



Regional Food Policy

September 2020

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## KERR-TAR REGIONAL FOOD POLICY

In the Kerr-Tar region, we have the ability to feed our population healthy food from our own local farms, thereby helping to address many of our region's pressing economic, food security and health needs. This food policy presents a strategy for guiding local governments, non-profit organizations, and businesses in growing a *sustainable regional food system*, encompassing sustainable food production, processing, distribution, marketing, consumption and waste management. Such a system has the potential to improve economic prosperity and quality of life across the Kerr-Tar region.

Community input on the development of this policy was solicited through a series of public events in 2019, which were attended by more than 200 stakeholders.

- **General Convening:** Held at Vance Granville Community College in June of 2019, 100+ stakeholders gathered and met with other members of their affinity groups:
  - Farmers | Growers | Livestock Raisers
  - Food Processors | Aggregators | Distributors | Retailers | Restaurateurs
  - Social Services | Human Services | Healthcare | Education
  - Government Agencies | Economic Development Agencies

Detailed feedback from convening attendees provided a comprehensive list of priorities and goals for the region's development of a food policy.

- **Community Reports & Feedback Meetings:** The priorities identified in the initial convening were reported to the community through a series of county-based meetings in the fall. Community members were invited to provide feedback and contribute ideas for tactics that they felt would help achieve each priority.

Stakeholders who participated in this process expressed their belief that development of a sustainable food system in the Kerr-Tar Region has the potential to play a critically important role in improving the economic, environmental and physical health of their communities.

### Kerr-Tar Regional Agriculture

According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture's 2017 Agricultural Census, the Kerr-Tar region contains 442,000 acres of farmland, representing 32% of the region's land area. The agricultural sector in the region has an estimated market value of \$181.5 million, of which \$79.1 million (43%) is food agriculture. Given the fact that Kerr-Tar counties lost 87% of their farms between 1950 and 2017, it is somewhat encouraging that the latest agricultural census shows almost 1000 new and beginning farmers in the area. This group of new farmers, coupled with experienced farmers who may be interested in diversifying their crops to include food crops, have the capacity to meet many of the region's food needs.

### Kerr-Tar Health Statistics

While some Kerr-Tar communities have relatively positive health profiles, others rank among North Carolina's least healthy. A lack of access to healthy food in our communities is associated with the prevalence of certain chronic diseases and notably higher death rates from these diseases. Specifically, it is recommended that treatments for diseases of the heart, type II diabetes, high blood pressure, obesity and

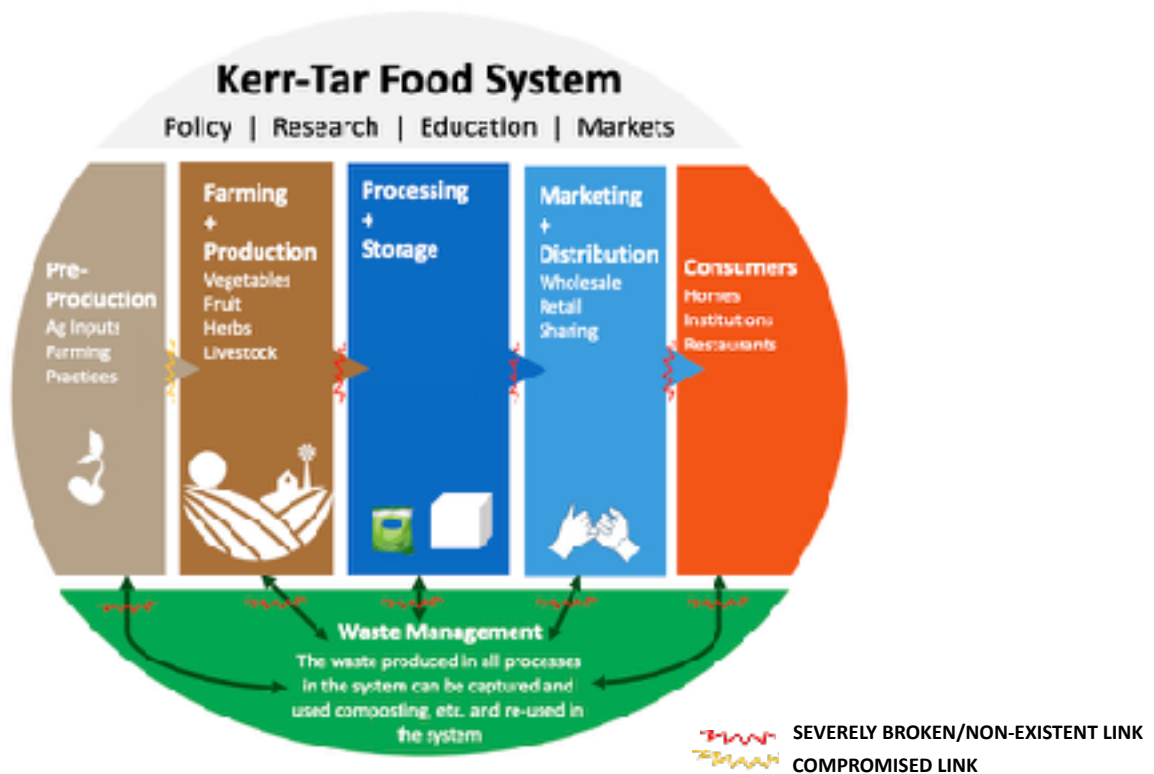
certain cancers also include dietary adjustments to increase intake of fresh vegetables and fruit, replacing processed foods that have higher amounts of salt, fat and sugar. These very diseases are near the top of the list of causes of death in our communities.

### Kerr-Tar Regional Food System

Food is big business. By creating a healthy, sustainable, local food system, the potential for community economic development increases. If the working elements of a sustainable food system are based in and supported by the region, jobs can be created, and the dollars generated will circulate within the region multiple times.

An examination of the Kerr-Tar Region’s food system shows a series of unsupported or broken connections that are vital to a robust, thriving system. The priorities and tactics defined by the region’s stakeholders in a series of community meetings held over the past 7 months all point to repairing these connections through a focus on policy, research, education, and markets.

Below is a diagram of the Kerr-Tar Regional Food System. It represents the various stakeholders, their roles and their linkage to the entire system. What our initial research has shown us is that most, if not all of the links that are needed for a robust food system are either non-existent or severely compromised in the region. The priorities and tactics defined by the region’s stakeholders who participated in the 2019 community meetings point to repairing these connections through a focus on policy, research, education, and markets.



## **Kerr-Tar Regional Food Strategies & Tactics**

By analyzing input from 200+ stakeholders, along with secondary data and food system policy frameworks from other areas, we have identified six priorities for developing a sustainable food system in the Kerr-Tar region, as well as 2-3 tactics that support implementation of each priority.

### **Priority #1**

Use more of the region's land to sustainably produce food for the Kerr-Tar region and neighboring areas

- Create new pathways for agricultural land access/ownership
- Educate local residents about land ownership, leasing and succession/inheritance planning
- Provide support to landowners who want to increase food production on their properties

### **Priority #2**

Ensure that area farmers are prepared and able to feed the region and beyond

- Provide resources and opportunities for education, training and certification for farmers
- Identify and secure financial support for farmers, particularly for small scale farmers
- Increase coordination among farmers; support the development of cooperative agricultural ventures

### **Priority #3**

Create and strengthen value chains connecting food producers to consumers across the region and beyond

- Establish distribution networks
- Build farm-to-fork infrastructure
- Expand resources for local food marketing, consumer education, and digital platform development

### **Priority #4**

Expand markets for our region's food products within the region and in adjoining areas

- Expand direct-to-consumer markets, e.g. farmers' markets, CSAs, wholesale
- Expand institutional/foodservice markets, e.g. schools, healthcare facilities, restaurants
- Expand wholesale markets, e.g. grocery stores

### **Priority #5**

Improve access to healthy, local food for our region's consumers

- Increase procurement of locally, sustainably grown/raised food by public institutions
- Establish new direct-to-consumer access points for healthy, local food

### **Priority #6**

Effectively manage waste streams and environmental impacts of the region's food system

- Redirect food waste streams into useful products, through composting or other methods
- Educate stakeholders about food waste reduction
- Advance farming practices that benefit our region's soils, climate, and environment

## **Performance Measures**

To evaluate progress toward improving the region's food system, we have identified both milestones that would indicate movement in a positive direction and metrics with which to measure the impact of these efforts in the region.

### **Milestones**

- Adoption of this Regional Food Policy by the Kerr-Tar Regional COG Board
- Establishment of a Kerr-Tar regional food council charged with guiding implementation of this policy's recommendations, along with addressing challenges and opportunities related to our region's food system
- A regional food system assessment that provides a clear cataloging of resources, gaps, insights and opportunities for the food council, the COG and area governments
- Identification of socially responsible business opportunities for regional economic development, as noted by the regional food system assessment
- Adoption of county or municipal plans that reference this regional strategy for local food system development

### **Metrics (all metrics refer to the Kerr-Tar Region as a whole)**

- Stabilization of or increase in the number of farms
- Increase in the number of acres producing food
- Growth in new/beginning, women-owned & minority-owned farms
- Increase in the number of GAP or Organic Certified farms
- Increase in the number of farmers participating in resource sharing through cooperative formation, equipment sharing, coordinated production, or other means
- New capital investment in food value chain infrastructure
- Increase in supply chain connections among stakeholders in the food system
- Increase in the number of direct to consumer market channels for local farmers
- Increase the amount of regionally sourced food procured by Kerr-Tar institutions
- Increase in the number of and participation in food waste reduction programs

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