level, Concerned Citizens of Tillery (CCT) has a history of challenging environmental injustices and industrial agriculture\textsuperscript{133} and in 2010 started discussing impacts from Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations (CAFOs) and industrial hog farms with the national nonprofit Food and Water Watch.\textsuperscript{134} \textsuperscript{135}

\textit{Extending the Regional Reach of the Food System through Close Proximity to Interstate-95 and a Partnership with a National Food Processor}

As a rural county, Halifax producers face challenges in accessing a regional customer base. Interstate-95 passes through the county and is cited as an advantage. Although created for the Indian Tribe, Karen Lynch Harley with the Haliwa-Saponi Farmers Market says travelers on I-95 sometimes shop at the market.\textsuperscript{136} County
Commissioner Rives Manning notes that I-95 yields “good transportation costs and access” up and down the eastern seaboard. As a result, national companies located in Halifax including Perdue Farms chicken and Reser’s Fine Foods salads. Cathy Scott with the Economic Development Commission notes that because of its rural location, “we have to build our own region and take advantage of natural assets to help us.”

In September 2010 the national company Empire Foods announced plans to open a food processing facility in Halifax and to add 200 jobs. As Commissioner Manning (who is also a member of the Board of Directors for the Economic Development Commission) explains, the facility will “take farm produce and give it a shelf life of up to 12 months without refrigeration,” marketing products to the military and institutions including schools and prisons. Although in its first year the company will not be able to entirely meet its needs with local products, its ultimate goal is to source locally.

Working Together as Empowered, Supportive Communities

Halifax towns are united to improve their harvests. In a Sunday school class at First Baptist Church, Reverend LaCount Anderson asked students “How can we reach out to people? Do you think a community garden is something we could do?” He goes on: “Before the end of the hour, I had a tractor and four acres of land.” A Baptist church in Cary (Wake County) “got wind of [the Union Mission community garden] and drove [to Halifax] to donate.” Then, the community efforts extended from the garden to the table; “we would be neighborly and take some tomatoes over to the house[s] of [the elderly]...and I had one rule: if you take some you give some away...so we had people going out in the garden picking vegetables and also giving to countless other people.”
On larger scale, the organization Families Supporting Families gets food donations from local farmers: “Our farmers make sure we’re taken care of...they know there is a lot of need.”\(^\text{152}\) Also, Happy Acres Farms lets the 4-H students borrow goats for showing events in the capital city Raleigh.\(^\text{153}\)

As another example, Gary Grant devoted himself to the struggles faced by Tillery residents, black farmers, and other disadvantaged groups, uniting passionate self-starters. The organizations he is involved with (the Concerned Citizens of Tillery, the Black Farmers and Agriculturalists Association, and the North Carolina Environmental Justice Network) bring people together through discussions, rallies, and events.\(^\text{154}\) As a newcomer in 2010, Willie Wright quickly noticed that in Halifax, “communities take it upon themselves to get the job done, and they push the local government to get their jobs done.”\(^\text{155}\)

**Innovative Leaders Creating Lucrative Markets and Forging Unique Partnerships**

When John C. Dockery inherited his family’s farm, he started growing “conventional veggies...okra, cabbage, blueberries” and “wasn’t able to make any sales because...[his produce] was a large duplication of products being offered.”\(^\text{156}\) After an interest meeting at NC Agricultural and Technical State University on specialty crops, Dockery found his niche in East Indian and Asian vegetables. At a farmers market in Pitt County (separated from Halifax by Edgecombe County), he “notice[d] the Indian community was underserved.”\(^\text{157}\) Based on a recommendation from Indian customers, he now sells primarily in Cary (Wake County) at the Triangle Indian Market. Along with finding out what to grow and where to sell, Dockery took time to learn how to sell. He explains, “[y]ou need to know the culture base too...I used to have a Vietnamese woman...
complain about the presentation...I had [the produce] in vats and they wanted it displayed out on the ground [like in their home countries]."158

Similarly, other farmers fashioned distinct markets for themselves. The owner of David’s Restaurant does not seek out locally grown products; the farmers “just stop by” and he buys local because “food in season just tastes better.”159 Looking for an “emotional outlet” from her job as a critical care nurse, Kathy Barnhill started a small greenhouse for hydroponic vegetables and plants.160 Although her operation has since expanded to a larger greenhouse and some outdoor farming, she still uses the original four-gallon white buckets she collected from an ice cream shop, which she saved from going to the landfill.161

Reverend Anderson is another creative leader. He took the initiative to propose community gardens at local churches and built partnerships to make the gardens possible. The Union Mission garden was located on a piece of town land and used water from a fire hydrant, both available through permission granted from the town council. First Baptist Church planted its garden under the power lines operated by Dominion Power & Light; “we all benefited...they don’t have to cut the grass and we get to plant a garden.”162

_Facing Challenges: Ties to the Industrialized Food System, a Rural Location, Limited Resources, Lacking Infrastructure, and an Aging Population_

Halifax’s food system is dominated by industrial agriculture. Nearly three-quarters of its farms (269 of its 365 farms) receive government payments for growing commodity crops that predominantly travel outside the region for integration into the processed national food system. Although formerly one of the state’s leading tobacco producers,163 in 2010 there were just 3,050 acres of tobacco planted.164 As Commissioner
Manning explains, “they switched to corn and cotton.” The county is also home to a chicken hatchery and growers for the national company Perdue Farms.

Farmers that are not part of this national system are smaller in scale and try to reach their local consumer base. However, since Halifax is rural, Joyce Kight of Oak Grove Orchard notes “it takes a while to get people to know about you.” Additionally, despite operating on Wednesdays its first season to avoid “competition” with the Roanoke Valley Farmers Market, the Haliwa-Saponi market is struggling. It hopes its application to accept WIC Farmers Market Nutrition Program (FMNP) and Senior FMNP vouchers will be approved for the 2011 season because “that would make or break whether or not we are successful because we are in a small, rural area not around anything.” Ultimately, income from farming alone does not suffice for many producers and they thus work second non-agricultural jobs.

Along with the presence of industrial agriculture and a rural location, Halifax faces socioeconomic disadvantages and is the state’s fourth poorest county. Explaining the motivation behind the community gardens, Reverend Anderson says “for people in eastern NC, the money just doesn’t make it to the end of the month, and many times we run out of food.” While the addition of jobs through industries and businesses has been helpful, as of 2010 Halifax has “about 13-14% unemployment, 27-28% on Medicaid, [and] about 33% using social services.” These numbers are even higher for certain segments of the county’s population including the Haliwa-Saponi Indians. (See Appendix B for facts about the disproportionate challenges faced by the Tribe.) Tribal member and Warren County Commissioner Barry Richardson relates these
socioeconomic hardships to the food system: “Most people [in the Tribe] don’t have a lot of land and don’t have the resources to plant.”

The challenges for Halifax extend into lack of infrastructure for distribution and food processing. Restaurant owner David Watson admits “[w]e can’t always get enough [locally] to fill our needs right when we need it.” Although the products may be available somewhere in the county, the distribution system is not set up to meet demand. Farmer John C. Dockery says retail stores “still don’t take me seriously... I take my [food] in bags and loose and not weighed... I would have to install infrastructure to weigh and label,” which he says northeastern NC lacks. Then, there is always the issue of refrigeration, which is costly. Why does Dockery choose to sell wholesale, which gives him a lower price? “Farmers markets are nice, road stands are nice, if you have the family structure that can support it... I take less money but can move [all the produce] at once.”

The new Empire Foods facility will help address these issues for institutional markets willing to consume processed foods, but for households wanting fresh produce, lack of infrastructure will remain an issue in the county.

Finally, farmers across the country are aging; in 2010, the average age of an American farmer is 57. Not only are Halifax farmers not an exception to this, but neither is its entire population. For example in Tillery, around 85% of residents are over age 60. In the county as a whole, 14.9% of the population is over age 65, two percent higher than both the state and national numbers, which makes attracting new farmers difficult. Grower Kathy Barnhill, who farms on her great-inlaws’ land, feels that small farmers in Halifax are a “dying breed.” Fortunately, new and young producer Richard
Grant, Jr. recently starting filling a “great niche” by farming in Tillery and selling in Halifax.\(^{180}\)

Making Plans to Expand Use of the Local Food System for Economic Development and to Continue to Advocate for this System to Be Socially Just

In the coming years, Halifax will see growth in its local food system. Cathy Scott, Executive Director for the Economic Development Commission, looks to the county’s recent past as a small version of what can be expected in the coming years. In 2010 alone she points out the 700 new jobs created in the food industry and highlights that “agriculture is one of our biggest economic drivers, so given our focus on food, that’s what we’re basing our future on.”\(^{181}\) As of November 2010, Halifax was in the final round for the North Carolina Rural Center’s Economic Innovation Fund, which if awarded “will help [the county] in developing a food-based economic development strategy...[including] identifying our supply chain opportunities.”\(^{182}\)

Reverend Anderson hopes to start community gardens at other churches, like those in Edenton and Ahoskie (Chowan and Hertford Counties respectively). He comments, “I am trying to get churches to use their dormant acreage...there’s plenty of place to grow gardens here.”\(^{183}\) Grower Richard Grant, Jr. foresees a growing demand for produce grown without pesticides as more people consider the health implications and he plans to “go bigger.”\(^{184}\) He is applying for a grant from the Rural Advancement Foundation-International (Chatham County) to make this possible.\(^{185}\)

Recommendations and Conclusion

While Halifax County has improved its food systems, the county has the capacity to further these gains. Making plans for the future of the county’s food system should take into consideration the fact that the county is home to a large population of low-income community
members with substantial health concerns. Expanding access to fresh, local foods may have benefits beyond economic development and public health. In a community with a history of environmental injustices, future local foods initiatives must seek community input and support. Additionally, recognizing the limited resources of farmers and community members in Halifax, community gardens could benefit the county. Not only would community gardens unite neighborhoods around commonly held goals but also simultaneously target the current lack of access to fresh foods that challenges some people in the community.

There are also opportunities for Halifax to integrate local food into already existing infrastructure and programming. First, Halifax Community College currently has a Greenhouse/Grounds Maintenance program in which students use the college’s greenhouses to grow annual flowers for sale to the community in the spring and fall. Much the same as Carteret County’s Community College’s Culinary program has done, Halifax could use their greenhouse production for growing produce for the college’s dining or for sale to the community at the farmers market or through a store.

Halifax County currently provides its communities with some locally grown and raised foods. Although the soil is not ideal, the mild climate supports a longer growing season than many other counties in the state. Additionally, Halifax has a knowledgeable and committed group of citizens and public officials striving to support the county’s economy, environment, and public health and to achieve social justice. Committed individuals combined with empowered communities and public-private and regional partnerships can further improve the food system.
Appendix A – Black Farmers Facts

- Between 1920 and 1992 the number of black farmers in the U.S. declined from 925,710 to 18,816 – or 98%.


- Between 1984 and 1985, the USDA lent over $1.3 billion to 16,000 farmers to buy land. Only 209 of those farmers were African American.

- In 1981, 48% of all black-operated farms were 50 acres or less.

- In 1981, only 4% of black farmers were under the age of 35.

- In North Carolina, there has been a 70% loss of farms and a decline of 67% black land ownership, nearly 300,000 acres or $1.2 billion dollars of lost assets to the African American community covering the years of the Pigford Class Action, 1981-1996.
Appendix B – Statistics about the Haliwa-Saponi Indian Tribe*

According to the 2000 Census, NC State 2005 statistics and a survey conducted by [the Haliwa-Saponi Indian Tribe] in 2004, the following is true for [the Haliwa-Saponi] community:

- Unemployment for the State is 5%, 8% for Halifax County and Warren County 7%. The unemployment rate in [the Haliwa-Saponi] community is 14% of the people seeking employment. Unemployment on the national level is 5.2%.

- According to the 2000 Census, education is lacking in [the Haliwa-Saponi] community. The state rate for people with a high school diploma is 70%. Halifax and Warren County’s rate is 53%, and according to [the Tribe’s] survey, [the] rate is 42%. The national rate is 84%.

- According to the 2000 Census, only 58% of [the] community own their own home (25% of those homes are mobile homes) compared to the state rate of 68%. In Halifax County overall, 65.3% of the population own their home and 76.4% for Warren County. On the national level 69% of the population owns their own home.

- [The Tribe’s] statistics show that 36% of [the] population lives in substandard housing compared to a county rate of 2% and a state rate of 1%.

- According to NC statistics, the median household income in the state is $35,320 compared to $24,741 for Halifax County and $23,025 for Warren County. The rate in [the Haliwa-Saponi] community is $18,507. The national level is $41,994.

- According to the 2000 Census, the poverty rate in the state is 12.6%. The national poverty rate is 12.1%. The Warren County Department of Social Services lists the poverty rate in Warren County at 23.4%. In Halifax County the poverty rate is 23.4%.[The Haliwa-Saponi Indian Tribe’s] poverty rate is 31% according to the local Department of Social Services.

*Although many of these statistics are outdated, they show strong disparities faced by the Haliwa-Saponi Indian Tribe in unemployment, education, home ownership, housing conditions, income, and poverty compared to the state and national averages.
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