

Alamance Food Collaborative Strategic Plan 2016 – 2018



Overview

Alamance County has a robust food system. From the beauty of the Haw River, to its charming neighborhoods and farms, its history speaks to residents who care about preserving its natural assets. The most important asset within the county is its people, those who keep Alamance County thriving. A healthy population is vital for the county to succeed, grow sustainably, and allow all residents to enjoy a good quality of life.

This Strategic Plan was created to outline the goals and strategies that can positively impact health for all of Alamance County's residents.

This Strategic Plan focuses on strategies that increase access to healthy food and goes beyond simply raising awareness or conducting educational campaigns and programs. While these are important, the Food Collaborative knows that in order to improve health outcomes in citizens' lives, it will take a multidisciplinary approach that works across sectors and jurisdictional lines and focuses on policy, systems, and environmental change.

Each goal outlined in this plan has specific, doable steps that can be taken by Alamance County and its partners to make lasting changes in how our residents access healthy foods.

ALAMANCE FOOD COLLABORATIVE BACKGROUND

Situated between the Triad and Triangle regions, Alamance County residents often commute outside the county for work, entertainment, recreation, and healthy food options. Not only is this lost revenue for the county but also a loss of talents and skills. Therefore, addressing the county's health is broader than simply looking at what happens within healthcare systems.

In April 2015, Healthy Alamance and Impact Alamance invited approximately 25 organizations and individuals to participate in the first meeting of what would later be named the Alamance Food Collaborative. Regular meetings are attended by 20-30 participants, representing (see a list of representatives on page 5) entrepreneurs from the local restaurant industry and private sector, academics from Elon University, public health and healthcare sectors, non-profit leaders, farmers, and local government. This group is focused on creating infrastructure to Alamance County's food system that will have a lasting impact and influence the health of the community and economic viability.

VISION

The Alamance County Food Collaborative creates a **sustainable** local food system by supporting local farmers and businesses to **improve access** to healthy food options and education.

MISSION

Alamance County is the **leader** for local, **affordable, healthy** foods in North Carolina.

-Vision and Mission adopted October 21, 2016

Healthy Alamance

Healthy Alamance is a non-profit partnership between Cone Health-Alamance Regional and Alamance County Health Department. Guided by the community assessment priorities, the organization facilitates and creates coalitions. These coalitions build networks across the county that directly support the health of Alamance County and empower residents to advocate for themselves and their neighbor.



The mission is to mobilize resources to develop and support a healthy, nurturing community, with a vision of an Alamance County in which everyone has the opportunity to be their healthiest and happiest.

Impact Alamance

Impact Alamance seeks to bring the community together for healthy change. To make this happen, they invest more than \$2 million annually into Alamance County, focusing especially on strengthening the systems and environments that influence our community's greatest asset: our children.



!impactAlamance
healthier • smarter • stronger

It is the foundation's goal to create a healthier and smarter community that will lead to a more prosperous future for all. The mission is to strategically invest in the County for health, hope and prosperity, with a vision to make Alamance County the best place to live and thrive.

Cover photo – courtesy of Healthy Alamance

Alamance Food Collaborative Members

Bob Byrd, County Commissioner

April Durr, United Way of Alamance County

Bob Frigo, Elon University

Glenda Linens, Alamance County Health Department

Claire Haslam, The Eddy Pub

Janet Macfall, Elon University

Rachel Marquez, Cone Health-Alamance Regional

Elizabeth Read, Carolina Farm Stewardship Association

Amanda Schism, Sustainable Alamance

Caitlin Vatikiotis-Bateson, Allied Churches

Christiana Kernodle, Burlington Downtown Farmers' Market

Ryan Kirk, Elon University

Aeriel Miller,

Doris Schomberg, Alamance Community College

Eric Henry, TS Designs

Matt Ballard, Benevolence Farm

Peggy Robinson, Second Harvest

Tiffanie Jackson,

Jason Cox, CoOperative, Press

Marcy Green, Impact Alamance

Ann Meletzke, Healthy Alamance

Goal 1

IMPROVE COMMUNITY ACCESS TO A JUST FOOD SYSTEM

Justice and Fairness is a theme which assesses a food system's current capacity to provide opportunity and food for all. The following strategies support infrastructure development, ensuring that public institutions and local business promote procedures and policies which address inequity.

Strategies Identified

- Diversify the demographics of farmers in Alamance County by encouraging young people and second career persons to consider agriculture as a profession.
- Improve geographical access to healthy foods, using local whenever possible.

Additional Considerations

Alamance County has a disproportionate number of family farmers over the age of 45 years. Supporting strategies which allow them to engage with and share resources and knowledge with a growing number of people interested in small scale farming is key to transforming agriculture in this area.

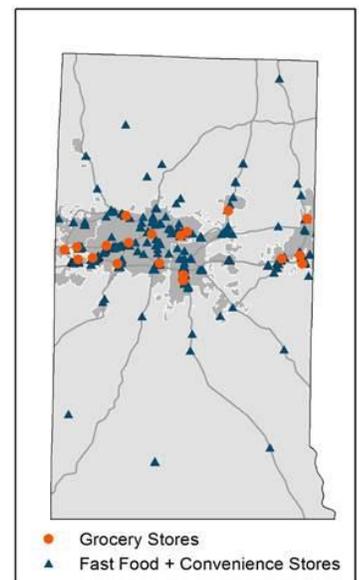
No one initiative will address food insecurities in Alamance County. Careful coordination efforts that support distribution of nutritious local food reduces chronic disease associated with hunger. Food insecurity in the United States is most often due to easy access to energy-dense, nutrient-poor foods that contribute to an overconsumption of calories.

What Can You Do Now?

Learn how other communities have successfully funded school agriculture programs that engage interested youth.

Utilize NCFarmlink.org as resource to create linkages between land owners and potential farmers for lease.

of **farms'**
who
indicated the
gender of
their
**principal
operators,**
16 %
(119 out of
732) are
female



Ryan Kirk, Ph.D.,

Elon University, Department
of Environmental Studies
(2016)

Goal 2

IMPROVE HEALTHY SCHOOL FOOD ENVIRONMENTS

With approximately 27.4% of children living in food insecure households in Alamance County, schools play an important role in the food system, providing students with a majority of their nutrition on a given school day. This offers the school system a unique opportunity to support the local food system, offering students produce from local farms and educating students about agriculture through the use of school gardens and increased access to the local food network.

Strategies Identified

- Increase the presence of school gardens and connect schools to local agriculture.
- Continue to improve healthy meal options in schools by considering models like the Durham County School District pilot program with Farmer Foodshare, to accept “less than perfect” produce at a reduced price into public schools, and encourage school gardens to become GAP certified so their produce can be used in schools.

Additional Considerations

All ABSS schools currently participate in the NC Farm to School Program. The program provides deliveries of produce from North Carolina farms based on the desires and needs of the local school district. As of 2016, the produce originates from four farms, none of which are located in Alamance County and all of which are more than 100 miles from Burlington.

The Food Collaborative learned that school/community gardens exist at several schools in the district including South Graham Elementary and Altamahaw-Ossipee Elementary.

What Can You Do Now?

Encourage Alamance County School District to adopt the following language “local preference in procurement policies.”



Goal 3

INCREASE THE NUMBER OF SHORT FOOD SUPPLY EXCHANGE RETAIL OPPORTUNITIES

A Strong Community with a thriving local economy seeks to improve access for all and be responsive to community needs regarding food. Strategies support healthy relationships, where trust and reciprocity are the foundation for collaboration. Residents are engaged civically and feel empowered. Thriving local economies use the food system to foster economic vitality through job creation and build infrastructure leading to efficiencies.

Strategies Identified

- Increase number of farmers' markets accepting SNAP/WIC and SNAP/WIC-Authorized Retailers.
- Increase efficiency of operations at farmers' markets and farm to fork initiatives.
- Encourage market opportunities for growers by connecting them with buyers in the county, particularly those interested in buying North Carolina product.

Additional Considerations

Local zoning and land-use regulation should be structured in a way that allows roadside and mobile markets, farmers' markets, urban gardens, community gardens, agri-tourism, and farming signage to thrive.

Strategies working in other counties include, connecting urban and rural markets within the county, bringing in additional tourism dollars from outside the counties, and offering educational opportunities (like field trip tours for schools).

What Can You Do Now?

Provide additional market opportunities for farmers, such as 10% campaign (www.nc10percent.com) sign-up by institutional purchasers such as hospitals and local governments.

Average **produce prices** were **18% lower** at **farmers' markets** than at supermarkets in 12 NC counties

Farmers Markets and other **locally owned** retailers **return** more than **three times** as much of their revenue to the local economy than do chain competitors. This "economic multiplier effect" helps **create jobs** and boosts economic activity.

Goal 4

INCREASE VEGETABLE INTAKE IN RESIDENTS AGED 2+

The local food system ought to provide nutritious food for all, ensuring the health and wellbeing of all community members. Actions targeting expanding access to fresh produce and educating residents about nutrition and food preparation can contribute to increased vegetable intake and reduced rates of obesity.

Strategies Identified

- Increase number of schools conducting nutrition education
- Improve education materials for SNAP recipients to facilitate buying fresh and/or local produce
- Advocate for backyard gardens and create framework for existing and future community gardens

Additional Considerations

More information is needed about school nutrition education currently being done in ABSS schools in addition to knowledge about evidence-based practices that can be employed in schools.

A key component for fruit and vegetable consumption is access to retailers that sell high-quality produce. The Food Collaborative can support the work of the Alamance Wellness Collaborative surrounding built environment initiatives.

What Can You Do Now?

Share resources developed by the NC Division of Public Health with store owners to assist in offering healthy food through the Healthy Corner Store Initiative.

Shop at local farmers' markets and encourage friends, family, and coworkers to do so.

Advocate for community gardens in your neighborhood.

Percentage of
farmers'
markets listed by
the NC Cooperative
Extension in
Alamance County
accept SNAP
benefits is
22%
(2 out of 9)



Proximity to
farmers
markets was
associated with
lower BMI
among NC youth,
while density of fast-
food and pizza
venues was
associated with
higher BMI.

Goal 5

INCREASE ADVOCACY AT LOCAL GOVERNMENT LEVEL FOR POLICY CHANGE

The Food Collaborative recognizes the need for advocacy for policy adoption at municipal and county boards, commissions, and council meetings in order to improve the overall food environment in Alamance County. Of primary concern are policies that support a sustainable, ecology-oriented food system.

Strategies Identified:

- Increase advocacy for organic conversion policies in order to include backyard chicken policies and pollinator conservation efforts.
- Promote regionalism and partnership among counties
- Make planning and land use suggestions based upon adopted plans for farmland preservation and conservation development.

Additional Considerations

Alamance Wellness Collaborative is pursuing strategies that will increase advocacy for improvements to the built environment.

Advocacy is most effective when it engages the community, adding new voices to the call for change.

What Can You Do Now?

Attend municipal and county government meetings.

Sign up for newsletters and follow social media accounts to learn about what is being discussed and share with family and friends.

Every dollar spent at farmers' markets led to an **additional \$0.58 to \$1.36** in **sales** at other nearby businesses



*To continue this conversation, plan on attending the
NC APA's LOCAL FOODS: PLANNING FOR
PROSPERITY Central North Carolina conference,
February 16, 2017 at The Haw River Ballroom*

For more information on the Alamance Food
Collaborative:

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