

Development Options for  
Local Food and Agriculture in Caldwell County, North Carolina

A Report on the Viability of Local Food Aggregation

Prepared for

Caldwell County Center of the North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service

And the

Caldwell County Health Department

By

Smithson Mills, Inc.

December 21, 2012

Funded By:



## TABLE OF CONTENT

Section One: Executive Summary	Page 1
Section 2: Regional Agricultural Profile	Page 3
Section 3: Caldwell County Farm Producer Survey Results	Page 10
Section 4: Representative Farmer Interviews	Page 18
Section 5: Markets for Local Agricultural Products	Page 36
Section 6: Development Opportunities and Recommendations	Page 42
Appendix A: Caldwell County Farm Producer Survey	
Appendix B: Regional Local Food Assets	

## **Section One: Executive Summary**

In March of 2012, the Caldwell County Board of Commissioners approved the submission of a grant application on behalf of Caldwell County Cooperative Extension to the Blue Cross Blue Shield of North Carolina Foundation. With approval of that grant request, in June of 2012 the county hired Smithson Mills, Inc. to provide research and recommendations for development of a local fresh produce aggregation and sales and marketing venture serving farmers located in or near Caldwell County, NC.

Research was to proceed in two phases. The first phase, of which this interim report is the outcome, was to complete a regional local foods assessment of Caldwell County and adjacent counties. The second phase is contingent upon results of phase one research and is subject to modification based upon recommendations in this report. This assessment discusses the viability of multiple development strategies, including development of a community local foods aggregation and distribution program, marketing and support for private local food businesses, improved retail sales points, and other options to support the vitality of agriculture in Caldwell County.

This assessment identifies the number and type of local food producers in Caldwell, with emphasis on identifying those capable of growing local food sales with proper support. Demographic analysis from the 2007 Census of Agriculture was used to establish a profile of the variety and nature of agricultural production in the county. In addition, research identifies local institutional buyers and describes retail buyers and consumers who are most likely to support local foods businesses.

In order to gain a more comprehensive understanding of agricultural operations in Caldwell County, researchers sent a direct-mail survey to farmers in the community. A total of 197 surveys were mailed, and 30 completed surveys were returned to the researchers. While the response rate of 15% is quite low, researchers believe they accurately represent many of the attitudes and concerns of the farming population in Caldwell County. A copy of this survey may be found in the appendices of this report. A survey results discussion can be found in Section 3: Caldwell County Farm Producer Survey Results.

In addition to written surveys, farmer interviews were conducted during site visits to local farms and the Caldwell County Farmers Market, as well as through targeted telephone interviews. Interviews were selected with leading agricultural producers who are representative of production systems found in the county, as well as entrepreneurial producers who are currently accessing local food markets. Results of interviews can be found in Section 4: Representative Farmer Interviews.

Results from the regional local foods assessment suggest that a local foods aggregation, sales and marketing entity would not be a viable project for Caldwell County's agricultural community at this time. This is primarily due to insufficient levels of production, as well as a small consumer

base willing and able to support such an endeavor. However, the aggregate results of demographic analysis, farmer surveys and targeted interviews have helped identify other approaches to developing a local foods economy and supporting the long term viability of agriculture in Caldwell County.

Researchers recommend consideration of the following activities as part of Phase Two project implementation:

Establish a Local Food Policy Council

Reinvigorate Farmland Preservation Activities

Create Market Linkages between Farm Producers and Consumers, Distributors and Retailers

Increase Targeted Training for Certifications including GAP

Increase Access to Farm Equipment to Increase Production Efficiency

A detailed discussion of these activities may be found in Section 6: County Development Opportunities and Recommendations.

## **Section 2: Regional Agricultural Profile**

Formed in 1841 from portions of Burke and Wilkes Counties, Caldwell County is a rural county located primarily in the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains. The county is part of the Hickory-Morganton-Lenoir Metropolitan Statistical Area. According to the US Census Bureau, the county has a total area of 474 square miles. The county contains eleven municipalities: Blowing Rock, Cahah's Mountain, Cedar Rock, Collettsville, Gamewell, Granite Falls, Hudson, Lenoir, Sawmills, Northlakes, and Rhodhiss. With a 2010 population of 83,029, the demographics of Caldwell County are reflective of a rural population in the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains of Western North Carolina. This population represents a 9% increase in population from 2000. In 2010 Caldwell County had a per capita income of \$19,686 and a median household income of \$46,568. The 2010 poverty rate in Caldwell County was 18%. Unemployment in the county stood at 10.3% as of September 2012.

Caldwell County is bordered by Wilkes County to the north and northeast, Watauga County to the north and northwest, Avery County to the west, Burke County to the southwest, Catawba County to the southeast and Alexander County to the east. Of the adjacent counties, only Catawba County is considered urban as of the 2010 Census.

Caldwell County ranks 76<sup>th</sup> in the state in agricultural cash receipts, with a 2010 total of just over \$23 million. It had 459 total farms and 32,593 acres of farmland in 2010, representing no change from 2007. The average farm size is 71 acres. Most of the county's agricultural receipts come from crops, with the county ranking 16<sup>th</sup> in the state for nursery, floriculture, greenhouse and Christmas trees. Caldwell County ranks 38<sup>th</sup> in the state for hay production. As with many rural counties in the state, Caldwell livestock production also accounts for a large portion of agricultural activity. Livestock represented almost 29% of agricultural receipts in 2010. Caldwell ranks 50<sup>th</sup> in the state for beef cattle production, with a 2010 total of 4,300 head.<sup>1</sup>

Statistics from the 2007 Census of Agriculture describe Caldwell County's agricultural economy:

2007 Census Data	
Number of Farms	459
Total Land in Farms, Acres	32,593
Average Farm Size, Acres	71
Harvested Cropland, Acres	8,477
Average Age of Farmers	56.4
Average Value of Farm & Building	\$360,485
Average Market Value of Machinery	\$48,611

<sup>1</sup> Source: North Carolina Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services 2011 Annual Statistics Book

& Equipment		
Average Total Farm Production Expense		\$35,714
<b>Crops 2007</b>	<b>Harvest Acres</b>	<b>Yield</b>
Barley: Bu.	14	740
Corn for Grain: Bu	462	38,693
Corn for Silage: Tn	(D)	(D)
Hay, All: Tons	4,588	6,333
Soybeans: Bu.	525	7,984
Tobacco: (1,000#).	(D)	(D)
Wheat: Bu.	546	15,888
<b>Livestock</b>		<b>Number</b>
Broilers Produced (2007)		147,111
Cattle, All (Jan 1, 2009)		4,531
Beef Cows (Jan1, 2009)		2,394
Chickens, Excluding Broilers (2007)		(D)
Hogs and Pigs (2007)		80
<b>Cash Receipts: 2008</b>		<b>Dollars</b>
Livestock, Poultry and their products		\$7,613,000
Crops		\$13,138,000
Government Payments		\$51,000
Total		\$20,802,000

(D) - Withheld to avoid disclosing data for individual farms.

The following tables from the 2007 Census of Agriculture illustrate a breakdown of farms and acres for agricultural products harvested in Caldwell County. Tables include breakdowns for individual products, products harvested for processing and/or fresh market, and the value of agricultural products sold directly for human consumption:

<b>Vegetables Harvested for Sale</b>	<b># of Farms</b>	<b>Acres</b>
	25	78

Vegetable Item	# of Farms	Acres	Harvested for Processing		Harvested for Fresh Market	
			Farms	Acres	Farms	Acres
Beans, snap	14	7	3	(Z)	11	6
Cantaloupes	5	5	---	---	5	5
Cucumbers and Pickles	7	6	---	---	7	6
Herbs, fresh cut	1	(D)	(X)	(X)	1	(D)
Mushrooms	1	(D)	---	---	---	---
Potatoes	10	9	3	(Z)	7	9
Squash, all	1	(D)	---	---	1	(D)
Squash, summer	1	(D)	---	---	1	(D)
Sweet Corn	18	33	3	2	15	31
Tomatoes in the Open	17	12	4	1	14	11
Watermelons	9	4	---	---	9	4
Vegetables, other	2	(D)	---	---	2	(D)

Fruit, non-citrus	# of Farms	Acres
		8

Fruit Items	# of Farms	Acres	Bearing Age Acres		Non-bearing Age Acres	
			Farms	Acres	Farms	Acres
Apples	3	1	3	1	---	---
Cherries, sweet	2	(D)	2	(D)	---	---
Grapes	7	22	6	(D)	1	(D)
Pears, all	2	(D)	2	(D)	---	---

Berries, all	# of Farms	Acres
		6

Berry Items	# of Farms	Acres	Harvested		Not Harvested	
			Farms	Acres	Farms	Acres
Blueberries, tame	5	(D)	1	(D)	4	1
Strawberries	1	(D)	1	(D)	---	---

Nuts, all	# of Farms	Acres
		2

Nut Items	# of Farms	Acres	Bearing Age Acres		Non-bearing Age Acres		Dollar Value
			Farms	Acres	Farms	Acres	
Chestnuts	2	(D)	2	(D)	---	---	---
Walnuts, English	2	(D)	2	(D)	---	---	---

Acres of Organic Production		Acres Being Converted to Organic Production		Value of Sales	
Farms	Acres	Farms	Acres	Farms	Dollars
---	---	1	(D)	---	---

Produced and sold value-added Commodities (farms)	Marketed products through Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) (farms)
12	1

Vegetables, Potatoes and Melons		Fruits, Tree Nuts, and Berries	
Total # of Farms	Total Value	Total # of Farms	Total Value
25	\$165,000	8	(D)

Christmas Trees			
Acres in Production		Trees Cut	
Farms	Acres	Farms	Number
3	(D)	3	1,900

Value of agricultural products sold directly to individuals for human consumption	
# of Farms	Total Value
18	\$121,000

Several of the tables above are useful for analyzing viability of a produce aggregation, packaging and marketing facility. In 2007, 18 farms sold \$121,000 in direct sales to individuals. Acreage of production of fruits and vegetables are extremely small, with per-farm average acreage being less than one full acre for many commodities, including tomatoes and potatoes. In all, 25 farms were recorded harvesting 78 acres of vegetables for sale, for an average of about 3 acres per farm.

### **Major Urban Market Demographic Comparisons**

Caldwell County is a rural county with limited fresh produce production. Research has indicated that the farm producers in the county desire assistance to expand their production but are met



with barriers on several different fronts, including educational and training needs for both consumers and producers, assistance in obtaining and maintaining certifications, and cost sharing for certifications, equipment and insurance.

One proven way to increase economic viability of farming is to access markets in larger urban areas with higher per capita incomes. An illustrative example of a large urban market is Mecklenburg County, only 75 miles away from Lenoir. Mecklenburg is a larger urban market with a larger variety of grocery outlets than Caldwell County. Additionally, the population in Mecklenburg County is more demographically aligned to purchase local foods. The following comparisons of Caldwell and Mecklenburg Counties comes from a combination of The North Carolina Rural Center’s Rural Data Bank ([www.ncruralcenter.org/databank](http://www.ncruralcenter.org/databank)) and an article from the Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior, *Understanding Characteristics of Families Who Buy Local Produce* (Racine, et al, 2012).

In 2012, Caldwell County was ranked as a Tier 1 County by the North Carolina Department of Commerce, placing it among the 40 most economically distressed counties in the state. By comparison, nearby Mecklenburg County is designated a Tier 3 County, placing it among the 20 wealthiest counties in the state. The following comparison shows the disparities in population, income and education between the two counties<sup>2</sup>:

<b>Population</b>	<b>Caldwell</b>	<b>Mecklenburg</b>
Median Age	41.3	33.9
Percent Black	5%	31%
Percent Born in NC	77%	43%
Percent 65 and Over	15%	9%
Percent White	89%	51%
Population (2000)	77,415	695,454
Population (2010)	83,029	919,628
Population Density (2010)	176	1,756
<b>Income and Poverty</b>	<b>Caldwell</b>	<b>Mecklenburg</b>
Child Poverty Rate	29%	21%
Elderly Poverty Rate	12%	8%
Median Household Income	\$36,860	\$52,363
Per Capita Income	\$19,686	\$31,848
Poverty Rate	18%	16%
Percent Receiving Food Assistance	17%	13%
<b>Education</b>	<b>Caldwell</b>	<b>Mecklenburg</b>
Percent With Bachelor's Degree or Higher	12%	40%
Percent With High School Diploma Only	34%	20%
Percent With Less Than High School Diploma	25%	12%
<b>Labor Force and Employment</b>	<b>Caldwell</b>	<b>Mecklenburg</b>
Unemployment Rate (2010)	13%	11%

<sup>2</sup> Source: NC Rural Center Rural Data Bank.

According to the Racine article, populations where median household incomes are \$50,000 per year or more are more closely associated with local food purchasing habits. The Mecklenburg County market has high per capita and median household incomes. Caldwell's \$19,686 per capita income is 62% of Mecklenburg's \$31,848. Caldwell County's \$36,860 median household income is 70% of Mecklenburg's \$52,363. Caldwell County's median household income has fallen by about 21% from 2000 to 2010. Also, given lower overall incomes as well as higher poverty, there is a likelihood that more residents in Caldwell County rely on SNAP benefits. Again according to Racine, this is an indicator of a dramatically decreased tendency to purchase local produce. Mecklenburg County also has greater rates of higher education, which is another indication of increased likelihood of making local food purchases.

### Regional Demographic Comparison

For a project investigating the development of a local food economy in Caldwell County, it is useful to review the latest demographic information from the 2007 Census of Agriculture. This research looks at agricultural statistics from Caldwell and three nearby counties in the Appalachian Foothills. In 2007, the four counties of Caldwell, Burke, Wilkes and Alexander had 2,662 farms with a combined 226,590 acres. A total of 479 acres were deployed in vegetable, potato, melon, and orchards production, with over half of that production in Alexander County alone. According to the Census of Agriculture, the four county region also has 90 farms producing on 821 acres of orchards, and 24 farms producing 11 acres of berries. The total population of the four county area is 280,479, with an average per capita income of \$19,757 and a median household income of \$37,682.

Statistic	Caldwell	Burke	Wilkes	Alexander	Average	Total
# of Farms	459	481	1095	627	666	2662
# of Acres in Farms	32,593	29,068	109,970	54,959	56,648	226,590
# Acres Vegetable, Potato and Melon Harvested for Sale	78	130	21	250	120	479
# Acres in Orchards	25	78	442	276	205	821
# of Acres in Berries	2	2	6	1	3	11
Market Value of Agricultural Products Sold	\$20,751,000	\$35,594,000	\$389,831,000	\$111,957,000	139,533,250	558,133,000
Average Market Value Per Farm	\$45,208	\$73,999	\$356,010	\$178,560		
Average Farm Production Expenses	\$35,714	\$61,774	\$268,080	\$137,087		
Average Net Cash Farm Income	\$10,973	\$13,878	\$90,524	\$43,848		
Average Acreage of Farms	71	60	100	88		
Median Acreage of Farms	30	28	48	40		
Total Population	83,029	90,912	69,340	37,198	70,120	280,479
Per Capita Income	\$19,686	\$19,220	\$19,406	\$20,716	\$19,757	
Median Household Income	\$36,860	\$38,541	\$34,886	\$40,441	\$37,682	

Caldwell County has much lower agricultural receipts and average market value per farm compared to its neighbors. Caldwell County net cash farm income is also lower. Per capita and median household incomes are comparable, but low considering the demographics of consumers likely to purchase local food. The county's low per capita income and limited agricultural production indicates a limited market for development of a local foods aggregation and marketing center. This leads researchers to recommend identifying other methods of enhancing the local food economy, such as improving market linkages for farm producers, educating consumers on purchasing and utilizing fresh local produce, preserving farmland, encouraging farmers to pursue on-farm certifications, and developing a local food council to devise and implement strategies for enhancing agriculture in Caldwell County. More information on these specific strategies can be found in Section 6: County Development Opportunities and Recommendations.

### **Section 3: Caldwell County Farm Producer Survey Results**

In order to gain a more comprehensive understanding of agricultural operations in Caldwell County, researchers sent a direct-mail survey to farmers in the community. A total of 197 surveys were mailed, and 30 completed surveys were returned to the researchers. While the response rate of 15% is quite low, researchers believe they accurately represent many of the attitudes and concerns of the farming population in Caldwell County.

Two thirds of the farmer survey respondents in Caldwell County have been farming between 20 and 50 years while one-third have been engaged in agriculture for less than 20 years.

Only 43% of farmer respondents in Caldwell County own all of the land they are farming on, with the remainder renting some portion of the land they farm. Respondents indicated leasing anywhere from 1.5 to 1,200 additional acres. The median rented or leased acreage is 100 acres.

Researchers believe that landholders leasing land to farmers are not likely to gain significant income from their leases. Instead, leasing farmland at low rates ensures continued preferential property tax rates under Present Use Valuation (PUV). This is a win-win for county agriculture, giving farmers more access to affordable land and preserving such land for agricultural production through lower tax rates.

Most Caldwell County respondents purchased the land that they are currently farming on, with smaller percentages of farmers having inherited their property or married into it. Several farmers who indicated having purchased property also indicated having inherited property as well, expanding their acreage available for farm production and income.

Farm longevity is supported by survey responses regarding how long individual farms have been in the farmer's family. In Caldwell County, most respondent farms (70%) have been in the family for over 20 years. Of those, 11 respondent farms, or almost 40%, have been in the family for over 50 years.

With the average age of the farmer in Caldwell County at 56.4 years old, development of farmland preservation and farm transition plans will become an increasingly important service.

Caldwell County respondents have an average of 107 acres in agricultural production, but the median acreage in production is between 20 and 41 acres. Many of the larger farms in the county are involved in beef cattle and hay production, with some farms producing on over 1,000 acres. While some of the smaller farms are strictly involved in horticulture, many still raise a few head here and there, if for no other reason than that's what has always happened on the farm. The smallest livestock producers surveyed are raising animals for their own consumption, with a small amount shared among family and friends.

Farmer respondents in Caldwell County have an average of 25 acres in forestry production, with a median area in forestry production of 30 acres.

The highest revenue generators for farm production according to the survey are cattle, vegetables and hay, accounting for 68 percent of responses. Cattle and hay topped the second tier rankings of highest farm revenue generators, with fruits and vegetables tied for third highest revenue generators.

In Caldwell County, there is a wide diversity of farm products being raised, from fruits, vegetables, melons and berries to forestry products, row crops and livestock. One unique farmer in the county is raising vegetables commonly associated with Asian food, while another is raising Atlantic sturgeon for caviar and meat. The following table represents the results of one survey question regarding farm production. Many respondents indicated growing more than one item, so the total count exceeds the total number of survey responses. As can be seen in the table below, the top three agricultural products according to the survey respondents are Hay, Cows/Beef Cattle, and Produce/Vegetables:

Category	Count	Category	Count
Hay	11	Oats	1
Cows/Beef Cattle	8	Row Crops	1
Produce/Vegetables	6	Blackberries	1
Corn (grain)	5	Strawberries	1
Soybeans	4	Pears	1
Wheat	4	Grapes	1
Beans	4	Watermelon	1
Blueberries	3	Sweet Potatoes	1
Tomatoes	3	Peas	1
Pasture	2	Beets	1
Fruits	2	Herbs	1
Berries	2	Bok Choy	1
Apples	2	Mustard Greens	1
Sweet Corn	2	Cilantro	1
Potatoes	2	Green Onion	1
Cucumbers	2	Snake Gourd	1
Okra	2	Basil	1
Squash	2	Spinach	1
Turnips	2	Water Spinach	1
Flowers	2	Luffa	1
Hogs	1	Peppers	1
Dairy Goats	1	Pumpkins	1
Chickens (for eggs)	1	Honey	1
Tobacco	1	Small garden feeds 3-4 families	1
Barley	1		

Supporting the diversity of agriculture in Caldwell County is important to its overall success. The table above shows that there are at least 43 unique farm products that are being grown in the county (ignoring general categories like produce/vegetables, fruits, berries, herbs and row crops). Such diversity doesn't necessarily lend itself to development of produce aggregation and marketing organizations, especially when overall volume of production for each item is extremely low. The low aggregate volumes make it difficult to attract interest from large scale buyers such as supermarkets and produce distributors. Furthermore, farmers growing very small amounts of produce for sale typically rely on higher prices from direct retail sales to offset higher costs of production.

Interviews with leading agricultural producers in Caldwell County indicate that farmers need help with market development. The markets that survey respondents indicate using most are very simple; they sell mostly to friends and family if they sell at all. Respondents report that they sell produce out of their yards and through word of mouth in the community. One producer reported selling farm products at the flea market. Outside of these small and informal distribution networks, the next most popular venues for farm sales are the area farmers markets. Other reported sales venues include farm stands, sales to restaurants, grocery stores, packing plants, and livestock auction sales.

The types of marketing support requested by survey respondents are largely unique to the individual producers. For example, Red Angus beef cattle producer Ronnie Holman of Hard Rock Beef Cattle thinks there is a need for niche market development for his beef; beekeeper Ryan Higgs of Blue Ridge Apiaries is interested in market development for pollination services to area farmers.

There is little external management of Caldwell County farms – all survey respondents indicated that they manage their farm operations on their own, with occasional help from immediate family members. Most of these farm operations are relatively small, with at least two-thirds of survey respondents indicating that they earn less than \$25,000 in farm revenue per year.

Wholesale markets of row crop commodities are an important avenue for a few Caldwell farm producers. Only two farmers, growers of soybeans and tobacco, indicated that they raise any products under contract. According to their responses, these farmers' land has been in their families for a long time, they have been farming it for a long time, and they understand the importance of a secure farm transition plan. These farmers appear to be both more stable and more invested in their agricultural businesses than the majority of small landholders growing hay, beef cattle, or vegetables for retail sale.

Only four of the larger farm respondents indicated earning more than \$50,000 in farm revenue per year. These four farmers represent an important demographic among the farm population. They are all between 40 and 70 years old and all have farm transition plans in place. Three out of four are farming land that has been in their families for over 50 years. These growers have been

farming their land for between 20 and 50 years, and they indicate having wholesale markets in place. Their combined acreage in agricultural production totals 2,318 acres in Caldwell County, or just over 7% of all the land in farms in the county according to the 2007 Census of Agriculture.

Few farmer respondents are engaged in producing value added products in Caldwell County, with only five respondents indicating value added production. Three other respondents are interested in pursuing value added production but have not yet done so. The main focus on value added production is on canning and acidified foods, with jams, jellies, preserves, pickles and salsa topping the list. Other value added products being produced by survey respondents include grass-fed beef cuts, organic hydroponics and goat cheese.

Over the course of the next twenty years, the majority of farmers surveyed intend to hold onto their land and keep it in the family. Many of them intend to make no changes to their land at all, keeping it the way it is now. It is also encouraging that only one respondent indicated selling some land for residential use, with the family keeping the rest. Not one respondent indicated that their land will be strictly sold for development. However, almost 26% of respondents stated “I have no idea” when asked what would happen to their land in the next 20 years. Obviously, there is a need for support in farm transition to ensure that good farmland remains in agricultural production. This is supported by interviews conducted with local farmers, such as rabbit grower Lee Messer, who plans to slow his business down and retire soon, but who has no plan in place for the succession of his land.

Of those farmers who indicated that they do in fact have a plan for the transition of their land, nearly all of them (7/8 or almost 88%) intend to have their farms transition to their family members. However, there are still a good many farmers without any plan whatsoever, and it will be important to help these individuals plan for the future of their land. This is supported by survey responses that show a demand for land transition workshops, farmland preservation workshops and planning for a generational transition of land to family members. Those farmers who already have transition plans in place may serve as examples or mentors to those in need of a plan.

There is support in the farming community for projects that will help to increase sales of locally grown foods in Caldwell County, with just over 60% of survey respondents indicating an interest in participating in projects that would help strengthen local food sales. Among the 40% of farmer respondents who are not interested in participating in projects to increase local food sale are large landowners with secured wholesale markets as well as vegetable farmers with large garden-type production focusing on direct retail sales.

Survey respondents were split down the middle with respect to familiarity with CSA programs: half were unfamiliar and half were either familiar or interested in learning more about them. However, one-third of respondents were actually interested in selling their farm products through

a CSA program. Of those respondents who did indicate a product they would be interested in selling through a CSA, all indicated a desire to sell beef. Given that almost two-thirds of survey respondents indicated eating local foods on a daily basis, a targeted meat and/or produce CSA program could realize some success. A survey of consumer attitudes towards participation in a CSA would be important before pursuing CSA development. With so many unfamiliar with the concept of CSA's in Caldwell County, a consumer education component could be important.

Other opportunities for training and education were identified by survey respondents. Any educational offerings should be held during the evenings whenever possible, as this was the most convenient time as expressed by over 77% of survey respondents. The following table illustrates response rates for classes and programs that farm producers may have an interest in attending:

<b>Class or Program</b>	<b>Count</b>
Land Transition/Farmland Preservation Workshops	15
Good Agricultural Practices Training	9
Developing new products that I can grow and sell	9
Planning for a generational transition of my land to family members	7
Marketing my agricultural production	5
Wine Making Workshops	4
Developing strategies to keep from having to sell my land	4
ServSafe Training	3
Obtaining Organic Certification	3
Beer Brewing Workshops	2
Canning Workshops	2
Cheese Making Classes	2
Production/Grower's School	2
How-To	2
Better Process Control School (AKA Pickle School)	1
Food Preservation	1
Other	0
Production/Growers School	0

Open-ended responses to this survey question included workshops on how to raise fish and rabbits, as well as classes on commodities such as corn, soybeans and wheat.

According to respondents, the most in-demand educational offering that the county can offer to farmers in Caldwell County is land transition/farmland preservation workshops. This is especially important given the age of farmers in the county: 62% of farmers surveyed are over 50



years old and 93% are over 40. The average age of a farmer in Caldwell is 56.4. The county could use more young people who are more actively engaged with farming, but the most important identified factor in preserving county agriculture is with land transition.

Generational transition of land to family members also falls high on the list. This should reinforce the importance of planning assistance for farmers in the county. A related response that falls a little lower on the list, but still adds credence to the need, is help developing strategies to keep from having to sell land. If a farmer is putting more money in his or her pocket, selling land will probably become less of an issue, which is supported by two farmer responses near the top of the list: developing new products for grow-out and sale, and marketing agricultural production. Pursuing these two activities can help alleviate some of the pressure to sell land.

Even farmers who have transition plans in place can use help figuring out how to succeed in their next endeavors. Liza Plaster, for example, has children who intend to preserve the farm and keep it natural and productive in agriculture. They intend to pursue forest conservation and are interested in GAP certification and preservation through VADs and eVADs. Liza, however, is interested in developing on-farm experiential agritourism, whereby guests in their spare two-bedroom apartment can get a feel for agriculture and for working with animals.

Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) training is another top tier educational offering that farmers expressed an interest in receiving. The purpose of GAP is to provide farmers guidance in implementing best management practices that can help to reduce the risks of microbial contamination of fruits and vegetables. Examples of GAP training offerings can include worker hygiene and health, manure use and water quality throughout the production and harvesting process. While GAP certification is still voluntary, GAP is quickly becoming de facto law for sales into wholesale, grocery and restaurant markets. Pursuing GAP certification on behalf of farmers is important for market development as well as food safety. However, the training and audits necessary for GAP certification cost money, money that not all farmers are willing to expend on a certification that some still view as unnecessary. For that reason, the county may consider providing cost-share for those farmers interested in pursuing this certification or others, such as organic certification or Animal Welfare Approved (AWA) certification through the Animal Welfare Institute.

Such a cost-share would be welcomed by people like start-up farmer Tyler Case. In an interview with researchers, Tyler indicated a need for financial assistance in getting his GAP and AWA certifications in order. He wants to be able to access larger markets that have more restrictive certification and insurance requirements. As the only one in his family interested in pursuing agriculture as a career, it is extremely important to get him started off right. And it's not just young, new farmers who need the help: for Catawba Valley Vineyard owner Randy Vance, the cost of GAP and organic certifications is also prohibitive.

More information regarding certifying agency contact information can be found in Section 6: County Development Opportunities and Recommendations.

One interesting need for educational opportunities was identified in interviews with leading agricultural producers in the county: Education of the consumer. In order to help sustain the viability and longevity of the local farm culture, interviewee Liza Plaster of Ripshin Goat Dairy suggested that the consumer needs more education about how farming and local farmers markets work. Farmers such as Shane Snyder believe that something must be done to counteract the “on-demand” culture that is supported by year-round availability in grocery stores. Shane also wants to educate the consumer on how to utilize less popular and less expensive cuts of meat.

Other improvements that can help farmers become more economically successful in farming include the following open-ended survey responses:

- Continued support from agencies like our Cooperative Extension office
- Proper soil amendments
- Changing to organic produce
- A “unified” farmers market for the county
- A good abattoir to process locally grown beef
- Tractor, tiller, sprayer, seeder and planter

Suggestions for equipment needs to improve the economic success of farming relate directly to another survey question regarding what types of equipment would help farmers to further develop their agricultural activities. The following table illustrates the frequency of open-ended survey responses to equipment needs:

<b>Equipment</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
Tractor/Loader	4
Tiller	3
Greenhouse	2
Spray	2
Combine	2
Round Baler	1
Plow	1
Disc Harrow	1
Irrigation System	1
Roundup	1
Seed Planter	1
Grain Bin	1
GPS	1
Silage Chopper	1
No Till Drill	1

Machinery	1
2 Mexicans	1
Something to help w/ pork production	1

Among survey respondents, the greatest equipment need is for a tractor/loader and a tiller. The county may consider assisting producers in sourcing equipment, either for direct purchase by individuals or on behalf of farmers for a shared-use arrangement, whereby farm equipment is made available on a schedule of use. For more information on recommendations regarding shared-use equipment, see Section 6: County Development Opportunities and Recommendations.

## **Section 4: Representative Farmer Interviews**

### **Randy Vance - Catawba Valley Vineyard, Owner**

Randy Vance and his wife have lived and worked or otherwise been a part of a farm for almost their entire lives. Randy himself was raised on a dairy farm. He worked 26 years in a factory, only to be laid off several years ago. That experience changed their whole approach to life and retirement. They had wanted to start a vineyard and to become more self-sustaining with respect to food production. So, with the assistance of the WIA program, they went back to school and in that first spring grew organic vegetables for sale at the farmers market. From that small beginning, they have grown to the point that they are now earning \$700-800 per week. While this is a viable income during the spring and summer harvest seasons, winter and fall are more difficult, which makes diversification all the more important. This is why they have expanded into organic grapes, which are harvested in September and October. This provides a large amount of capital that helps them carry over into the spring. Luckily, they also have a long growing season in Caldwell County, with the farmers market staying open until the Saturday before Christmas Eve. With such a mild winter last year, Randy and many others were growing almost right up until that point. In order to further extend their growing seasons, Randy is planning to take a row cover and hoop house seminar, which will help the farm start production earlier and end later in the season.

Randy is the owner of Catawba Valley Vineyard and the manager of the Caldwell County Farmers Market. He and his wife are in their second year with the vineyard and grapes are growing, but it will be another 2 years until the grapes are ready for wine production. They are growing several wine varieties, including Riesling, Noiret, Muscadine, Catawba and Reliance seedless, which are for sale at the market. They are growing approximately 5 acres of grapes at the moment, including 12 varieties of table grapes. Insect pressures have been a major challenge, but they are up to it.

Two other new crops that they have put in the ground are organic blueberries and blackberries. These were planted in April 2011, so this is the first full year of plants for Randy. However, next year they should be producing berries, and Randy is considering starting a U-pick operation for these berries as well as his grapes.

Randy stays in constant contact with the other organic growers in Caldwell County. They have considered starting a CSA program together, but there are a couple of issues that need to be resolved first. Randy feels that there needs to be some meetings and organization to this process. For instance, farmers should be encouraged to grow what they grow well (and to a saleable standard), which for Randy is organic grains, root crops and tomatoes as well as grapes. For example, Randy has a hard time growing corn successfully, so farmers who are better at corn should concentrate on that. If they could work together as a group, he feels that more people could concentrate on growing out their specialties. That way they could benefit from each other's

strengths and support each other's weaknesses, and still have a very diverse produce production in the county. While they currently grow 30 types of fruits and vegetables on 4 acres on the farm, Randy would like to concentrate on the 8 to 12 varieties that he really knows how to grow best. If he could only work on those varieties and make those as good as possible, Randy could improve his diversity of production and its quality while reducing the stress of farming. In fact, Randy believes that he could sell his produce more cheaply if he was able to specialize in this way. Other farmers who follow suit would be able to reap the same benefits.

Randy is supportive of the concept of a produce aggregation and distribution center for both himself and the conventional farmers in the county, and he would be interested in participating in it if there was an organic option. However, he also understands the pull of the conventional farmers there, since only two of the 30 farmers who participate in the Caldwell County Farmers Market are certified organic. While Randy wishes that more of the conventional farmers would get on board with organics, he knows that the produce they sell is good and held to a high standard. He wants to help people get a premium price for what they grow, but there is not yet a well-developed market for organics sold at that premium in the county. In fact, he must sell his organic produce at the same price points as the conventional farmers, while dealing with lower yields, greater insect and disease pressures, and higher input costs. For instance, their organic certification, which is provided through Princeton University, cost \$1,700 in the first year alone. A yearly renewal fee of \$800 is also a significant cost for the farm. He has tried to apply for an organic certification reimbursement program, but the paperwork for it is too time consuming and the deadlines always seem like they have just passed when they get around to it. And with more and more organic producers coming online every year, that money seems to go to fewer and fewer people. While it would be nice if there was someone who could apply on their behalf, that person would need to have so much detailed information about their farm as to make it almost impossible.

The Vances do not yet participate in any land preservation programs such as VAD or eVAD and have not pursued GAP or HACCP training. While he recognizes that these certifications, especially GAP, are important and open the doors to larger markets, the expense is virtually prohibitive and therefore unjustifiable for a farmer of his level. He understands why folks like MDI and Lowe's must adhere to the standards they have set, but he is dismayed because he knows that his product is excellent, and he simply cannot afford to walk through those doors. He would like to see some cost share assistance available in Caldwell County for farmers wishing to pursue further certifications such as these.

Randy has been fortunate to work with farm and agricultural support organizations such as the Carolina Farm Stewardship Organization, Rural Advancement Foundation International, and the Appalachian Sustainable Agriculture Project. He and his wife attend as many CFSA training programs as possible whenever possible and have been fortunate to work with RAFI. That organization provided a grant to help them get started with their grape program. The Vance's have attended farmers market training classes with and advertised through ASAP. Randy is also

very appreciative of the efforts of Caldwell County Cooperative Extension director Seth Nagy. Without his input and expertise, Randy would never have thought to grow shiitake mushrooms on his 18 acres of forest land. It was Seth who discovered the abundance of oak trees there and convinced them to try growing mushrooms.

At 53, Randy knows he is right at the average age of farmers in North Carolina, and he believes that it is a shame that more young people are not taking up the plow behind their parents when the time comes. While there are many older farmers with no one to take over, the future of the Vance's farm is secure. Their farm is a family farm that his wife inherited long ago. While it sat dormant for a long time, they are doing their best to open the land back up to farming. Their son Matthew is receiving his MS in Plant and Soil Science from North Carolina A&T, and he fully intends to take over the farm when the time comes. Randy and his wife believe that the work they are doing on the farm is helping to build a legacy for their children.

### Ronnie Holman - Hard Rock Beef Cattle

Ronnie Holman farms on land in Caldwell County that was originally purchased by his great-grandfather. Ronnie was raised on that land and still lives within eyesight of it. They don't own all of the 60 acres of the original plot, but some of it is still owned by family and friends. They keep purebred red Angus cows on all of the land, however, as they continue to lease it for their farm operation. All of their cattle are grass-fed, which Ronnie believes helps his with his niche market. Not many people, after all, raise red Angus, as black Angus is the preferred breed in this country.

Right now they are raising twelve mother cows as well as ten head which are destined to be freezer beef. He also runs another 60 cows in Rutherford County, and while they have raised as many as 120 at a time, they are currently in the process of rebuilding their herd numbers. He sells probably between 8 and 10 animals per month, mainly through word of mouth. They do not sell many individual cuts of meat, but he does sell ground beef. Mostly he sells primals and quarters.

Ronnie looks at his marketing options every year, but he does not go to the area farmers markets because he has a very hectic and busy day job. When he has time off, he prefers to spend it at home on the farm with his family and his animals. He is certain he would do well at the farmers markets, but since this is not his main source of income, he prefers to do it his way: *"It's not really about the money. It's my joy. I do it because I love it. It's a great way to live, raise kids, raise grandkids."*

For this reason, he is not terribly interested in trying to grow his business. It takes him so much time to finish the animals, especially in the summer, that it just doesn't pay for itself at the current stock and grain prices.

Ronnie hates seeing people that think they can't make a go at farming on a smaller scale. He believes that there needs to be better niche markets. He is lucky because farming is essentially

his hobby, and his hobby pays for itself. He makes some money at it, but it fits his personality and he likes to be able to do good for other people, too.

Ronnie's beef is processed at Mays Meats for two reasons: the first is because as an AWA certified farm, they require an AWA-approved processor (however, they have since let their AWA certification lapse because he was tired of the limitations it placed on his farm operation – the expense raised his meat prices, and not everyone could afford his beef at those prices.) The second reason is that they do a great job with his meats, and while they are a little more expensive, his customers like their packaging. They provide him with his own label, which is important to him.

While he has looked into working with meat delivery companies, it has not really panned out to be cost effective for him. He has concerns about aggregating his meat products for delivery, mainly with respect to the consistency and quality of the products that would move through such a facility. This is especially important for Ronnie, because he grows out red Angus, which can be a less popular animal. This sometimes leads to him receiving about 5 to 10 cents less per pound on the hoof at wholesale. He can usually recoup these costs at the retail level, however.

85% of Ronnie's beef is sold through word of mouth referrals, with only a small portion going to friends and family. Most of his steers sell into the Whole Foods and Fresh Market markets, with a good number of them being sold to Jamie Ager at Hickory Nut Gap. Of course, they process one cow at a time for their own personal consumption. Ronnie thinks that his prices, which are a little bit higher than grocery store meat, scare some customers off. However, he also believes that the quality of his meat could command a higher price given the right market. He encourages people to come on out to the farm to see what he does to the water, soil and grass, meet the animals and experience the infectious passion he has for farming beef. When they do, they want to be a part of that passion, and many of his customers do not buy any commercially raised beef at all anymore.

Ronnie has not looked too far into value added processing, but he did take one cow that would not breed to a master German sausage maker at Weeping Radish Brewery, who made a batch of hot dogs for him. The finished product was great, but at \$6 per pound he could not make much money on hot dogs. While this is cost prohibitive, he is interested in investigating value added for other cattle that do not reproduce.

When it comes to farm transition, Ronnie would like for his 24 year old son to be more involved. He would like to secure more land but he does not have a good answer to transition yet.

### Ryan Higgs – Blue Ridge Apiaries

Ryan Higgs, 36, is a fourth-generation beekeeper who relocated to North Carolina from the Midwest with his wife after the birth of their daughter. North Carolina was attractive for a number of reasons: they had family in the area and had been planning a move here long in

advance of their move – also, it is possible to make sourwood honey here, which they could not do in the Midwest. This unique honey flow can sell for higher prices than other mixed honey. He currently operates Blue Ridge Apiaries in Hudson, NC, while his wife teaches in the Caldwell County School system. In fact, it was her position in the schools system that brought them to Caldwell County in the first place.

Ryan runs bees in three counties and markets in four counties. For an apiary of his size, however, there is not enough forage on his land for all of his bees. Seth Nagy has been very helpful at recommending farmers, ranchers and other big landholders that he could work with in order to move his bees around the county. This land access helps him maintain his honey supply for retail sales, which is the predominant revenue stream on the farm. However, honey is not usually how most people make their money with bees. Instead, most people make money from the pollination services they offer. Unfortunately, there is little demand for pollination services in his region, due to the low volume of produce and other crops grown that require bee pollination. While there used to be a significant demand from apple growers, that demand has declined. Blackberry growers used to take advantage of those services as well, but now that those growers use fumigants and other chemicals, those chemicals can adulterate the honey and ruin it.

Ryan prefers to focus on better honey as well as bee breeding stock to help offset the decline in the industry. Breeding bees genetically equipped to deal with disease and predation pressures can help this decline as well. Ryan mainly sells his breeding stock to hobby beekeepers, of which there are many in North Carolina. His stock is inspected by the state by one of the handful of inspectors who inspect all of NC's beekeeping operations.

He has tried to access some resources in the state, such as the bee breeding program at NCSU run by David Tarp. This is a valuable service for the few beekeepers in the state of sufficient size to take advantage of their services, but according to Ryan this is only about 2% of the beekeepers in the state. He feels that NCSU could better serve the beekeeping community by focusing only on those farmers who make a living from beekeeping. He feels this way because only commercial-scale beekeepers can realistically benefit from NCSU's programs. Ryan believes that NCSU dilutes its impact on beekeeping because they try to serve too many small-scale beekeepers. There are only about three other commercial scale honey producers in the county. One has just recently passed away, and one is in his 70s. This elderly gentleman sells at the commodity level to a distributor, while the remaining operator is focused only on a queen breeding program. This group is so small as to not be cohesive, says Ryan.

Ryan does not sell as much in his home county, but rather sells in a diamond pattern around Caldwell County, going to Asheville, Boone, and Charlotte to sell his products. He finds that the populations in these places are more apt to purchase and support local foods. The stores in those places also cater more to products that are local and artisanal. Stores that he sells to include Earth Fare and Fresh Market, but most of his sales occur direct to the consumer, which is crucial to his cash flow. A typical supermarket's honey prices are simply unsustainable for a regional



beekeeper selling his honey. Ryan cannot compete at local grocery stores with a demographic uneducated about global honey production. There is a limited population base there that will support purchases of higher-end products. This is frustrating to Ryan, because he feels that there needs to be a more highly educated consumer in his region for him to sell to.

Ryan travels to three area farmers markets to sell his honey: Boone, Hickory and Blowing Rock. The Boone market is his most pivotal, being well established with good local customer interactions. Hickory has a smaller base clientele, and the Blowing Rock market is essentially a spin-off, tourist driven market.

Sourwood honey is a finicky, weather dependent honey to manufacture – heat and moisture must come at the proper times to ensure that the nectar flows without being washed out. The varied weather patterns in the mountains can also make it hit or miss, which makes honey production in the mountains challenging.

Especially in the Asheville area, honey producers have run into mislabeling problems, where some farmers were sourcing honey from outside of the region and marketing it as sourwood honey. This allowed them to charge higher prices, usually about \$2 to \$5 extra per jar, especially where demand is higher, such as in regions that produce less or no sourwood honey. These vendors brought a bad name to honey at the state-run farmers market in West Asheville. Other farmers were purchasing this mislabeled honey in mass quantities and selling it at other farmers markets at lower prices. This hurts the small farmer in Caldwell County. These problems have led to a honey standard that was passed by the legislature that requires honey sellers to register and become certified. The legislature also put in place a process to pursue producers who are mislabeling their products.

Ryan's farm does not currently have any organic or other certifications. They do work with the NC Department of Agriculture's apiary stock inspectors, but they process all of their honey on-site. They are inspected by the state for the use of their home kitchen as well.

While Ryan appreciates the assistance that grants giving organizations have provided to agriculture in the state, he is a little off put by the way RAFI has handled funding for honey production equipment. RAFI funded two honey processing rooms, one in Marion and one in Shelby, which while well intentioned, have led to his markets being undercut. He feels that there is only really one beekeeper in the region that is of a size to justify the tens of thousands of dollars in equipment purchased for those projects. And, as hobby keepers utilize the facilities and are able to sell their products for less than he does, his business suffers. He feels that this was a lack of foresight on RAFI's part, and that by trying to help everyone, they have hurt some, albeit unintentionally. He used the facility in Marion once, but only to try a piece of equipment he was considering buying. While the equipment there helps speed up production, the amount of time it takes to clean between uses is prohibitive.

Ultimately, the three things that Ryan needs most in Caldwell County are education of the consumer, marketing, and distribution assistance. Shipping is expensive because honey is a heavy product and it is infeasible for him to be able to make all his deliveries alone. Selling more product closer to home will do the best towards improving his bottom line.

### Shane Snyder – Snyder Family Farm

Shane Snyder and his wife are first generation farmers in Granite Falls, North Carolina who have been farming for about 15 years now. Shane grew up in a family that operated convenience stores in the area. His wife's step-father farmed hay and cows, and her uncles also farmed extensively as she grew up. The prospect of farming had always interested the Snyders, so after they got married, they bought a 50 acre farm, built a house on the property and put in fencing to begin raising cows. Once they got the fencing finished and cows out grazing, they expanded their animal inventory to include goats and pigs as well. The upkeep and attention that all this required began to get burdensome on the Snyders and they realized they needed to do something. Luckily, Shane's in-laws had the idea to get them a border collie to help with the livestock, which helped out immensely.

Interestingly, the owner of the Border collie had his meat handler's license, and this intrigued the Snyders. They wanted to have their own meat handler's license to transport, process and sell their meat too. Shane figured that his farming experience, combined with this retail and marketing experience growing up in convenience stores, was the perfect fit for marketing and selling meat.

Now, the Snyders lease another 150 acres and raise pastured pork, cows, goats, chickens and eggs. There is a waiting list for his beef and he cannot produce enough cows to satisfy the demand for meat at the Hickory Farmers Market. He has considered outsourcing the grow-out of cattle and then having them slaughtered himself to help satisfy the demand. However, that is not how he wants to conduct business, so he has stayed away from doing that. Other farmers he knows do conduct business this way. Shane prefers to sell only products that he himself has raised.

They are also growing an all organic garden, much of which Shane's wife cans and puts up for later in the year. Vegetables they are currently growing on the farm include tomatoes, beans, squash, cucumbers, lettuce, kale and sweet potatoes.

Shane has witnessed some problems with his organic produce versus the conventional produce also available at local area farmers markets. Since he has an organic product that commands a higher price, and there is a smaller window of people who understand the value of organics, it can be frustrating to try to sell organics there. This is exacerbated by farmers market vendors whose produce wasn't even grown by the vendor, but rather was sourced in its box at the WNC Farmers Market and sold as local in Caldwell County. Shane believes this is happening more and more, and it is supported by his seeing other vendors throw away boxes; if they were actually

growing on the farm, he says they would be keeping those boxes rather than throwing them away.

In fact, one customer that Shane knows recently bought meat from him as well as some other vegetables for dinner at the Lenoir Farmers Market. After his customer got home, he noticed a sticker on his bell peppers that caused him and Shane some concern: “Product of Mexico”. In his opinion, the farmers market should abide by the maxim “If you didn’t grow it, you don’t sell it,” but too many people are taking advantage of the situation. He knows that Seth is a busy guy and does not have the time to be policing the farmers markets every day, but he wishes there was some way to ensure that products sold at the farmers markets were raised and processed by the actual farmers themselves.

It happens with meat, too. Some of the meat being sold at the Lenoir Farmers Market, according to Shane, is being sourced from farmers outside the county who are not even involved with the market. To him, this defeats the whole purpose of even having a farmers market. “It’s all a matter of integrity,” said Shane. “I don’t know how to police it or take care of it, but something should be done about it.”

The development or expansion of farmers markets can be a double edged sword in Shane’s opinion. When it is late in the season, a much smaller variety of vegetables can be grown for sale at the market, which contrasts with availability in the local grocery stores, where anything you want is available year-round. This instant gratification mentality is dangerous for a farmers market. It is problematic because consumers who want a tomato in October see that there are no tomatoes available at farmers markets, so they go to satisfy their demand at the grocery store. Many of these potential long-term customers never come back to the farmers market because they were not satisfied on their initial visit.

Shane believes that there must be some additional education on the part of the consumer as to what it takes to eat in season, not to demand out of season vegetables from places like Chile and Mexico.

Shane sees this demand for gratification with his beef sales as well. Almost everyone wants the “in” cut, which has recently been skirt steak. And since there are only two skirt steaks on every cow, not everyone who wants to eat skirt steaks gets to. The same goes for tenderloin in his pigs; everyone wants it, but there are only two four-pound tenderloins in a 200-300 pound animal. There are limited amounts of popular cuts available and everyone cannot have exactly what they want when they want them.

Unfortunately, this seems a lot like a no-win situation to Shane; unless there is some systemic collapse of the larger food distribution systems in the country, he doesn’t think farmers markets and local food will get a much larger audience. Basically, people aren’t going to turn to local food unless they are forced to in this way. Education is the most important component in this problem; someone should start in the elementary schools to get the next generation involved and

interested in local foods. The problem cannot be fixed overnight, but if more people care about what they eat it can be fixed. The other problem impacting this is the dollar menu; as long as this is available people will continue to eat quickly and cheaply instead of healthfully.

All of Shane's meats are currently being processed under USDA inspection at Mays Meats, the closer of the two nearest USDA facilities for beef processing in North Carolina. He has value added products such as sausages and bratwurst made there, as well as most of the conventional cuts like stew beef, sirloin tips, sirloin roasts, filets, strips, ribeye, skirt, T-bone, and London broil. They do not pursue any other value added processing for beef. Since many local producers process small quantities on farm for personal consumption, he believes the infrastructure costs of setting up processing are prohibitive, but that an inspected shared-use kitchen would have a better user base.

Many people can a lot of their produce, including the Snyders who have considered having their home kitchen inspected to do canning on a larger scale for sale. He knows of maybe only one family doing commercial level canning for sale at farmers markets.

Shane would be interested in the pursuit of a milk processing facility in the county.

They currently market their beef to Health Hut and Bistro on 127, with plans to expand to Granny's Oasis and a local German restaurant.

*"It seems that nobody really wants to farm anymore; it is such hard work with no time table or vacations. Nobody worries about where their food comes from; it's at the grocery store."* However, this is much different for the Snyders: *"We don't just sell it, we live it."*

### Jim Barlowe

Jim Barlowe is a 66 year old cattle farmer in Caldwell County. He began farming full time in 1983 after having run a country store for years and looking for a career change. Jim had always wanted to farm, to have the chance to work outside, and to work with his son Alan. Earlier in his career Jim had farmed chickens, raising animals for Case Farms and selling eggs, but he switched to a few cows on a small farm with a complimentary hay business on the side. Alan intends to take over the farm when Jim is no longer able to take care of it. Jim plans to farm as long as he can until his son Alan must take over. He would like to grow his son's input on the farm between now and then.

Right now, Jim has about 170 mother cows on the farm. Of those 170 animals, he usually sells between 130 and 150 head per year and keeps the rest. The cows that he sells are mostly taken to the state graded sales with some commercial heifers sold off the farm in the spring and through private trade.

In addition to cows, Jim also raises row crops. He has, on average, 300 acres of grain corn, 60 acres of soybeans, 60 acres of wheat, 300 acres of hay and 50 acres of silage. About 2,000

bushels of his grain corn are sold to Tyson and various hog farmers in the region. Jim has a good market in Virginia for his hay, while his silage is sold to a feeder cattle operation. Jim has not really pursued any value added production for his farm operation.

Initially, Jim did not have any suggestions for improvements that could be made at the county level for farmers like him, but the more he thought about it, the more he could think of to aid farming in Caldwell County.

His overhead is particularly high at the moment, thanks in no small part to elevated grain prices, and this is a big problem for him. However, he feels lucky that commodity prices are high too, which gives him some hope. Insurance and taxes are his highest costs. If there was some way to help him offset these costs, he would be grateful. He hasn't been able to expand his operation in the ways that he would like because of these changes in the market. However, they have been able to put in a new grain elevator on farm that they are very proud of.

Since Jim sells the majority of his hay in Virginia, he would like to be able to sell more hay locally. Most of the hay that he sells locally is sold through word of mouth. Some measure of market identification and market development for local hay sales would help him out. However, overall preservation is probably the most important thing that the county can do to ensure the success and future of farming:

*“People don't know where their food is going to come from in the next ten years – that's the big problem: we drove around from Lexington to Winston-Salem and back recently and all that pretty farmland, what used to be pretty farmland, has big ole houses sitting on it and no one's farming. That's going to be a problem.”*

#### Lee Messer

Lee Messer has farmed off and on his entire life. For the last thirty years, Lee has been a rabbit man, with much of his business picking back up in the last 14 years or so. His operation usually has about 450 does that keep him in 2,000 to 3,000 head at any given time.

Lee ships live rabbits to buyers in Hickory as well as in Tennessee and Virginia, and since he has about 30 growers that grow out stock for him, they are able to ship out 400-500 live animals every two weeks during the summer. During the spring and fall he is able to ship out between 600-700 animals every two weeks.

Lee has processed a little bit of sausage in the past, and he has considered having some animals processed in state. He would want to be able to sell it all in state so that his regulatory inspection requirements would be lower. He has no intention of selling meat across state lines and requiring FDA or USDA inspection, for example.

Lee does not have too much time for farmers markets and such. He recoups additional farm costs by selling his rabbit litter to vegetable growers from Hickory and beyond. The church in Hickory

that purchases his rabbit litter as fertilizer for their garden say that their garden yields two to three times as much produce thanks to Lee's rabbit litter. Lee says that this litter makes a great fertilizer because it holds moisture, loosens the ground, and is slow to release. He sells a bobcat bucket-full for \$20 (1500-2000 pounds). According to an organic farmer that Lee knows, rabbit litter can be considered organic as long as it has been resting for six months.

Lee has no farm transition plan. He is very interested in having people come to his farm for a visit to see how his operation works.

### Tyler Case

Tyler Case grew up in Lenoir, NC near an 87 acre family farm that was started by his grandparents, so farming is in the family blood. During the spring of his senior year in high school, Tyler completed the master gardening program at Cooperative Extension, and then worked with Liza Plaster at Ripshin Goat Dairy for a year after graduation. Afterward, he studied for a few semesters in the sustainable agriculture program at Western Piedmont Community College before going to Puerto Rico for his internship.

Tyler moved back home after spending the last year in Greensboro, and he plans to begin ramping up his on farm production. His past experiences have come from growing broilers and laying hens and selling eggs and layers. Two years ago he produced about 200 broilers for sale at the Watauga County Farmers Market. He processes his chickens on farm using a processing trailer that has been available through NC Choices, a program designed to increase consumption and production of local meats. This year he intends to ramp up production even further, and next year he would like to be able to utilize the Foothills Pilot Plant in Marion, NC. However, his preference is to process on-farm and he would like to see a mobile processing trailer available for use in Caldwell. A mobile vegetable wash line, which was in development at Western Piedmont Community College to get more people involved in agriculture, is another way to help the local farmer out.

He has not yet accessed the local restaurant market with his meat, but he has sold some eggs to restaurants that employ his friends. When he tried to sell his meat, he realized that he was not capable of meeting his client's cutting and packaging requirements. He is learning more about different cuts and has cut more in his second year than in the first. He is also now harvesting hearts and livers for sale at the farmers market. Additionally, Tyler's farm is not GAP or AWA certified and he carries no liability insurance. He is interested in learning more about GAP and AWA and pursuing those certifications, but as a relative newcomer to local food sales, he has no capital to pursue them with. He wants to end up selling into larger markets and make a living from growing food, but he sees the need for some sort of cost share opportunity to help him, and farmers like him, achieve these certifications. Mountain farmers need more help for cost share in things like business, marketing and sales. He knows how to raise animals, he just doesn't know

best how to move them. He does believe that they are doing the best they can at Extension, especially with continuing to get information out to farmers about new legislation.

*“Seth Nagy is exceptional at passing along information to people he knows about. When he passes along relevant information to individual farmers, it shows that he knows and is paying attention to his people.”*

One reason that Tyler moved back home was his interest in starting a foodservice business called “3-hour Local Food” that would serve local farmers. Tyler’s business would act as the middleman for local farmers who want to sell into farmers markets or restaurants, but who don’t have the time or inclination to do so. Tyler became interested in this concept after sensing a need for more avenues to push local farm products, such as distribution channels, aggregation and sales outlets.

Tyler believes that agriculture in Caldwell County is generally well received by the locals, albeit with some apprehension. The Cattlemen’s Association, which started from scratch and has become successful, has regular well-attended meetings and has helped him raise stockers for sale. He sells what he can and the rest goes into the family freezer. Agriculture, however, is viewed as an unprofitable endeavor, and he knows many farmers who now keep only a couple of cows because that’s what they have always done. People outside of farming do not perceive farming as a dynamic industry, but Tyler thinks that farming has the opportunity to replace most of the traditional North Carolina industries that have collapsed.

Tyler is the only person in his family who is interested in farming as a career. *“If I had tried a little harder to market my products, I probably could have sold more, but it’s not like people are scrambling over themselves to get local food,”* he says. His mother, who works in the Caldwell County school systems, has helped him make personal connections through which he has been able to sell some additional meat.

Tyler is interested in being a big part of agriculture in Caldwell County. He is passionate about his home town and the possibilities for the growth of agriculture. If a local foods action council is started, he is willing to serve on the board.

### Liza Plaster – Ripshin Goat Dairy

Liza Plaster is a Caldwell County goat farmer and she serves as Vice President of the Watauga County Farmers Market Board of Directors. She originally grew up on a farm in Caldwell County where her father raised cows, pigs and chickens, so she is familiar with farm life. She left the farm for many years to pursue her professional career. During the 1980s, Liza was serving on an arts council and visited the Carl Sandburg farm. There, she became interested in the small, but high-quality goat dairy farm being operated there. Her interest piqued, she continued to let the thought of operating her own goat dairy percolate in her imagination until 2004, when she retired from a pharmaceutical company. Twelve years of study prepared her to begin her dairy

operation, Ripshin Goat Dairy, in Caldwell County, which started with 4 goats on 20 acres. The farm currently milks around 22-24 goats in any given year. At kidding time, they have over 70 goats on the farm; they keep most of the doelings and sell some as dairy goats. The bucks are either sold for meat or as studs. Her meat goats are processed at May's Meats in Taylorsville, Thomas Brothers in North Wilkesboro, or Crawley's Abattoir in Morganton. Liza is concerned about the welfare of her animals in the slaughter process, so she prefers doing business with Crawley's because that operation keeps the animals very calm, which improves the quality of the meat. Ripshin Goat Dairy is also AWA approved.

Liza's brother operates La Paz Atlantic Sturgeon and Caviar, a 20,000 gallon aquaculture facility currently supporting over 16,000 fish of three different species. This business sells to a global market as well as to higher end restaurants in the High Country.

The dairy, which was designed and built by Liza's son, is in its ninth year of operations. Liza's husband retired from his career as a photographer and jumped at the chance to manage the farming operations, including hay, feed and deworming. He employs anywhere between 8-10 people part-time on farm to help with milking and cheese making and delivery of products to the three farmers markets they sell at, which include the Wednesday market in Hickory from 10am-3pm, the Blowing Rock Farmers Market on Thursdays from 3pm – 6pm, and the Boone Farmers Market on Saturdays from 7am – Noon. The Hickory market provides tents, which is especially important since that market is open during the hottest part of the day. The Boone market is their largest market, as it sees over 2,000 individuals on any given Saturday. They raise American Saanen dairy goats on natural pasture, woods and forages, using sound ecological practices. Handmade farmstead goat cheeses are sold at farmers' markets in Boone, Blowing Rock and Hickory, and at Erick's Cheese & Wine Shop in Banner Elk as well as at Hickory Wine Shop in Hickory and at Stick Boy Bread Company in Boone. They are also enjoyed at restaurants in Blowing Rock, Boone, Hickory and Lenoir. The two restaurants that Liza feels are the most supportive of local foods in Caldwell County are Wine Cellar and Bistro and Sweet T's.

The local farmers market in Lenoir is more problematic, according to Liza. There is conflict between the older, more conventional producers and the younger, more natural and organically minded producers. There needs to be some effort made in Caldwell County at eliminating the factionalism between these two producer groups. A location where these different producers could both have sufficient space to sell their products is important, as is the construction of some shade-providing structure. It is also important for the producers to agree on a good time for the market to be held. Currently the conventional farmers sell on Saturday mornings, and the younger group on Saturday afternoons. During the heat of the summer, it is harder to draw a crowd, especially one that has already shopped in the morning at a separate market. Because of this the younger crowd has had a struggle to get underway. This whole situation has caused undue tension and resentment between producer groups. Liza believes that someone with good diplomacy could bring these disparate groups together and improve the status of local foods in



the county. Liza feels that this generational gap can be remedied and that both producer groups can coexist in the same market.

The conventional farmers, in particular, need good leadership and organization. They have had leadership in name only, as they have never collected any dues from members nor provided any advice to farmers. There are no meetings, no board. A committed farmers market manager could do wonders for developing a well-run, participatory farmers market.

Liza believes that the Caldwell County public is extremely supportive of local agriculture, mostly because of the efforts of organizations such as the Appalachian Sustainable Agriculture Project (ASAP) and the Carolina Farm Stewardship Association (CFSA) that have lead the way in promotion of fresh, local food. She herself has taken advantage of some of the support services available in the county, especially the library, which carries books dedicated to goat farming and farming resources as well as the community college Small Business Center (SBC), which has good employees committed to helping farmers manage their resources. Ultimately, however, the best resource in Caldwell County, according to Liza Plaster, is the cooperative extension director, Seth Nagy. Liza says that, “Seth Nagy is a guardian angel for Caldwell County.” He personally applied for a grant on her behalf for a solar panel for her goat feed room. The solar panel runs a hot water heater that heats the goats’ drinking water to around 115F, which they prefer even in the summer. They discovered this quite by accident, having fed them hot water during winter birthings to increase their water consumption. Liza also attends Seth’s cattlemen’s meetings to help her stay in touch with livestock issues. The farm will participate in the WNC Cheese Trail, which is in the works because of such a high number of artisanal cheese producers operating in North Carolina.

Liza is interested in additional training and educational opportunities for Caldwell County farmers as well. She believes that information sharing is very important to maintaining a vibrant farming culture. Since Caldwell has been more intensive in the plant and tree markets, she feels that more attention to produce cultivation would help farmers in the county branch out. A beginner’s organic workshop would be a good place to start. As the vice president of the Watauga County Farmers Market, Liza feels that extension leadership would do well to visit that market to better understand the initiatives they have taken on behalf of their income producing farmers.

Liza and her husband are only going to be operating the dairy for a couple more years. They will be keeping their cheese operation running for the rest of the year and are planning to stop milking soon as well. Her husband has expressed some interest in hand milking, but they are not going to stop their operations abruptly. Over the next few years, they will sell up to 20 milking goats per year to Liza’s mentor, the Goat Lady Dairy in Climax, NC, which is a premier artisan dairy. She is also interested in experiential agritourism. She has a 2-bedroom apartment on the farm that can accommodate guests who have an interest in seeing what it’s like to work with animals on a farm. Their children intend to preserve the farm and keep it natural and productive

in agriculture. They intend to pursue forest conservation and are interested in GAP certification and preservation through VADs and eVADs. Her son is particularly interested in pork production. While he is not raising pork at the moment, he is interested in raising about 6 piglets for market per year, and he already has leads for selling to high end restaurants in the High Country.

Liza is interested in attending a meeting to learn and discuss more about this project as it moves forward. While she would prefer to attend a dinner after the day's work has been completed, she would make efforts to attend a breakfast as well (so long as it is not on Wednesday when she attends the Hickory Farmers Market).

### Joe Doll – Atlantic Caviar and Sturgeon

In the early 2000s, former Atlantic Caviar and Sturgeon President Joe Doll was traveling extensively in Russia, enjoying the caviar along the way. Throughout his travels, though, Joe began to notice that the Russians were depleting their stocks of wild Caspian Sea sturgeon, and in 2003 on a plane flight home, he began to develop the idea for sturgeon meat and caviar production in the US.

Together with three other partners, Joe embarked on the plan for Atlantic Caviar and Sturgeon with assistance from North Carolina State University's Cooperative Extension Office. NCSU professors got on board, in particular Dr. Jeffrey Hinshaw, Associate Professor and Extension Specialist in the Department of Biology, whose research and extension interests include cold-water and cool-water aquaculture and fish health management and water quality.

These principles further developed their concepts and business plan and in 2005 they received their first fish. Their initial plan was to raise the sturgeon in ponds on the farm, but the regulations regarding sturgeon production required that they grow out their sturgeon in enclosed tanks. This is so because no sturgeons, some of which are considered threatened or endangered species, may be released into waterways in the state.

The project initially intended to pursue outside funding. They had looked into Small Business Research funding opportunities, but never really found a great match. Then, in 2008, one of the principle investors passed away, bequeathing his controlling shares of La Paz, the parent company of Atlantic Caviar and Sturgeon, to NCSU. He also provided for funding to complete the facility and to operate the company until it is self-sustaining. Because NCSU has a controlling interest in the project and the funding is secured, they do not have to pursue outside funding for the farm. The farm has been built to a level of sustainability and actually has room for about a 30% expansion.

The business partners purchased tanks, which now total 720,000 gallons and hold 16,000 fish, and began to ramp up production. Since sturgeons have extremely long life cycles that can exceed the human life expectancy, it takes a while for the sturgeon to be ready for meat and

caviar production. In fact, 2012 is the first year that the farm will harvest caviar and meat. It is their expectation that Atlantic Caviar and Sturgeon should be able to produce over 2,000 lbs. of caviar and 100,000 lbs. of meat per year. They are currently discussing wholesale relationships with a client in New York State as well as some retail in local markets. However, they have not yet pursued full scale marketing:

*“It’s not yet a real well developed business model, but it is the leading force in NC aquaculture. There’s another farm on the coast that is attempting something similar, but the potential is great if they can make it work.”*

Joe has since stepped down as president of Atlantic Caviar and Sturgeon, handing over the position to Dr. Jeffrey Hinshaw of NCSU. Dr. Hinshaw has a better understanding of the problems or challenges the operation may face, and the ways in which the county can help support their unique version of agricultural development in Caldwell County.

#### Dr. Jeffrey Hinshaw – Atlantic Caviar and Sturgeon

Dr. Jeffrey Hinshaw is an associate professor and extension specialist in the North Carolina State University Department of Biology whose research and extension interests include cold-water and cool-water aquaculture and fish health management and water quality.

Atlantic Caviar and Sturgeon currently has two buildings on site, with a third in their long-term plan for development. There is infrastructure on site for product production, and this infrastructure should be able to accommodate a 30% increase in production levels. However, the business is expensive structurally, and the return on investment is not rapid due to the long life cycle and maturation of the species.

Dr. Hinshaw provided some concrete suggestions for improvements that could be made on behalf of agriculture, and aquaculture in particular, in Caldwell County.

His first suggestion was for the Cooperative Extension Service to serve as an informational clearinghouse or central contact point to help enhance small business development in the county. Keeping track of things like agriculture specific tax breaks, energy conservation cost sharing, benefits or workers compensation information could help people who operate agricultural enterprises, yet do not have the time or know-how to stay on top of those pieces of information, especially changes to them. This was a problem for La Paz, the parent company of Atlantic Caviar and Sturgeon, when their employment numbers exceeded the exemption for unemployment insurance. When the business first started, they were exempt from providing unemployment insurance because they had a limited number of employees working a limited number of hours. As the business grew, however, it eventually exceeded the exemption, but the accounting department was unaware that they grew past the exemption limit, forcing them to pay for unemployment insurance retroactively.

Next, Dr. Hinshaw suggested that the county could help provide basic infrastructure for animal processing, in particular a clearinghouse for dealing with animal by-products, in this case fish viscera, which can be rendered for use in terrestrial animal feed or composted into an excellent fertilizer. Atlantic Caviar and Sturgeon is not currently capturing its protein waste because they are not producing enough viscera to make it worthwhile, but as they expand they will be able to utilize this by-product. A local farmer had been picking up some viscera for a protein enhancement in hog feed, but Dr. Hinshaw was unaware if this was still ongoing.

Another improvement that could help Atlantic Caviar and Sturgeon further develop their aquaculture enterprise is secure dry storage. They have sufficient cold storage on site, but since the facility needs to truck in large quantities of dry feed to achieve that economy of scale, they also require inexpensive warehousing that they cannot provide themselves. Any dry storage facility would have to be close by, rodent free, and preferably provide delivery as well. Their feed is terrestrial-animal-protein free, which comes at the request of caviar brokers so they can sell into the lucrative European caviar market.

Regional marketing assistance would also benefit Atlantic Caviar and Sturgeon. The peak sturgeon harvest on the Atlantic coast occurred around 1890. This once popular long-lived species was overharvested, and species native to the Atlantic coast were protected as endangered. There has been a moratorium in place for Atlantic sturgeon for about the last 20 years. Since there has been no commercial North Carolina sturgeon fishing for quite some time, there is a need to recreate the market. People do not know what sturgeon tastes like anymore. Chefs need to be re-acclimated to utilizing sturgeon on their menus. Some high end restaurants in New England have reintroduced sturgeon on their menus. These restaurants serve California White Sturgeon. Dr. Hinshaw would love to be able to develop local markets and sell more in North Carolina, but he was unwilling to share proprietary information about where his current markets are. However, he did indicate that one customer is the largest Caviar broker in the country.

#### Caldwell County Farmers Market

Average number of vendors: 18-22

Estimated number of customers: 600-800

Researchers visited the Caldwell County Farmers Market and held informal conversations and interviews with many of the vendors there. The Market is located in the lower, shaded parking lot of the Caldwell County Center, home to the library and cooperative extension. There were twenty vendors operating at the time of our visit. Compared to other small farmers markets visited by researchers, prices in the market are remarkably low. Potatoes were selling for \$0.50 per pound and tomatoes between \$0.50 and \$1.00 per pound. Immaculate fresh flowers could be had for as low as \$1.00 per bunch. The variety of products sold was impressive: tomatoes (German pink, Mr. Stripey, Roma, beefsteak, Cherokee purple, orange, yellow and green), potatoes (mostly Kennebec), eggplant, Japanese eggplant, okra, jalapeno peppers, habanero

peppers, bell peppers (red, yellow, green), cayenne peppers, apples, sweet potatoes, half runner beans, squash, zucchini, green beans, cucumbers, moringa (a new superfood), jams, jellies, soup mixes, jarred soups, whole wheat, pickled vegetables, baked goods, cut flowers, relishes, grapes, clothing, jewelry, magnets and novelties.

The ratio of farm operations that have succession plans was about 50:50 to those that do not. The stands that have younger generations ready to take over the helm tended to be the more established stands. Most of the next generation farmers were in the high school to college age range and were not quite yet prepared to take over farm operations fully. Some participants in the market were there for only the first or second time, while many established growers have taken to attending the Watuaga Farmers Market in Boone as well.

Opinions on the status of agriculture in Caldwell County generally referred to the lack of farming in the county and the need for more. It is understood that there are many acres of land that are arable in the county and that any expansion of agriculture would be good for the county. No concrete suggestions for infrastructure or supply chain improvements were made known, but many people indicated that they would think on it and call us if they come to any conclusions for potential support.

## **Section 5: Markets for Local Agricultural Products**

### **Local Retail Markets**

The following section provides a brief description of the larger retail markets available in Caldwell County, along with discussions of how Caldwell County growers may access them.

The main supermarkets and distributors that are proximate to Caldwell County or that may serve local growers are presented in the following table:

<b>Market</b>	<b>Address</b>	<b>City</b>	<b>State</b>	<b>Zip</b>	<b>Phone</b>
Lowes Foods	1208 Hickory Bvd	Lenoir	NC	28645	828-728-0499
Ingles	2630 Connelly Springs Rd	Granite Falls	NC	28630	828-726-0029
Food Lion	2116 Morganton Blvd SW	Lenoir	NC	28645	828-754-0643
Food Lion	847 Wilkesboro Blvd NE	Lenoir	NC	28645	828-754-2811
Aldi	205 Wilkesboro Blvd NE	Lenoir	NC	28645	
Harris Teeter	619 Connelly Springs Rd	Lenoir	NC	28645	828-754-9066
Leading Green Distributors	PO Box 63	Black Mountain	NC	28711	828-664-1443
Merchants Distributors Inc.	5005 Alex Lee Boulevard	Hickory	NC	28601	828-725-4100
New River Organic Growers	2220 Big Helton Road	Grassy Creek	NC	28631	336-384-2546
Cornucopia Cheese and Specialty Foods Company	8756 Hwy 87 South	Graham	NC	27253	336-376-9626

### **Ingles**

Ingles opened its first store in Asheville, North Carolina in 1963. Merchandise for their stores is distributed in a 250 mile radius from a distribution hub in Black Mountain, North Carolina.

Ingles has a large presence in the Carolinas, with 69 stores in North Carolina and 36 stores in South Carolina for a total of 105 stores. Traditionally a low cost retailer selling into blue collar communities, Ingles' urban stores have in recent years been transformed into upscale shopping venues with a wide selection of specialty foods and locally sourced products. In the past few years, Ingles has increased the amount of locally grown fruits and vegetables that it purchases for sale in its stores. This can be seen in the produce section itself; there are many signs indicating produce items that were sourced from local farm operations, with the farmers' names and photographs included.

In order to sell locally raised produce into the Ingles system, suppliers must be GAP certified to Tier 1. A Tier 1 GAP certification educates the farmer on common issues related to field production and harvest. Certification also introduces common food-borne illnesses and ways to recognize potential contamination, proper use of biosolids as a nutrient source, hand washing procedures, packing facility cleanliness, and verifying water quality for field application and postharvest handling.

Ingles suppliers will also be required to obtain product liability insurance in the amount of \$5,000,000. Obtaining this level of insurance could end up costing growers around \$400 per year. However, Ingles has the potential to be a substantial customer for NC-grown produce, a relationship that could help farmers increase farm income while expanding their markets.

Contact: Jim Ray, Ingles Corporate Buyer  
2913 US Highway 70 W  
Black Mountain, NC 28711-9103  
P: 828-669-2941  
F: 828-669-3678

### Lowes Foods

Lowes Foods is a North Carolina-based supermarket chain that operates out of Winston-Salem, North Carolina. They have over 100 stores located in North Carolina, South Carolina and Virginia.

The company participates in the North Carolina 10% Campaign, whereby they pledge to source at least 10% of their purchases from North Carolina. According to the Lowes website, during the North Carolina growing season, Lowes exceeds its 10% goal for locally grown fruits and vegetables.

Lowes also has a “Locally Grown Club,” a CSA-style food program that operates out of the grocery locations. Participants in this program place an order for a box of produce once a week. Included with each box is information about the farm that raised the produce as well as recipes that help the consumer prepare the items they receive.

This educational component is particularly important for a consumer market such as the one in Caldwell County. Many survey respondents and interviewees indicated a need for consumer education in preparation methods and seasonality. This grocery program facilitates an understanding of seasonality as only fresh local produce is distributed. It also helps to educate the consumer on methods of preparation.

At Lowes Foods, produce managers do not have a lot of authority to purchase local products. However, in emergency supply situations, produce managers are allowed some authority to make local purchases. The main contact at Lowes Foods for vendors wishing to supply products is VP

Dick McKellog. Their broker and transportation organization is Merchant Distributors Inc. (MDI), which is owned by the same parent company as Lowes Foods.

Contact: Richard McKellog  
P: 336-775-3235  
DMcKellog@lowesfoods.com

### Food Lion

As far as the researchers can tell, Food Lion does not have a concentrated focus on purchasing or selling local foods. Attempts to contact Food Lion by phone at the corporate level have been relatively unsuccessful. Frequent attempts to contact an operator resulted in redirection to the main automated menu.

In order to do business with Food Lion, new suppliers must meet certain insurance requirements. Suppliers must obtain a minimum of \$1,000,000 in liability insurance with Food Lion, Inc. named as additional insured. Once this has been obtained, suppliers must complete introductory paperwork that describes the company and products to be sold, a comparison of the competition, and a marketing and distribution analysis. Potential suppliers should begin their relationship with Food Lion by filling out a supplier profile online at [www.apps.foodlion.com/SupplierDiversityForm/default.aspx](http://www.apps.foodlion.com/SupplierDiversityForm/default.aspx).

### Aldi

Aldi is a discount supermarket that only carries the most commonly purchased grocery and household items. By doing this, Aldi is able to keep its prices low. However, this also means that they generally do not purchase at the local level. Interviews with Aldi management indicate that individual store managers do not have much discretion when it comes to buying local food. All food purchases must be made through the corporate system, and all products sold through Aldi must be routed through a corporate warehouse for consolidated delivery. The nearest warehouse location to Caldwell County is Salisbury, North Carolina. New suppliers must first fill out a Product Information Form and a Product Pricing Form, which are available from their website, [http://aldi.us/us/html/company/company\\_supplier\\_opportunities\\_ENU\\_HTML.htm](http://aldi.us/us/html/company/company_supplier_opportunities_ENU_HTML.htm)

Contact: ALDI Corporate Purchasing  
1200 N. Kirk Rd.  
Batavia, IL 60510

### Harris Teeter

Based in Matthews, NC, Harris Teeter has 136 stores in over 50 North Carolina towns and cities. It is the dominant upscale supermarket chain in the state, with a commanding presence in the Piedmont and greater Charlotte region. In recent years, the company has embraced the concept of “green” business practices, pledging to provide shoppers with the highest level of customer



service while implementing sound environmental practices in its stores, corporate office and community.

Individual stores carry both conventional and local produce, with “Locally Grown” signage indicating products that have been raised in the state of North Carolina. Regionally grown produce is also indicated with signage carrying a state designation. These products are generally sourced within a six hour drive of each store.

Harris Teeter is always on the lookout for new local vendors. Jodi Goff at corporate is the best person to contact regarding new product market entry. Jodi will help new vendors get set up in their delivery system and issue the product a PIN number. Once that is complete, the producer is able to deliver to individual stores. The seller will be required to secure a \$2,000,000 insurance policy that is approved at the corporate level.

Contact: Jodi Goff, Produce Category Manager  
701 Crestdale Road  
Matthews, NC 28105  
P: 800-432-6111

#### Leading Green Distributors

Kathryn Beaty of Leading Green Distributors began her business in 2009 as a hauling service for local farm producers. She has since expanded to provide both distribution services and buying and selling produce to accounts she has established. Leading Green distributes a wide variety of fresh products, and a listing of their availability can be found at [www.buyappalachian.org/buyer/leading-green-distributing](http://www.buyappalachian.org/buyer/leading-green-distributing). Leading Green distributes within the Appalachian Grown service area of Western North Carolina and the Southern Appalachians. This area ranges from Abingdon, Virginia, through the Asheville region, down the US74 corridor to Charlotte and along I-40. In North Carolina, Kathryn also services Boone, Winston-Salem, Greensboro, Chapel Hill and Pittsboro. Leading Green distributes to Charlotte twice weekly.

Contact: Kathryn Beaty, Owner  
P.O. Box 63  
Black Mountain, NC 28711  
P: 828-275-2405  
[leadinggreendist@aol.com](mailto:leadinggreendist@aol.com)

#### Merchants Distributors Inc. (MDI)

MDI is a privately owned wholesale grocery store distributor that is headquartered in Hickory, North Carolina. It currently supplies over 600 retail food operations in 11 states and is owned by Alex Lee, Inc., which is also the parent company of Lowes Foods. MDI operates a program

called Business to Business, which services chains and distributors that buy in amounts under a truckload. Consolidation Services is a third party logistics company under the Alex Lee, Inc brand. This division supplies warehousing and distribution services, specializing in helping manufacturers ship products to retail. One Caldwell County example of a potential user of these services is Ryan Higgs of Blue Ridge Apiaries, whose honey shipments are heavy and expensive to move. Potential producers should contact Dick McKellog for more information regarding how to get products into the Lowes Foods distribution system.

Contact: Merchants Distributors, Inc.  
5005 Alex Lee Blvd  
Hickory, NC 28603  
P: 828-725-4100  
F: 828-725-4527  
[info@merchantsdistributors.com](mailto:info@merchantsdistributors.com)

#### New River Organic Growers

Formed in 2000, NROG is a cooperative of farmers located in the Blue Ridge Mountains of North Carolina. According to their website, [www.newriverorganicgrowers.org](http://www.newriverorganicgrowers.org), their goal is to provide fresh produce and humanely raised meats to consumers in North Carolina, to help preserve farmland by improving the success of their farms through the pooling of resources for marketing and transport, bulk purchasing of farming supplies, sharing and coordination of information, and to educate the general public about the benefits of sustainable, local farming and consumption. NROG is a good example of how local farmers can work with Cooperative Extension and other support organizations in the region to get their products to market.

Contact: Caleb Crowell, NROG Marketer  
P: 828-773-1588

#### Cornucopia Cheese and Specialty Foods Company

Cornucopia is a food distributor located in Graham, NC. The company is currently developing a distribution center in Lenoir, and there may be an opportunity to link farmers to their distribution network. Extension personnel may wish to pursue discussions with Cornucopia and other distributors to determine if such relationships are feasible.

Contact: Cornucopia Cheese and Specialty Foods Company  
8756 Highway 87 South  
Graham, NC 27253  
336-376-9626

#### Local Restaurants

A good market for several local producers in Caldwell County is the restaurant industry. Many chefs are increasing the amount of food they purchase locally, and many customers are beginning to take an interest in where and how their food was raised. An example of one restaurant owner in Lenoir who is always on the lookout for sources of fresh, local produce is Tina Nordan of The Wine Cellar and Bistro.

Tina sources a great deal of local produce for the Wine Cellar and Bistro, and she is always looking for more and better sources of local foods. Local foods that Tina has served or is currently serving include wheat berries, edamame, goat cheese, sturgeon, herbs, Carolina Distillery spirits, Howard Brewing beers, and local desserts from Icing on the Cake.

Tina or her chef sources foods from local farmers markets when they are in operation in season, including the Tuesday afternoon market in Sawmills and the weekend market in downtown Lenoir. They grow some of what they serve in the restaurant at a local community garden where they have two beds. One is completely herbs, while the other contains a mixture of spring and summer vegetables.

Tina is trying to support local foods, and she has noticed in the last two years a significant uptick in awareness of local foods. She believes that the majority of people around there are *“starting to get it. It’s starting to sink in, the importance of eating locally. It keeps local money in town and helps support everyone from the producers to the consumers. The one thing we might need is increased networking for the farmers market through technology, like a Facebook page to get the word out further.”*

Suppliers have been catching on too. They have been able to come to the table recently with increased recognition of North Carolina sourced foods. Restaurants share information with each other as well, sharing new sources and products available locally.

Contact: Tina Nordan, Owner  
Wine Cellar and Bistro  
128 Main Street NW  
Lenoir, NC 28645  
828-754-2829  
[www.thewinecellarandbistro.com](http://www.thewinecellarandbistro.com)

## **Section 6: County Development Opportunities and Recommendations**

Agricultural producer research conducted in Caldwell County indicates that there is not sufficient support for development of a local food aggregation, marketing and sales venture at this time. The amount of produce being grown in the county is simply not sufficient to support such a venture. A body of evidence seems to be emerging that aggregation centers need to approach or exceed \$300,000 in annual sales to justify the capital and operational expenditures required for operation. While several producers would like to participate in aggregation activities, research does not indicate a high degree of likelihood that an aggregation center can generate sufficient cash flow to be viable.

Through a combination of farm and farmers market visits, farmer interviews and survey analysis, the researchers did identify specific areas of potential development among agricultural producers in Caldwell County. These include farmland preservation and land transition, targeted training and education opportunities, increased access to production equipment, and the development of a local foods policy council. The county should consider pursuing these development options as soon as possible.

### **Local Food Policy Council Development**

Researchers recommend organizing a local food policy council to assist in developing the local food economy in Caldwell County and in coordinating activities across a broad spectrum of support organizations.

Food First, a national organization advocating policies that help end hunger ([www.foodfirst.org](http://www.foodfirst.org)), describes food policy councils as follows:

“A Food Policy Council consists of a group of representatives and stakeholders from many sectors of the food system. Ideally, the councils include participants representing all five sectors of the food system (production, consumption, processing, distribution and waste recycling). They often include anti-hunger and food justice advocates, educators, nonprofit organizations, concerned citizens, government officials, farmers, grocers, chefs, workers, food processors and food distributors. Food Policy Councils create an opportunity for discussion and strategy development among these various interests, and create an arena for studying the food system as a whole. Because they are often initiated by government actors, through executive orders, public acts or joint resolutions, Food Policy Councils tend to enjoy a formal relationship with local, city or state officials.”

The council can be a venue for devising and implementing development strategies that will positively impact production and consumption of local foods. The council may consider legal incorporation, especially if it intends to handle finances. Regularly scheduled meetings should be held, composed of program driven events with educational components. A larger annual meeting open to all citizens active in supporting local foods should also be considered.

One possible mission statement for a council of this sort could be:

*The Caldwell County Local Food Policy Council exists to support healthy eating choices through the support and development of Caldwell County agriculture. The Local Food Policy Council will strive to further the development of local agriculture in pursuit of healthy food choices, farmland preservation, increased markets, and producer and consumer education.*

To help the project move forward collaboratively, the council should have a diversely populated board, representing the many different faces of local food in the community, such as chefs, farmers, institutions, culinary professors, county personnel, economic development personnel, a Soil and Water representative, and the local family and consumer services extension agent.

A cooperative extension agent can also act as a food entrepreneurship liaison, perhaps acting as a dual agent in conjunction with a nearby county or serving as an area specialized agent. Activities that a food liaison position can be tasked with include the following:

- Community garden development and maintenance
- School garden development and maintenance
- Coordination of farmer training and educational offerings
- Cross agency collaboration and information sharing
- Deadline and application tracking
- Disseminating Local Food Policy Council developments
- New market identification and development
- Identification of new crops for diversification initiatives
- Certification assistance
- Tracking changes in laws regarding agriculture

#### **Other Development Suggestions:**

- Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) Development
- Shade Shelter for Farmers Market
- Consumer Education Initiatives
- The establishment of a local food council will help support healthy food choices through the growth and development of Caldwell County agriculture.

In addition to supporting long-established farms with accessing local markets, new and beginning farmers as well as local food entrepreneurs will benefit from activities initiated by a local food policy council. These approaches may include training and education opportunities regarding land preservation, generational transitions, and certifications including GAP and organic certification. Comprehensive approaches addressing issues of food insecurity, increasing healthy eating choices in schools, and access to capital and equipment for local food producers

can all be developed through an active local council. A funded liaison position between the community and the council will help council set and achieve goals and objectives in a timely manner.

The researchers recommend that Caldwell County engage professional facilitation assistance in the first year of organizing a local foods policy council. The County is encouraged to enter discussions with Blue Cross Blue Shield of North Carolina Foundation staff to revise anticipated expenditures from the 2012 grant in order to facilitate local food policy council development.

### **Farm Transition and Land Preservation**

Keeping land in agriculture and in the family is the number one issue that farmers wish to address concerning their farms. The county should consider developing training and educational opportunities to help people understand and achieve the various methods of preserving their farmland and planning for generational or other farm transition. Whenever possible, the county should help farmers who are interested in preservation issues with identifying and completing applications for preservation programs. If these applications require application fees, the county should consider providing cost-share assistance. Possible topics for training and educational opportunities in farm transition and land preservation include the following:

- Voluntary Agricultural Districts (VADs) – A VAD is a farmland protection tool that allows farmers to protect their land in agriculture. Farmers agree to restrict development on their land for a specified amount of time, usually 10 years. In return, the farmer receives certain benefits, such as greater protection from lawsuits, a suspension or waiver of water and sewer assessments, and increased public attention on land preservation. Farmland, forestland and horticultural lands must meet the following criteria to be eligible as a VAD: (1) the land must be part of the present-use-value taxation program or be determined eligible for present-use-value; and (2) the land must be managed in accordance with USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service guidelines with respect to highly erodible land. The landowner may revoke this agreement at any time within the 10 year agreement, usually with a 30-day notice, which will result in the property no longer qualifying for the VAD program and its benefits. A Voluntary Agricultural District ordinance has been adopted in Caldwell County. The program provides for the creation of VADs which contain a minimum of 20 contiguous acres of qualified farmland OR that contain one or more qualified farms within areas designated by the Advisory Board.
- Enhanced Voluntary Agricultural Districts (eVADs) – Eligibility for eVADs is the same as for VADs. However, there are some additional benefits and restrictions to enrolling in the eVAD program. Additional benefits may include eligibility for a higher percentage of cost share funds under the NCDENR Agricultural Cost Share Program, priority consideration from state agencies, departments and institutions that award grants to farmers, suspensions or waivers of utility assessments, and receipt of up to 25% of gross

sales from the sale of non-farm products and still maintain zoning exemptions. The landowner may not revoke to agreement during the 10 year term, and the eVAD automatically renews for 3 years unless the landowner provides a written 30-day notice. For more information on VADs and eVADs in North Carolina, contact the following:

North Carolina Agricultural Development and Farmland Preservation Trust Fund  
2 West Edenton Street, Raleigh, NC 27601  
P: 919-707-3071

- Conservation Easements - A conservation easement is a voluntary legal agreement between a landowner and a qualified conservation organization or public agency. In the agreement the landowner promises to keep the land in its natural condition without extensive disturbance, and the conservation organization or public agency is granted the right to enforce the covenants of the agreement and to monitor the property. This plan for land preservation works best when the landowner is motivated to preserve land, land use is compatible with preservation, and the owner can take advantage of income tax deduction, tax credit, or reduction in value of his or her estate. Conservation easement assistance can be found at the Foothills Conservancy of North Carolina:

Foothills Conservancy of North Carolina  
PO Box 3023  
Morganton, NC 28680  
P: 828-437-9930  
[info@foothillsconservancy.org](mailto:info@foothillsconservancy.org)  
<http://www.foothillsconservancy.org/>

- Farmland Preservation Plans – Caldwell County has a Land Usage Plan that includes farmland preservation under Voluntary Agricultural District designation. This is itself a positive indicator of the county’s ability and willingness to implement measures to help improve the status of agriculture in the county. However, according to Caldwell County Cooperative Extension Director Seth Nagy, while documents exist regarding farmland preservation, those measures are not currently being utilized. The county has been without a planner for the last four years. As a result there has been no code enforcement in the county.

A Voluntary Agricultural District Association (VADA) was set up to implement the recommendations of the Land Usage Plan. Their initial work preserved 4,109 acres of farmland in the county. Now, their work has slowed down and fewer farmers have expressed interest in VADs. The county is interested in reforming the board and moving forward with farmland preservation implementation. To that end, personnel have conducted a meeting in mid-November 2012 to look at and revise candidate lists and move the association forward. The VADA board is composed of six members, representing county residents and landowners, active farmers, and

elected leadership. Three members' terms have expired this year with three more set to expire in February 2013.

Other efforts at farmland preservation in the county include conservation easements by the Foothills Conservancy, which has preserved river bottom land. The conservancy has also preserved land on Jones Farm in the Yadkin Valley, which received money from the Farmland Preservation Trust Fund to preserve part of their property.

While the county should be proud of their efforts at promoting and raising awareness of farmland preservation, the researchers encourage them to continue trying to attain the goals set forth in their Land Usage Plan. The hiring of a new agricultural agent starting January 1, 2013 is a step in the right direction. This position may be able to serve as liaison between the farmers and the county and help enact measures in the Land Usage Plan to preserve farmland.

### **Creating Market Linkages**

Farmers need professional help and organizational support to further develop their markets. Examples of strategies that Extension personnel can pursue include, but are not limited to, increasing the number of farmers market consumers, enticing distributors to pickup local food in Caldwell County, and linking larger growers with distribution capacity to supermarkets.

While a farmers market is a good venue for sales of local produce, vendors do not generate sufficient farm income from these markets alone. Strategies for increasing farmer income and the volume of produce sold at a farmers market should be pursued. One method for increasing the number of consumers at the market is to increase marketing and advertising efforts for the markets itself. Increased marketing and advertising can become expensive. However, existing consumers themselves can be enticed to purchase more local food at farmers markets through consumer education. Educating consumers on preparation and preservation methods, eating in season, and trying unfamiliar items can help increase consumer confidence. Increased consumer confidence can result in farmer's market customers purchasing more fresh local produce.

Local distributors may also be able to assist farmers by providing cold chain and dry storage facilities. A local distributor, such as Leading Green Distributors, may also pickup or backhaul local food for delivery to larger markets, such as institutions and restaurants. Cornucopia Cheese and Specialty Foods Company is a food distributor located in Graham, NC. The company is currently developing a distribution center in Lenoir, and there may be an opportunity to link farmers to their distribution network. Extension personnel may wish to pursue discussions with Cornucopia and other distributors to determine if such relationships are feasible.

Most farmers in Caldwell County will not be large enough producers to sell produce to local supermarkets. However, some supermarkets may be willing to work with local producers whose production volume is sufficient to service an individual store's needs. The county should assist those farmers with the capacity to distribute at this level by facilitating contacts with local



supermarket produce buyers. The county may help identify those farmers who are best suited to work together to access local supermarkets. Working together with limited agricultural aggregation and delivery can help farmers open the door to new local grocery markets. A natural collaborator for supermarket delivery in Caldwell County is Harris Teeter. Once a vendor is entered into the Harris Teeter system and the vendor is issued a product PIN number, the vendor may then distribute to individual stores within their system.

### **Targeted Training and Education Opportunities**

Many farmers who wish to attend training and educational opportunities are unable to do so. There are many reasons for this, but the most prevalent are a lack of time and/or money. Whenever possible the county should consider providing cost-share arrangements for farmers who wish to pursue training and education. Educational offerings should be held during the evenings when possible, as this was the most convenient time as expressed by over 77% of survey respondents.

- Good Agricultural Practices – GAP certification is still voluntary, but at the rates that larger purchasers such as institution and grocery stores are adopting GAP certification requirements for producers, it is quickly becoming de facto law. Encouraging farmers to undergo GAP training is a good way to help them remain competitive in a 21<sup>st</sup> century food economy. Many farms already use practices that ensure clean and healthy food products, which puts them in a good position to receive GAP certification. However, this certification also costs money to implement and maintain. Therefore, many farmers will not become GA certified unless the law requires it in their case. To further encourage farmers who may be resistant to GAP certification due to the cost, the county should consider establishing a cost-share program whereby farmers are reimbursed for some or all of the cost of becoming certified.

Diane T. Ducharme  
GAPs Program Coordinator  
Extension Associate in Horticulture & Food Safety  
NC MarketReady  
NC State University at the NC Research Campus  
600 Laureate Way  
Kannapolis, NC 28081  
Phone: (704) 250-5402  
Fax: (704) 250-5409  
E-mail: Diane\_Ducharme@ncsu.edu

- Regional Information Sharing Workshops – Many farmers are unfamiliar with agricultural resources outside of Caldwell County that are available to help their farm operations. One example of this is the Foothills Pilot Plant, a USDA-certified poultry and

rabbit processing center in Marion, NC, which provides fee-for-service processing. The plant also serves as a center for learning best practices for small flock production of poultry and small scale production of meat rabbits. Field trips to successful operations in the region can serve to educate farmers on available resources, and a cost share component to these workshops for a first-time user can encourage attendance and future resource utilization.

- Organic Certification – Receiving organic certification for a farm is no simple task. It takes time and resources to achieve. Therefore, the county should consider providing a cost share opportunity to farmers who wish to pursue or maintain organic production in Caldwell County. All producers and handlers who sell over \$5,000/year in organic products must be certified. Producers and handlers who sell under \$5,000/year do not have to be certified, but they still have to follow the National Organic Standards (NOS). Non-certified organic producers can sell their products directly to customers or to retail stores, but their products cannot be used as organic ingredients by other operations, and they cannot use the “USDA Organic” seal. The nearest certifying agent to Caldwell County is the Department of Plant and Industry at Clemson University:

Sherry Aultman  
511 Westinghouse Road  
Pendleton, SC 29670  
P: 864-646-2128  
[saltmn@clemson.edu](mailto:saltmn@clemson.edu)  
[http://www.clemson.edu/public/regulatory/plant\\_industry/](http://www.clemson.edu/public/regulatory/plant_industry/)

- New Market Identification and Developing New Farm Products – In conjunction with a Family and Consumer Services Food Entrepreneurship Liaison, the county can provide workshops in the identification of new markets, certifications required to enter those markets, volume and packaging requirements, liability insurance, developing a business plan and servicing clients. For farmers interested in developing new farm products that they can grow and sell, these liaison-guided workshops can assist in identifying new products with markets in North Carolina, disseminate information about proper growing techniques, and help farmers who wish to add value to their products by developing relationships with certified shared-use kitchens in the region.

### **Increased Access to Farm Equipment**

Several farmers expressed a need for greater access to equipment that can increase productivity and profitability of farm operations. The two most frequently requested pieces of equipment are a tractor and a tiller, followed by a greenhouse, a sprayer and a combine. For various reasons, primarily financial, individual growers are either unable or unwilling to purchase needed equipment. County extension personnel can work to meet these needs in different ways, including providing technical assistance in locating affordable equipment, arranging financing

options for equipment purchases, or facilitating acquisition of community-owned equipment that can be shared by multiple growers on a scheduled basis.

One regional example of equipment sharing can be found in Yancey County, the Toe River Aggregation Center and Training Organization Regional (TRACTOR). The project should coordinate with Yancey County Cooperative Extension Director Tres Magner to discuss the successes and challenges inherent with shared-use equipment programs.

### **Funding Opportunities**

Adequate funding is needed to implement any of the above recommendations. While volunteer participation is essential, it helps tremendously to have paid staff and a budget for implementing projects that will address core strategic goals. The following are some of the existing programs that make funding available to community food and agricultural efforts:

Specialty Crop Block Grant - The mission of the N.C. Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services is to improve the state of agriculture in North Carolina by providing services to farmers and agribusinesses, and to serve the citizens of North Carolina by providing services and enforcing laws to protect consumers. Applicants are encouraged to develop projects solely to enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops pertaining to the following issues affecting the specialty crop industry: Increasing child and adult nutrition knowledge and consumption of specialty crops; participation of industry representatives at meetings of international standard setting bodies in which the U.S. government participates; improving efficiency and reducing costs of distribution systems; assisting all entities in the specialty crop distribution chains in developing “Good Agricultural Practices”, “Good Handling Practices”, “Good Manufacturing Practices”, and in cost-share arrangements for funding audits of such systems for small farmers, packers and processors; investing in specialty crop research, including organic research to focus on conservation and environmental outcomes; enhancing food safety; developing new and improved seed varieties and specialty crops; pest and disease control; and sustainability.

North Carolina Department of Agriculture & Consumer Services  
1020 Mail Service Center  
Raleigh, NC 27699-1020  
P: 919-707-3111  
[specialtycropgrant@ncagr.gov](mailto:specialtycropgrant@ncagr.gov)  
<http://www.ncagr.gov/markets/scgrant/index.htm>

Golden LEAF Foundation – Golden LEAF supports activities that improve social and economic conditions in economically distressed or tobacco dependent regions of the state. The Open Grants Program places high priority on the areas of agriculture, job

creation and retention and workforce preparedness. Other projects that focus on other opportunities to support and develop economic strength in tobacco-dependent, economically distressed and/or rural communities are also welcomed. In light of the economic downturn, Golden LEAF will be looking for opportunities to complement and leverage federal and state stimulus programs to increase the impact of its grantmaking on targeted communities. For more information on Golden LEAF programs:

301 N. Winstead Avenue  
Rocky Mount, NC 27804  
P: 252-442-7474  
F: 252-442-7404  
jtinklepaugh@goldenleaf.org

North Carolina Rural Economic Development Center – The NC Rural Center is a private non-profit organization whose mission is to develop, promote and implement sound economic strategies to improve the quality of life of rural North Carolinians. Two programs whose initiatives would be of interest to Caldwell County are the Agricultural Advancement Consortium headed by Billy Guillet and the Economic Innovations Grant program headed by Brett Altman.

- Agricultural Advancement Consortium - The Agricultural Advancement Consortium promotes the benefits of a strong farm sector and considers new ways to increase farm profitability. It conducts original research and awards grants for research and demonstration projects with potential to create new products or markets and to improve agricultural practices.

Billy Guillet, Director, Agricultural Advancement Consortium  
N.C. Rural Economic Development Center  
4021 Carya Drive  
Raleigh, NC 27610  
P: 919-250-4314  
F: 919-250-4325  
bguillet@ncruralcenter.org

- Economic Innovations Grant – The Economic Innovation Grants Program spurs business activity, job creation and public/private investment by supporting innovative economic development projects. Funds are provided by the North Carolina General Assembly and are available for local and regional projects in rural communities. Proposals are evaluated based on the innovative nature of the project and the project’s ability to generate measurable outcomes for business and job expansion.

Brett Altman, senior policy associate, Economic Innovation Program

N.C. Rural Economic Development Center  
4021 Carya Drive  
Raleigh, NC 27610  
P: 919-250-4314  
F: 919-250-4325  
[baltman@ncruralcenter.org](mailto:baltman@ncruralcenter.org)

North Carolina Tobacco Trust Fund Commission - The Tobacco Trust Fund Commission was created to assist tobacco farmers, tobacco quota holders, persons engaged in tobacco-related businesses, individuals displaced from tobacco-related employment, and tobacco product component businesses in the State due to the adverse effects of the Master Settlement Agreement. The Commission can disburse funds through compensatory programs and qualified agricultural programs.

William Upchurch, Executive Director  
Jeff Jennings, Program Officer  
1080 Mail Service Center  
Raleigh, NC 27699-1080  
P: 919-733-2160  
F: 919-733-2510

North Carolina Agricultural Development and Farmland Preservation Trust Fund - The purpose of the fund is to support the farming, forestry, and horticulture communities within the agriculture industry by: supporting the purchase of agricultural conservation easements (on farm, forest, and horticulture lands), including transaction costs; funding public and private enterprise programs that will promote profitable and sustainable family farms through assistance to farmers in developing and implementing plans for the production of food, fiber, and value-added products, agritourism activities, marketing and sales of agricultural products produced on the farm, and other agriculturally related business activities; and funding conservation agreements (on farm, forest, and horticulture lands) targeted at the active production of food, fiber and other agricultural products.

Dewitt Hardee  
North Carolina Agricultural Development and Farmland Preservation Trust Fund  
Physical Address: 2 West Edenton Street, Raleigh, NC 27601  
Mailing Address: 1001 Mail Service Center, Raleigh, NC 27699-1001  
P: 919-707-3069  
[dewitt.hardee@ncagr.gov](mailto:dewitt.hardee@ncagr.gov)

WNC AgOptions - The mission of the WNC AgOptions Program is to build sustainable farming communities in the mountain region by providing resources directly to farmers who are diversifying or expanding their operations. The ultimate goal of WNC

AgOptions is to protect mountain farmland by assisting the longevity of farm enterprises and encouraging groups of farmers to solve logistical challenges in the local agricultural system.

Ross Young, Steering Committee Leader  
Madison County Center  
N.C. Cooperative Extension  
258 Carolina Lane  
Marshall, NC 28753  
P: 828-649-2411  
F: 828-649-2020

## Appendix A: Caldwell County Farm Producer Survey

# Caldwell County Farm Producer Survey

***North Carolina Cooperative Extension is conducting a detailed feasibility study for the development of programs and initiatives for farmers in Caldwell County, NC and surrounding counties. This research is designed to ensure this project is developed according to community characteristics and will be operated under a plan for long-term sustainability. Your input is important to us. Please take a few moments to fill out the following survey. Feel free to skip any questions that you are uncomfortable answering.***

**1.** How many years have you been farming in Caldwell County?

- a. \_\_\_\_\_ Less than 5 years
- b. \_\_\_\_\_ More than 5 and less than 20 years
- c. \_\_\_\_\_ More than 20 and less than 50 years
- d. \_\_\_\_\_ 50 years or more

**2.** How long has your farm been in your family?

- a. \_\_\_\_\_ Less than 5 years
- b. \_\_\_\_\_ More than 5 and less than 20 years
- c. \_\_\_\_\_ More than 20 and less than 50 years
- d. \_\_\_\_\_ 50 years or more

**3.** Do you own some or all of your farm?

- a. \_\_\_\_\_ Yes
- b. \_\_\_\_\_ No

**4.** Do you lease some or all of your farm?

- a. \_\_\_\_\_ Yes
- b. \_\_\_\_\_ No

**5.** How did you acquire your farm?

- a. \_\_\_\_\_ Purchased it
- b. \_\_\_\_\_ Inherited it
- c. \_\_\_\_\_ Married into it
- d. \_\_\_\_\_ Other (please describe):

---

---



6. How many acres do you have in agricultural production? \_\_\_\_\_

7. How many acres do you have in forestry production? \_\_\_\_\_

8. What do you grow on your farm? (please describe):

9. Who manages your land for agricultural production?

- a. \_\_\_\_\_ I manage it myself
- b. \_\_\_\_\_ Someone else in my family
- c. \_\_\_\_\_ I contract with someone to manage it for me
- d. \_\_\_\_\_ I lease it to someone not in my family
- e. \_\_\_\_\_ Other (please describe): \_\_\_\_\_

10. What is your annual revenue from your farm operations?

- a. \_\_\_\_\_ Less than \$2,500
- b. \_\_\_\_\_ \$2,500 - \$4,999
- c. \_\_\_\_\_ \$5,000 - \$9,999
- d. \_\_\_\_\_ \$10,000 - \$24,999
- e. \_\_\_\_\_ \$50,000 - \$99,999
- f. \_\_\_\_\_ \$100,000 or more

11. From the options below, please number your top three farm revenue generators from 1 to 3:

- a. \_\_\_\_\_ Forestry
- b. \_\_\_\_\_ Cattle
- c. \_\_\_\_\_ Other Livestock
- d. \_\_\_\_\_ Hay
- e. \_\_\_\_\_ Grain or Corn Silage
- f. \_\_\_\_\_ Fruit
- g. \_\_\_\_\_ Berries
- h. \_\_\_\_\_ Vegetables
- i. \_\_\_\_\_ Aquaculture
- j. \_\_\_\_\_ Other (please describe): \_\_\_\_\_

**12.** Do you produce, or are you interested in producing, value added products?

*Value-added products are basic products whose value has been increased by adding extras in the manufacturing process, or by tacking on extra products and/or services, such as making jelly or jams from raw fruits and vegetables.*

- a.  No, I do not produce any value-added products
- b.  Yes, I produce: \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_
- c.  I am interested in producing: \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

**13.** What types of equipment would help you further develop your agricultural activities?

**14.** Where do you currently sell your farm products?

- a.  To friends and family
- b.  Farm Stand
- c.  Restaurants
- d.  Farmers Market
- e.  Grocery Stores
- f.  Wholesale
- g.  Other (please describe): \_\_\_\_\_

**15.** Do you sell any of your products directly to consumers?

- a.  No
- b.  Yes; if you direct market your products, please describe your markets:

16. Do you grow or raise products under contract?

- a.  No
- b.  Yes; if you grow or raise under contract, please describe:

17. What do you expect will happen to your land in the next 20 years (check all that apply)?

- a.  Nothing different. I'll keep it just the way it is.
- b.  It will stay intact but pass on to another generation in my family
- c.  It will be subdivided among family members
- d.  It will be sold to someone else for forestry or agricultural use
- e.  Part of it will be developed for residential use, and my family will retain the rest
- f.  It will be sold for development
- g.  I have no idea
- h.  Other (please describe): \_\_\_\_\_

18. Do you have a plan for the transition of your land? If so, please tell us about it:

If not, why not? \_\_\_\_\_

19. Are you interested in participating in projects to increase sales of locally grown foods?

- a.  Yes, I am interested
- b.  No, I am not interested

20. Are you familiar with Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) programs?

- a. \_\_\_\_\_ Yes, I am familiar
- b. \_\_\_\_\_ No, I am unfamiliar
- c. \_\_\_\_\_ I am unfamiliar but would like to learn more

21. Would you be interested in selling your farm products through a CSA?

- a. \_\_\_\_\_ Yes, I am interested in selling: \_\_\_\_\_
- b. \_\_\_\_\_ No, I am not interested

22. Which of the following classes or programs would you be most interested in attending?

- a. \_\_\_\_\_ ServSafe Training
- b. \_\_\_\_\_ Land Transition/Farmland Preservation Workshops
- c. \_\_\_\_\_ Canning Workshops
- d. \_\_\_\_\_ Better Process Control School (*AKA Pickle School*)
- e. \_\_\_\_\_ Good Agricultural Practices Training
- f. \_\_\_\_\_ Obtaining Organic Certification
- g. \_\_\_\_\_ Cheese Making Classes
- h. \_\_\_\_\_ Production/Growers School
- i. \_\_\_\_\_ Beer Brewing Workshops
- j. \_\_\_\_\_ Wine Making Workshops
- k. \_\_\_\_\_ Marketing my agricultural production
- l. \_\_\_\_\_ Planning for a generational transition of my land to family members
- m. \_\_\_\_\_ Developing strategies to keep from having to sell my land
- n. \_\_\_\_\_ Developing new products that I can grow and sell
- o. \_\_\_\_\_ Other (please describe):
- p. \_\_\_\_\_ How to (please describe): \_\_\_\_\_

23. When is the most convenient time for you to attend these offerings?

- a. \_\_\_\_\_ Mornings
- b. \_\_\_\_\_ Afternoons
- c. \_\_\_\_\_ Evenings

24. How often do you consume local foods?

- a. \_\_\_\_\_ Daily
- b. \_\_\_\_\_ Weekly
- c. \_\_\_\_\_ Monthly

25. What other improvements (support services, physical infrastructure improvements, supply chain improvements, etc.) would help you become more economically successful in farming?

26. Please tell us about yourself:

I am a:

- a. \_\_\_\_\_ Man
- b. \_\_\_\_\_ Woman

What is your age category?

- a. \_\_\_\_\_ Over 70
- b. \_\_\_\_\_ 60 to 69
- c. \_\_\_\_\_ 50 to 59
- d. \_\_\_\_\_ 40 to 49
- e. \_\_\_\_\_ 30 to 39
- f. \_\_\_\_\_ Under 30

27. May we contact you for more information as the project moves forward?

- a. \_\_\_\_\_ No, Thank You
- b. \_\_\_\_\_ Yes, my contact information is:



# Caldwell County Farm Producer Survey

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Farm Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Please return the survey to:

Seth Nagy  
County Extension Director  
Caldwell County Center  
NC Cooperative Extension  
120 Hospital Avenue NE  
Lenoir, NC 28645

***THANK YOU!!***

## Appendix B: Regional Local Food Assets

Company Name	Company Type	Address	City	Stat	Zip	Phone	Website
Sara Lee Bakeries Inc.	Bakery	116 Pennton Avenue SW	Lenoir	NC	28645	828-754-3221	
Sara Lee	Bakery	910 Burkemont Avenue	Morganton	NC	28655	828-437-3984	<a href="http://www.saralee.com">www.saralee.com</a>
Catawba Valley Brewing Company	Brewery/Restaurant	212 South Green Street	Morganton	NC	28655	828-430-6883	<a href="http://www.catawbavalleybrewingcompany.com">www.catawbavalleybrewingcompany.com</a>
Olde Hickory Tap Room	Brewery/Restaurant	222 Union Square	Hickory	NC	28601	828-322-1422	<a href="http://www.oldehickorybrewery.com">www.oldehickorybrewery.com</a>
Ashe County Cheese Inc.	Cheese Maker	106 East Main Street	West Jefferson	NC	28694	336-246-2501	<a href="http://www.ashecounychese.com">www.ashecounychese.com</a>
Cheval Farmstead Dairy	Cheese Maker	2380 Cats Square Rd.	Vale	NC	28168	704-240-9353	
Daddy's Girl Dairy	Cheese Maker	4032 Curds and Whey (Hwy21S)	Hamptonville	NC	27020	336-468-4468	<a href="http://www.daddysgirldairy.com">www.daddysgirldairy.com</a>
Dallas Ranch	Cheese Maker	132 Dallas Road	Lawndale	NC	28090	704-538-3397	
Greene Meadows Creamery	Cheese Maker	10754 Hwy 18 N	Laurel Springs	NC	28644	336-657-0422	
Guernsey Girl Creamery	Cheese Maker	3370 Dairy Bridges Road	Shelby	NC	28150	704-692-8230	
High Country Farm and Dairy	Cheese Maker	1477 Hoyle Drive	Lenoir	NC	28645	828-455-7008	
Holton Hollow Farm	Cheese Maker	154 Matthew Drive	Statesville	NC	28625	704-873-0644	
Mariah Farms	Cheese Maker	400 Mariah School Road	Casar	NC	28020		
Oak Moon Creamery	Cheese Maker	452 Roan View Drive	Bakersville	NC	28705	828-688-4683	<a href="http://www.freewebs.com/oakmoonfarm">http://www.freewebs.com/oakmoonfarm</a>
Ripshin Goat Dairy	Cheese Maker	1865 Hwy 268	Lenoir	NC	28645	828-758-0906	<a href="http://www.ripshingoadairy.com">www.ripshingoadairy.com</a>
Stone Mountain Valley Cheese, Inc.	Cheese Maker	1095 Traphill-Brown Rd	Traphill	NC	28685	336-957-8525	
Susan English Dairy	Cheese Maker	19618 US Hwy 221 N	Marion	NC	28752	828-756-4625	
Merchants Distributors Inc.	Distributor	5005 Alex Lee Boulevard	Hickory	NC	28601	828-725-4100	<a href="http://www.merchantsdistributors.com">www.merchantsdistributors.com</a>
Alex Lee Inc	Distributor	120 4th Street SW	Hickory	NC	28603	828-725-4424	<a href="http://www.alexlee.com">www.alexlee.com</a>
Institution Food House	Distributor	120 4th Street SW	Hickory	NC	28603	828-725-4500	
HT Hackney Co.	Distributor	1200 Burriss Road	Newton	NC	28656	828-464-1010	<a href="http://www.hthackney.com">www.hthackney.com</a>
Holler and Greene	Distributor	230 Cabbage Row Drive	Boone	NC	28607	828-264-2177	<a href="http://www.hollarandgreene.com">www.hollarandgreene.com</a>
New River Organic Growers	Distributor	2220 Big Helton Road	Grassy Creek	NC	28631	336-384-2546	<a href="http://www.newriverorganicgrowers.org">www.newriverorganicgrowers.org</a>
Altapass Orchard	Farm Stand	1025 Orchard Road	Spruce Pine	NC	28777	888-765-9531	<a href="http://www.altapassorchard.com">www.altapassorchard.com</a>
Apple Hill Orchard	Farm Stand	2075 Pleasant Hill Avenue	Morganton	NC	28655	828-437-1224	<a href="http://www.applehillorchard.com">www.applehillorchard.com</a>
Clyde Valley Farm	Farm Stand	1725 Salem Road	Morganton	NC	28655	828-433-0015	
EarthPerks Organic Farm	Farm Stand	975 Poors Ford Road	Rutherfordton	NC	28139	828-287-7730	<a href="http://www.earthperksnc.com">www.earthperksnc.com</a>
Hidden Rock Farms	Farm Stand		West Jefferson	NC	28694	336-977-3187	
Lattimore Farms	Farm Stand	318 Peachtree Road	Shelby	NC	28150	704-434-7190	<a href="http://www.lattimorefarms.com">www.lattimorefarms.com</a>
Muddy Creek Farm	Farm Stand	3515 Seals Road	Morganton	NC	28655	828-403-5569	
Rock House Farm	Farm Stand	1120 North Green Street	Morganton	NC	28655	828-438-3881	<a href="http://www.rockhousefarm.info">www.rockhousefarm.info</a>
Roger's Fruit Stand	Farm Stand	2262 Linville Falls Highway	Newland	NC	28657	828-733-4742	
Triple Oaks Farm	Farm Stand	4731 Ike Starnes Road	Granite Falls	NC	28630	828-396-1130	
Burke County Farmers Market	Farmers Market	Faet Street	Valdese	NC	28690	828-879-2129	
Distributor El Globo	Food Broker	2358 Springs Rd NE	Hickory	NC	28601	828-324-5001	
Variety Meat & Seafood	Food Sales	189 Crawford Road	Statesville	NC	28625	704-871-9409	
The Mast Farm Inn	Lodging	2543 Broadstone Road	Banner Elk	NC	28604	828-963-5857	<a href="http://www.themastfarminn.com">www.themastfarminn.com</a>
Green Park Inn	Lodging	9239 Valley Boulevard	Blowing Rock	NC	28605	828-414-9230	<a href="http://www.greenparkinn.com">www.greenparkinn.com</a>
Caldwell's Meat Processing	Meat Processor	3730 Goodson Road	Maiden	NC	28650	828-428-8833	
Cole's Meat Processing	Meat Processor	178 Cole Drive	Vilas	NC	28692	828-297-2038	
Drop Tine Deer Processing	Meat Processor	1913 Lincolnton Highway	Cherryville	NC	28021		
Fargo Trail Deer Processing	Meat Processor	4715 Fargo Trail	Vale	NC	28168		
Fat Mike's Deer Processing	Meat Processor	4076 Joe Crouse Road	Maiden	NC	28650	828-428-3996	
Grady Deal Meat Processing	Meat Processor	3950 Springs Road	Conover	NC	28613	828-256-8365	
Hunting and Fishing Meat Processing	Meat Processor	3318 Hickory Boulevard	Hudson	NC	28638	828-728-4868	



Mays Meats	Meat Processor	541 East Main Avenue	Taylorsville	NC	28681	828-632-2034	<a href="http://www.maysmeats.net">www.maysmeats.net</a>
Price's Meat	Meat Processor	8450 Price Meat Cutting Road	Hickory	NC	28602	828-397-5150	
Thomas Borhters Meat Processing	Meat Processor	347 Thomas Street	North Wilkesboro	NC	28659	336-667-1346	
Vantage Foods	Meat Processor	1450 Vantage Foods Ct	Lenoir	NC	28645	828-754-1854	
Williams Meat Processing Company	Meat Processor	48 West View Street	Marion	NC	28752	828-724-4190	<a href="http://www.williamsmeatprocessing.com">www.williamsmeatprocessing.com</a>
Tyson Foods Inc	Processor	704 Factory Street	Wilkesboro	NC	28697	336-838-2171	<a href="http://www.tysonfoods.com">www.tysonfoods.com</a>
Earth Grains Company	Processor	530 US 321	Hickory	NC	28690	828-324-6098	
Coffey's Produce Company	Produce Company	113 Whipering Pines Drive	Hudson	NC	28638	828-728-7565	
Farm Fresh Produce	Produce Company	1507 Morganton Boulevard SW	Lenoir	NC	28645	828-757-7900	
Lett-Us-Produce	Wholesaler	3422 NC 105	Boone	NC	28607	828-963-7524	
Statesville Wholesale Meat	Wholesaler	1881 Old Wilkesboro Road	Statesville	NC	28625	704-873-7423	
Carolina Mist Winery	Winery/Vineyard	126 Mulberry Street NW	Lenoir	NC	28645	828-754-4660	<a href="http://www.carolinamistwinery.com">www.carolinamistwinery.com</a>
Sullivan Estate Vineyard	Winery/Vineyard	4040 James Drive	Hudson	NC	28638	828-728-5099	<a href="http://www.tudorhousewine.com">www.tudorhousewine.com</a>
Waldensian Heritage Wines	Winery/Vineyard	4940 Villar Lane NE	Valdese	NC	28690	828-879-3202	<a href="http://www.waldensianheritagewines.com">www.waldensianheritagewines.com</a>
Cerminaro Vineyard	Winery/Vineyard	4399 Wilkesboro Boulevard	Boomer	NC	28606	828-754-9306	<a href="http://www.cerminarovineyard.com">www.cerminarovineyard.com</a>
Ginger Creek Vineyards	Winery/Vineyard	858 John Cline Road	Taylorsville	NC	28681	828-312-4362	
South Creek Winery	Winery/Vineyard	2240 South Creek Road	Nebo	NC	28761	828-652-5729	<a href="http://www.southcreekwinery.com">www.southcreekwinery.com</a>
Grandfather Vineyard and Winery	Winery/Vineyard	Vineyard Lane	Banner Elk	NC	28604	828-963-2400	<a href="http://www.grandfathervineyard.com">www.grandfathervineyard.com</a>
Raffaldini Vineyards & Winery	Winery/Vineyard	450 Groce Road	Ronda	NC	28670	336-835-9463	<a href="http://www.raffaldini.com">www.raffaldini.com</a>
Daveste Vineyards	Winery/Vineyard	155 Lytton Farm Road	Troutman	NC	28166	704-528-3883	<a href="http://www.daveste.com">www.daveste.com</a>
Shadow Springs Vineyard	Winery/Vineyard	5543 Crater Road	Hamptonville	NC	27020	336-468-5000	<a href="http://www.shadowspringsvineyard.com">www.shadowspringsvineyard.com</a>
Yadkin Valley Wine Company	Winery/Vineyard	6324 Laurel Gray Lane	Hamptonville	NC	27020	336-468-4249	<a href="http://www.yvwc.com">www.yvwc.com</a>
Laurel Gray Vineyards	Winery/Vineyard	5726 Old US Hwy 421	Hamptonville	NC	27020	336-468-9463	<a href="http://www.laurelgray.com">www.laurelgray.com</a>
Dobbins Creek Vineyards	Winery/Vineyard	4430 Vineyard View Lane	Hamptonville	NC	27020	336-468-3770	<a href="http://www.dobbinscreekvineyards.com">www.dobbinscreekvineyards.com</a>