

NC GROWING TOGETHER

Connecting Local Foods
to Mainstream Markets



HOSTING GROWER-BUYER CONNECTION EVENTS

INCREASING ECONOMIC
SUCCESS FOR NORTH
CAROLINA PRODUCERS

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Purpose

Grower-Buyer Connections Events are designed to connect individual growers to individual buyers in a respectful & efficient setting that can lead to a sales relationship.

Each grower meets face-to-face for 8-10 minutes with each buyer, with buyers moving from table to table. Growers at each table have the opportunity to share product lists, photos of their farm, and samples with buyers; and buyers have the opportunity to share their requirements for volume, insurance, delivery terms, and their specific product needs.



Successful Events

A successful Grower-Buyer Connections event can lead to sales relationships.

It also facilitates knowledge exchange and understanding between growers and buyers, addressing business and communication needs on both sides of the table that can facilitate successful long-term relationships.

Growers and buyers can discuss solutions to specific impediments in production/sourcing (insurance, travel distance, volume) that can lead to more flexibility on each side of the relationship. At the same time, the organizers of the event can learn and then take action to set the stage for future grower-buyer collaborations.

“Farmers need more of these events!”

– 2015 attendee

Grower - Restaurant Events: It is important to include farmers of all sizes and products from the immediately-surrounding community and to collaborate with downtown development groups, chefs collaboratives, and other civic and community agencies.

Grower - Wholesaler Events: It is important to have, to the greatest degree possible, well-matched growers and buyers. Lining up a set of buyers that require large volumes and GAP certification with a set of growers producing small volumes without GAP certification will result in growers and buyers becoming frustrated and more unwilling to make connections.

Sample Agenda



SAMPLE AGENDA

2:00 p.m. Registration & Coffee

This is a time for growers to set up any samples/table displays and for informal networking.

2:10 p.m. Welcome & Overview

Introduce yourself, your organization, and how your work intersects with stronger relationships between buyers and growers.

2:20 p.m. One-on-one conversations begin

(no more than 8-10 minutes between rotations)

3:45 p.m. Open networking

This is a time to continue conversations & meet with colleagues.

4:15 p.m. Closing Remarks / Evaluations Completed

"I really liked that farmers came prepared and had packets with a lot of information."

- Buyer, 2015 attendee

Planning Timeline



Three Months Ahead:

- Contact NC Cooperative Extension Agents in surrounding counties about potential dates and collaboration
- Compile outreach list of Growers, Buyers and community partners
- Secure sponsorships (where applicable)

Two Months Ahead:

- Secure a location for the event. Ideal locations are affordable, centrally located for buyers and farmers, have plenty of parking, and can accommodate a room setup of roughly 15 small tables (or about 40 people).
- Create event invitations. Email a “Save the Date” announcement to your outreach list and promote through social media.
- Print & distribute postcards or flyers that can be used in other locations, such as Extension and USDA offices, and sent via mail.
- Create a registration form that includes information about the schedule, location, date, who to contact with questions, and how to register.
- **Important registration notes:** online registration is great, but many farmers will want a paper option. If co-sponsoring with Extension, most offices know the farmers and content and have experience doing workshops, so they have a good mechanism for accepting payment. Payment options should include, at a minimum, checks and money orders, and preferably credit cards.
- Contact potential buyers with the save-the-date: note that it’s important to have, to the greatest degree possible, well-matched growers and buyers: make sure to match them by volume and type (such as larger volume GAP certified growers with larger wholesale buyers) whenever possible.

Planning Timeline



One Month Ahead:

- Identify a moderator and ensure other roles, such as check-in and setup, are filled.
- Conduct follow-up with farmers – some may require phone or paper mail invitations!
- Prepare the information guide and half-page instruction sheets for buyers and growers.
- Identify a local caterer for refreshments during the event.

Two Weeks Ahead:

- Email Info Guide for growers and for buyers, and send out half-page farm info template
- Make reminder phone calls to farmers
- Confirm all details of the schedule with the moderator, caterer (if applicable), and setup team
- Confirm all wholesale buyers/distributors who will be present
- Re-send electronic reminder for registration to grower lists and other marketing sources.
- Make direct calls to farmers who received paper invitations and may not respond online.

One Week Ahead:

- Print all materials (including additional info page copies for those who may not bring them).
- Pre-load all presentations onto a thumb drive, and verify that a computer and projector are available.
- Check registration for a final head count and send the total number of meals needed to the caterer.
- Verify final number of attendees with the venue or office manager. Send final reminder email to all participants and include directions, parking information, and the agenda or schedule for the day.

Supplies and Links to Resources

- Name Tags & [Sign-in Sheet](#)
- Printed [Participant Information Forms](#) (for those with no Grower/Buyer handouts)
- Printed [Conversation Guide Forms](#) (preformatted for taking notes)
- [Facilitated Conversation Slides](#)
- Projector & Screen (if using slides)
- Clip boards, pens, and other office supplies as needed
- Evaluations - [Grower Example](#), [Buyer Example](#)
- Station markers (with farm name visible and clearly identifiable)
- Signage about local food snacks
- Timer (cell phone or other)
- Noise maker to note transitions (our team really likes having a reason to ring a cowbell!)
- Camera

Setup and Post-Event Tasks

Event Setup

Registration table, including sign-in sheet, conversation guides, nametags, and evaluations

Projector and computer with slide show launched

Food table for refreshments

Stations for private discussions (remind growers to bring and share one-page printouts of their farm)

Clipboards with conversation guides and evaluations

A great tip to make sure you get evaluations back: print them on brightly colored paper, so you can see which ones are still with participants!

Post-Event Tasks

Thank you email to attendees

Summarize evaluations and identify areas for future improvement or follow-up

Six-week check-in with participants (see [example questions](#))



Tips for Successful Event Facilitation

Note that suggested attendance is for 10 pairs of growers and buyers in equal representation.

Recommended time between rotations is 8-10 minutes.

Use [slides](#) to facilitate the conversations.

Thank everyone for their time and remind attendees about evaluation sheets!

Suggested Language

Save The Date / Event Announcement

Date + Time
Hosts & Sponsors
Location
Refreshments
Registration cost

Are you a farmer looking for new markets to sell your product?

Are you a restaurant looking for new places to buy local produce/foods?

OR

Are you a wholesale buyer or distributor seeking new clients for your local food lines?

Please join us to make new connections with restaurants/farmers in _____.

Plus, we'll have local food and great conversation. Full invitation to follow next week.

*Make sure to include event partners/sponsors names/logos, including any buyers who may be attending if they are to be counted as sponsors or partners.
Make sure to include RSVP instructions.*

Sample Postcard / Flyer Language

**also includes all information from the Save-the-Date or Event Announcement*

[YOUR AGENCY NAME], in partnership with [LIST SPONSORS HERE], will host a mixer to connect farmers with new wholesale markets. There will be a speed-meeting format where each grower and buyer will exchange information. Snacks will be provided. Please join!

The event will be held [DATE] from [TIME] at [LOCATION].

[Make sure to include RSVP Instructions, contact person/email/phone.]

Email Reminder / Phone Message

We hope to see you next [day, date, time] at the Grower/ Buyer Connections event.

If you have already RSVPed, thank you! If you have not, please respond to this email or give us a call to let us know you plan to attend.

We'll be at [location of event]. There will be NC-grown light snacks.

Farmers are encouraged to bring photos of your farm and a list of products that you have to sell.

Wholesalers should bring a list of products that you are hoping to source locally.

(Please see the attached [grower info guide](#) & [grower info example](#); [buyer info guide](#) for more examples of suggested information to bring.)

[Postcard Image and grower/buyer info templates attached to email message.]

Download Grower Preparation Template:

<https://www.ncgrowingtogether.org/ncgt-resources/ncgt-grower-buyer-connections-event-planning-guide/>

Download Buyer Preparation Template:

<https://www.ncgrowingtogether.org/ncgt-resources/ncgt-grower-buyer-connections-event-planning-guide/>

More Information

This guide and its associated resources are available from NC Growing Together and the NC 10% Campaign, 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.

Presentation & Package Links

NC Growing Together:

www.ncgrowingtogether.org

NC 10% Campaign:

www.nc10percent.com

All presentation links are accessible by clicking throughout this document and can also be accessed directly at:

<http://www.nc10percent.com/ncceresources>

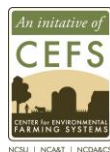
For information and support on holding a grower-buyer event in your community:

Robyn Stout

State Coordinator, NC 10% Campaign

Center for Environmental Farming Systems

robyn_stout@ncsu.edu



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