



THE DAILY DISPATCH

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Locally grown food can be good for economy

BY EVA CLAYTON
GUEST COLUMNIST

Increasingly more people understand that locally grown food (within North Carolina) is good for their health. Sales have increased because consumers demand healthy food. The emphasis on “eating right” by our medical officials, and school lunch and other government nutrition programs that now require healthy menus has contributed to this growth. Amazon recently acquired Whole Foods and promised to lower prices. Wal-Mart will now deliver to your refrigerator. Is food going e-commerce?

The food industry is big business in the United States and in North Carolina, of which locally grown healthy food is rapidly growing. Farmers in the five counties of the Kerr-Tar region (Vance, Granville, Warren, Franklin and Person counties) should be encouraged and supported to scale up their production of locally grown food into a thriving local food system.

The Center for Environmental Farming Services (CEFS) says, “Developing a local food economy — the system within which food is produced, distributed,

and purchased within the same region — has been recognized as a way to revitalize traditional agricultural communities and energize urban, and rural landscapes alike. Support for these systems includes the creation, retention, expansion, and recruitment of farms and food-related businesses in a town, county, or region, with a resulting positive impact on a variety of industries, including production, processing, storage, transportation, distribution, and wholesale and retail sale.” This process generates income and keeps it local.

Congratulations to the Kerr-Tar Regional Council of Governments and Green Rural Development Organization (GRRO) for sponsoring the recent Food Policy Conference at Vance-Granville Community College. The conference brought together farmers, extension agents, water-soil officials, community leaders, school lunch directors, health officials, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture to consider a food policy and the role of healthy food. Local food policy usually addresses access to food, food availability, food security, advantages of healthy food, and the

economic development of food. Hopefully this great discussion that took place over the course of one day will be followed-up with a policy/strategy within the five counties to support the expansion of locally grown food to sell to a wider market.

We are fortunate to have the Kerr-Tar Regional Council of Governments (representatives of local governments), committed to improving the economy and the lives of residents in the five counties, working with local food partners. These partners are GRRO, which has developed a formula for community gardens, recruits and works with new farmers and partners with local health providers; Landscape (HUB), which assists farmers with processing, storage and marketing to various institutions; economic developers of five counties charged with the responsibility to build up their counties’ economy; farmers; and extension agents available to assist farmers. Additionally, there are state organizations that would be pleased to provide technical assistance. There are available financial resources, including USDA.

Given this development

and leadership around local food in the region and the state, local governments should develop their policy and a strategy to support and invest in building a vibrant local food system that can sell to medium-sized and larger cities. Local foods will create employment and improve the economy (tax base) of the area. Full expansion will not happen immediately, but with strong supportive leadership, great technical assistance, and investment, significant progress will occur. As we develop this capacity, our region will become more attractive to other agrobusinesses.

I have spent much of my career advocating that all people should have access to food to sustain and improve their health. I remain committed to that mission. The local food economy provides an opportunity to improve our economy, provide jobs, attract new farmers, and produce healthy food. I am hopeful that our elected officials will embrace the opportunity to help our farmers and help our local economy.

Eva Clayton is a resident of Warren County and a former member of the U.S. House of Representatives.

LETTERS

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