



**STRATEGIES TO INCREASE
SALES OF LOCAL MEAT AT
FARM STANDS AND
SMALL RETAILERS**

Purpose

This guide outlines a few key strategies to increase local pasture-raised meat sales at independent, small-scale grocery retailers and retail farm stands.

The step-by-step information provided is based on marketing and merchandizing strategies tested by **NC Choices** in conjunction with farm stands and retailers in 2017 and 2018, and should be useful to farmers, retailers, Extension professionals, and others working to increase local meat sales.

The following specific strategies are considered:

- On-site Promotional Tastings
- Retail Staff Trainings
- Retail to Farm Tours

When using this guide consider your resources and time. If you can't apply all the promotional efforts, pick the one that best suits your retailer's needs.

Local, Niche Meat Buying Trends, Data Points, and Retail Benefits:

1. The Rise

2. Label Claims

3. Natural and Alternative Retail Advantage

4. The Power of Communication, Sampling, and Serving
Specialty Products

5. Increasing Purchasing and Developing Loyal Customers
Via Agritourism

The Rise

The local niche meat industry is **on the rise** as more consumers demand “local food,” food produced close to the point of sale and having additional attributes such as “natural,” “healthy,” “sustainably raised,” and “from family farms.”

New cuts of meat (e.g. shoulder tender, oyster steak, Vegas Strip Steak, Merlot cut) is #1 on the National Restaurant Associations **What’s Hot for Menus trends in 2018** – And – sustainably raised, locally produced meat products are part of this trend, appearing on the Association’s What’s Hot top 10 list since 2014 (*What’s Hot, 2018*).

North Carolina is a **leader in the production of local, sustainably raised meat**. Since 2002, the number of NC livestock producers obtaining meat handlers licenses to sell meat directly to consumers, butchers, restaurants, and retailers has gone **from one to more than 1000**. A recent NC market analysis found that the demand for local niche meat could amount to as much as \$51 million (Moore, 2015), suggesting room for growth compared to the **\$10 million dollars of local meats** estimated to be in the market based on a 2016 survey (NCC 2016 survey).



Label Claims

According to a recent study conducted by the Hartman group, “[when it comes to meat purchasing], the meaning of sustainability is broadening to encompass a rising concern for animal welfare issues,” and 65% of consumers say animals **raised in as natural an environment** as possible make them more likely to buy the product (*Sustainability Practices Animal Welfare, 2015*).

Americans want **more transparency** with their food, particularly when describing how the animals they eat are raised.

A 2016 Consumer Meat Purchasing Survey of 3,802 respondents found that the customers are increasingly looking for **label claims** around their meat products with locally grown ranked as the popular claim, even over certified organic claim. However, while more customers are demanding meats with sustainable attributes, the majority of customers are confused by label claims on meat and poultry products.

Between 60% and 85% of consumers thought the word “**natural**” incorrectly referred to animal production practices and even more think the label should mean these things (Consumer Reports, 2014). Lack of transparency makes it difficult for farmers to reach their target audience esp. in retail channels where they rely on labels to describe their product. Retailers who want to market pasture raised meats must have trained staff who are proficient in describing the meats they carry.

Natural and Alternative Retail Advantage

Locally sourced fresh meats offer a **competitive advantage for small grocers**. According to a recent consumer study conducted by A.T. Kearney (*Ripe for Grocers, 2013*), carrying local foods is one way small grocers can compete for market share in the crowded and consolidated grocery retail space. Consumers look for local: the study noted that more than 40% of respondents purchase local food on a weekly basis, and another 28% buy local food at least once a month, (*Ripe for Grocers, 2013*).

When Millennials were asked to rank where they would buy the highest quality raw meat, the three most popular venues were: **butcher shops** (#1), **farmers markets** (#2), and then **natural food stores** (#3). Traditional larger chain grocers were listed much farther down than any of the above venues, suggesting that Millennials don't look to larger grocers for premium meats and may be willing to shop at these small or alternative grocers when seeking these items (*Consumer Meat Purchasing, 2016*).



The Power of Communication, Sampling, and Serving Specialty Products

Natural and alternative retailers tend to have the flexibility when it comes to carrying a wide variety of meat cuts and products, which can be a win: win for small farmers who need to move “**whole animal**” and for customers seeking to taste and purchase specialty cuts.



When it comes to grocery meat departments, millennials and older consumers both placed highest importance on the **availability of specialty products** (#1, #2), **somebody I know behind the counter** (#3), **organic options** (#4), **cooking tips/recipes** (#5), followed by the **availability of sampling**.

55% of **Farmers' Market customers** bought a product after sampling even though they had not originally intended to buy it.

- Dr. Timothy Woods (*Best Practices, 2012*)



Millennials valued more **specialty products** (lamb, bison, organic, grass fed), when compared to older adults suggesting these categories preferences may become even stronger in years to come (*Consumer Meat Purchasing, 2016*).

Brick and mortar retailers are not the only beneficiaries of on-site sampling.

Increasing Purchasing and Developing Loyal Customers Via Agritourism

As NC transitions becomes to more urban, farmers can capitalize on increased rates of **agritourism** and the economic benefits of operating farm retail stands.

According to a 2015 NC study that examined the influence of agritourism on niche meats loyalty and purchasing, respondents, “had very strong perceptions of the potential role of agritourism as a catalyst for both branding specific agricultural products and overall creating a bond with local food production.

The majority reported that agritourism would definitively increase their **loyalty** with a specific farm or brand (54.6%), increase their likelihood of purchasing **similar products** in the future (54.2%), and strengthen their **bond** with their food (61.4%)”, (*Cline et. all, 2015*).

ON-SITE PROMOTIONAL TASTINGS

THE INITIAL APPROACH

In the work done with retailers in 2016 and 2017, 78% of the retailers who implemented an on-site tasting marketing strategy reported their local meat sales had increased from the prior year, with sales increases ranging from **5-20%**.

Retailers reported that their sales of local meat in the two weeks after the tasting was an average of **30% higher** than sales in the two weeks prior to the tasting.



ON-SITE PROMOTIONAL TASTINGS

PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS

Here are a few items to consider before diving into specific event details:

- The busiest day, time, and months of the year.
- Any upcoming events or opportunities to cross-promote with a tasting? Cheese and wine events are especially good to pair with meat tastings.
- Your target audience? New customers, regular customers, tourists?
- Which product(s) you want to sell more of and why?

Don't forget to analyze your organizational capacity!

Most tastings require a minimum of **3 separate on-site promotional tastings** to make any substantive impact on sales or customer shopping behavior; Saturday typically being the biggest shopping day.

Do you have the organizational capacity to devote an average of **4+ on-site hours** (1 hour set-up and break down, 3 hours sample) to run the promotions for 3 Saturdays? Don't forget to consider planning time that may take between 2 and 4 hours per event.

Planning Timeline

Two months ahead

- Select dates on the calendar, coordinating with other sampling events occurring on-site if possible. Most tastings are held on weekends.
- Identify the product(s) to sample for each tasting per calendar day. Maybe consider an item to sample that complements an upcoming holiday or event such as sliders for the Super Bowl or Corned Beef for St. Patrick's Day.
- Keep in mind that quick-cooking middle meats like steaks sell well over summer months, whereas slow-cook items, such as roasts, sell well during winter months, so customer education might be required if selling roasts in summer. Be ready to give customers incentives like "it might sound hot cooking a chuck roast in the summer, but if it is prepared in a crockpot your kitchen will stay cool."

Sample Budget per Event

Estimated Cost and Recommended Supplies

\$25-\$50	Local Meat to serve 50, 1 oz. portions
\$10	Paper products
\$30-\$50	Printing needs
\$10	Miscellaneous: Clip boards, pens, ziplocks

Don't forget to order and/or set-aside the amount of product needed for the event.

If you're wondering how much to budget for a tasting event here is a good rule of thumb for ordering:

- 1 oz portions per person
- Plan on an average of 50 customers for 2 hour busy weekend tasting.
- 50 1 ounce portions = 5 pounds of boneless raw meat or 6-7 pounds of bone-in raw meat product like pork shoulder

There is an average of 25% shrink on cooked meat.

Planning Timeline

1 month ahead

- Finalize meat order and delivery plan, if necessary. Ideally, you will want the meat product two or three days before the tasting event.
 - Create a **social media card**, FB event, and boost the event. For example, \$20 for 7 days typically yields a good response.
 - Determine which recipe (if needed) you'll use to cook your meat product.
Crockpot cooking with an average of 3-5 ingredients is an approachable range for customers to follow who are new to cooking meat. Remember simple but tasty is always a winner. See our [Meat Tips: Cuts for Your Crockpot video](#) for recipe ideas!
 - Determine if you will cook the product on-site or elsewhere.
- If you are sampling a hot dish, you can use a hot plate, chafing dish, or crockpots are great, just make sure there is an available outlet.
 - USDA Recommended cook temperatures for meat can be found [here](#).
 - For information about holding food at the right temperature and avoiding the “Danger Zone” when sampling food refer to this [USDA-FSIS guide](#).

Planning Timeline

2 weeks ahead

- Determine the time you need to set-up and, and any specific set-up items such as available outlets. This is also a good time, to decide if you want to cross-promote another product (for example, lard, mustards, mayonnaise, breads, etc).
- Confirm delivery day of product and be sure to confirm whether the product is fresh or frozen and where exactly it needs to be delivered.
- Determine where in the store where the event will take place to get an idea of space and flow.
- Secure one or two, 6' tables depending on the size of set-up.

1 week ahead

- Print materials. Determine if offering a special discount on sampled items. Be sure to include the logo of item sampled along with sale price if applicable.
- Make a plan if cooking the dish onsite. If the product is a slow cooked item like shoulder or brisket be sure to cook the meat the night before.
- Pull together your suitcase of items which includes most of the things you will include on your demo table.



Planning Timeline

Sample Day-of Promotional Tasting Schedule

- **Half hour to 1 hour before** set-up
- **Event time** 2-3 hours is the normal amount of time for a tasting
- **Half hour after event ends** Be finished breaking down and leave everything clean as a whistle

What to include at your table?

- Farmer bio and display frame
- Educational Resources and display frames (if applicable)
- Business information (business cards, brochures, information about products with logos)
- Pictures
- Paper, pen, and clipboard for informal survey data
- Sample product
- Any cross-promotional items with serving utensils
- Sample dish on platter or in heated container with serving utensils
- Tablecloth ideally printed with Organization's logo
- Paper products for tasting like toothpicks, 6" plates, cocktail napkins.
- Extension cords, etc.
- Small trash can beside table.
- Binder clips for holding things down especially if you're outside
- Cloth towels for clean-up, cutting board and knife



Planning Timeline

Best Practices

- Display the packaged product on tasting table if possible and be able to point to where the product is located in store. Be sure to keep on ice if it's perishable.
- Make On-Site Events Interactive.



Sample food that involves the customer like build your own mini tostadas



If you are surveying shoppers, consider informal or interactive surveys, such as keeping a tally mark on a notepad and asking 1-2 simple questions such as “Did you like the product (y/n), and do you think you’ll buy it?” If you want to get more detailed data, an interactive survey such as the bean survey (pictured left) allows customers to engage in a fun activity while responding.

- Have a few questions prepared ahead of time to engage customers such as “Do you shop here often?” “Did you like what you sampled?”
- Produce aromas by cooking on-site versus sampling pre-cooked items.
- Make a checklist and a packing list for putting on the event.
- A rolling suitcase is a convenient way to transport tasting materials.
- Extra’s to pack: Ziplocks, hand sanitizer, pens, and bungee cords.

Promotion and Social Media:

- Employ any networks involved in the tasting. These include newsletters, listservs, websites, social media handles, and on-site signage.
- When creating an Event on your Facebook page, you have the ability to invite any partners of the event as co-hosts.
- Social media “cards” that you can make using an application like Canva (<https://www.canva.com/>), are great for creating Save the Dates to share on all social media platforms
- Show “behind the scenes” activities using **FB live** or time lapse your set-up. This makes the audience feel intimately involved with your cause.
- **Boost posts** and your event on FB. We have seen a \$20 boost budget for seven days increase the number of people interested in attending a tasting

Post Event Action

Post Event Action

- Send a thank you to any partners involved with the event.

2 weeks after event

- Be sure to evaluate any data collected and use it to better to your next tasting, product mix, or project.

For more information, planning considerations, and general event planning timelines for on-site tastings and promotion, please see the NC Growing Together (NCGT) guide titled, [Hosting Local Food Events with Grocery Stores and Retailers](#).



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Retail Staff Training on Pasture-Based Meats

The goal of retail training is to **deepen the connection** between retail staff and their locally sourced meat products so they can better sell these products to customers on the floor. These trainings can be held in addition to Retail-to-Farm tours or as stand-alone training opportunities.

“I thought last week's training was AMAZING and I got lots of other feedback [from our staff] saying the same!”
- **Carolyn Tweston**, Produce and Meat Merchandiser Weaver Street Market.



The more their staff can communicate their products in store, the better they can sell the products and deepen their **relationship** and **trust** with their customer base. Consider piggybacking a specialized meat training onto an existing meeting.

Trainings shouldn't take more than **2-3 hours** at most.

Staff should include **customer-facing employees** on the floor as well as those involved with other parts of the retail operation.

Planning Considerations

An ideal training brings together representatives from all key parts of the **local meat supply chain** to address how the retailer fits into that larger meat purchasing process, how using a third party certifier can help market and give value to the product, and how each component works alongside each other in a local meat supply chain.



So for example a good training might include:

- The farmer who raises the animals
- The branded meat company who buys the animals and brokers the meat under a brand (this is more commonly seen in grocery models but it may just be the farmer who sells the meat under his/her own label)
- The meat manager/buyer
- Representatives who can provide overall context for how the local meat supply chain works
- Someone who can discuss consumer-marketing such as Grassfed, Organic, Animal Welfare Approved, etc. label claims.

Identify a **moderator** who can help facilitate discussion, guide questions, and keep the training on schedule. The moderator can be a manager at the retailer or a member of the organization who understands the whole system.

Each **presenter** talks about their role in bringing the product to the retail location, starting with the farmer who raises the animal through the label claim and marketing of the final product. See sample agenda below:

Sample Two Hour Schedule

10 minutes Samples of Local Meat

10 minutes Welcome from Host

15 minutes Local Meat Supply Chain: History, Uniqueness, and Importance

15 minutes Featured Farmer talks about farming practices, certifications, processing,

20 minutes Featured Branded Meat Company shares what goes into whole animal utilization, partners, and products.

15 minutes Marketing: Label Claims and Customer Talking Points. What does it mean for a farm and thus its products to bear Third Party Certifications?

25 minutes Q&A - Feedback from employees as to what resources they can use, want, need. What has been made clear in this session? What is still confusing? What do they hear from customers?

Planning Timeline

6 weeks ahead

- Secure supply chain presenters.
- Reserve meeting room.
- Send invitation to staff.

4 weeks ahead

- Create agenda for the meeting.
- Arrange any AV equipment needed.
- Secure videographer if recording training.

1 week ahead

- Remind speakers of arrival time.
- Gather any PowerPoints and load on computer.
- Coordinate any products to be sampled.

Planning Timeline

Best Practices

- Leave staff with 3-5 key take-aways. Be careful not to fall into the trap of information overload. Less is more. For example, you may want them to know that:
 1. Product is pasture-raised
 2. We buy from a network of local NC farmers
 3. We purchase meats that promote high animal welfare
 4. We participate in larger whole animal utilization program, meaning we help sell all parts of the animal saving the farmer time and money.
- Arrange for someone to record the training if possible. Videos can be used to train those who couldn't attend.
- Designate someone on your team to document the process and share with your customers via a blog, newsletter, or social media.

POST EVENT ACTION

- Send an email to all speakers thanking them for taking time to work with staff and raise awareness of the local, niche meat supply chain.

Weaver St. Video



Weaver St. Blog Post Retail Training

WEAVER STREET MARKET LOCATIONS FOOD COMMUNITY

Blog

Learning About Our Pork Supply: The NC Natural Hog Growers Association
POSTED MARCH 21, 2018 BY EMILY IN HAND SELECTED PRODUCTS

By Carolyn Twisten, Weaver Street Market Meat Merchandiser

It takes a little over three months for a sow to farrow (give birth) after she has been bred, then about seven months after birth till the hogs are ready for market. Jeremiah Jones of Grassroots Farm started raising hogs for the natural meat company Niman Ranch in 2005, when the company said they needed 2000 hogs. Less than ten months later (read: before Jones's hogs were ready for market) Niman pulled out of the North Carolina hog market, leaving the farmers they were working with in the lurch.

With steep investments in land, grain, grain bins, and live animals,
Jeremiah at Grassroots Farm

Retail-to-Farm Tours

Retail-to-Farm tours, guided tours whereby customers follow a product from grocery shelf to farm, strengthen consumers' relationships to their local food supply chain and increase the likelihood of developing loyal local meat customers.

Tours start at a point of purchase retail location and take consumers to the farm(s) and/or key supply chain partner locations. The tours are intended to deepen personal connections between consumers shopping at retail locations (as compared to purchasing directly from farmers) and the farmers and supply chain players responsible for the local pastured meats sold in retail stores, with the ultimate goal of increasing customer willingness to buy locally sourced meats while also supporting a chain of local businesses.

The Retail-to-Farm Tours produced the following outcomes:

- 100% of participants gained new information from the tour
- 100% had a better understanding of the local meat supply chain and would recommend the tour to a friend.

“[I appreciated] being able to hear their story of how it started and how they raise the animals.”

“Was very informative...and will inform my decision making when buying from local farmers.”

Planning Considerations

- Tours work best from retailer to farmer who ideally are located within a **40 minute** drive (less is preferable) between store and farm, who have a good working relationship with one another, and who each have a loyal customer base.
- Coordinate with the farmer to see if they are comfortable with people visiting on farm. Be prepared to follow all necessary **biosecurity measures** to make sure visitors aren't tracking in or carrying out pathogens on their boots, car tires, and clothes. It's recommended to provide disposable booties for off-farm visitors.
- Develop a **sign-up sheet** for the retail location. The best place to post the sheet is by the cash register so employees can point out the tour and answer any questions that the customer might have.
- Compose an email that all hosts can use in any **newsletters** or **listservs** to help spread the word.
- If budget allows, rent a **passenger van** to drive folks from retailer to the farm. Carpooling together versus individually fosters a sense of community and aids in continued questions and conversation throughout the event.
- Consider including a **farm liability waiver** as part of the registration for any incidentals on farm or during the tour.

SAMPLE LIABILITY AND PHOTO WAIVER

WAIVER OF LIABILITY

In consideration of participation in [Name of Tour] I do hereby waive, release, and forever discharge the [Name of Organization in charge of tour] and the units of which it is comprised, and its instructors, officers, agents, employees and volunteers from and against any and all claims, demands, action or causes of action for costs, expenses or damages to personal property or personal injury, or death, which may result from my participation in these activities.

I understand and admit the dangers and risks inherent to my participation in [Name of Tour] is voluntary. I assume full responsibility for any injuries or damages resulting from my participation in this activity/ program, including responsibility for using reasonable judgment in all phases of participation of the program and travel to and from the site location. I recognize and understand that the activities may be hazardous, that my participation is solely at my own risk, and that I assume full responsibility for any resulting injuries and damages. I understand that it is my responsibility to notify the appropriate person or event host(s) of emergency medical information. I also understand that this Waiver of Liability and Release binds my heirs, executors, administrators, and assigns as well as myself.

PHOTO RELEASE

I consent to and allow any use and reproduction by the [Name of Organization] in charge of tour] and the units of which it is comprised, of any and all photographs or videotapes taken of myself during participation in any and all activities. I understand that [Name of Organization] will own the photographs and videotape and the right to use or reproduce such photographs and videotape in any media, as well as the right to edit them or prepare derivative works, for the purposes of promotion, advertising, and public relations. I hereby consent to this use of my name, likeness, or voice, and I agree that such use will not result in any liability for payment to any person or organization, including myself.

Planning Considerations

- Talk with the farmer to see if they want to **charge for the tour**. Often they will want to charge a small fee such as \$5/person or \$10/family for their time. Farmers can offer incentives and leverage their own customer base to help recruit attendees. For example, in a recent Retail-to-Farm tour, a participating farmer offered to waive the tour fee to all attendees who pre-ordered a Thanksgiving turkey from their farm that season. The promotion boosted his turkey sales and tour attendees, while also giving a reason to creating conversation and “buzz” on social media. Other examples may include offer items for sale on the farm, like Cut-Your-Own Flower Bouquets.
- If transportation is provided for children, be sure to remind parents of your state’s child restraint requirements. 15-passenger vans are included under the North Carolina Child Passenger Safety Law. All children riding in a 15-passenger van should be properly restrained in an age and size appropriate restraint. North Carolina requirements are [here](#).
- **Surveying customers** at the end of the tour is a great way to assess impact, refine your event, and share impacts with participating partners.

Planning Timeline

6 weeks ahead

- Decide date and time of tour.
- Create Facebook event.
- Work out any pre-order details.
- Create Google Form and be sure to post link in the FB event.

4 weeks ahead

- Have promotional signs and sign-up sheets in store.
- Rent van.

2 weeks ahead

- Contact the farm and see if there are any last minute changes in tour schedule or needs based on weather, etc.
- Create surveys.

1 week ahead

- Send reminder email to participants.
- Print Surveys, waivers, and maps (for those driving their own cars or to leave at store for those running late!)

Day Before

- Pick up van.
- Pack surveys, clipboards, pens.
- Don't forget to take pictures!

Sample Email to Participants

TEMPLATE

Hello!

Thank you for registering for our Retail-to-Farm Tour. I have listed as attending: [names of people attending]. And that you will bring a child restraint for the van. We will meet at [retailer] at [time] this [date]. Please park in the gravel lot next to the store. We will then hop into the van and shuttle down to [farm]. There we will walk around the farm and hear from [owner's name].

Friendly reminder that the tour costs [amount per person and per family] or FREE with your [pre-order item here]. Cash or check payable to [farm]. There is also the opportunity to Cut-Your-Own Bouquet [price].

Bring a cooler if you want to purchase anything. The forecast is high of 78, sunny, with a 20% chance of rain. Please dress accordingly: wear closed-toed shoes, a hat, sunscreen, and bring a water bottle! We plan to return to [retailer] by 6 pm.

I very much look forward to meeting you and exploring our local meat supply chain together. If you have any last minute questions or concerns, you can reach me on my cell at [number]. See you soon!

Planning Timeline

BEST PRACTICES

- Create a Social media card to advertise the event.
- Create an event in FB and invite all organizers of the tour to be co-hosts.
- Boost Event Post.
- Make creative signs and put in the store and at the farmer's farm stand/farmers' market booth.
- Send an invitation to join the tour through all organizers listservs.
- Have a few printed waivers on hand for anyone who did not sign up ahead of time so they can fill out the paper registration and sign.
- Post videos and pics to Social Media while tour is happening.

POST EVENT ACTION

- Analyze surveys and share with all co-hosts.

SAMPLE BUDGET PER EVENT

Estimated Cost and Recommended Supplies

\$89 1 day, standard passenger mini van rental (carpooling is a free alternative)

\$45 Gas (may be included in rental cost if renting vehicle)

\$20 Printing needs

\$30 Miscellaneous: Clip boards, pens, Facebook Boost



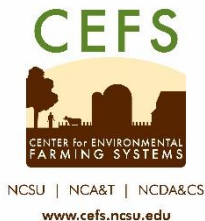
SAMPLE FACEBOOK EVENT LANGUAGE

Join us as we travel by passenger vans from [retailer name] to [farm name] to see where some of the food you purchase at [retailer name] is raised! From your Thanksgiving turkey to your pork chops, see the animals of [farm name] and meet [owner's name]. Use this [Google Form link] to register for the tour. Or, visit [retailer name] and sign-up there. Contact [event coordinator email] for more Retail to Farm Tour information.

More Information

Remember, if you can't apply all the promotional efforts, pick the one that best suits your retailer's needs.

This guide and its associated resources are available from **NC Growing Together** and the **NC Choices Program**, initiatives of the Center for Environmental Farming Systems (CEFS). CEFS is a partnership of North Carolina State University, North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University, and the North Carolina Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services. For more information, please visit www.cefs.ncsu.edu. NC Choices receives program support from the Golden Leaf Foundation and the NC Growing Together Project.



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