

Montgomery County Farm to Community Planning Project Final Report

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About the Montgomery County Farm to Community Planning Project

Montgomery County, Virginia, with a population of 94,932 (US Census, 2010) is located within the Blue Ridge range of the Appalachian Mountains. This is a predominately rural county, with the largest employer being Virginia Tech. Median household income is 35% below the state average and 18% below the national average. 22.6% of the population is living below the poverty line, a figure that is 119% above the state average, and 64% above the national average (US Census, 2010). In July 2012, SNAP benefit enrollments included 8,009 persons (a 52% increase over the past 5 years) and 3,806 households (a 63% increase in 5 years) (VA Dept of Social Services, 2012). Ten hunger relief agencies, including food pantries, hot food programs, and school backpack programs currently serve an estimated 50,000 persons per year. Although 36% of students are eligible for free and reduced lunch, this figure is much higher in rural areas, and half of the county schools have a rate between 44% and 78% (VA Dept. of Education, 2011). These figures are indicative of a less visible population of need that is often overshadowed by the more affluent community of Blacksburg, with the Virginia Tech campus at its center.

The Blacksburg Farmers Market is a key player in a growing and vibrant local food movement in the region. The Market, which is under the jurisdiction of the Friends of the Farmers Market Inc. (FFM), a non-profit, is committed to making a positive community impact by providing an accessible venue for healthy and affordable food, educational and outreach programs that connect an ever-widening and diverse audience with local food information, and increased opportunities for local farmers. The Market has initiated or participated in several projects over the past few years that were designed to increase its capacity to reach out to low-income consumers:

- FFM partnered with Master Gardeners in 2009 to initiate the Share the Spare program, which collects donations at the Market from home and community gardens and encourages Market shoppers to buy extra produce to donate. In 2011, over 2 tons of fresh produce and eggs were collected.
- Market vendors participated in a pilot program in 2009 and 2010 that examined the impacts of a local fresh fruit and delivery program on food purchasing patterns of 51 Head Start families, who received a weekly community supported agriculture (CSA) bag of local produce over the two seasons.
- FFM started a new EBT program at the Market in 2011, with assistance from the USDA Farmers Market Promotion Program. A SNAP Double Value Incentive Program has been in place since July 2012.
- FFM organized a training session in 2011 for regional farmers markets that needed assistance with starting new EBT programs, and went on to found the Blue Ridge Farmers Market Manager Coalition, which meets regularly to discuss EBT programs, diversifying the local foods audience, and other market-related issues.
- FFM partnered with VT Engage to secure an Americorps VISTA position. Three Americorps VISTAs have worked with the FFM to increase access to local foods for low-income residents through connections with the Department of Social Services, area food pantries, and the Family Nutrition Program.

Seeking to expand opportunities for outreach to low-income consumers, FFM submitted full proposals to the USDA Community Food Projects program (<http://www.nifa.usda.gov/fo/communityfoodprojects.cfm>) in 2009 and 2010. Last year, support was requested for the GardenShare Project, which was designed to provide opportunities for low-income, first-time gardeners to participate in existing and new community gardens, increase the volume of fresh produce that is donated to the Share the Spare collection project, and use some of the produce as in-kind incentives to EBT shoppers at the Market. The primary reason for not recommending the project for funding appeared to be a lack of low-income engagement in both the planning and program stages.

Until now, The FFM and partnering agencies had never invested the time to jointly take the pulse of our community and ensure that the solutions adequately address the real needs as expressed by those they were meant to benefit. The FFM believes that it is time to invest some energy into assessing the true needs of the community and invite the most affected stakeholders (low-income people and farmers) to have an informed and engaged role in the development of solutions. This process, funded by the USDA Community Food Projects Program and entitled the Montgomery County Farm to Community Planning Project, will provide valuable input into setting priorities and shaping initiatives in the coming years.

Executive Summary

From November 2013 through November 2014, the Friends of the Farmers Market completed the Montgomery County Farm to Community planning Project, a food system assessment that specifically sought to identify opportunities to foster growth in local agriculture in ways that are inclusive to the low-income population. The results were simultaneously predictable and surprising.

From the consumer end, an in-person survey of fifty low-income consumers indicated that the vast majority buy fresh produce through mainstream food venues, such as chain grocery stores. Although convenience was listed as the number one reason why they shopped there, quality came in second. They care about the condition of their produce. Additionally, nearly three-quarters of participants agreed or strongly agreed with the statement “I know how to grow my own food,” reflecting the agricultural heritage of the sample and of the region. However, focus groups revealed that the reason why so few survey participants gardened at home was because of rental situations and prohibitions from landlords. The vast majority of those surveyed believed having a community garden and/or farmers market in their neighborhood would result in them eating healthier. Finally, while only sixteen percent were interested in starting their own food-based businesses, most people believed that a food business incubator and community kitchen would be beneficial to their community.

From the producer side of the food system, expansion is on the minds of area producers. Seventy-six percent of those surveyed desired to expand their operations, focusing on direct, restaurant, and then institutional buyers. Those producers cited land and labor access, transport cost or type, and marketing as top barriers to doing so. Training programs regarding business planning, lending and grants, and marketing were listed as needs. During focus groups and interviews, an aggregation and distribution hub was commonly suggested, as producers were also keenly aware of the major barrier cited by local food stores and restaurants in selling local produce: communication between buyers and producers. Independent grocery stores were found to be the current option for producers, though large chain groceries were not opposed to selling local, but extremely concerned with keeping up with demand and organizing logistics between individual producers.

This report was presented to a community forum of 56 stakeholders, including farmers, low-income community members, community organization representatives, Virginia Tech faculty, and Virginia Tech students. During this forum, the most salient issues were identified and used to guide the formation of working groups, which will continue to work on potential solutions also identified.

We can conclude from this assessment and forum that the primary means of linking low-income consumers and local-producers is currently through mainstream food venues. However, the producers in the area are finding barriers to scaling up and to communicating with buyers. A food hub or farmer cooperative may ameliorate these issues of scale and marketing. Community gardens would be welcomed by residents and may help to increase the amount of produce consumed and foster entrepreneurship around agriculture that is already a part of the region's heritage. A food business incubator may help to channel this in ways that will encourage creativity and collaboration between producers, entrepreneurs, and food venues.

**Report on Montgomery County
According to Area of Assessment**

Assessment Area 1: Consumers

Three methods of data collection gathered input from low-income consumers regarding purchasing practices, opinions relating to agriculture, and barriers to fresh produce. The three methods included an in-person survey, a focus group, and structured interviews.

Survey Methods

From May 30, 2014, through August 8, 2014, 50 participants at two locations in Montgomery County completed the consumer survey. Full survey text is located in Appendix A. 21 surveys took place at Fieldstone United Methodist Church’s Giving Tree Food Pantry on 4 separate occasions, while 39 surveys took place at the Montgomery County Department of Social Services and Department of Health over 2 sessions. The surveys took place one-on-one, usually while the participant was either waiting for service at the pantry or for service at the Department of Health/Social Services.

Survey Results

Description of Participants

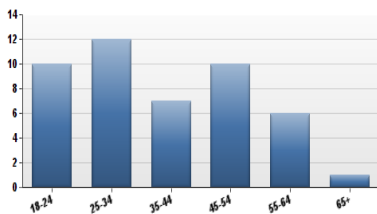


Figure 1. Age Ranges of Participants

The participants largely identified as female (71%), followed by male (27%), then other (2%). The ages of participants were diverse, with most participants falling between 18-54 years of age. One veteran (and no participants currently active in the military) completed the survey. The greatest amount of participants lived in Christiansburg (13), followed by Blacksburg (10), Allegheny Springs (2), Belview (2), Belmont (2), Floyd (2), Merrimac (2), Plum Creek (2), Radford (2), Riner (2), Elliston (1), Giles County (1), Longshop (1), Pulaski County (1), Roanoke (1), Salem (1), and Shawsville (1).

Sixteen participants had no children living in their home, 13 had one child, 6 had 2 children, 3 had 3 children, 5 had 4 children, and 2 had 5 children at home. The majority of participants were earning \$0 – \$29,999 in income per year. Finally, 68% of participants agreed or strongly agreed that farming or growing their own food was a part of their family history.

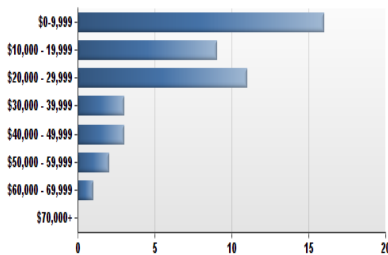


Figure 2. Income Levels of Participants

Habits

Most participants’ first choice for fresh produce shopping is a Large Chain Grocery Store (40), followed by Roadside Stands (5), Dollar Stores/Markets (2), Farmers Market (1), Small/Independent Grocery Store (1), or Grow at Home/Community Garden (1). Their second choice offers a small amount of diversity: Most participants still shop at Large Chain Grocery Stores (18), followed by Small/Independent Grocery Stores (4), Roadside Stands (4), Grow at Home/Community Garden (3), Food Pantry (2), Dollar Store/Market (2), Farmers Market (2), Convenience Store/Gas Station (1), Friend or Family Member (1), and Other (1).

When asked why they chose to obtain their fresh produce from their number one location, numerous responses were gathered along central themes. These responses do not pertain to any one particular venue, meaning they could pertain to major grocery stores as well as alternative venues. Twelve reasons related to Convenience, 10 related to Quality, 7 related to Price, 5 related to Closeness/Location, 5 related to Not Being Able to Grow at Home, 4 related to Health Concerns and Safety of Food, 2 related to Not Being Familiar with Area, 2 related to Supporting Community, and 1

related to Better Choices. While Convenience still trumped all, it's important to note that Quality came up more often than Price when listing reasons for shopping at a particular venue for fresh produce.

In regards to actual fresh produce consumption, over half (54%) of respondents stated that they cook with fresh fruits or vegetables for at least half of their meals. Fourteen percent claimed to cook with them at a quarter of their meals, 24% at occasional meals, and 8% at rarely or none of their meals. When asked if they already consume locally-grown or raised food (including from neighbors or grown at home) 76% said yes. As seen in Figure 3, most people (60%) are sourcing that local produce through friends and family or they grow it themselves. Roadside stands served 24% of respondents, farmers markets 16%, large chain groceries 16%, other 11%, and food pantries, small groceries, and convenience stores each served 3%.

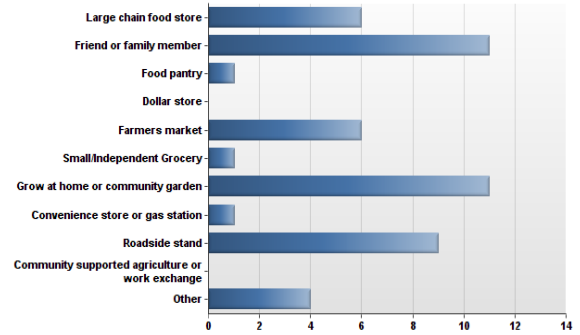


Figure 3. Where local foods are obtained

Thirty percent (15) of participants have a vegetable garden at home. This included container gardens. Only 2 people participated in a community garden, one at The Giving Tree food pantry and another informal one with their neighbors.

Opinions

Ninety-eight percent of participants agreed or strongly agreed that farming could help Montgomery County's economy. Nearly as many people (91%) agreed or strongly agreed that it's important that their food was not sprayed with chemicals. Additionally, 84% percent of people also agreed or strongly agreed that locally-grown or raised food is of better quality than other foods. Sixteen percent said they neither agreed nor disagreed with that statement.

Barriers and Opportunities

Cooking knowledge relating to fresh fruits and vegetables does not seem to be a significant issue. As seen in Figure 4, 88% either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement "I know how to cook with fresh fruits and vegetables."

Transportation does not appear to be a problem for most as well. Ninety-four percent of respondents said that finding their own transportation when buying or obtaining fresh fruits and vegetables was easy. Most (88%) were using their own vehicle, followed by a borrowed vehicle (6%), carpooling (2%), walking (2%), or the Christiansburg Go Anywhere bus (2%).

Nearly three-quarters of participants agreed or strongly agreed with the statement "I know how to grow my own food," reflecting the agricultural heritage of the sample and of the region.

Similarly, nearly three-quarters of participants agreed or strongly agreed that a community garden in their

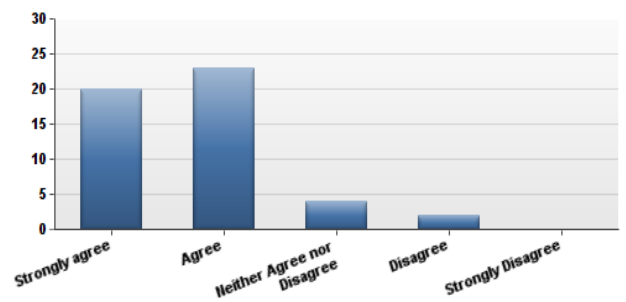


Figure 4. "I know how to cook with fresh fruits and vegetables."

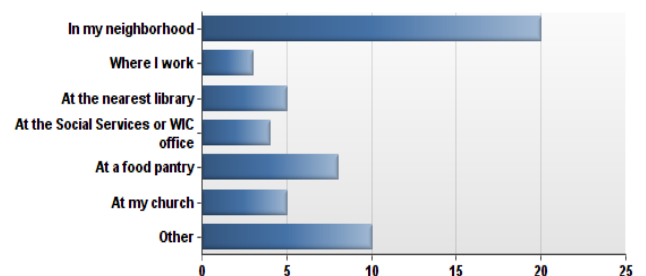


Figure 5. Best location for a community garden

neighborhood would increase the amount of produce that they eat. However, more people (22) felt as if they did not have enough information regarding how to participate in one than when compared to those who felt informed (15). Their own neighborhood appeared to be the best location for a community garden, followed by a myriad of other places. "Other" responses included specific elementary schools or Kentland Farms, which were likely near the respondent's own neighborhood.

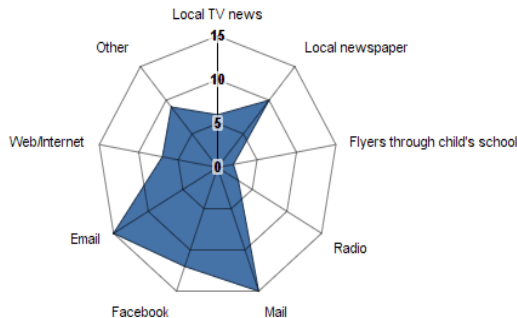


Figure 6. Best way to reach participant

The majority (87%) of participants also felt a farmers market in their neighborhood would increase the amount of fresh produce they included in their diet. It was nearly a 50/50 split among residents who had enough information about them compared to those who didn't, however. When asked how best to reach them with this type of information, web-based routes and old-fashioned mail garnered the most mentions, as seen in Figure 6. Of the "Other" category, 5 responses were related to phones or text messages.

Most participants (69%) were not aware that SNAP/EBT (formerly known as Foodstamps) could be used at the Blacksburg Farmers Market. An even greater percentage (85%) did not know about the Double Value program at the Blacksburg Farmers Market, which doubles the amount of money up to \$10 that a SNAP customer is able to use to make purchases at the farmers market using funds raised by the community.

When asked if they were interested in starting their own food-based business, 8 participants said yes. This indicates some level of desired entrepreneurship among the low-income people surveyed, perhaps once again paralleling the history of agriculture and related businesses in the region. Most people also strongly agreed or agreed with the statement, "A food business incubator would be beneficial to my community."

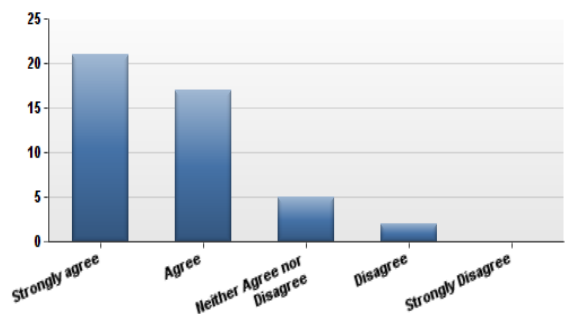


Figure 7. "A food business incubator would be beneficial to my community."

Last, survey respondents were asked to add any comments regarding trends they've noticed relating to access to food, food stores, or farming in the region. Their responses are listed in Appendix A.

Focus Group Methods

The consumer focus group took place on July 25, 2014 at Fieldstone United Methodist Church during the Giving Tree Food Pantry. Eight participants spoke about barriers to gardening, trends they've seen regarding food, and impacts of farmers markets, community gardens, and food business incubators/community kitchens. The entire transcript can be found in Appendix A.

Focus Group Results

The conversation opened with a prompt for their favorite food memory. Examples given were primarily hands-on: grading produce, pickle recipes, and picking hot peppers. Trends they've noticed over time included the rise of food taxes, food prices, and fuel prices. When asked how they'd like to eat, fresh produce was cited. When speaking about farmers markets, prices, current habits, location, and farmer interaction were considerations around if they'd attend a market near their home. The group agreed that they would "probably" use a community garden, which would help them eat more produce. Current barriers to gardening included not being allowed to (rental or mobile homes), garden pests,

risk, time, and aging. When asked about food business incubators/community kitchens, participants thought people would likely use it for canning purposes and preserving food for winter, rather than starting a business.

Final comments made appeals for lower food prices, persuading landlords to allow gardening, and unique opportunities to volunteer to sort or process produce in exchange for food—an idea that may pair well with area farmers' processing needs.

Interview Methods

One structured interview involving 2 participants took place on August 29, 2014 at The Giving Tree Food Pantry at Fieldstone United Methodist Church. A full transcript of the interview is found in Appendix A.

Interview Results

The two participants gave illuminating and, at times, unexpected responses to the questions posed in the interview. When asked why, in a region with rich agricultural heritage, gardening at home is a rare pastime, it was concluded that instability of families and economic situations often leads to literal and figurative uprooting. Families move frequently or live in apartments and trailer parks where land for gardening is not available. Community gardens were thought by both to be a solution to this, though both admitted their landlords would not be open to the idea. If a garden incorporated volunteer work, volunteers could be compensated with produce. Shares would also go to seniors and food pantries. Coupling a community garden with a community kitchen would contribute to the success of both. Student volunteers could be utilized if they also received free meals. In general, intergenerational projects were favored. Additionally, in regards to farmers markets, the participants stated that they wished there were more of them to serve a wider geographic population. Freshness of the produce available was important to them and would factor into where they would shop for produce.

**Report on Montgomery County
According to Area of Assessment**

Assessment Area 2: Producers

Three methods of data collection gathered input from local producers regarding expansion barriers, goals, and opportunities. The three methods included an online survey, a focus group, and structured interviews.

Survey Methods

From March 5, 2014 until May 13, 2014, 33 producers and food artisans located in the Appalachian region participated in an online survey regarding barriers to expansion and success. The full survey can be found in Appendix B. The surveys took place online and were distributed via email through previous contacts or relevant producer organizations. Recruitment also took place at the Blacksburg Farmers Market and at agriculture-related forums and events, such as an agritourism forum. The target population were producers participating in the Montgomery County food system, though not necessarily located in Montgomery County.

Survey Results

Description of Participants

Producers participating in the survey were diverse in products grown/raised and in size. Participants were able to select more than one farm sector. Thirteen produced livestock, 19 poultry for meat or eggs, 24 produce, 2 dairy, and 12 value-added. Figure 8 reveals that most farms surveyed were less than 50 acres.

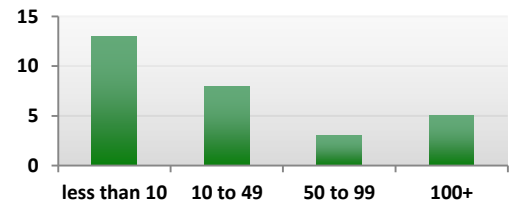


Figure 8. Farm Size by Acreage

Most producers made \$5,000-\$9,999 annually in sales, followed by \$10,000-\$24,999 and \$50,000-\$99,999, illustrated in Figure 9. Not surprisingly, 19 producers indicated that income from the farm business was not their primary source of income. They join the majority of US producers who rely on income from off the farm.

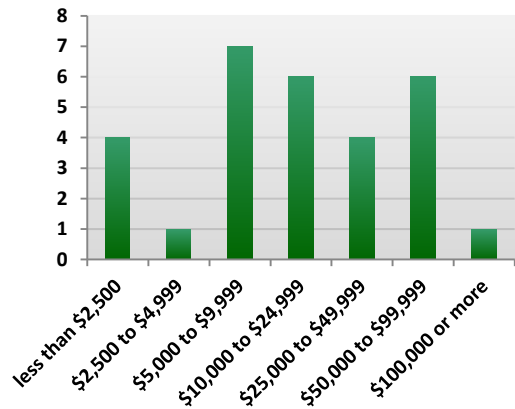


Figure 9. Income by Annual Sales

Of those 19 producers whose primary income does not come from the farm, 16 responded Yes when asked if they would like their business to serve as their primary source of income.

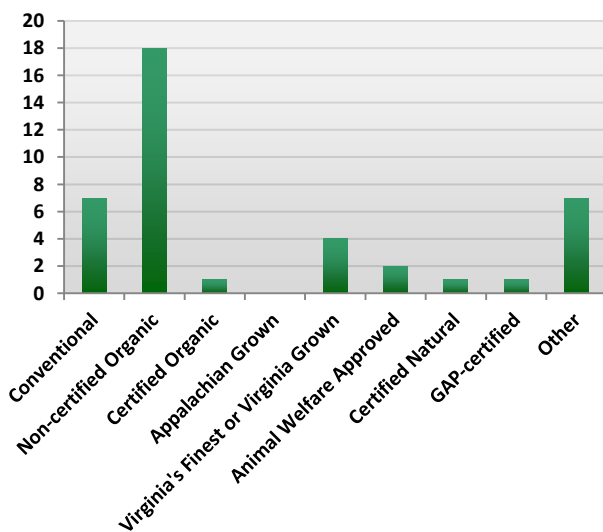


Figure 10. Growing Methods

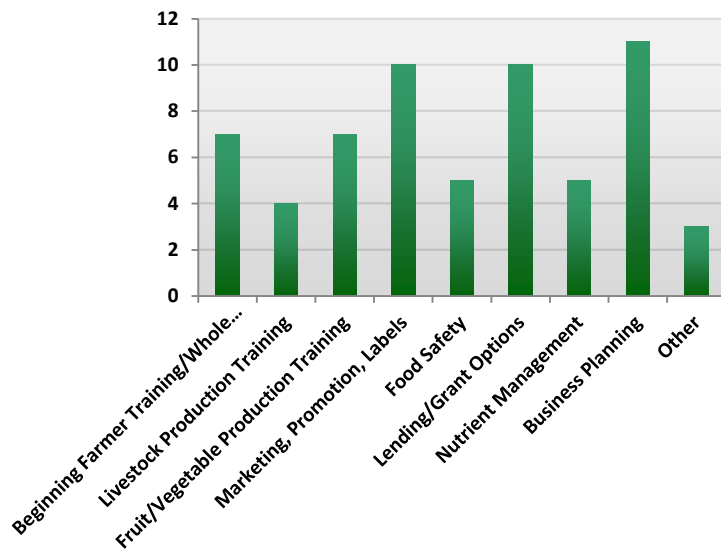
Most producers self-identified as non-certified organic, other, or conventional. Those who marked Other listed non-gmo, pesticide-free, grass-fed, grass-based, chemical free, Beef Quality Assurance, and processed by Animal Welfare Approved facility.

Barriers and Opportunities

Among all those who would like to expand their farm business (25), the top five barriers to expansion included:

1. Labor Access (12)
2. Land Access (11)
2. Transport Cost or Type (11)
2. Marketing (11)
3. Price Margin (10)
4. Packaging and Labeling (8)
4. Storage (8)
4. Demand (8)
4. Access to Farm Equipment or Supply (8)
5. Access to Processing (7)
5. Other (7)

Those who selected Other defined it as management stress, access to capital, regulation intended for larger scale agriculture, limited market access, time, and weather. The bottom two barriers were issues relating to GAP Certification (2) or Organic Certification (2).



When asked what type of training they would need to expand, Business Planning ranked number one with 11 participants indicating need for this type of training. Lending/Grant Options and Marketing, Promotion, Labels followed second (10), and Beginning Farmer/Whole Farm Planning and Fruit/Vegetable Production both came in third (7). Other training needs are seen in Figure 11. Those who selected Other defined it as fungus, weed, and pest control and fruit tree management.

When all participants (33) (including those not wishing to expand) were asked to identify which local/regional buyers they were most interested in connecting with or building relationships with, they selected:

Figure 11. Training Needed to Expand

1. Direct Markets (33)
2. Restaurants and Food Service (22)
3. Farm to School or Farm to Institution (20)
4. Independent Groceries (16)
5. Wholesale Distributors (11)
6. Other (both indicated this meant You Pick Operations) (2)

Challenges to selling to local/regional buyers included being Unable to Produce Adequate Quantities (12), Unable to Sell at High Enough Price (10), Issues related to Marketing (10), and being Unable to Find Information about Local Buyers (9). Inadequate Distribution Network, No Demand from Local Buyers, and Manufacturing/Processing Issues were selected by 6 producers. Other (5), Lack of Com-mingling/Aggregation Facility (4), and Product Not Feasible for Scale (1) rounded out the challenges to selling to local buyers. Those who selected Other elaborated that town ordinance issues, uninformed food safety regulation, and time kept them from reaching local or regional buyers.

Questions according to sector

Are you interested in expanding your farm business?

	Yes	No
Livestock	11	2
Poultry	15	4
Produce	18	6
Dairy	2	0
Value-Added	11	2

Number of acres farmed and within 50 miles of Montgomery County's border:

	less than 10	10 to 49	50 to 99	100+	# Respondents
Livestock	3	2	3	5	13
Poultry	7	4	3	2	16
Produce	12	6	1	3	22
Dairy	2	0	0	0	2
Value-Added	4	5	2	1	12

Farm size by value of annual sales:

	less than \$2,500	\$2,500 to \$4,999	\$5,000 to \$9,999	\$10,000 to \$24,999	\$25,000 to \$49,999	\$50,000 to \$99,999	\$100,000 or more	# Respondents
Livestock	1	0	6	1	2	2	1	13
Poultry	4	0	4	2	2	3	1	16
Produce	3	1	4	6	3	5	0	22
Dairy	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	2
Value-Added	2	1	3	3	1	2	0	12

	Is your primary source of income from this farm business?			Would you like this farm business to serve as your primary source of income?		
	Yes	No	# Respondents	Yes	No	# Respondents
Livestock	4	9	13	8	1	9
Poultry	7	9	16	9	1	10
Produce	8	14	22	11	4	15
Dairy	1	1	2	1	0	1
Value-Added	5	8	13	7	1	8

What are the challenges or barriers to expansion?														
	Packaging and Labeling	Transport Cost or Type	Storage	Land Access	Demand	Access to Processing	GAP Certification Time or Cost	Organic Certification Time or Cost	Labor Access	Access to Farm Equipment or Supply	Price Margin	Marketing	Other	# Resp.
Livestock	3	5	4	7	4	3	0	1	7	3	4	5	1	11
Poultry	5	6	8	10	4	6	2	1	9	7	6	5	5	15
Produce	5	8	5	7	5	5	2	2	9	5	7	7	7	18
Dairy	2	1	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	1	1	2	0	2
Value-Added	4	6	4	5	4	4	1	0	5	4	4	5	4	11

What kind of training would help you expand?											
	Beginning Farmer Training/Whole Farm Planning	Livestock Production Training	Fruit/Vegetable Production Training	Marketing, Promotion, Labels	Food Safety	Lending/Grant Options	Nutrient Mgmt	Business Planning	Other	# Respondents	
Livestock	3	2	1	4	1	5	2	5	2	11	
Poultry	5	3	6	6	3	7	5	8	3	15	
Produce	4	1	6	8	4	6	5	8	2	17	
Dairy	0	0	0	1	0	2	0	0	0	2	
Value-Added	2	1	4	5	2	5	2	5	1	11	

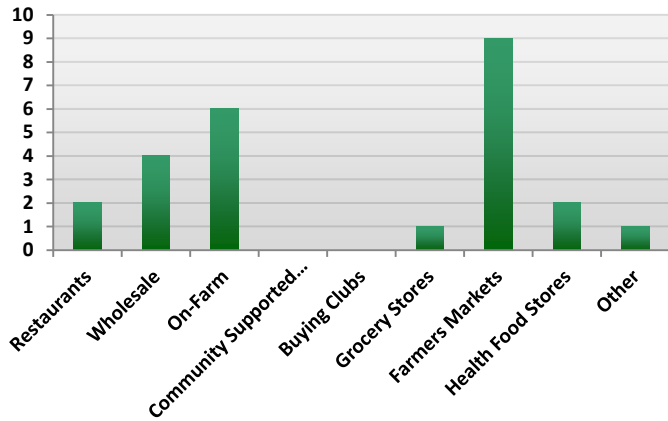
With which local/regional buyers are you most interested in establishing or building connections?							
	Wholesale distributors	Direct markets	Restaurants and food service	Farm-to-institution	Independent grocery stores	Other:	# Respondents
Livestock	3	12	9	8	7	1	13
Poultry	6	18	10	11	9	2	19
Produce	8	20	15	14	8	2	24
Dairy	0	2	2	1	2	0	2
Value-Added	3	12	9	7	7	1	13

What are the challenges to selling your products to local/regional buyers?											
	Inadequate distribution network	Unable to sell at high enough price	Unable to produce adequate quantity	Unable to find information about buyers	Issues related to marketing to local buyers	No demand from local buyers	Product not feasible on local/regional scale	Local/regional manufacturing or processing not adequate	Lack of aggregation/co-mingling facility	Other	# Respondents
Livestock	2	5	5	3	4	2	0	4	0	1	12
Poultry	3	6	7	3	4	3	0	5	1	3	18
Produce	5	8	10	7	5	5	1	3	4	5	23
Dairy	1	1	0	0	2	2	0	1	0	0	2
Value-Added	1	5	7	3	5	3	0	3	1	3	13

Sector-specific Information

Livestock

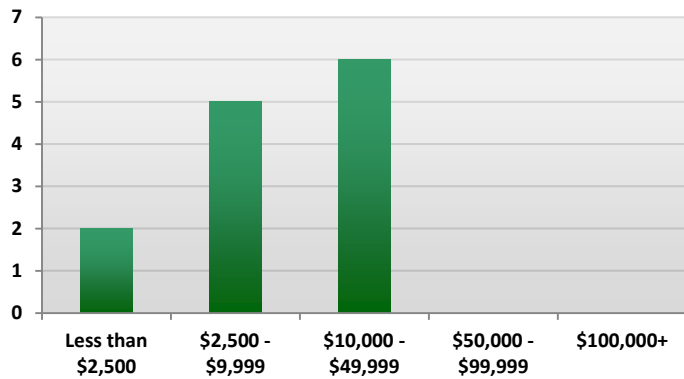
How do you primarily sell your livestock products?



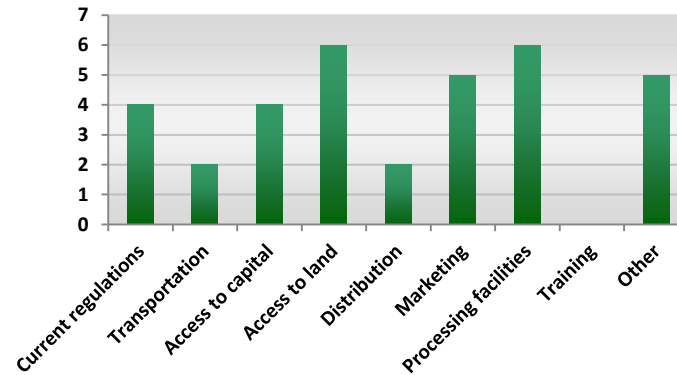
To the best of your knowledge, are any of these livestock products consumed in Montgomery County?

Yes	No	# Respondents
8	5	13

Total Annual Sales from Livestock Products

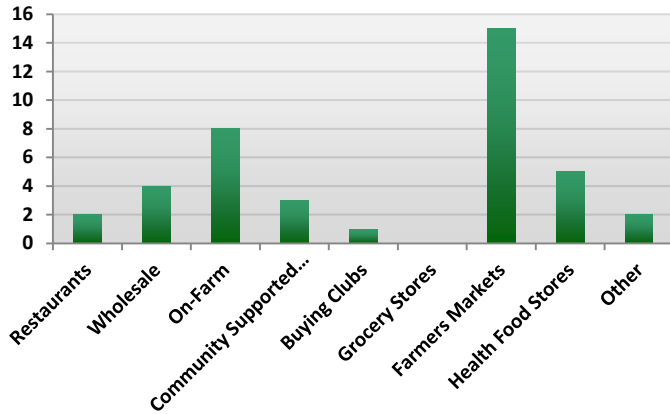


Biggest barriers to the success/expansion of this aspect of farm business



Poultry

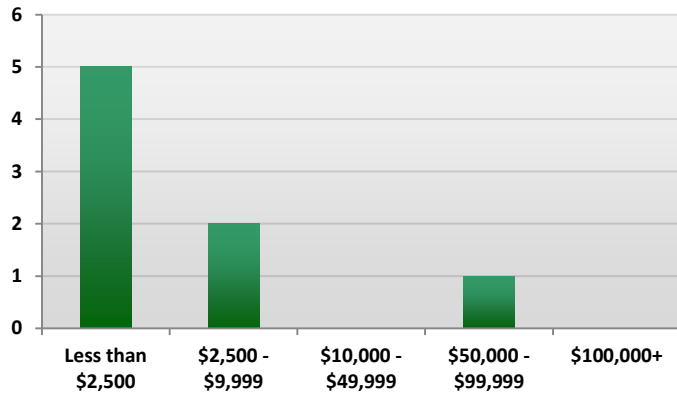
How do you primarily sell your poultry products?



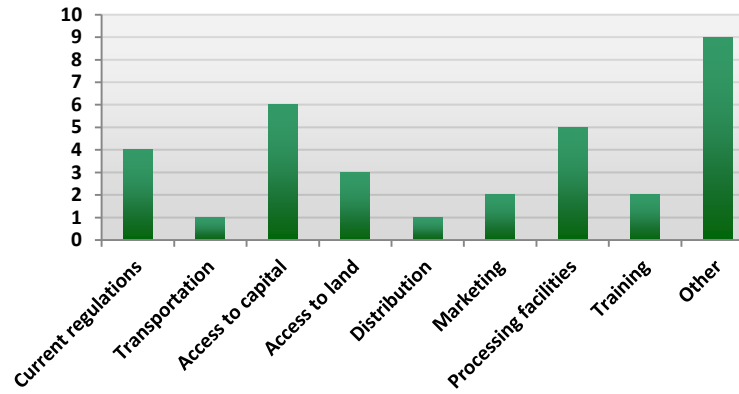
To the best of your knowledge, are any of these products consumed in Montgomery County?

Yes	No	# Respondents
15	3	18

Total Annual Sales from Poultry Products

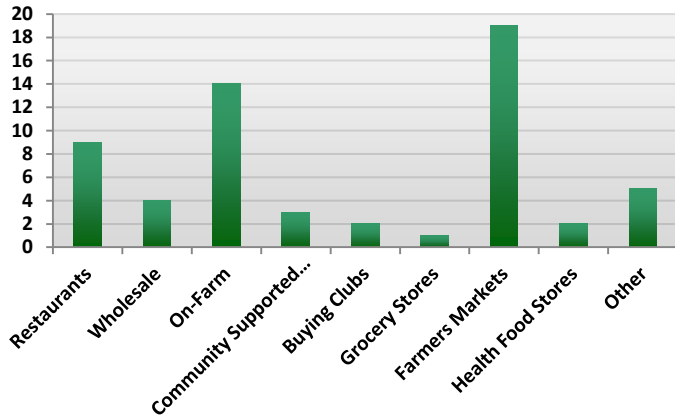


Biggest barriers to the success/expansion of this aspect of farm business



Produce

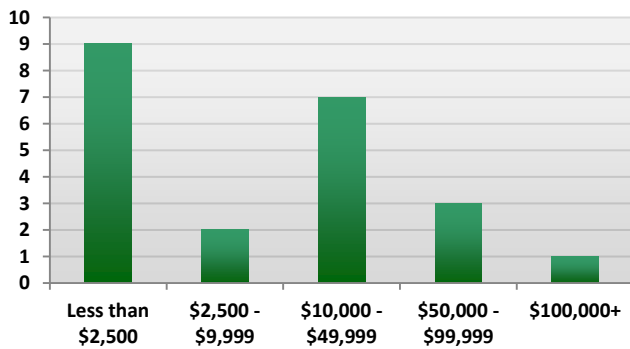
How do you primarily sell your produce?



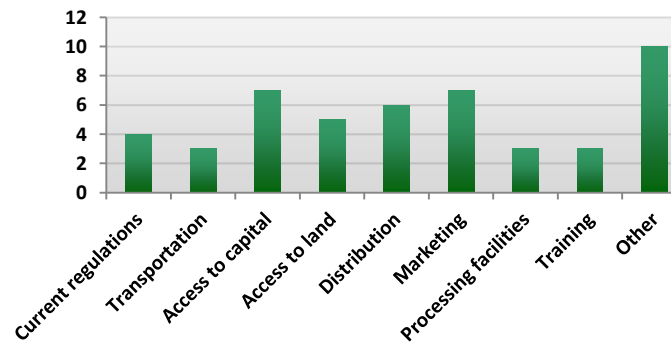
To the best of your knowledge, are any of these products consumed in Montgomery County?

Yes	No	# Respondents
18	5	23

Total Annual Sales from Produce

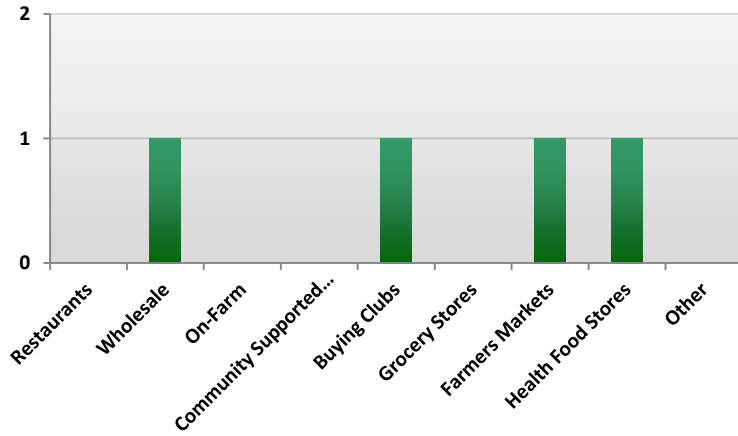


Biggest barriers to the success/expansion of this aspect of farm business



Dairy

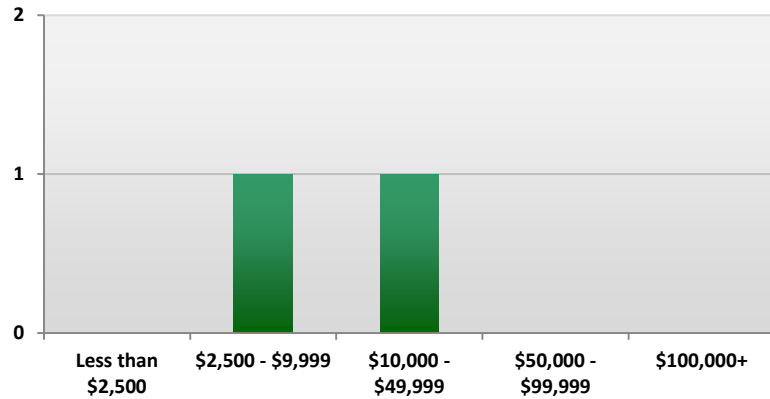
How do you primarily sell your dairy?



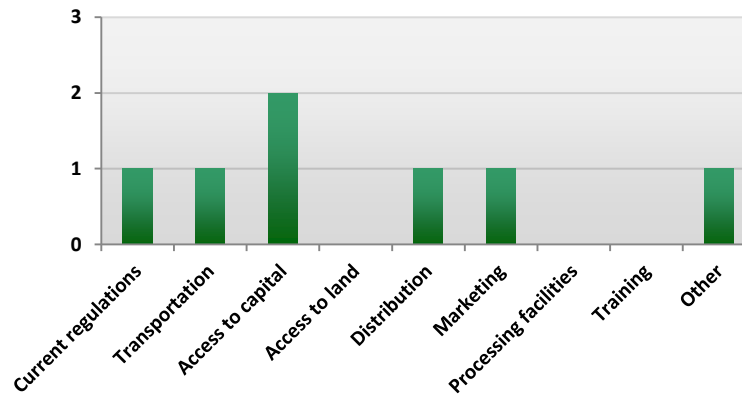
To the best of your knowledge, are any of these products consumed in Montgomery County?

Yes	No	# Respondents
2	0	2

Total Annual Sales from Dairy

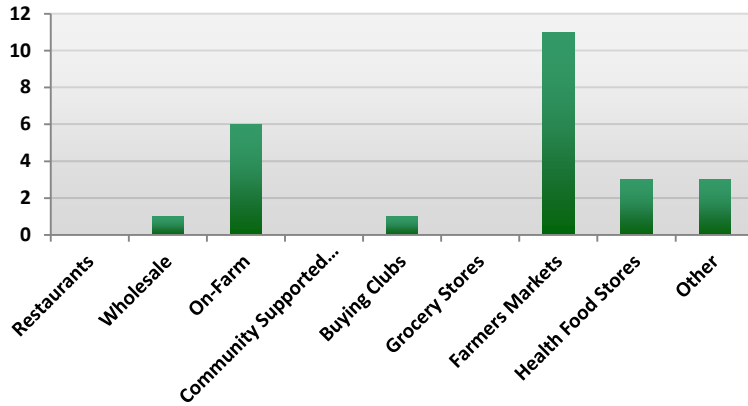


Biggest barriers to the success/expansion of this aspect of farm business



Value-Added

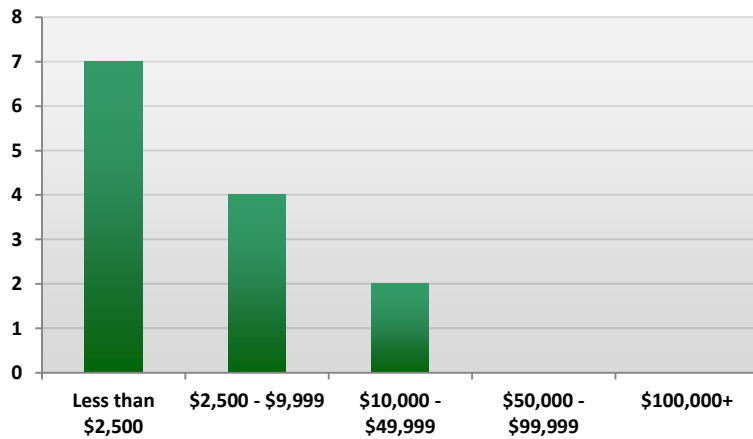
How do you primarily sell your value-added products?



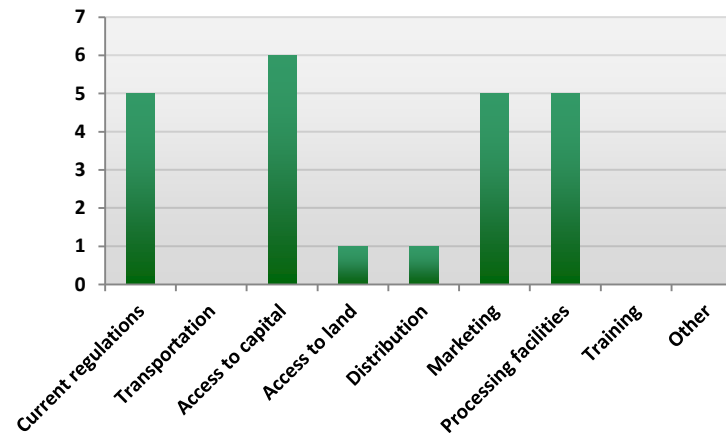
To the best of your knowledge, are any of these products consumed in Montgomery County?

Yes	No	# Respondents
10	3	13

Total Annual Sales from Value-Added Products



Biggest barriers to the success/expansion of this aspect of farm business



Focus Group Methods

The producer focus group took place on July 12, 2014 at Market Square Park in Blacksburg, VA. Six participants spoke about various barriers to expansion. The entire transcript can be found in Appendix B.

Focus Group Results

The group consisted of three livestock producers, two produce growers, and one value-added producer. Four were first generation producers. When prompted to explain how they determine market potential and volume for products, record-keeping and community supported agriculture were cited. Additionally, utilizing feedback from customers was considered paramount at the direct market level. Although some considered wholesale accounts to be preferable, most vendors agreed that the higher margin, lower volume model at the farmers market worked well for them. More flat land, reliable buyers, and assistance with navigating the additional regulatory burdens of scaling up would be necessary to produce enough to sell at the wholesale level.

Labor access, land access, and inadequate numbers and locations of processing facilities were most commonly cited as problems for livestock producers. They explained that the intuition required for handling animals could not be taught. Additionally, training a new person every season would be cumbersome. The three livestock producers all noted trouble finding available land to buy near where they already raised their animals. They explained that processors are usually extremely busy and were concerned about fitting them in. Also, many processors just do custom meats (not USDA inspected) and are still exceptionally busy. A mobile processing facility was cited as a potential solution.

Marketing was listed as a concern for the value-added producer and produce growers. One produce grower stated he was building up his volume of vegetables capable of storage to capture the niche winter market and constructing necessary infrastructure on site. However, he also voiced concerns over how to market all the extra product he can grow as he becomes more efficient on the farm.

Interviews

Three structured interviews took place at the Blacksburg Farmers Market on July 25, 2014, with 2 produce vendors and 1 meat vendor. The notes derived from the interviews can be found in Appendix B. Ideas and concerns from the interviews include:

- Reinstatement tax deduction for farm products donated to charities/hunger relief organizations. This would be coupled with a program at organizations where people would “earn” a box of produce for volunteering their time sorting and packaging. They could also sort or package for the co-op or volunteer their time on farms for produce.
- Organize co-operative for farmers. They could call in their produce each week/month, or even plan it out for the year like a CSA would plan for its customers. Amounts can be divvied up according to each farm’s capacity.
- Hiring long term workers is a problem. Farmers cannot afford workers compensation, liability insurance, or health insurance for workers, but need a long term person so they do not have to rely on transient college labor. Likely policies/laws that need to be addressed.
- Land suitable for farming produce around the NRV needs to be protected from development and made more accessible/affordable to beginning farmers or expanding farm businesses.
- An organic cost share or similar incentive for sustainable farming techniques should be reinstated.

**Report on Montgomery County
According to Area of Assessment**

Assessment Area 3: Food Venues

Survey Methods

From November 2013 through March 2014, four volunteers contacted 76 food venues within Montgomery County either by phone or in-person to complete our survey regarding local food availability, interest in local food procurement, and barriers to procuring local food for sale in store. All grocery stores, independent grocery stores, pharmacy grocers, dollar stores, and convenience stores located within Montgomery County were approached. Forty-two total venues, representing all store categories except pharmacy grocers, completed the survey. The survey script is located in Appendix C.

Survey Results

Completions by Venue Category and Location

	Blacksburg	Christiansburg	Elliston	Pilot	Shawsville	Total
Major Grocery	3	4	0	0	0	7
Independent Grocery	4	0	0	0	1	5
Convenience Store	10	9	4	1	2	26
Dollar Store	2	1	0	0	1	4
Total	19	14	4	1	4	42

Grocery Stores

Eight of the nine groceries located within Montgomery County completed the survey. All eight venues accepted SNAP/EBT as a form of payment. All but one sold an extensive line of fresh fruits and vegetables. None currently sold local fresh fruits and vegetables (50 mile radius) though one chain did sell various items that fit their own definition of local: sourced from the Mid-Atlantic region.

The survey was administered to managers of the stores. When they were not available, interviewers spoke with produce workers. While support for local produce was voiced, logistics and supply were primary concerns. At one particular grocery store, produce accounted for 10% of gross sales. According to the manager, current local supply could never meet this demand.

Additionally, sourcing their produce takes place through an internal ordering system that deals with suppliers. Integrating local farmers into that system would be challenging. However, the manager stated that discussions have taken place regarding incorporating local farms into the structure and that the company would not be opposed conceptually.

Guidelines for becoming a supplier were sent to investigators through email and are listed below:

“Please submit your proposal, along with the following information to our corporate offices (address listed below).

On a single page, please prepare a brief letter of introduction containing the information listed below:

- Background information on your company
- Product/service information; variety of items offered, including styles, signs, colors, cost estimates and marketing plans.

- Your financial position; actual resources and/or ability to raise capital.
- Advise if your product is on the shelf of other retailers and sales results.
- Production capabilities, equipment, shipping point and what quantities you can provide.

Please do not send samples at this time. Send brochures and/or color photographs along with two business cards (if available).” (Address was removed to maintain anonymity.)

Independent Grocery Stores

Five of the seven specialty grocery stores completed the survey. Four stores were located in Blacksburg, and one was located in Shawsville. All five stores accepted SNAP, sold fresh fruits and vegetables, and sold local fresh fruits and vegetables. Three expressed interest in increasing their local produce offerings.

One store in Blacksburg listed their total produce sales as accounting for approximately 15% of gross sales. Another store stated that 10% of their gross sales came from local fresh produce. Local produce came from a 100 miles radius, with Giles, Montgomery, and Pulaski counties mentioned specifically. Direct relationships with local farmers were cited at all five stores, with Puckett Produce, Albert’s Organics, and SYSCO also cited. One store stated they were able to consistently move produce with minimal spoilage.

Challenges to sourcing local produce for independent groceries included inconsistent supply (4), cost (3), quality concerns during certain seasons (1), and that many residents were already growing their own produce more cheaply (1). A lack of supply of certified organic apples, certified organic oranges, broccoli, fungi, and other important vegetables was cited by one store.

Pharmacy Grocers

All five of the pharmacy grocers declined to participate in the survey.

Dollar Stores

Three of six dollar stores located in Montgomery County (1=Christiansburg, 1=Blacksburg, 1=Shawsville) participated in the survey. Two accepted SNAP as payment, and none currently sold fresh fruits and vegetables, local or otherwise. None expressed interest in increasing their produce offerings. No store floor space or refrigeration space was cited as a barrier to sourcing produce. Additionally, it was believed fitting produce items into the dollar price structure would be challenging.

Convenience Stores

Twenty-six of forty total convenience stores located in Montgomery County completed the survey. Specific locations included Blacksburg, Christiansburg, Elliston, Pilot, and Shawsville. Twenty-two stores accepted SNAP and twenty currently sold fresh fruits and vegetables, although most offered a limited variety (apples and bananas). Two stores offered local fresh fruits and vegetables, and five expressed interest in either increasing or switching to local produce. Those offering local fresh fruits and vegetables obtained them directly from farmers and were located in Blacksburg/Prices Fork and Shawsville. One chain of stores offering very limited produce stated they buy their fruit from grocery stores at retail.

Convenience stores listed several common challenges to sourcing and offering fresh produce.

Challenges	Low Demand/ Spoilage	Unknown Source	Cost	Inapprop for Venue	Inconsistent Availability	Logistics	Quality	Ethnic Varieties Unavail.
Times Cited	16	10	10	6	3	2	2	1

One particular convenience store in Shawsville stood out for its extensive array of fresh produce and meats. Aspiring to be a small grocery, the owner hopes to attract the attention of residents caught between two distant major grocery stores, located in Salem and Christiansburg.

Upon first offering his line of produce and meats, the owner experienced a lot of spoilage. However, he remains committed: just before the interview, he had mailed 1,100 flyers to increase awareness. Additional creative marketing includes the store's own rewards point system for customers, where every dollar spent earns one point to be used toward fuel. The owner hopes this incentive will drive produce and meat sales.

Although the produce offered there is not local, the owner said he was very interested in sourcing local as long as quality was consistent and the produce was insect-free.

Common Barriers

Among those venues already offering local produce (n=8), barriers or challenges to procuring locally grown fruits and vegetables included difficulties with accessing or identifying sources (2), low demand (1), limited space (1), residents growing own food more cheaply (1), and kinds needed not available locally (1).

One particular store voiced support for better organization of the sourcing/ordering local produce along with better consistency and variety in availability. The owner gave an example of a farmer offering four boxes of green peppers at a time when they were unneeded. However, the next week, when the store did need them, the farmer was carrying a different type of produce.

Among those not currently offering local produce (n=34), barriers listed included perceived low demand (17), difficulties with accessing or identifying sources (9), cost (9), inconsistent availability (5), quality (3), and kinds needed not available locally (1).

Opportunities

Gaps in individual store types

At current production levels and available infrastructure, farmers are unable to break into major grocery stores with their produce. Aggregation and streamlined distribution through cooperative projects are necessary in order to tap into mainstream grocery stores, where the vast majority of all produce in the county is sold.

Sales of local produce at small independent groceries are occurring and are successful. Three stores in the county wish to increase their produce offerings and are open to working one-on-one with farmers/producers, which is the typical relationship for independent groceries. However, the top barriers (inconsistent supply, cost) to sourcing listed by these venues indicate room for growth in volume, better organization, and efficient, straightforward distribution techniques—once again suggesting a need for cooperative aggregation and distribution projects. Specific products currently lacking include organic apples, organic oranges, broccoli, and fungi.

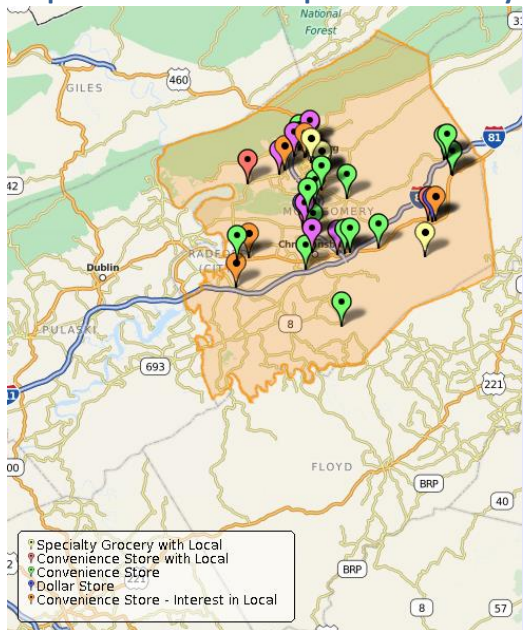
Opportunities at dollar stores for local produce are limited. The price structure and lack of storage and floor space inhibit entry of fresh produce into stores of this kind.

The majority of convenience stores do not appear to be appropriate venues for substantial quantities of fresh produce. Simple substitutions for the apples sold at most convenience stores could be made if the produce was available through mainstream distributors. Additionally, unique opportunities exist for entrepreneurial stores that recognize a demand in their area for more extensive lines of produce and meats, such as the Shawsville convenience store. Again, aggregation and distribution projects such as foodhubs would assist in local procurement for select convenience stores.

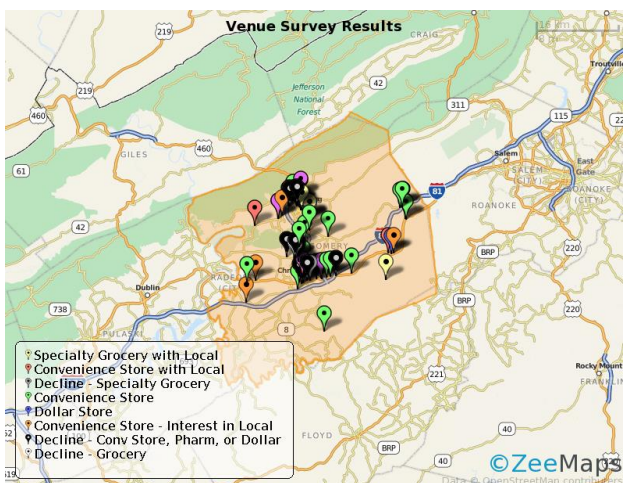
Finally, marketing opportunities are present within the county for some stores carrying produce and for farmers or cooperatives of farmers. For example, the store in Shawsville is currently trying to market its extensive selection of produce and meats to local residents. Likewise, eleven of the forty-two venues indicated difficulty in simply finding local produce sources. This indicates a marketing opportunity for local producers to make known availability and quantities of produce they grow. This marketing need could also be integrating into cooperative activities, such as a foodhub. Several stores voiced that they would like to sell locally-grown produce and that it was simply a matter of finding the source.

Gaps in coverage of county

Map of venues that completed the survey according to local/fresh availability



Map of all venues located in Montgomery County



Community Forum and Next Steps

A community forum was held November 21, 2014 at the Montgomery County Government Building at 755 Roanoke Street in Christiansburg, VA. The agenda for the forum is found in Appendix D. Results of the assessment were presented, salient issues identified, and actionable items determined. From this forum, working groups were formed according to the issues and items determined. These groups will work toward finding meaningful and inclusive solutions to the problems illuminated by this research.

The following working groups were formed during the forum:

Group Focus	Topics Listed	Preliminary Working Group
Farmer Support and Land Access	Networking and Farmer Mentors/Landowner Education/Land Access	Jane Aronson (Blacksburg Farmers Market) Teresa and Bruce Caldwell (Cavalier Farm) John Bush (Blacksburg Town Council) Peter Macedo (Blacksburg Bagels) Kelli Scott (Cooperative Extension) Christy Gabbard (Local Concepts LLC) Velva Groover (VT Department of Horticulture) Garland Mason (VT) Susan Clark (VT Department of Horticulture)
Local Food Infrastructure and Business Development	Food Hub/Local Processing/Food Business Incubator/Community Kitchen	Heather Schaerer (Annie Kays) Caroline Montgomery (Blacksburg Farmers Market) Rachel Doyle (HazelBea Catering) Rial Carver (VT Dining Services) Amy Hahn (Blacksburg Farmers Market) Maureen McGonagle (Mont Co Dept of Health)
Community Gardening Growth and Support	Gardening Support and Education/Seed Exchange/Landowner Education for Community Gardens	Amy Hahn (Blacksburg Farmers Market) Peg Fisher (Community Member) Jenny Schwanke (YMCA Community Garden) Sarah Misyak (Family Nutrition Program) Meredith Ledlie (Family Nutrition Program) Lynn Brammer (Master Gardeners) Maureen McGonagle (Mont Co Dept of Health)
Market Accessibility and Alternative Programs	Mobile Markets/Seconds CSA/Transportation to Markets/Work Exchange/Bartering	Karl Bitikofer (Americorps VISTA) Karlee Siepierski (VT Engage) Amy Hahn (Blacksburg Farmers Market) Christina Zaverucha (Permaculture for Peace) John Bush (Blacksburg Town Council) Raleigh Priddy (Americorps VISTA)

Four project foci were identified through the community forum, and are listed in the working group table above. Individually, these foci target an area of the food system, from logistics to education, in need of development or support. Collectively, the efforts—past and present—geared toward resolving these issues will have longstanding positive impacts on local economies, local environment, and public health.

Caroline Montgomery, Americorps VISTA for the Blacksburg Farmers Market, compiled the complete ideas and notes from the forum, which are also found in Appendix D.

The Friends of the Farmers Market will continue to support these groups as we work toward a more equitable and resilient food system.

Appendix A

Consumer Survey

Montgomery County Farm to Community Planning Project

Survey Administration Site _____ Survey Date _____

Survey Administered By _____

RECRUITMENT SCRIPT:

Hello. Can I ask you a few questions about eating, gardening, growing, and selling food? It will take about 10 minutes. This survey is voluntary, and your responses are not connected in any way to your benefits or health care. Your responses will be kept confidential. This means that your responses will NOT be shared with ANYONE outside the study INCLUDING the Department of Health NOR the Department of Social Services.

This survey is a part of a larger study about how local foods can be made better available to more residents of Montgomery County while supporting regional farmers at the same time. It's funded by the USDA and Southern SARE and administered by Virginia Tech and the Friends of the Farmers Market, which is based in Blacksburg, VA. If you have additional questions or comments, you can contact the farmers market through email or phone (bbfarmersmarket@gmail.com and 540.239.8290) or Virginia Tech IRB at 540.231.4991.

AFTER PARTICIPANT AGREES TO PARTICIPATE:

Are you over the age of 18? (IF YES, CONTINUE. IF NO, THANK THEM FOR THEIR TIME BUT THEY CANNOT PARTICIPATE IN THE SURVEY). Thank you for agreeing to participate in this survey. We value your opinion. I'm going to ask you three sets of questions. The first set is about the foods you eat and where you get them. The second set is about gardening, growing, and selling food. The last set of questions is just to get basic information. Also, whenever a question uses the word "local," for the purpose of this survey, local will mean it's grown or produced within 50 miles of the county's borders.

Are you ready to start?

Current Consumption

1. Where do you obtain or buy most of your fresh fruits and vegetables? Second most? Third most? (SURVEYOR: Place "1" on the line next to most, "2" next to the second most, and "3" next to third most. If they inquire about seasonality, ask where they buy the most during peak season).

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Large Chain Food Store (Walmart, Kroger) | <input type="checkbox"/> Grow at Home or in a Community Garden |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Friend or Family Member | <input type="checkbox"/> Convenience Store or Gas Station Store |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Food Pantry | <input type="checkbox"/> Roadside Stand |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Dollar Store | <input type="checkbox"/> Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) or Work Exchange |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Farmers Market | <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Small/Independent Grocery Store (Eats, Wades, etc) | |

1.a. (IF YES – OMIT QUESTION IF FOOD PANTRY IS #1 LOCATION) Why do you obtain most of your fruits and vegetables food from the #1 location?

2. How often do you eat or cook with fresh (not canned or frozen) fruits and vegetables? (SURVEYOR: Read options)

- Every or Most Meals
- Half of My Meals
- A Quarter of My Meals
- Occasional Meals
- Rarely or None of My Meals

For the next few questions, I'd like to know how strongly you agree or disagree with the statement I'll read. The first statement is:

3. There are enough local fruits and vegetables where I usually shop. Do you...

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

4. I know how to cook with fresh fruits and vegetables. Do you...

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

5. I can easily find or use my own transportation when I buy or obtain fruits and vegetables. Do you...

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

6. How do you currently travel to obtain your food or groceries?

- | | | |
|---|--|--------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Own Vehicle | <input type="checkbox"/> Public Transportation | <input type="checkbox"/> Taxi |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Borrowed Vehicle | <input type="checkbox"/> Walk | <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Carpool/Friend | <input type="checkbox"/> Bike | |

7. Do you eat any foods that are grown or raised locally? This could be something from a neighbor, family member, or your own garden. YES / NO / NOT SURE

7.a. (IF YES) What types of local foods you eat? _____

7.b. (IF YES) Where do you buy or obtain those foods most of the time?

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Large Chain Food Store (Walmart, Kroger) | <input type="checkbox"/> Grow at Home or in a Community Garden |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Friend or Family Member | <input type="checkbox"/> Convenience Store or Gas Station Store |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Food Pantry | <input type="checkbox"/> Roadside Stand |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Dollar Store | <input type="checkbox"/> Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) or Work Exchange |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Farmers Market | <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Small/Independent Grocery Store (Eats, Wades, etc) | |

Tell me again how strongly you agree or disagree with the statements I read.

8. Locally-grown or raised food is of better quality than other foods. Do you...

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

9. It's important that my food has not been sprayed with chemicals. Do you...

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

10. A farmers market in my community would increase the amount of fresh fruits and vegetables I eat. Do you...

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

11. I have enough information on the prices, times, and locations of farmers markets. Do you...

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

12. What is the BEST way for you to get information about food prices, food stores, and farmers markets? (Check all that apply):

- | | |
|---|---------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Local television news | <input type="checkbox"/> Mail |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Local newspaper | <input type="checkbox"/> Facebook |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Flyers through my child's school | <input type="checkbox"/> Email |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Radio | <input type="checkbox"/> Web/Internet |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____ |

13. Did you know before this survey that SNAP/EBT (formerly called FoodStamps) can be used at the Blacksburg Farmers Market?

YES / NO

14. Did you know that the Blacksburg Farmers Market often offers a SNAP matching program which gives you double the amount of SNAP money to buy food there up to \$10? YES / NO

Gardening and Entrepreneurship

Now I'm going to ask you questions about growing your own food and/or starting a business.

How strongly do you agree or disagree with this statement?

15. I know how to grow my own food. Do you...

- a. Strongly Agree
- b. Agree
- c. Neutral
- d. Disagree
- e. Strongly Disagree

16. Farming or growing my own food is part of my family history. Do you...

- a. Strongly Agree
- b. Agree
- c. Neutral
- d. Disagree
- e. Strongly Disagree

17. Farming can help Montgomery County's economy. Do you...

- a. Strongly Agree
- b. Agree
- c. Neutral
- d. Disagree
- e. Strongly Disagree

18. Do you have a vegetable garden at home that supplies some of your food (does NOT incl. community garden)?

YES / NO

19. Do you currently participate in a community garden? YES / NO

19.a. (IF YES) Which one? Where is it located? _____

20. I have enough information on community gardens and how to participate. Do you...

- a. Strongly Agree
- b. Agree
- c. Neutral
- d. Disagree
- e. Strongly Disagree

Now for the last few questions...

How strongly do you agree or disagree with this statement:

21. A community garden in my neighborhood would increase the amount of produce I eat. Do you...

- a. Strongly Agree
- b. Agree
- c. Neutral
- d. Disagree
- e. Strongly Disagree

22. Where would be a convenient location for a community garden?

- | | |
|------------------------------|--|
| _____ In My Neighborhood | _____ At a Social Services or WIC Office |
| _____ Where I Work | _____ At a Food Pantry |
| _____ At the Nearest Library | _____ At My Church |
| | _____ Other _____ |

23. Are you interested in starting your own food-based business? Examples include a catering business, a baking business, a farm business, or preserving jams or jellies for sale. YES / NO

Last statement:

24. Food business incubators are appearing more frequently across the United States. At these places, people can rent Department of Health-inspected kitchen space to start their own food businesses. A food business incubator would be beneficial to my community. Do you...

- a. Strongly Agree
- b. Agree
- c. Neutral
- d. Disagree
- e. Strongly Disagree

Demographic Information

Now just some basic information questions.

Which describes your gender? ___ Male ___ Female ___ Other

What is your age range?

- a. 18-24
- b. 25-34
- c. 35-44
- d. 45-54
- e. 55-64
- f. 65+

Are you currently in the military or a military veteran? YES – Current Military / YES – Veteran / NO

Where is your community or neighborhood?

Allegheny Springs / Belview / Belmont / Bethel /Blacksburg / Camp Alta Mons / Catawba / Childress / Christiansburg / Ellet / Elliston / Graysontown / Ironto / Lafayette /Longshop / McCoy / Merrimac / Mount Tabor / New Ellet / Pilot / Plum Creek / Price Mountain / Prices Fork / Riner / Rogers / Sugar Grove / Vicker / Warm Hearth / Whitethorne / Yellow Sulfur / Other _____

What is your zipcode? _____

How many children live in your home? _____

What is your household income? We ask this question so we know we are talking to the right audience.

- ___ \$0-9,999
- ___ \$10,000-19,999
- ___ \$20,000-29,999
- ___ \$30,000-39,999
- ___ \$40,000-49,999
- ___ \$50,000-59,999
- ___ \$60,000-69,999
- ___ \$70,000+

Would you like to add any comments about your personal food history, or any trends you've noticed over time in your community related to food stores, farming, or access to healthy food?

Can we contact you about participating in a group discussion about your ideas and concerns about buying food and growing food in Montgomery County? It will take place in late spring or early summer and be approximately 1 hour in length. (IF YES) May I have the best way to contact you? (RECORD THIS INFORMATION ON CONTACT SHEET).

Thank you very much for participating in the survey. We really appreciate your time and opinions.

Consumer Survey Open Ended Responses

Love food

Food banks are very helpful.

disabilities prevent gardening, don't have a place to garden at home either, cooks vegetables with a lot of butter

Interested in starting a landscaping/flower business but not right now

Gardened before moving but now live in apartment. Grandparents had a land share with a great aunt/uncle; would go over and garden/farm on their land. Also, would love to learn how to can so her garden could sustain her family through winter.

working on installing gardening beds around trailers, collaboration with neighbors. would like to have a plot cleared in the trailer park for use as a community garden. Also, in regards to FBIs, mother-in-law does wedding cakes by word of mouth, used to be baker at Wade's. Finally, used to can foods, nice to "do it yourself". Also also, mentioned buying beef and pork from Virginia Tech and also enjoying hunted meat (deer) from a relative that likes to hunt for sport.

When taxes go up, people who inherit land can't afford to keep the farm going. Would like to see more dairies, milk delivery, prices reasonable. Uncle was a dairy farmer. Also, would like to see a farm market open up at Kentland Farms (Kentland would be selling their own produce to the public). She thinks a lot goes to waste there, but a market stand there would be convenient for her neighborhood in Longshop because they have to drive up to Snuffey's usually. Finally, the cafe/sit-down restaurant portion of the FBI was really important to her. They need someplace to go out to eat in Prices Fork/Longshop/McCoy. Need 20-30 tables.

Knows that a lot of kids don't want to go all the way through culinary school but want their own food businesses/restaurants, so an FBI would be beneficial to them. Also feels like government/planning is phasing out farming in favor of building up residential. It's going to screw them over because they can't eat money. Radio channels listened to at work: 94.9, 96.3, 98.1

too old to tend a garden. sometimes tomatoes come through food pantry but not sure if local.

America needs to help out its own citizens and not spend so much on foreign aid and immigrants. The homeless shelters in Roanoke are overflowing and turning people away. Participant was homeless two years ago.

Seems like farms being pushed out with residential. Trying to turn Christiansburg and Blacksburg into one city. In regards to an FBI, participant said a restaurant was a "pipe dream" and didn't fully understand the concept of an FBI. However, he also noted that many empty buildings in downtown Chrsitiansburg would be suitable locations. The food/chemical question seems to cause some consternation among people who reason with it. Often a respondent says, well as long as I wash it off and don't eat it it's okay.

FBI should have a canning facility open to public, too. Or Canning facility should be tied to food pantries with education on how to preserve food. Most fresh produce is cheapest when it's in season. People have to learn how to preserve it to increase their food stability.

Have family chickens and a family garden

Used to have a garden at home but has deer problems.

meat is not good at the food pantries, it's either frostburned or rotten. Helps at a pantry sometimes, sorting meat.

Compared to the commercial market, farmers market food is expensive but they are unable to find differences in quality.

Trying to get away from starches, salt, and frozen/canned foods. Trying to eat more fresh or use steamers for frozen food.

Mom does canned vegetables, jellies, jams, fruits and would be interested/helped by a community kitchen. Also, grandparents attend farmers markets. Finally, participant has noticed most vegetables are getting too small at grocery stores but not a farmers markets.

Has talked with husband about opening restaurant. Her husband is a chef at Olive Garden and she cooks

a home. They don't know the process to get started or how that works. A farmers market in Christiansburg would be easy for her to access. Thinks it's great that people want to garden, and started a garden at home with previous neighbor, continuing this year. Participant grows flowers. Participant would like to see more crafts and events where you see people selling amber necklaces and soaps, more people with their own businesses doing crafts. She herself does a little bit of everything and is quick at learning.

Thought about doing cake decorating but it's so hard to find funds for starting up. Also, has difficulty finding local eggs to buy and has trouble getting to the farmers market because of her baby. There isn't a space for her to garden at home (woods/rocks), but she's looking into it. She wants to move where she can garden and thinks Virginia should support people who grow their own food through tax breaks because it's good for their community.

Lives with great-grandparents. Grandma cans everything: ketchup, pizza sauce, dilly beans. Participant says she doesn't like helping grandma can and usually leaves the house when she does. Grandma has a huge room full of canned goods. Participant lives on a farm. Also, participant doesn't see many people using the community kitchen.

wants a bigger farmers market and wants more choices in hispanic foods/ingredients

Goes to the roadside stand in Ironton

Hopes this survey is useful. Would like to see more roadside stands rather than farmers markets.

Participant thought the farmers market is cheaper than the store but didn't know that it keeps going in the winter, too. He grew up with his grandparents, and they had a garden plot in the backyard with chickens and rabbits. There's no space for him to garden in the trailer park, plus he is not allowed/doesn't own the land. He'd like to go back to work (just retired). When asked if he would sort produce for food, he said he'd rather work for money and anticipated the fact that he'd have to drive out to the farm to be too big of an obstacle.

Participant used to farm with her mother, who has since passed away. They had a dairy cow and large garden plot. Remembers planting potatoes. She doesn't garden anymore because her mother is gone, and would love to start a garden behind home but can't--too many deer and other pests.

Participant gardened with his father back in Ohio but stopped once he moved back to the NRV. States he has no place to put one since there is just red clay in his backyard. Notes that he could put up raised beds in wood boxes, so is aware of other alternatives.

Consumer Focus Group Transcript

Giving Tree Food Pantry

7.25.14

Participants: 8

Moderator/MOD: Jessica Schultz

Assistant Moderator/MOD2: Xiaolu Hou

MOD: So thanks again for coming. I'm Jessica and this is Xiaolu. I didn't mean to be at the head of the table. Oh, yeah. Have a seat. The reason why we have you all here together is, if you remember I was doing surveys a few weeks ago, and basically we want more in depth questions, more in depth answers to those questions. So, we want to find out more about the barriers to acquiring healthy fruits and vegetables that are also grown by the farmers who live here. We want you to do the talking. Everyone should participate, and I might pick on you if you don't speak up (gestures toward one woman; group laughs). There's no right or wrong answers so everyone has different experiences and opinions. We want to hear from everyone. What's said in this room stays here between all of us. And obviously we're tape-recording the group so if you can speak up that would be good. We just want to capture everything that you have to say. I can't really capture everything that you have to say or really understand what you're saying if I'm furiously trying to write at the same time. So that's why we have that. Okay. Is everybody ready?

P2: Nuh uh. (group laughs)

MOD: Well, my first question, and it's kind of an opening question, is: What is your favorite memory related to food or to farming?

P2: Can you say that you work in a packing hut and they ought'n run across the table—

P1: That's grading.

P2: Grading. And you had to pick out the bad ones and send them, can you say that?

MOD: Oh, you were grading?

P2: Yeah, I was working in a packing hut at a farm.

MOD: Oh!

P2: And I did the grading, so everything that come through there with a bruise on it, had to take it out. And they would go down to the people that were bagging them. And I moved from there, and then I was down there cutting and bagging. So I was right there sending bad ones right back. They send bruised ones there a couple. And when I worked the table, we didn't have nothing come back. Then they moved me from the table. They had all kinds coming back.

MOD: Wow. So you must've been pretty good.

P2: I was. Well, we did, you had "fancy" kind. And you had to be real good, no bruise, no cut or nothing could be on it. And while I was sending back, they would tear it open, send it back to me, and I would send it back again.

MOD: Didn't you say you were a farmer? She might've been grading your produce. What did you grow?

P3: I grow everything. I had cattle, beans, corn, all kinds of stuff. I've canned 61 quarts of beans this week.

MOD2: Yeah, he was telling me that.

P3: I canned six gallons of cucumber pickles. I've got a cucumber recipe, it's called Christmas Pickles. You take a gallon jar and fill it up with cucumbers and then you take 4 tablespoons of salt, 4 tablespoons of alum, 4 tablespoons of pickling spice, and tie it up in a rag and put it in the jar. And fill it up with vinegar, and then you seal it up. And you leave it for a month or you can leave it 'til next year if you want to. And then you take it out and then you soak 'em in water. And

then you taste them, and if it's still too spicy, you put them in a container and put 9 cups of sugar on 'em while you slice them. You know, cross-ways or long ways, either way you want to do it. And you shake 'em up for about 3 days and it makes strong pickles. And you can just put them in a jar and seal 'em up. You don't have to cook 'em or nothing to seal 'em, you just put them in your fridge. I put mine in a gallon bucket and just set it in there (can't tell what he said next).

MOD: Why are they called Christmas Pickles?

P3: It takes about, well, I guess why they call 'em Christmas Pickles is that it takes that long for you all, to do 'em. By the time you do 'em, you know, they'll be ready to do. And they're real crisp and sweet. They are delicious. (?) brought a jar (group laughs).

MOD: Okay, does anyone else have a favorite memory?

P4: I don't know about a favorite memory, but when we lived in Indiana some, a neighbor took us pepper picking. And one thing he forgot to tell us is we needed gloves. Because once the sun come up hoooo, think about fire. Our hands were on fire.

MOD: They were hot peppers?

P4: Yes. (group ohs/gasps/laughs) You got to go early in the morning to pick 'em, but if you're going to stay past the sun up, Ha, once the sun come up, if you don't have on gloves, you're feeling that.

MOD2: I hope you didn't touch your eyes.

P4: Nooo. That was one thing he told us, don't rub your eyes, don't rub your hands in your eyes.

MOD: That kind of leads me into this next question. A lot of the people that completed the survey that I did, said that farming or growing their own food was a part of their family history. It was something that they grew up with. And yet they don't have a garden at home or a farm now. So I kind of want to know why. Why do you think that's the case? Why is nobody growing their own food anymore?

P5: Gardening is hard (group agreement).

P6: Some places they won't let you. And some places are too dry and need a lot of rain. And there's too many cats and dogs around so you can't.

MOD: So some places won't let you garden?

P7: And maybe because you could go and buy it cheaper instead of having to do it and then the crops could fail.

MOD: Yeah. That's a good point, too. There's risk in it.

P3: Last year we had too much rain. Lot of my stuff rotted. This time, well I got all kinds of stuff, but the rain hasn't come in. But I got probably a bag or more, beans and corn, cucumbers, cabbage, and what I don't use I send it to individual people.

MOD: Other troubles? We've heard it's hard, we've heard sometimes where you live you can't garden, that there's risk in it. Are there any more reasons you can think of that if you had a family history of it at home you wouldn't have something now?

P5: They may not have liked it and didn't want to do it.

P6: Or some people just don't have the time.

P4: And some people as they age, they might not be able to keep it up. Years ago, I worked at a place where a gentleman used to keep a garden, but he's not able to get out in the garden. His daughters keep it for him. But he personally is not able to get out. So there may be some physical limitations that people may get as they age.

MOD: That's a really good point. I know aging in place is hard for this area here. A lot of people, as they get older they can't stay in the homes they grew up in, just because they're harder to get in and out of, they have a lot of stairs. So I could see how gardening could be a problem with that, too. (group agreement)

MOD: What other trends have you noticed in the area in regards to food stores or farms or anything like that? Have you noticed anything since you've been here? You've been farming a long time, have you noticed anything?

P3: I have more trouble with deer than anything else. They try to eat up my stuff.

P1: Rabbits and bears.

P6: And dogs.

MOD: And groundhogs. My dog just killed a groundhog.

P3: Groundhogs eat the top of them beans.

P1: Oh, yeah, oh yeah.

P5: Skunks. There are skunks everywhere.

P6: Possums.

MOD: (laughs) How about non-garden pests. What about any trends you've noticed with food stores or what's available or anything like that?

P6: A lot of stuff just costs us more now. Can't afford to buy. (group agreement)

P3: Everything costs a lot more now, doesn't it? I did have a lot of chickens and guineas and turkeys because the price just got so high.

P1: It's true.

P3: You can buy eggs cheaper than what can raise 'em and sell 'em.

MOD: I know. The folks at the farmers market, they have a hard time selling their eggs for a profit. And they're still the most expensive eggs here.

P3: Yeah. Diesel fuel is so high now, can't even run your tractor. Everything's got out of hand.

P5: We got the highest food tax.

MOD: Virginia does?

P5: That's what I heard. I work at Hardee's and our, uh, food tax is 13% on the food.

MOD: That's only on prepared foods, right?

P5: Yeah. But we still got garden stuff there. We've got tomatoes and lettuce.

MOD: Yeah. Let's see. I have more questions that kind of stem from the survey, too. We had some people who thought a farmers market in their neighborhood would be helpful to them. Do you think it would be helpful to you guys if you had a farmers market that was by where you live? How would it impact you? Would it change any habits or anything?

P4: Well, I like fresh vegetables. As long as the prices are good.

P1: Yeah. That's right.

P4: I know Blacksburg has one but I can honestly say, I don't know why I don't go. I just don't go.

P5: It's out of the way for me.

P4: I usually just get my stuff from the store. I guess it's just habit. Yeah, not knowing what to expect or what the food prices are going to be.

MOD: If the food market was like by your house, do you think you would go?

P4: Maybe. If it was a little closer.

P6: Well you get to ask what kinds of stuff they use on the products, too. In case you might be allergic to it or something.

P1: Yeah, true.

P3: All people want now is something that ain't been sprayed or nothing. Organic.

MOD: What about if you had a garden nearby, like some people said you couldn't have one where you live. Would you use it? If you had a community garden that was near you?

P4: Probably yeah.

P6: Probably.

MOD: It wouldn't be too hard, or you wouldn't be too lazy? (group laughs) There wouldn't be too many groundhogs.

P2: Or deer.

MOD: Just like a garden space you could show others and grow. How do you think that would change how you eat? If anything?

P6: It would help out a lot.

MOD: How?

P6: Well you get more fruits and everything and vegetables and everything.

P3: Yeah it does, if you can.

MOD: Do you have a problem accessing land around here?

P6: Probably because people ain't gonna let you use dirt, their land. They won't let you do it.

P8: They might charge you. Can't plant nothing on my land. Too many tree roots.

MOD: Okay, so we've talked about farmers markets, community gardens, and like I mentioned before, now community kitchen space. So now you have this great garden and all this food, would it be helpful to have like a kitchen space where you could maybe can it or you could rent it by the hour to start your own food business? How do you think that might impact you personally or the community if that kind of service was available to you?

P6: You could help out other people canning and everything. I mean, you could have your food for the winter, yeah.

P8: When I was a kid, my mother did that. We used to have a big garden. Tomatoes, corn, cucumbers, and deer didn't get in it back then.

MOD: Do you think people might use it more for canning purposes or do you think they might use it to start a business?

P6: Canning.

MOD: Canning? What if you would like to start a business, start a catering business, and you could rent it by the hour and just churn out all your products and go do an event, or something like that. Do you think there would be interest in this area for that type of facility?

P6: Maybe so.

P4: Maybe.

P6: Maybe but most of them, old people, they like to can.

P2: Young people don't like to can no more. They like to play.

P3: Out at the school, they'll help you can.

MOD: Where?

P3: Out at the schoolhouse in Riner. They got a canner. Certain times they'll help you can it.

MOD: Is that the same, like I knew of a Riner cannery that was out there, but it has since closed. Is this a different place?

P3: I mean, they'll do it for you. When you got your stuff, when you got make it for them.

MOD: All right. I just have two more questions. How would you want to eat?

P2: Good food.

MOD: What is good food?

P2: Tomatoes, cucumbers, carrots, oranges.

P5: Apples.

P6: Nectarines.

P3: Beans, potatoes.

MOD: What about you guys? How would you like to eat?

P4: I would rather eat fresh things, but growing up as an army brat, we ate a lot of processed food. So I guess because it was cheaper and more available.

P1: It was back then.

P4: But that's kind of what I grew up on so it's hard to switch just to fresh things. But I would prefer fresh.

MOD: What kinds of things would have to change in order for you to get all those cucumbers and all those tangerines and things like that? What would have to happen in order to meet that goal?

P6: Prices could go down. (group agreement)

P4: If they could make them as cheap as the processed food. You can get it cheaper than you can get the produce.

P6: And if you look at the beef, oh man. It's outrageous.

MOD: The prices?

P6: Yes.

MOD: I usually go through the managers special meat.

P3: The price of the beef starts out high. 300 pound steer the other day, got 900 hundred some dollars for it.

P6: I know, I went to the stock pen down there in (mayers?) and saw all kinds of cows going through there. And they selling big herds of them. Money was going way up. It's like, man if only I could have just the money that the cows are worth. (group laughs)

MOD: Do you think if you had land you would raise cows?

P6: If I could get on some cheap enough, and if I could find a way to sell them as quick and I could and make a profit.

MOD: Anything else that would have to change besides price? For you to start eating all the good stuff?

P6: Probably quality, too.

MOD: Is the quality not high enough for you now?

P6: Well, I mean the quantity. You go and they have all this bruised or damaged stuff. Like only half of it is good to eat.

MOD: What about you?

P5: Prices was the thing for me. I mean, we're at a food pantry.

MOD: Yeah, kind of a moot point, I realize. But I gotta ask, you know. Everybody is surprising, with different opinions. Is there anything else you'd like to comment on related to food or farming in the region? This is your chance. This is going to be what we're going to use to inform policymakers or town council or regional commission, things like that. Is there anything else that you'd like to comment on?

P5: Lower the prices.

MOD: I don't know if they have control over something like that.

P5: Then up our pay.

P6: Just make it more affordable where people can buy.

P4: Make it some where you live if--some of my neighbors do grow it. I just know some of my neighbors get special treatment. To let people have gardens in their, you know, you're renting the land anyway so they should let you have your own little garden.

MOD: So make it easier to garden?

P4: Yeah.

P6: If there could be a building, where you could go in and work in, like if you can't afford food, if you could go in and put your time in and work in it, and then that would pay for your food.

MOD: So almost like a volunteer thing?

P6: Yeah.

MOD: Would you rather do that than come to the food pantry?

P6: I've done it before. In Radford.

MOD: What kind of place?

P6: It was where you go and you didn't have the money to buy the food, and you go ride a bus and you start that morning, you work 5 hours, anywhere from 2 to 5 hours, depends on how long you can sit there at the table and bag onions, tomatoes, and you keep on going until you run out of that. And then you bag oranges and stuff. And then at the end of the day you go and they have a box of food there for you. But they don't have that no more.

MOD: Okay. That was in Radford, you said?

P6: Yeah.

MOD: Do you know what the organization was called?

P6: To feed the hungry. It was a feed the hungry. That was back when she was little. Way back in 1996 or 97.

MOD: That'd be interesting because I get some farmers in the area that would need the processing help to process their produce, and get it to food stores and things like that.

P6: Yeah, I would go do it.

MOD: Okay. Would anyone else go do something like that?

P4: I'd take my kids, too.

MOD: All right. Well, does anybody have any other comments they'd like to share? All right. Well thank you very much. Please take the peaches.

P5: I'll take one for my husband.

MOD: Thank you very much for joining us. We really appreciate it.

The Giving Tree Interviews

August 29, 2014

MOD: Jessica Schultz

MOD: I've been around a long time here doing surveys with people, here at this pantry. And a lot of people who did the survey said that farming or gardening or growing their own food was a part of their family history or their personal history, yet they didn't have a garden at home. So why do you think this is the case?

P1: People used to have land and houses.. They had like, they lived differently than they do now. A lot of people now live in apartments or trailer parks or places that are owned by somebody else. And they move often and everything so you can't have, and you don't know when you're going to be uprooted so you can't plant a garden and then right before it comes in, you have to move somewhere else.

P2: Right.

MOD: So you're saying their lives are a little more unstable so it's harder to put down roots, literally and figuratively.

P1: That's right. Because where I'm at..

P2: Nobody has a family root nowadays. They up and move every time you turn around.

P1: Yeah, you want to, but it's just not, there's divorces. There's all kind of problems in the family that cause people to be uprooted all the time. There's sicknesses. There's a lot going on now. And plus, the economy, nobody has money to. Most people make it from one payday to the next by the skin of their teeth.

P2: If they're lucky.

MOD: So it's hard to think ahead enough to be able to plant a garden?

P1: Yeah. And even if you did, a lot of times if you put a lot of money in seed and everything else, and then your life is uprooted, then after a while you just stop doing it. And then there's age, too. With age you can't do as much as you did when you were younger.

MOD: Yeah, I've been hearing about that issue, too. Have you noticed any other trends regarding farms in this region? Or in regards to food stores or anything like that? Like, you talked about trends among people and like socially, but what about food and farming?

P1: There's so much, so many food places where people get food free, and if they didn't have that I think they would starve to death. Because the welfare has cut down on food stamps, and the availability of people getting food stamps or the requirement for food stamps. And a lot of people can't, I mean, if you have somebody in the family working, they might not be giving you any money. So then they won't be giving you any food stamps, and I think that's part of it, too. That people do have availability food pantries and so forth. And that's good.

MOD: What about you? Have you seen any trends in regards to food stores or farming around here?

P2: Well, there is farmers markets and so forth on weekends, which is great, but there's not enough of them. I think there's one here in Blacksburg, there's one in Radford. You got to go all the way to Roanoke for a really nice one. But there's not enough of them. They're too spread out.

MOD: I've heard gas prices are a concern for people trying to get food.

P2: Exactly.

P1: And I found out that the flea markets and everything. I asked somebody and they said they were getting their produce from Walmart and taking it and selling it like it was from the farm. And of course they were charging more for it. And so you can't really trust people anymore.

MOD: The Blacksburg Farmers Market, the market manager goes out to everybody's farm and makes sure that what they have there is what they're bringing.

P2: Oh, really? Oh, good.

P1: I'm glad they do that.

MOD: If you had a farmers market closer to you, how would that impact you? Would you eat more produce? Or would you shop there?

P2: I would go there before I went to Walmart. Because it would be fresh. It would be fresh produce. Whatever they have there is fresh from the garden.

MOD: So freshness is important to you?

P2: Sure.

P1: After all my bills, and I'm trying to get some bills paid and stuff, I really don't have the money left over, the food banks are about all I can afford right now.

P2: It's true, I don't either. But whatever you can do for the freshness.

P1: And a lot of times if you go late in the day, I went late in the day when they're about ready to close up, and they'll give you special deals on stuff. I did that. So if you could just tell them, that you're low income and you're hoping that you can get things that are reduced, then a lot of times they will.

P2: I haven't found that.

P1: Well you probably haven't asked. Or if you wait until right before they close up, you can do it.

MOD: A lot of times, if you have a relationship with a farmer, like if you buy from them for a little while, like eventually, maybe you can start trading with them or things like that.

P1: You can barter.

MOD: Bartering is pretty big at the Blacksburg Market, at least among vendors. I'm a vendor there, too.

P1: They used to have goat cheese, and I love goat cheese, and you can't find it anymore.

MOD: Finding local cheese is a big problem.

P1: Yeah they used to have goat cheese, and it was really, really good.

P2: I wonder if Annie Kay's might have it.

MOD: Annie Kay's probably does, and Eats in Blacksburg, they have goat cheese there, too.

P1: I used to go to a little restaurant when I had a little bit more money, and they had a salad that they put goat cheese in it. And it was really, really good. But that's the only place that I found they had the goat cheese.

MOD: What about a community garden?

P1: (Earnestly) I think they need to do that. I think communities ought to do that because a lot of people would participate. Especially the young people, the young children. And it would teach them a whole lot. If people had land, that they could volunteer the use of the land for four or five months and maybe get a tax break for it. I think that would be great. And I think that would be great for the students at Virginia Tech to let, to help people participate, like the children. And maybe the old people could have something, the senior citizens could have something. They could get part of the produce, they wouldn't have to get it all, but they could get part of the produce. And part of the produce could go to the pantry. But then part of the produce could go to whoever was working it, too. And then the owner could get part of it, so they could all share in it like that. I think that would be good.

P2: Oh, absolutely.

MOD: Do you think people would really do that, I mean really use the garden even if they weren't getting paid?

P1: Yeah, I think they would if they got some of the produce. They would have to get a least half of the produce if they were going to volunteer. But part of it would have to go to the owner of the land, part of it would have to go to the food bank, and then part of it, maybe 50 percent would have to go to the people who are actually doing it. I think that would be reasonable, but you couldn't do it if you weren't getting something out of it.

MOD: Do you think your landlord could be convinced to start a community garden in your trailer park?

P2: No. He wouldn't do it.

P1: No. They wouldn't.

MOD: Not if he got a tax break?

P2: No.

P1: Now Virginia Tech could probably do it. Have a program of it. I think Virginia Tech would do it.

MOD: Yeah, they would need the land, too, and it would have to be close by people.

P1: They have a lot of people who donate farms to Virginia Tech. A lot of people donate land that went to school there, they donate their farms to Virginia Tech.

MOD: To do studies and such?

P1: Yeah. They do studies and stuff, so Virginia Tech has land that they could really develop community gardens on.

MOD: Okay, I have one more question—did you guys want to go to the service? Okay, then just one more question: We're thinking of starting a community kitchen space that people could rent by the hour. So it would have the equipment people would need to can or to start their own food business, or to bake, like if they wanted to start their own baking business. Do you think this would be beneficial? Like, would people actually use it and rent it?

P1: There's been people that.. you go ahead.

P2: I don't think they do it like they used to. They used to have the community kitchens like that, like there's one in Shawsville. But there's not that many that do it anymore. There's the old-timers that do it, that did it way back when we were children.

P1: They'd can fruitcakes. Way back, they'd actually can fruitcakes.

P2: But I don't think they would actually do it that much anymore.

MOD: Who are you talking about, with 'they'?

P2: I don't think the people would be interested in doing it that much anymore. They're too busy doing other things in life to take time to go to these places, I think. And they do all their canning at home and so forth.

P1: Yeah. But if you could combine it with something else, like feeding the public. Combine it with something else, because there's always a need for a free meal, even for the students at Virginia Tech. Combine it and just have it every so often. That would be the main thing, is not have it all the time.

P2: Uh, huh. Don't have it too often.

P1: Just have it every so often and then combine it with a feeding program through Virginia Tech, where you could get the students to help with the cleaning and everything. The whole thing is to involve the students at Virginia Tech and let them help set it up. But they would have to get something back, which would be free food. And you could also use that for the canning, too. And it could also go in with the community garden. But the main thing is to involve them, because the cleaning of the kitchen would just be huge.

MOD: So you think it would have to rely on student volunteers?

P1: Well, they would have to get something back like free food. Like the people who help at the YMCA thrift shop, they get a lot of the free clothes and stuff that are donated. A lot of times, there's perks involved in everything.

MOD: Yeah, and you were just saying you think people would use the community garden if they were getting food from it. Do you think community members would help clean the kitchen and stuff if they were getting food from it, too?

P1: Yeah, probably. It's just like here. People volunteer here and they bring in food, but they also stay and get food. And like one woman said a long time ago in Pearisburg, they used to give out free food down there. And she said no matter how much money people have anymore, a lot of times the bills and sending kids to college and everything, everybody runs short. But you know, they base on income now, they don't base on need. And that's sad because a lot of people that's got a lot of money...

MOD: Are still stretched pretty thin?

P1: Are very thin. A lot of times I've driving on gas fumes until I get my check. (laughs) And I think I'm not the only one.

MOD: Do you think anyone would use that kitchen space to start a business? Do you know anybody who would be interested in that?

P1: I don't know. It's so expensive to get started, you'd almost have to start it with using it as a service, and then start it up as a business. Almost as a service where you could get help, volunteer help, and then later on turn it in to your business.

MOD: Okay. That's what I had to do. Okay. Thank you very, very much for your comments. Thank you.

Appendix B

Producer Survey

This survey is a part of a larger initiative to determine how local foods can be made better available to low-income residents of Montgomery County while simultaneously supporting regional farmers. Basically, we'd like to know how we can help you, as a producer and business owner, expand in ways that ensure equal access to your products. We're NOT talking about donations. We're talking about helping you find and take advantage of market opportunities that ensure you are profitable and that all our neighbors can access even with financial or geographic barriers. Your answers will inform local and regional agricultural policy, training, and marketing initiatives that strive for a more just food system—for farmers and residents. The first step is for you to tell us what your vision is and what you need to get there. The survey will take approximately ten minutes to complete. You do not have to take the survey, and you can stop at any time. We would greatly appreciate your feedback though. By completing the survey, you are expressing your consent to do so. Your farm or business's contact information will not be used to identify you UNLESS you indicate that you'd like to be a part of documents made available to the community, such as a regional food map or directory. This study is funded by Southern SARE and the USDA and administered by the Friends of the Farmers Market, based in Blacksburg, VA. If you have additional questions or comments, please contact us at bbfarmersmarket@gmail.com or 540.239.8290. We'd love to hear from you. Thank you very much for your participation, and for all your work as a producer, business owner, and neighbor. Click the arrow below to continue on to the survey.



The survey questions are divided into three general topics and presented in this order: Expansion Opportunities and Barriers Specific Needs According to Sector (Livestock, Poultry/Eggs, Produce, Dairy, Value-Added) Farm Demographics (Size, Location, Type) Click the arrow below to continue.

1. Expansion Opportunities and Barriers We'd like to know if and how you'd like to expand your farm operation and what you need to do so. Please click the arrow to move on to the questions.

Are you interested in expanding your farm business?

- Yes
- No

What's your vision for expanding your operation?

What are the challenges or barriers to expansion? Check all that apply.

- Packaging and Labeling
- Transport Cost or Type
- Storage
- Land Access
- Demand
- Access to Processing
- GAP Certification Time or Cost
- Organic Certification Time or Cost
- Labor Access
- Access to Farm Equipment or Supply
- Price Margin
- Marketing
- Other: Please feel free to elaborate. _____

What kind of training would help you expand? Check all that apply.

- Beginning Farmer Training/Whole Farm Planning
- Livestock Production Training
- Fruit/Vegetable Production Training
- Marketing, Promotion, Labels
- Food Safety
- Lending/Grant Options
- Nutrient Management
- Business Planning
- Other: Please feel free to elaborate. _____

With which local/regional buyers are you most interested in establishing or building connections? Check all that apply.

- Wholesale distributors
- Direct markets (farmers markets, CSA, on-farm purchases)
- Restaurants and food service
- Farm-to-school or farm-to-institution
- Independent grocery stores
- Other: Please list. _____

What are the challenges to selling your products to local/regional buyers? Check all that apply and clarify if necessary.

- Inadequate distribution network _____
- Unable to sell at high enough price _____
- Unable to produce adequate quantity _____
- Unable to find information about buyers _____
- Issues related to marketing to local buyers _____
- No demand from local buyers _____
- Product not feasible on local/regional scale _____
- Local/regional manufacturing or processing not adequate _____
- Lack of aggregation/co-mingling facility _____
- Other: Please feel free to elaborate. _____

Please use this space to provide your thoughts or your own personal challenges when trying to participate in regional food system initiatives, including opportunities, challenges, failures, and successes.

2. Specific Needs According to Sector Please tell us about each aspect of your farm operation. The same questions will be asked for each sector in which you participate. Click the arrow button below to continue.

Do you currently raise livestock (excluding poultry) for meat?

- Yes
- No

How do you primarily sell your livestock products? Check your top 3 according to sales.

- Restaurants
- Wholesale
- On-Farm
- Community Supported Agriculture (CSA)
- Buying Clubs
- Grocery Stores
- Farmers Markets
- Health Food Stores
- Other _____

To the best of your knowledge, are any of these products consumed in Montgomery County?

- Yes. Please list the products and where they are available for sale. _____
- No

What are your total sales per year from livestock/livestock products?

- Less than \$2,500
- \$2,500 - \$9,999
- \$10,000 - \$49,999
- \$50,000 - \$99,999
- \$100,000+

What is or are the biggest barriers to the success or expansion of this aspect of your farm business? Check all that apply, and explain if necessary.

- Current regulations _____
- Transportation _____
- Access to capital _____
- Access to land _____
- Distribution _____
- Marketing _____
- Processing facilities _____
- Training _____
- Other: Please feel free to elaborate. _____

Do you currently raise poultry for meat or eggs?

- Yes
- No

How do you primarily sell your poultry products? Check your top 3 according to sales.

- Restaurants
- Wholesale
- On-Farm
- Community Supported Agriculture (CSA)
- Buying Clubs
- Grocery Stores
- Farmers Markets
- Health Food Stores
- Other _____

To the best of your knowledge, are any of these products consumed in Montgomery County?

- Yes. Please list the products and where they are available for sale. _____
- No

What are your total sales per year from poultry products?

- Less than \$2,500
- \$2,500 - \$9,999
- \$10,000 - \$49,999
- \$50,000 - \$99,999
- \$100,000+

What is or are the biggest barriers to the success or expansion of this aspect of your farm business? Check all that apply, and explain if necessary.

- Current regulations _____
- Transportation _____
- Access to capital _____
- Access to land _____
- Distribution _____
- Marketing _____
- Processing facilities _____
- Training _____
- Other. Please feel free to elaborate. _____

Do you currently grow produce? This includes vegetables, fruits, orchard fruits, nuts, and edible plant starts/seedlings.

- Yes
- No

How do you primarily sell your produce? Check your top 3 according to sales.

- Restaurants
- Wholesale
- On-Farm
- Community Supported Agriculture (CSA)
- Buying Clubs
- Grocery Stores
- Farmers Markets
- Health Food Stores
- Other _____

To the best of your knowledge, are any of these products consumed in Montgomery County?

- Yes. Please list the products and where they are available for sale. _____
- No

What are your total sales per year from produce?

- Less than \$2,500
- \$2,500 - \$9,999
- \$10,000 - \$49,999
- \$50,000 - \$99,999
- \$100,000+

What is or are the biggest barriers to the success or expansion of this aspect of your farm business? Check all that apply, and explain if necessary.

- Current regulations _____
- Transportation _____
- Access to capital _____
- Access to land _____
- Distribution _____
- Marketing _____
- Processing facilities _____
- Training _____
- Other: Please feel free to elaborate. _____

Do you currently produce any dairy or dairy products?

- Yes
- No

How do you primarily sell your dairy? Check your top 3 according to sales.

- Restaurants
- Wholesale
- On-Farm
- Community Supported Agriculture (CSA)
- Buying Clubs
- Grocery Stores
- Farmers Markets
- Health Food Stores
- Other _____

To the best of your knowledge, are any of these products consumed in Montgomery County?

- Yes. Please list the products and where they are available for sale. _____
- No

What are your total sales per year from dairy?

- Less than \$2,500
- \$2,500 - \$9,999
- \$10,000 - \$49,999
- \$50,000 - \$99,999
- \$100,000+

What is or are the biggest barriers to the success or expansion of this aspect of your farm business? Check all that apply, and explain if necessary.

- Current regulations _____
- Transportation _____
- Access to capital _____
- Access to land _____
- Distribution _____
- Marketing _____
- Processing facilities _____
- Training _____
- Other: Please feel free to elaborate. _____

Do you currently produce any value-added or artisan food products? This includes bakery items, honey, jams/jellies, pastas, and pasta sauce.

- Yes
- No

How do you primarily sell these products? Check your top 3 according to sales.

- Restaurants
- Wholesale
- On-Farm
- Community Supported Agriculture (CSA)
- Buying Clubs
- Grocery Stores
- Farmers Markets
- Health Food Stores
- Other _____

To the best of your knowledge, are any of these products consumed in Montgomery County?

- Yes. Please list the products and where they are available for sale. _____
- No

What are your total sales per year from value-added or artisan food products?

- Less than \$2,500
- \$2,500 - \$9,999
- \$10,000 - \$49,999
- \$50,000 - \$99,999
- \$100,000+

What is or are the biggest barriers to the success or expansion of this aspect of your farm business? Check all that apply, and explain if necessary.

- Current regulations _____
- Transportation _____
- Access to capital _____
- Access to land _____
- Distribution _____
- Marketing _____
- Processing facilities _____
- Training _____
- Other: Please feel free to elaborate. _____

3. Farm Demographic Information We'd like to know some basic information about your farm, such as size and location. Click the arrows to finish up the survey with these questions.

Please provide your farm business name. (Optional)

Please provide the contact information (address, phone, email, website) of your farm business. (Optional)

Are you okay with your farm contact information being used in a regional food directory or map, distributed to the public?

- Yes
- No

Number of acres farmed and within 50 miles of Montgomery County's border:

- less than 10
- 10 to 49
- 50 to 99
- 100+

Farm size by value of annual sales:

- less than \$2,500
- \$2,500 to \$4,999
- \$5,000 to \$9,999
- \$10,000 to \$24,999
- \$25,000 to \$49,999
- \$50,000 to \$99,999
- \$100,000 or more

Producer type (check all that apply to you):

- Conventional
- Non-certified Organic
- Certified Organic
- Appalachian Grown
- Virginia's Finest or Virginia Grown
- Animal Welfare Approved
- Certified Natural
- GAP-certified
- Other: Please feel free to elaborate. _____

Is your primary source of income from this farm business?

- Yes
- No

Would you like this farm business to serve as your primary source of income?

- Yes
- No

Producer Focus Group Transcript

Market Square Park, Blacksburg, VA

7.12.14 (2:30pm)

Participants: 6 (farmers market vendors)

Moderator/MOD: Jessica Schultz

Assistant Moderator/MOD2: Maureen McGonagle

MOD: And we're recording. First of all, thank you so much. I know you all must be really tired. I'm really tired, so hopefully we can get this thing going without a hitch. So, this group, basically I wanted additional answers to the survey that went out, the electronic survey, I think everyone sitting here filled it out. And so we found some pretty interesting things and so I have additional questions on it. And it's to kind of fill in the survey, fill in the gaps and get more in depth kind of answers to the questions. The purpose of this group: You need to do the talking. It's not for me to talk at you. I'll prompt you with questions and things like that. If I find that you're not responding, I may pick on you like, "What do you think?" just to make sure we get a pretty round and full perspective of the group. There's no right or wrong answers. Everything stays here, relatively, I don't know, you might not want to make those people mad over there (laughs). But I think it'll be okay. And obviously, we're tape recording right now. So, but you'll still all remain anonymous with a code name or like "Respondent 1." Um, so anyway, thank you again. And I have eight questions for you. So it should go relatively quickly.

And the first one is, I just want to know, what was the first farm that you all ever worked on?

P1: My parents' farm. Since the time I was born, we farmed. That's what we do.

MOD: Anyone else have a family farm? (Respondents shake heads) ...No? ...Wow. Looks like we're all first generation except for you. Wow. Okay. Then what was the first farm you worked on?

P2: My own. I'd like to comment on that. I used to go to the sustainable agriculture class at Tech, and I'd always ask, How many of you were raised on a farm? And only just about the same percentage—just a few of them. The rest of them just had an interest in farming. So, uh, I thought that was kind of interesting. And maybe because it was sustainable agriculture. If you went to the ag, I think if you went to a conventional ag class you might see something different.

MOD: That was the civic agriculture class, right? I remember you speaking at it.

P2: Well, this one was a sustainable agriculture one, with Brinkley Benson. So it wasn't a conventional agriculture class, not the mainstream course at Tech.

P1: You know, I think one of the factors, and I'm speaking for people like myself that were raised on a farm, wanted to get off the farm. I spent the first twenty years trying to get off the farm, and the next twenty years trying to get back on the farm. Because I didn't like it then. It was just hard, and I wanted to do something different. So I think a lot of people leave the farm and don't go back, and that's probably why there's such a small percentage of people farming in our, in my age group, that actually grew up on a farm.

P2: But I think at Tech, if you went to some of their mainstream ag classes, a lot of them, especially the two year program, most of those kids grew up on farms and are going to go back to the farms.

P1: Yes, they do, right. Because I've been in some of those. You're right exactly.

P3: My grandfather made me and my brother hoe ten acres of corn. (laughs) We were thirteen years old. And so I've been trying to figure out how to raise stuff without hoeing ever since. (group laughs)

P1: Yeah, we hoed tobacco. Tell me about it. Those were long rows..

P3: Yeah, we would just pray for a cloud. Like, God, it's so damn hot.

MOD: That was like today. I don't know why, but I got a black tent. Cause it's significantly hotter underneath..

P1: What were you thinking? (laughs)

MOD: I don't know! But it's like you step on a chair and the temperature raises like twenty degrees. It was a bad idea. Anyway. So next question. This is more along the lines of the survey: How do you determine what product will have a market? Like how do you decide what you're going to bring, how much you're going to plant, based on like, how much you think is going to sell. How do you figure that out?

P4: JP figures it out. (group laughs) Well, we keep records. We know what we sell because we weigh it before and after. And that helps, and um..

MOD: You have those records throughout the years?

P4: Yeah. And, um, we have the CSA, and we know about how many we can support in the CSA and that 90 people will need 90 units of something. So we kind of plant certain sections to have a number of units of something ready every week. So that's part of it, too.

MOD: Okay.

P5: I just, we keep a lot of records. You know, based on that, try to guess, you know, each year.

MOD: I wish we had someone really knew, like starting out second year or something like that. We could ask them, how did you figure that out? I don't know if they'd just be guessing. Is that what you guys did the first few years?

P4: I think so. We only have a certain amount of space so we filled it with stuff we thought would be popular.

P1: Well, we're fairly new at this, and for us it's a matter of testing. I mean, you bring stuff to market, if the customers want more of it then you figure out how to raise more of it. That's just what we're doing. We found out, we have an idea now what the demand for our beef is, so we're working real hard trying to meet that demand. Even as far as how we have a cow cut. Just listening to our customers, I look at what sells, what they tell me, the size of the cuts they want, and we just incorporate that into the next round. So it's just a matter of feedback from customers. So this is really trial and error for us.

P2: Do you sell a lot of hamburger?

P1: Yeah. A lot of hamburger.

P2: For anyone raising cattle, the trick is getting rid of the hamburger..

P1: I run out of that before I run out of anything else.

P2: Exactly.

P1: That's not the last thing I have, is hamburger.

P2: It's a little different from what I read will be the problem, so you might have more hamburger made out of an animal.

P1: Exactly. Yeah, so those are things we don't...

MOD: So in the survey, when asked which local and regional buyers you all would like to sell to, most producers said direct markets, like farmers markets, that came up first, and that was way at the top. And then next was restaurants, and then farm to school or farm to institution, and then independent groceries. Wholesale was fifth, and there was only like ten out of the thirty-three people who completed the survey that said they wanted to invest or get more into wholesale. And so, why is that so? Why would direct market be preferable to wholesale.

P5: Cause you make more money.

MOD: Cause you make more money?

P3: That's an easy one.

P1: It is. And the other thing I see is the closer you move toward wholesale, the more regulation there is. Like, I'm not interested in organic certification or gap certification, but if you sell wholesale to the big beef companies, you have to have that. And that's just not what I want to.. I want to sell to people that care about how I raise my meat, and I don't care about those other things. So restaurants don't care, they know how your beef if raised, but the closer you get to that wholesale market, the more regulation, the more hoops you have to jump through. It just like, I don't sell me eggs at Eats because I have to mark out everything on the carton to put the carton on their shelf. I don't sell it there, and I quit selling them there when he started making me do that. Just the way it is.

P2: You sell all that you have anyway, don't you?

P1: Oh, I could sell three times what I have here anyway. So I don't have to do that and I'm not going to as long as I can sell them elsewhere. But again, that's just a tiny little form of regulation that if I don't have to deal with it, I'm not going to.

MOD: You guys seem pretty against wholesale... (to Sally)

P4: No, I would sell wholesale everything if I could, but we don't have the volume to make it. But I saw a different survey, like when I, I did this wholesale success course mostly with food safety, and the farmers they surveyed fifty percent said they preferred wholesale only, only five percent preferred farmers markets, because farmers markets are just so hard to do. You know it takes a lot more than just growing it, but for wholesale you have to have a lot of volume. And for vegetables around here, I don't think, I don't know. Like, we would just need so much more flat land to have the volume to make wholesale accounts work for us. You really have to get a wholesale account with somebody reliable. I guess Riverstone's doing it, so you could talk to them. And so the wholesale farms are smaller, you know, maybe they'll be less of them. So maybe that's why your numbers are more towards that way.

P1: That sounds exactly right, because that's just the basics of any business. Because when you lower your margin, you've got to increase your volume, and that's the only way that you're going to make it.

P4: Yeah.

P1: So most of us right here have small volume, large margin. And just like P4, if we were to sell wholesale, we'd have to have a whole lot more because we'd be getting a lot smaller margin on what we're selling.

P2: Did you check the prices for wholesale compared to..

P4: No.

P2: Cause that might make you feel a lot better about (farmers markets)

P4: (laughs) maybe. I don't know. It's just so much work. Like if you only have to focus on like a few accounts and certain crops. Like you just do them really well, and just deliver them to one place, it just...

P2: But you know one thing about coming to market, if it was easy, everybody'd be on it. And we'd have a lot more people.

P4: Exactly. And so, like, part of what we're selling is not just food. It's the conversation and the knowing, the customer security about what they're getting, you know.

P1: And the education. You know, people like Kroger don't tell you how to cook the vegetables we're selling.

P4: And like, when I go to Kroger, like I don't buy their vegetables even if they're grown the same way as mine, because just no.

P1: (laughs) Yeah, I don't buy their meat either.

P2: You know they were picked a long time ago.

P4: (laughs) yeah. At the very least that.

MOD: Do you think labor access might be a problem for people getting to direct markets, for people getting to farmers markets, cause that was one of the top barriers, when, like, I asked people to list the top barriers to expanding their operation. And labor access was number 1.

P1: Yeah, he can answer that. We were just talking about that.

P2: Yeah, that's just, by far..

MOD: Yeah, but you've got (a worker for at market).

P2: Yeah, and (he) comes here, but someone for days, I need someone that can work with animals, which that can be dangerous, too. So I've had people come and (laughs) how do you find out if someone knows how to work with animals? You tell them, you need to close this gate real quick or this animal can see that they can get out. And if they don't do it quick enough, well they could get run over. That almost happened a couple times and I was like, Wow, I didn't think this was this difficult but how do you teach somebody these things? And then when do you say I think they're ready? You know, it's like you do it or you don't.

MOD: So there's a learning curve?

P2: Yes.

P1: There's an intuition though. There's some people that have better intuition around animals than other people. Some people never get it. But some people I think have a natural intuition around animals. Like they watch the animals, they watch cows, the animal responds to them, and some people just can't do that.

P2: Yeah, I've read a lot of things about how to tell, how to move animals, but that's just natural.

P1: It's just reflex.

P2: Like if you walk this way, it's going that way. But I guess some people just don't understand that. Like I've had people come out, and like, to get them to go that way, you've got to go this way. Well, how do you know that? I don't know, I guess you have to read that article. I didn't think anyone really needed to read that.

P1: (laughs)

P2: But that is, that is doing certain things, is a problem. Working with machinery, because you know making hay and stuff like that. It can be dangerous. We're on hills, so it's a little different than on flat land. Driving trailers. He had to practice a long time.

P1: He did, I remember his first day here. He was really nervous, but you know he's gotten really good at it.

P2: You know he practiced at the farm for days. And how do you get someone, like, turn this way and it goes that way. You just get the feel for it. And then you get to bigger trailers, bigger things, loading animals on trailers.

MOD: Even more skills that are needed.

P5: And then you can invest all that time and energy training someone and then you have to start all over the next year if you get a new person.

P2: Thank you, that was the next thing I was going to say.

P5: So if it's someone who's not going to stick around, it's not worth your time to invest training them if you know they're not going to be there a long time.

P2: That happens to you, too, huh? (laughs)

MOD: I have that with bagels, people who help with the boiler and stuff. It's like, are you going to be here again? If so then I'm going to tell you everything, but if not, then I'm just going to tell you what you need to know to get them to come out looking okay. Um, but what about you guys, is labor a problem for you guys?

P6: We just avoid it. We just do everything ourselves. Yeah.

P1: We're kind of somewhere in between that. I mean, I would like to do everything myself but it's not feasible. It's what I really want to do because my husband works full time, so it's pretty much just me on the farm. So I'm torn about how much labor I need or whether I just need to quit doing this. Maybe I just don't need to do that much of that or maybe I need to hire someone to help me do that. So we're struggling with that right now. But when you're, I can tell a huge difference when I'm coming to the Wednesday market and when I'm not because like Phil was saying, freeing up him on Saturdays is huge. And when I'm coming to the market two days a week, by the time I get ready to come, and then I recover from coming, I mean that is a huge chunk of the week. And then there's just not that much time left for me personally to produce on the farm. So therefore, the more direct sales you do, it's a lot of work and it's a lot of time. The more that you do, you've got to bring in more labor. And really nobody, except in the case of like, Brett, not that many people that you'd hired are that invested in what you're selling to really be able to sell your stuff the way you sell it. So it's kind of hard to replace yourself.

P4: Yeah.

P5: Or you can have five kids that work and then they all grow up and start moving away. But then there's a whole nother problem.

P2: You got them working now?

P5: My oldest just finished high school and she's off to college.

P2: I mean, you get plenty of work out of them now?

P5: Some more than others.

Group (laughs)

P1: I noticed when I left home, and I was not the youngest, when I left home, they sold the milk cow and they started raising like a fifth of the tobacco that they were raising (laughs). Once I went to college so, I think that's yeah, a problem.

MOD: And I can see everyone kind of wants to go, but so I've got other barriers as well. So I've got marketing came up as the next barrier, um land access came up as another barrier, and transport cost or type came up. Out of those three is one of those particularly relevant to you as something that's holding you back? And again, it was marketing, land access, and transport cost or type.

P1: For us, land access. Because what we raise, and we raise cattle, requires a lot of it. So for us to expand and meet the demand, we need more land. And it's, to lease land, it's just not accessible where we live. So we can't find any suitable land to lease that isn't already leased, it's all gobbled up. I mean they've had it, they've leased land for years and years and years before we moved there and that was fifteen years ago. I mean, that is our biggest obstacle. There's not even that much land to buy, if you can afford to buy it.

P2: Are you from that area?

P1: No. That makes it so much more difficult.

P3: How much land do you farm?

P1: We've got a hundred and ten acres.

P3: Is it all pastured land, all open?

P1: No. Um, probably about fifty acres in pasture and then another twenty acres not fenced that we cut in hay. So that's about how much out of that that we have that's cleared, that's suitable for pasture. But I was telling Phil we're going to quit cutting hay and we're going to fence that twenty acres, and that way we can expand our cattle herd. Because we have found good hay that we could buy, which is challenging.

P3: And how many head a year do you produce off of that?

P1: It varies because we're trying to increase our herd size. So right now we're not at a steady harvest level. Like you know, three years ago we did like sixteen but we were culling our herd and trying to improve our herd. And like, last year, we only did six.

P3: I'm just curious. I mean, I got a farm that's about that same acreage that I could use.

P1: Our goal is to be able to harvest 24 a year. That's our goal. And I don't know if we'll make it with the land we have but that's what we're shooting for.

P2: Some years yes, some years no. But transportation, transportation cost, um. The processor I was using was two hundred fifty miles away. And these other ones, I used everybody between here, so trying somebody else now. And so if there was a processing facility nearby, if there was one here in Blacksburg, that would be real nice.

P1: And that's, we have the same issue. I mean that is an entire day that is just spent taking our animals to the processor. And then there's almost another whole day just spent going back and getting the beef because of the distance. So that's a lot of time.

P2: Yep. A lot of time driving.

P1: Because we're so remote form those facilities.

MOD: What about you produce guys? Marketing, land access, transport cost or type? Do any of those present significant challenges for you guys?

P4: No.

MOD: Would either of you two like to comment on any one of those?

P5: I have the same processor issues and land access. Yeah, there's none available around us right now, but thinking, you know, we're fine right now, but if we wanted to expand in the future, we're limited by how land is available.

P6: I think marketing is probably one of our top issues, because we spend most of our time making everything. And we just don't have the time to go out and do that.

MOD: All right, and I have one last question. If you were to wake up tomorrow and there was a perfect climate—and I don't mean environmentally, I mean policy, in general, having things that you need—for your farm business to be successful, what would that look like?

P1: I'm not sure I understand the question.

MOD: So like if you had everything that you needed for your farm to be successful, what would those things be? Like if you woke up tomorrow and said, Oh, it's so easy to be a farmer now! Like, what would have changed?

P1: I don't think anything would make it easy (laughs). I think you could give me land and labor, but I don't think it could be easy.

MOD: (laughs) Or what do you need? Like you said, better access to land..

P1: Yeah, we need land and labor and a processor.

P2: If I woke up tomorrow and my kids said, Dad, I don't know what was wrong with us, we want to stay on the farm, let's get to work! (laughs) And then that morning Virginia Tech also announced they were going to open their processing facility for public use and uh I said, Wow! I think I like farming.

MOD: What about you? I haven't heard very much from you.

P3: No, I don't know. That's a difficult question to say. You know, everything goes pretty well right now. I've just been doing this for now my third year and I'm just in a constant state of learning, so I don't really know about that, you know. I mean, I feel like marketing is a big problem for me, you know, cause I've just never done it really. So I get better and better at growin' stuff, but I also got to figure out how to get rid of a lot more stuff, you know. It's not a problem really, I get better at it. I can grow a lot more, and I know I can grow a lot more this year with the kind of advances I've made in the past couple years. But I know I have to be able to get rid of a lot more, you know. I'm gonna double, I'm gonna grow about fifteen thousand onions and twenty thousand garlic, and I'm going to double all that next year, and somehow or another I have to figure out how to get rid of all that stuff.

P2: Well, your garlic, it'll keep.

P3: No, it'll keep six months. But next year I'll grow about half softneck that'll keep about twelve months. And I'm really just growing this year, I'm just gonna double for winter sales. I'm planning on having a full complement of stuff for winter all winter long.

P2: I think that's an important..

P3: I came sold here last winter and there's nobody selling anything. You know I grow ten thousand storage onions, I got a total supply of onions for the year. I'm gonna grow a thousand cabbages and heal them in for the winter, all kinds of stuff like that, you know.

P2: I think that's smart, because, you know, we have meat in the freezer, we don't have to move it every week like fresh vegetables.

MOD: Sometimes the freezer doesn't even have to be on in the winter time.

P3: A lot of it is building the infrastructure to store the food. And I'm a contractor so I know how to do that. So I'm going, I've worked and worked and worked, so I can store a lot of food for a long period of time. And so I wait to see what happens this year when I do it.

MOD: Would anyone else like to comment on their dream farm situation? Is there anything else you'd like to say about what it's like to farm in this region? Like if you have a policymaker right in front of you or something that you need or trends that you noticed?

P5: Um, maybe some policies, like, related to food processing, like butchers.

P1: I agree, I was just thinking that. Because the Virginia department of Agriculture is not progressive and not---

P3: The Virginia Department of Nothing is progressive! (group laughs)

P1: I mean one of the things that we've batted around every which way is a mobile processor. Why wouldn't that work? Well, the Virginia Department of Agriculture says you can't have it. Period. No discussion, no open air. Because you know, if we could do that, I would go to the bank and borrow the money to build one and operate it. Because we need that. And they're doing it in so many other places so successfully, and Virginia just says no. No reason. Just no. And so the policies are really tying our hands to make farming easier.

P2: It also goes to the processors, it's why it's so difficult to find a processor. They have all these regulations, and several of them are actually going to get out of the US-inspected meat and just do custom slaughter. And I guess higher ups come down and tell the inspectors to just lighten up on them and stop with the nit-picking over things that don't matter and to keep them open. But they get so much crass from some of them, some inspectors are really good.

P1: And it's funny, because where we take our meat, they tell us they have a good inspector. He's not gonna nit-pick, he's reasonable, he's safe. And we found that. I mean there's some inspectors that came in and couldn't even guess the age of our animals. But he gets it right almost every single time, right down to the month.

P5: We have a processor in Floyd who just does custom, so we take our whole and half hogs there. And he's really good at what he does. And he's floated around the idea of doing USDA, but he is, like, maxed out. I mean he is totally booked all the time. And so he's like, why should I go USDA when I can't even keep up with the work I already have. And he can't find the labor either because nobody wants to work in a processor's. So that's another huge thing, I think.

P1: And we have the same issue with our processor. Our biggest fear is that eventually, they're not going to have time for us. Because they are so busy. And they went into business because they couldn't find a suitable processor, so they went into business to process their own beef. So they increased their processing fifty percent of their own beef this year. So guess what? There aren't as many openings for the rest of us. So that's the problem, because we have to seek out a USDA facility, or a suitably inspected facility, and there just aren't that many.

MOD: Does anyone have anything else they'd like to comment on? Okay. Thank you very, very much for staying.

P2: Turn it off, turn it off! (laughs)

MOD: Not yet, I need your consent forms, please.

Producer Interview Notes

Interviews with Farmers
Blacksburg Farmers Market
7.25.14

Questions:

1. Most people interviews want direct markets, restaurants, farm to school or institution, then independent groceries. Wholesale fifth on the list of which local/regional buyers producers would like to connect with/build relationships with. Why?
2. Top barriers to success and expansion among producers found in the survey included: labor access, marketing, land access, transport cost or type. Are any of these especially relevant to you?
3. Is there anything else you would like to comment on?

Interviewer: Jessica Schultz

Interviewees: Livestock Producer / Certified Organic Produce Grower / Resale and Produce Grower

Livestock Producer

Land access is an issue. There is none to rent at a reasonable price.

Labor access is also an issue. There is no one to work for a farm share (produce) as people would prefer to be paid in cash. Because their farm is out of the way, it's not as easily accessible to volunteers or students.

Certified Organic Producer Grower

1. Why direct sales and not wholesale?
 - a. You get full value for your product. There is no middle man who has to take a cut. This farm sells wholesale to Eats (considered wholesale because of the way it is taxed, or rather, not taxed). Eats is second compared to the farmers market.
2. Labor access, marketing, land access, transport cost or type?
 - a. Labor Access: Liability insurance is expensive for workers, and if you have more than two employees, you are required to purchase workers compensation.
 - b. Other Barrier: Competition for available buyers among other vendors at the farmers market. If their sales are down they consider competition is the cause because the customer base is not growing as quickly as the number of farms at market. Competition at market drove them to do much more wholesale with Eats.
 - c. Other Barrier: their own age. As they grow older, they can do less work.
 - d. Land Access: Their land in Blacksburg was inherited. It's more marginal farm land that they built up with sustainable soil methods. Their other land on Glade Road was purchased from the landowner after the community garden in which the grower was participating dwindled down to just him.
3. Anything else?
 - a. The farm took a big hit when they did away with the Organic cost share. The USDA used to provide it, but it got cut by the last farm bill. Now they have to shoulder the whole \$750 per year for certification.
 - b. Also, the state used to have a state income tax deduction for the retail price of farm products if they were donated to a non-profit. This was more than 10 years ago. He wishes they would reinstate that.

Resale and Produce Grower

1. Why is direct sale preferred over wholesale?
 - a. There is limited space to grow enough for wholesale. Wholesale accounts generally want 3-5 bushels a week and want product year round in order to establish account. This producer works to

- bring local to Oasis (independent grocery) in summer and other products in winter. Around here, farms just aren't big enough.
- b. In SWVA, they have a processing facility in Cana/Hillsville that does cleaning and packaging. The facility then has contracts with major groceries (Kroger, Food City). That's how wholesale works down there. People around here may not need a processor around here because they could just travel there and use the facility.
 - c. Blacksburg is ideal for people to sell to restaurants. Greens would like a local tomato source. In regards to other restaurants, "If they're not using local, they better start."
 - d. The time is really right for local produce. For years, he tried to sell tomatoes in Giles. He'd sell them just fine in Blacksburg for \$1.50/lb, and no one would buy them in Giles for \$1.00/lb, saying they were too expensive. Now he sells them in Giles for \$2.50/lb. SNAP is really helping rural people buy produce.
 - e. In the NRV, we need a co-op, a central place that farmers can bring in X products for X weeks. We need better communication with restaurants. The buying process needs to be streamlined for restaurants so they can see what's available and when. It should include delivery and distribution. Restaurants want small quantities and frequent deliveries, so it's not economical to drive on the produce everywhere.
 - f. They tried to set up a market in Pearisburg, but over time, the number of vendors dwindled. Tech (Dr. Martha Walker) did a survey among customers regarding shopping habits with the Junior Women's Club.
2. Labor access, marketing, land access, transport cost or type?
- a. Without access to Virginia Tech students, this farm couldn't do half of what they do.
 - b. They have a long term worker >3 years. But labor is a problem. They want folks who are interested in their food and where it comes from because they stick around. Other workers he just has them do seasonal big jobs, like harvests.
 - i. They had a worker who would work for \$30, then disappear, repeatedly. He was buying a bag of weed.
 - c. Good land is always an issue. They have 40 acres, but they're lucky to have 1 workable acre.
 - d. Water is a big issue, too. He used to have a spring, but houses went up nearby and it dried up. (Water competition). His house has town water, but the 40 acres uses a tank he has to have hauled there. For the past 50 years, oil has been the issue. He predicts water will be the issue for the next 50 years.
 - e. Communication is the major hold up for selling to restaurants. They often want to know what's available on Mondays or Tuesdays, get it delivered on Thursdays to have for the weekend. They aren't consistent either in their ordering.

Appendix C

Phone Survey Script

Hi! My name is _____, and I'm calling from the Friends of the Blacksburg Farmers Market. May I please speak with someone who is knowledgeable about inventory and purchasing procedures for your store?

(If s/he is not available, please ask when is a better time to call, and write this down in the "NOTES" column in the spreadsheet. Likewise, if the person you speak to next is not available to speak now, ask when is a more convenient time to call.)

Thank you! We're conducting a survey of all food venues in Montgomery County through the Blacksburg Farmers Market as part of our research to determine how local fresh produce can be made available to more people. I just have a few questions for you about sourcing your produce at _____ (name of venue). Only information about this business and NOT you personally will be collected. It won't take more than 5 minutes and you can hang up at any time. Would you like to participate?

1. Do you accept SNAP (formerly called Foodstamps) as a form of payment?
2. Do you currently sell fresh fruits and vegetables at your store?
 - 2.1 (IF YES) What kinds are consistently offered?
 - 2.2 (IF YES) Approximately how much money is brought in monthly through its sales?
 - 2.3 (IF YES) Where do you source your produce? (Ex: through distributor – GET NAME / Direct from farmer GET NAME)
 - 2.4 (IF NO) Go to Question 4
3. Do you currently sell any LOCAL fresh fruits and vegetables at your store? (Local = Regional)
 - 3.1 (IF YES) What kinds are consistently offered?
 - 3.2 (IF YES) Where is the produce grown? (Name of town/city/county)
 - 3.3 (IF YES) Approximately how much money is brought in monthly through its sales?
 - 3.4 (IF YES) Where do you source your produce? (Ex: through distributor- GET NAME / Direct from farmer- GET NAME)
 - 3.5 (IF NO) Go to Question 4
4. Through this survey, we're trying to figure out what needs to be done in order to get more locally grown produce into Montgomery County food venues. What would you say are the primary reasons you do not source more LOCAL produce? I have list of possible reasons. Please listen and tell me if ANY of these are reasons. You can pick more than one or add one of your own.

Possible responses (all pertaining to LOCAL produce):

Not appropriate for this venue

Not available through my supplier

No perceived demand from customers

No way to keep fresh/cool/refrigerated

No known source

No interest

High cost

Other _____

5. Do you have any suggestions or comments for how locally grown produce can be made more accessible to your store? OPEN COMMENT

Thank you very much for your time and consideration. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact the Blacksburg Farmers Market at 540.239.8290. Have a great day!

Appendix D



Community Forum Agenda

November 21, 2014

11am – 2pm

Objectives of the Forum

1. *Present results from the Montgomery County Farm to Community Planning Project*
2. *Gather feedback from stakeholders relating to emerging issues*
3. *Work to identify actionable items and next steps*

Agenda

- 11:10** Welcome, Introductions, and Agenda
11:15 Background of the Montgomery County Farm to Community Planning Project
11:25 Food Venue Result and Brainstorm
11:40 Producer Results and Brainstorm
12:00 Consumer Results and Brainstorm
12:30 Lunch – The Fare Palate and Bollo's
12:50 Synthesis: Brainstorming for Action Items as Large Group
1:15 Next Steps: Small Group
1:45 Regroup, Synthesize, and Thank You!

Presenters

Jessica Schultz, Assistant Coordinator / schultz.jessica.vt@gmail.com

Ellen Stewart, Project Coordinator / bbfarmersmarket@gmail.com

Maureen McGonagle, WIC Garden Coordinator / maureen.mcgonagle@gmail.com

If you would like to continue working on these issues through the groups identified today, please write your name, contact information, and group on one of the small slips of paper and put it in one of the red cans on your way out. Thank you for all the ways you shape our food system!

This project is made possible through grants from the USDA Food Projects Program and Southern SARE.



Community

Forum Notes

By Caroline Montgomery

Ideas from the Food Forum

Challenges for Consumers

- Cost barrier (perceived and otherwise)
- Inconvenience in purchasing (social time and seasonality)
- Communication, knowledge, information barriers
- Unable to grow own food (living situations, finances, not allowed)

Challenges for Producers

- Land access
- Political regulatory barriers
- Scale (quantity)
- Access to capital and business education
- Marketing product
- Transport of goods (to processing and to buyers)
- Consumer education
- Labor

Challenges for Venues

- Logistics (distribution, storage and perishability)
- Cost (perceived and otherwise)
- Quantity
- Marketing to consumers
- Consistency of product and supply
- Communication between buyers and farmers

Solutions to the Challenges: Your Ideas to Make Change!

1. A Mobile Market and or Transport for Vendors (Market Trolley)
 - a. Timeline-need a vehicle
 - b. 6 months per site
 - c. Combine with CSA seconds idea
 - d. Each visit should take 5 or 6 hours
 - e. Do farmers go to sites or does someone set up a CSA or curated selection to bring?
 - f. Hire a trailer park resident to drive the van
 - g. Who will it affect?
 - h. What sites are possible?
 - i. Seniors and low-income populations
 - j. How many people per site?
 - k. Where will the money for van and drivers come from?
2. Asset Mapping/ Networking among stakeholders/ Local food council
 - a. Open mic night
 - b. TED X talk format "Shed" talk
 - c. Speed dating
 - d. Catered with local food
 - e. Take donations
 - f. Have it at a food pantry
3. Gardening support and seed exchange program
 - a. Home garden support group
 - b. Community garden space for those without land access
 - c. Hale-Y community garden
 - d. Connecting people and their needs- garden mentors
 - e. Project partners- Hale-Y, Health Department WIC garden, Master gardeners, VT, community housing partners
 - f. More school/house gardens- homesteading
 - g. VT seed savers/vault- OI endangered seed species
 - h. Farmer mentor program for aspiring farmers
4. Landowner education regarding gardens and incentives
 - a. Who: renters, landlords, neighbors
 - b. Involved: urban development folks-policy and planning surveyors, GIS for Blacksburg
 - c. Survey participants (champions?)
 - d. Vacant lot farming-give owners tax credit for donated food
 - e. Research: Patchwork Farms in Austin TX and find out what'
5. Work exchange and bartering/timeshare
 - a. Timeline: immediate
 - b. Who will it affect: seniors/ retirees
 - c. Who needs to be involved: Stakeholders, FFM
 - d. What info is still needed to make this happen: Set up a work share on FFM website
 - e. Use a Time Bank model to exchange services (transportation, farming assistance)
 - f. Potential liability issues
 - g. Blacksburg Bucks- A local currency that would be equivalent to an hour's worth of labor (ie: Ithaca Hours)
 - h. Mentoring program

6. Local processing place/community kitchen/ incubator and consulting for food and Ag business
 - a. Freezing, canning
 - b. Prices Fork Project?
 - c. Partners: LEAP for Local food (community kitchen), Appalachian Foodshed Project (community enhancement grant), Prices Fork Project
7. Food craigslist
 - a. Publicly accessible
 - b. Piedmont and environmental council already has something like this
 - c. Model-FOODSHIFT (on west coast)
8. Food hub-Aggregator, distribution and marketing
 - a. A place for local producers to bring their products while the hub would help with marketing, certifications, budgeting, farm planning
 - b. Timeline: 5 years
 - c. Need to build on community capital
 - d. Challenges: GAP/ certifications
 - e. Regulations/permits
 - f. Funding and education
9. Subsidized seconds CSA program
 - a. Timeline: Spring 2015
 - b. Low-income families/farmers would be helped by it
 - c. Permaculture 4 Peace, VISTA volunteer could lead it
 - d. Which farms would be involved?
 - e. Communities/locations
 - f. Issues: will people buy vs. want donations? Who pays vans/labor/packaging?
10. Direct Mail campaign
 - a. Post cards
 - b. Keywords and discounts in mail
 - c. Should it be sent ONLY to low income people?
 - d. Supports customers
 - e. Sending to all income levels supports more sales and producers
 - f. QR code to track who uses it
 - g. Include a map and bus routes