

EmPOWERing Mountain Food Systems

Food and Farm Assessment

October 2019



Goals of the Assessment

- Identify **potential supply chain improvements** or additions (including but not limited to cold storage, loading docks, dry storage, and food processing).
- Explore the nexus between **agritourism, brewing, and the outdoor recreation industry**. Recommend project entry points and collaborations.
- Develop an understanding of **market opportunities** for farmers and food producers in the region.
- Assess **continuing education, training, certification and infrastructure needs** for farmers and food businesses. Training may include technical production topics and infrastructure as well as business creation, entrepreneurship, and management topics.
- Explore demand and viability for regional **food hub, cooperative processing facility, and/or incubator farm**.

What's Covered in the Assessment

1 The Project Region *geographic location, economic drivers, demographics*

2 Overview of Farming in the Region *beef production and cow-calf, dairy, fruits and vegetables, trout, farmer demographics, farmland use*

3 Market Opportunities for Local Food *direct markets, wholesale and retail, demand and potential spending in the region and surrounding metro areas*

4 Tourism and Agritourism *intersections with outdoor recreation and brewing industries*

5 Infrastructure and Supply Chain *sorting/packing, cold storage, food processing/kitchens, transportation, aggregation/food hubs, meat processing*

6 Labor, Internships, and Career-Ladder Opportunities *Labor challenges, intern potential*

7 Continuing Education, Training, and Certification Needs *primary training needs, existing opportunities*

Our Process



REVIEW

Collected and reviewed existing research. Met with experts who have worked in the region. Compiled an annotated bibliography.

ANALYZE

Data from USDA Census of Agriculture, ASAP's Local Food Guide database, Appalachian Grown Producer survey, and other ASAP data sources.

CALCULATE

Projected potential local food spending for top agricultural products given current consumption data.

SURVEY

Surveyed farmers, distributors, agricultural service providers, food and beverage entrepreneurs, tourism professionals, and others with knowledge of local food and farming in the region.

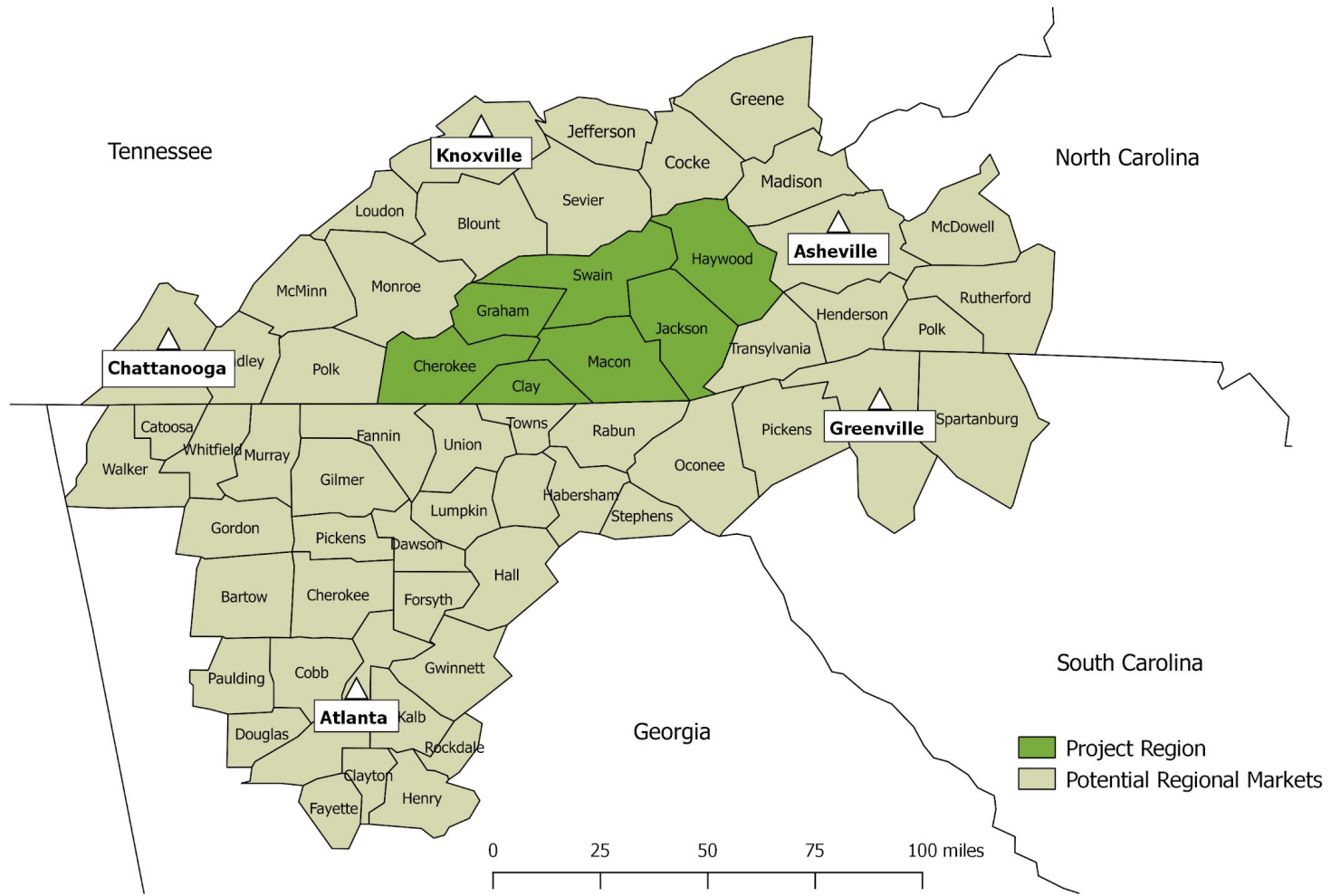
INTERVIEW

Identified key informants representing a cross section of professions and locations and conducted in-depth interviews.

SYNTHESIZE

Compiled what we learned into this assessment.

Project Region



- Project Region
- Potential Regional Markets

Major Economic Drivers

- largest industry clusters are **Health Services** and **Education**, both public and private
- fastest growing industries are **Arts, Entertainment & Recreation** and **Accommodation & Food Service**, driven by the large amount of public land and the associated outdoor recreational tourism opportunities

Demographics

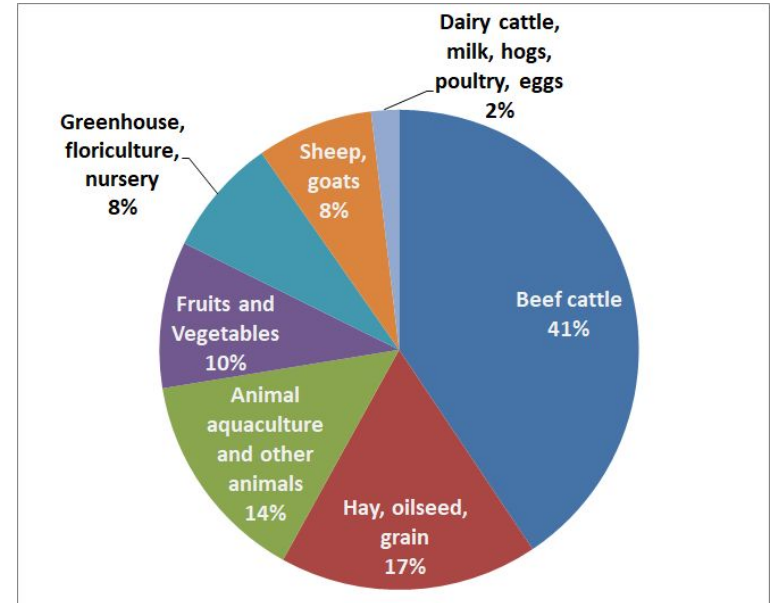
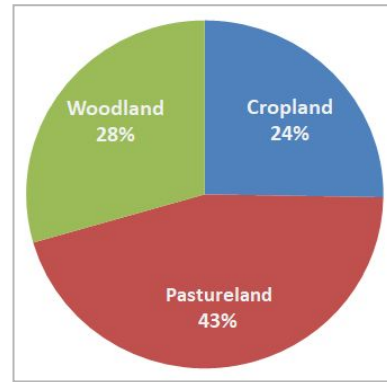
- **population:** 202,834
- higher percentage (18.6) living **below the poverty level** than NC average
- **less racially diverse** than the rest of NC

Visitor Demographics

- more **affluent**
- **higher education** levels
- even **less racially diverse**

Farming in the Region

- **1,759 farms** covering **147,638 acres**
- median **farm size**: 36 acres
- **7 percent** of the region's land is agricultural use; **24 percent** of that (35,000 acres) is used to grow crops
- **top crops**: beef cattle, hay, fruits and vegetables
- **farm sales**: \$64,689,000
- farming is often **part time**
- average **age of farmers**: 59



Recommendations

Promote local food and farms to build demand.



ACTION STEPS

- Collaborate with existing branding efforts to identify local food in the marketplace.
- Coordinate county-level “buy local” programs to cross-promote food and farms.
- Partner with local media to tell the stories of farmers in the region and to promote what is being grown and produced and where it can be found.
- Support direct markets and other direct experiences. CSAs, farm stands, farmers markets, and u-picks put a face on food.

Connect farmers and food entrepreneurs to markets.



ACTION STEPS

- Expand the capacity of farmers market management in the region.
- Support the development and promotion of CSAs.
- Assess market desires and industry requirements of buyers across market segments, including restaurants, large and small groceries, school districts, and hospital systems, including packaging and labeling, food safety certification, quality standards and traceback, product quantities and distribution requirements.
- Work with local farmers to assess the capacity of their operations, direct them to suitable market outlets, and prepare them to meet standards and requirements.

Link tourism to local food and farms.



ACTION STEPS

- Build partnerships with tourism agencies.
- Identify tourist attraction clusters, including farms, outdoor recreation activities, restaurants, and breweries, and cross-promote to attract visitors.
- Create accurate resources that guide visitors to authentic local food and farm-linked events and destinations.
- Integrate farms, farmers markets, farm to table restaurants, etc., into existing regional and county tourism promotions and guides.
- Encourage restaurants and breweries to identify farm and farmer names on menus and labels.

Enhance infrastructure and work with farmers and entrepreneurs to support their enterprises.

ACTION STEPS

- Make connections between existing infrastructure.
- Develop cost-share or grant options for farm and food business infrastructure projects.
- Leverage economic development incentives and low interest loans to finance projects.
- Identify the most promising new or enhancement infrastructure projects and conduct feasibility studies. Example opportunities might include supporting farmer-managed infrastructure such as the Drexel plant; underutilized assets within EBCI, such as the Trout Hatchery and Tribal Cannery; or sustainable aggregation models.

Integrate food and farm into economic development planning and create supportive policies.

ACTION STEPS

- Show economic benefits of homegrown food businesses and make a case for investment in food entrepreneurs.
- Review existing regulations and policies that may be hindering the production or sale of locally produced farm products. Create new supportive policies.
- Promote county and state-level programs to support agricultural land use.
- Connect farmers with farmland preservation and transition opportunities such as NC Farmlink and land trusts.
- Consider food and farm development inclusively, making space for cow-calf, woodland, nursery crops, and other prominent agriculture enterprises.
- Advocate for the needs of farmers around labor issues.

Support farmer and food business efforts to meet sales potential.

ACTION STEPS

- Connect farmers with existing training and technical assistance opportunities.
- Leverage partner expertise to offer support to farmers and food businesses. Ensure opportunities are accessible across the region.
- Partner with community colleges, nonprofits, NCDA, Cooperative Extension and other agencies and organizations for support.
- Identify unmet needs and work to develop support systems.

Coordinate, convene, and build on existing efforts and successes.



ACTION STEPS

- Develop a farm and food team to advise and guide this effort.
- Inventory the services, programs, and products offered by farmer support organizations in the region and find ways to enhance or build on those efforts.
- Build on completed feasibility studies and assessment.

Questions?