KERR-TAR REGIONAL FOOD COUNCIL
MEETING MINUTES

Date: August 26, 2026

Location: Kerr-Tar Regional COG, 1724 Graham Ave, Henderson, NC 27536

Time: 10:00 am – 11:30 am

Attendees

- Stephanie Velazquez: Granville County Economic Development (also serving as interim tourism lead)
- Thomas Blaine: Strong Arm Baking
- Hannah Jones: Food Bank of Central and Eastern NC
- Judith Burnett Arrington: Community Health Worker
- Martha Mobley: Franklin County Ag Agent (note: spelling correction requested)
- Alejandra: Franklin County Small Farms Agent
- Stacy Burns: Warren County Cooperative Extension
- Ashley Zuniga: Regional Program Coordinator, Kerr-Tar COG
- Desiree Brooks: Community and Economic Development Manager, Kerr-Tar COG
- Earline: Eva Clayton Rural Food Institute
- Felicia Barker: Operation Spring Plant, Oxford Farmers Market
- Jennifer Brown: Cooperative Extension, Person County (County Extension Director)
- Wykia Macon: Cooperative Extension Director, Vance County
- Ardis Crews- GRRO
- Jennifer Woods: Food Bank of Central and Eastern NC

Approval of Previous Minutes

- Minutes to be forwarded prior to next meeting for review
- Martha requested spelling correction on her last name to Mobley
- Gabe made a motion to approve; seconded

Council Membership Committee Update

- Executive committee: Judith, Korita, and Martha
- Application now live online; flyers with QR code available for distribution
- Recruitment is ongoing (not limited to spring cycle) to fill current gaps
- Committee will review applications and onboard members to fill vacant spots
- Membership spreadsheet started; committee call to be scheduled in the next couple of weeks to review gaps
- Allison and Judith rolling off; Person County referral in progress

Assessment Committee Update (Wykia)

- Committee met July 17; identified three priority areas from survey:

    - Technical assistance workshops
    - Shared resources
    - (Third area noted but not fully captured)

- One-year focus areas:

    - Collaborate with Extension offices on technical assistance workshops
    - Cross-promote open house with Working Landscapes to highlight shared infrastructure
    - Develop marketing materials about shopping local/mobile
    - Advocate to local government bodies on farmer support priorities

- Three-year focus: policy committee (replacing assessment committee) to address:

    - Farmland preservation
    - Local procurement
    - Food system infrastructure
    - Regional value chain coordinator (Thomas has raised this repeatedly): approx. $15,000 per county

Rooted Summit (October 8)

- Food council table inside (registration area, atrium/library): 8:00–10:00 AM

    - Signed up: Martha, Allison (table); Thomas (snacks); Judith (shirts)
    - Korita also volunteered to help at the table

- Marketplace outside on the blocked-off street: festival-style, farmers bring their own tables

    - Volunteers needed 11:00 AM–5:00 PM (split shifts available)
    - Duties: greet farmers, direct to spots, point out restrooms and managers
    - Vicki Salisbury (farmers market board president) volunteered
    - 12 farmers signed up so far; more expected

- Volunteer incentive: free summit registration + $15 lunch voucher for food trucks or downtown restaurants
- Summit program runs until \~3:30 PM; farmers/leaders encouraged to mix at the marketplace finale
- Music planned (sponsorship pending)
- First Lady attending to give remarks
- Registration: $30 general public; free for vendors/farmers
- Materials needed for the outside table: one-pager on assessment highlights, committee overviews (3x5 cards), general public survey
- Doodle poll to be sent for a marketplace planning meeting in September
- Vendor list (by county) to be shared with council members for targeted outreach
- Promotion tips discussed:

    - Use Bitly link in social media captions (not just QR code) for older farmers
    - Flyers to supply stores, barber shops, etc.
    - Targeted outreach directly to known farmers; limit craft vendors to keep focus on agriculture
    - Media: social media, newspaper, radio press release

Agriculture Council, Agritourism

- Regional food system model (doctoral student, CAMCP) update:

    - Spring workshop inputs incorporated; interactive model in development
    - Second refinement session in November (invitations sent to spring participants + 40+ additional participants across 6 sessions)
    - Final session to finalize model planned for spring 2027

- Farmer Funding Forum: October 27, mid-afternoon with simple dinner

    - Topics: agritourism conference takeaways, farmer/agribusiness funding, TAG Ventures grant (coming up in November)
    - Kerr-Tar region focus; Extension directors asked to promote broadly

- Agro-Medicine safety training (committee update):

    - CPR training funds run out in October; pivoting to alternative programs
    - Options still funded: farm equipment safety presentation, Stop the Bleed certification (hands-on, nationally recognized, open to public and first responders)
    - Can include farmer mental health resources and brief health screenings
    - Minimum 2.5 hours; location options: Granville County (Butler Beach, tobacco research station behind Extension office)
    - Timeline goal: November, but flexible pending executive approval

- Regional value chain coordinator role discussion:

    - Thomas, Gabe, and Desiree met; Kerr-Tar COG board supports the concept
    - Priority next step: define the job description
    - Model: reach out to Mountain Food Council (already has staff) for job description and measurables
    - Piedmont Triad regional food coordinator (Jennifer, Piedmont Triad COG) offered to present to the council on what the role looks like
    - Funding structure: would need to pass through COG's nonprofit arm; not possible directly under Kerr-Tar Regional COG
    - Ask: $15,000/year per county across five counties = one position
    - Path: present to executive board, then to county managers and their boards
    - Precedent cited: Triangle North Authority (economic development across 14 counties)
    - Next board meeting after December is early next year; strategy to move before then

- Summit panel: Dr. Korai (NC State agritourism specialist) presenting; five agritourism farms (one per county) on afternoon panel

Food Security/Safety (Earline)

- Approximately 40 agencies participated across food pantry partnership meetings
- Meetings held across counties; Warren County met first (July), requested follow-up the next month
- Met at College Grove Missionary Baptist Church in Warren County; Food Bank staff joined and provided additional resources
- Outreach methods: email, phone, USPS letters
- Icebreaker introductions surfaced commonalities; agencies shared challenges, barriers, and best practices
- Maps developed (in partnership with Desiree and Alan Winstead, Kerr-Tar COG) to identify service gaps

    - Food bank's existing map being incorporated; will include non-partner pantries and additional services (utilities, clothing, etc.)
    - Elijah (Food Bank) to incorporate non-partner agency data into interactive map once survey responses received

- Needs assessment survey sent; 12 responses so far; needs wider distribution
    - Push via social media, email blast (Hannah and others), cooperative extension networks
    - Tag cooperative extension accounts for reach
- Goal: larger bridge meeting (farmers + food pantries together) planned for February 2027
    - Timing chosen to avoid holidays and reduce snow risk
    - Volunteerism identified as a key challenge for pantries (many run by older volunteers)

Grant Updates

- Triangle Healthcare Foundation grant: $40,000 awarded
    - Supports the regional food council's Food Partnership Project broadly
    - Funds: partial salary support (Ashley shifting duties toward food council work), snacks, stipends, resources for meetings
    - Triangle Healthcare Foundation to be credited on all food council materials
- USDA grant: still pending
- County funding discussion: exploring sustainable multi-county contribution model for a dedicated staff role (3-year commitment ask)

Upcoming Events and Announcements

- Thomas's farm dinner: September 13 (Sunday), expected \~300 attendees
    - 15 high-end Triangle chefs; Strong Arm Baking providing bread; cheese and appetizers
    - 11 farmer grant applicants; top 4–5 farms being visited this week; scholarship to a youth livestock exhibitor; farmer to be sent to CFS conference
    - Lieutenant Governor attending; 1983 NC State national championship basketball team signing autographs
    - Tickets: $150 individual, $1,500 table of 8, $2,000 corporate sponsor table; nearly sold out
- Sustainable Forestry/Intention Project FARMS Conference: October 21–22, Rocky Mount, 8:30 AM–3:30 PM (lodging available for those traveling over an hour)
- Gabe presenting at local food council group (Hillsboro extension): October 27–29
    - Topics: cross-county partnerships, non-conventional partnerships (including prison programs)
- Operation Spring Plant conference: December 3–5, Rocky Mount (Felicia presenting; seeking additional presenters on small farming, sustainable ag)
- Community conversation and resource event (Earline): Wednesday, October 21, Impact Center
    - Topics: small farming, food safety, farm safety, senior support, civic engagement/elections
- Next council meeting: October 28, 2026
    - Korita will be traveling but offered to transcribe from a recording if someone records

Shared Calendar and Email

- Shared Google calendar exists but the Gmail account it was created under (Charlie's, now deactivated) is inaccessible
- Options discussed:
    - New dedicated email (e.g., foodcouncil@kerrtarcog.org): possible but adds cost; needs Diane Cox's input
    - Forwarding from a shared Gmail to multiple inboxes (like Oxford Farmers Market model)
    - In the meantime, Desiree's email is being used
- Suggestion: council members add "Proud Member of the Kerr-Tar Regional Food Council" to email signatures where permitted

Next Steps

- Schedule membership committee call to review spreadsheet and identify gaps (Ashley)

  Aim for within the next couple of weeks; determine which spots need to be filled before applications open broadly.

- Print and distribute summit table handouts and flyers (Desiree)

Enough copies for the inside registration table on October 8th; include assessment one-pager and committee overviews.

- Send doodle poll for September marketplace planning meeting (Desiree)

Coordinate volunteers, assign roles, and confirm vendor list by county.

- Share vendor/farmer sign-up list by county with council members (Desiree)

  Enables targeted outreach to known farmers ahead of the October 8th summit.

- Push food pantry needs assessment survey more widely (Desiree, Hannah)

Use social media, email blast to food bank networks, and cooperative extension channels; tag extension accounts.

- Contact Elijah (Food Bank) with non-partner agency survey data (Desiree)

He will incorporate it into the interactive service gap map.

- Draft regional value chain coordinator job description

  Reach out to Mountain Food Council for their existing description and measurables as a starting point.

- Invite Piedmont Triad regional food coordinator to present to the council

  She has offered to speak about what the role looks like in practice; coordinate with executive board meeting on October 28th.

- Confirm agro-medicine safety training date and location

Target November; finalize headcount, choose between Granville County venue options, and get executive approval.

- Talk to Diane Cox about dedicated food council email address (Desiree)

Determine cost of an additional COG email account and whether it can fit in the budget.

- Send Operation Spring Plant conference save-the-date (December 3–5, Rocky Mount) (Felicia)

Adjournment: 11:37 am

Minutes prepared by: Korita Steverson