

NC GROWING TOGETHER

Connecting Local Foods
to Mainstream Markets



**PLANNING GUIDE FOR
SMALL BUSINESS CENTER
AGRI-PRENEURSHIP
PROGRAMS**

.....
business planning to increase economic
success for North Carolina producers

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United States
Department of
Agriculture

National Institute
of Food and
Agriculture

This material is based upon work that is supported by the National Institute of Food and Agriculture, United States Department of Agriculture, under award no. 2013-68004-20363. Any opinions, findings, recommendations, or conclusions expressed in this publication are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the view of the U.S. Department of Agriculture. July 2017

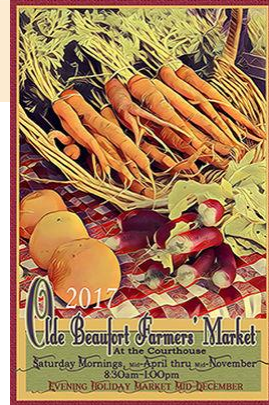
Purpose

The local food movement is growing, and North Carolina is part of this trend. Nationally, consumers have more opportunities to purchase food directly from producers, with 8,268 farmers' markets operating in 2014, up 180 percent since 2006.¹

In North Carolina, the latest US Agriculture Census reported a 21% increase from 2007 to 2012 in the number of farms selling directly to individuals. Statewide there has been a 9% increase in the value of locally sold farm products.²

Small Business Centers (SBCs) in North Carolina have a unique ability to help farmers and food businesses create viable business plans to increase their share of the local food market. This guide supports the development of a series of workshops enabling local food and farming businesses to follow an agriculture focused entrepreneurial curriculum with guidance from local experts. Participants finish the course with a complete business plan.

Three Small Business Centers in North Carolina have launched food and farm business planning short courses. This guide shares their experiences, resources and recommendations.



Audience & Timing

Sampson and Duplin County SBC's collaborated on their first food/farm business planning class, sharing resources and drawing attendees from multiple counties.

Farmers are not the only potential clients for a food/farming business planning course! There are many local food business entrepreneurial opportunities, including catering, beekeeping, farm crafts, agritourism, value added products, food trucks, and farmers' market management.

When marketing this course, expand the definition of farm business to include food businesses and start-ups. Consider that your audience may attract people who are not currently farming or producing at all, but rather are seeking to start an entirely new venture.

The timing of the course will depend on your target audience. Saturday workshops in early spring, summer, or early fall will likely not attract many production farmers or growers who sell at a farmers' market. However, new agriculture ventures may be a great fit for Saturdays. Courses have typically been held in the winter months, biweekly or weekly from January through March.

Some Small Business Centers (SBCs) are offering a variety of themed courses. The livestock farmer, the row crop farmer, the market gardener, the jam maker and the agritourism venue could each be served by a training series, with subject matter experts targeted to these specific audiences. Whether or not themed courses have an audience can likely be determined after an initial offering and evaluation process and consultation with local agencies, such as NC Cooperative Extension. The network of potential clients will likely expand with each new course iteration.

Rural Entrepreneurship through Action Learning

- This multi-week curriculum was originally developed thirty years ago as a way to introduce entrepreneurship as a career option for high school students. Participants complete the course with a final business plan.
- In the 1990's the North Carolina Community College system adopted the REAL curriculum to be used in both school curriculum programs and in Small Business Centers. REAL is now used worldwide to train entrepreneurs.
- In addition to the core REAL program, REAL curriculum developers offer three sets of specialized curricula in three business areas: Professional Craft Arts, Agriculture, and Healthcare.

Where to find instructors: Many Small Business Centers invest in training their directors or counselors in the REAL curriculum and the REAL Agriculture certification. The five -day training, and two day agriculture specific training is offered a few times a year; the schedule can be found online ([REAL Training Schedule](#)).

*"I really enjoyed the class! Left with great resources and a network of people I feel comfortable contacting in the future for help!"
- Southwestern CC Real Ag 2017 graduate*

Contracting: The staff at the REAL program can locate certified trainers to lead the course. The local SBC director identifies subject matter experts and guest speakers to complement the technical course content. Trainers are paid the normal rate for SBC instructors. When contracted instructors are used, the SBC director may or may not attend all course sessions.

Sample Course Outline- Weekly Topics

The REAL curriculum includes interactive student exercises. Each week students complete one element of their business plan in class and as homework. There is time in each class for a subject matter expert to share resources and technical advice on each topic. Based on client needs you can amend and combine sessions.

1. Topic: Introduction to Business Planning/ Local Resources
Local Speakers- SBC director & Cooperative Extension educator
2. Topic: Exploring Agricultural Business Ideas- Self Assessment
Local Speakers - Experienced Farmer or Food Maker
3. Topic: Market Feasibility
Local Speakers – NC Department of Agriculture & Consumer Services, Cooperative Extension, Local Marketing Specialist, Regulators
4. Topic: Introduction to Financial Concepts & Feasibility Analysis
Local Speakers - Farm Credit, Local Bankers, CDFIs
5. Topic: Creating a Marketing Plan
Local Speaker – Experienced Farmer or Food Maker
6. Topic: Business Operations
Local Speaker – CPA, Experienced Farmer
7. Topic: Financials
Local Speaker – CPA, Experienced Farmer, Tax Attorney
8. Business Plan Presentations by Attendees

Serving a meal is a nice way to build camaraderie among class members. Seek local sponsorship or support for meals, such as from your local Farm Bureau office, an area restaurant that may donate a meal, or from a local nonprofit.

Sample Class Agenda

Each REAL program has a course workbook, at a cost of about \$40 for students. Some programs secure sponsorship or grants to cover the costs of the workbook, meals, and other supplies.



SAMPLE AGENDA

Class 1: Introduction to REAL Ag Course & Business Planning, Self-Assessment

(Combined Lesson 1 & 2 when following manual)

Begin 5:00 pm

5:00 – 5:30 Dinner Served

5:45 – 6:15 90 Second Elevator

Speech/Introduction of attendees

6:15 – 7:00 Introduction to Local Resources -
Cooperative Extension and Small Business
Center Directors

7:00 – 9:00 Business Planning

REAL Agricultural Entrepreneurship Workbook



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Business Planning Journals

Financial Considerations

- Most SBCs offer courses free of charge. The REAL course can be part of the normal SBC course offerings with an added fee for the workbook.
- Vance-Granville SBC offers the course through the continuing education program, earning the college's FTE credits. Students are charged \$70 per course, with some scholarships available depending on sponsor funding. Courses can also be offered through the Occupational Extension program.
- Corporations can serve as sponsors. In Sampson and Duplin counties, Smithfield Foods supplied funding for meals.
- The North Carolina Tobacco Trust Fund sponsored student fees in Vance-Granville.
- The Southwestern Rural Economic Development Initiative (Rural Center) & the Community Foundation of Western North Carolina supported the Southwestern Community College program.
- The Center for Environmental Farming Systems' North Carolina Growing Together project funded workbooks for the Duplin/Sampson course and supplied speakers.



Graduates of the Vance-Granville REAL program

Vance-Granville SBC
holds their course at the
local farmer's market



Planning Timeline

Three Months Ahead: Committee Meeting

There are dedicated community agencies supporting the work of agricultural businesses. These agencies and allies can serve in an advisory capacity and provide specific technical expertise to your clients. Advisors can also be a source of sponsorship for scholarships and meals.

One advisory meeting may suffice, with individual follow-up to continue with planning and specific session development.

Even without a dedicated advisory group and meetings, SBCs can partner with one or more agencies to plan the class.

Advisors could include:

- Cooperative Extension Director/Agents
- Natural Resource Conservation Service
- Farm Bureau
- Farm Credit
- Seed and Feed Store owners
- Local Bankers
- Experienced farmers
- Chamber of Commerce members
- Regional SBC directors – consider a combined course



Planning Timeline



• Questions to Address in a Planning Meeting

- Assess partner's perception of need for business planning in the agriculture community
- What are the key business issues among farmers and food businesses?
- Who else should be included in planning?
- How can the agencies and organizations support the course?
 - Course promotion
 - Technical expertise, presentations
 - One on one consulting
 - Sponsor meals, snacks, scholarships?
- Logistics
 - Time of year? Dates? Evening classes? Saturdays in the winter?
 - Course location- Extension office, Incubator kitchen classroom, Farmers market ?
 - Collaborate with another SBC?

Planning Timeline

Two Months Ahead

- Secure instructor (if not SBC director)
- Recruit sponsorships
- Secure a location for the event
- Open registration
- Create flyers, advertisements and postcards. Contact your advisory team to recruit attendees and share promotion. Places to advertise might include:
 - Farmers markets
 - Feed and Seeds Stores
 - Planning Department
 - Future Farmers of America Club
 - Cooperative Extension web page calendar listing
 - Local papers
 - Local radio shows
 - SBC website, College calendar
 - Workforce Development office
 - Unemployment office



NCGT's Resources Page has templates for most items needed, including registration, marketing, and scholarship applications:
<https://www.ncgrowingtogether.org/ncgt-resources/hosting-food-farm-business-training-programs-at-community-colleges/>

Planning Timeline



One Month Ahead:

- Secure all speakers
- Prepare manuals
- Check on site logistics (entry, security, kitchen access, tables, chairs, plugs, A/V and projectors, computers for use, parking)
- Identify a local caterer or establish budget for break snacks (optional)
 - Note that SBC funds cannot purchase food items-- sponsorships or outside funding is required
- Marketing and outreach continues: social media “push” ads, Twitter, Instagram
- As students register, assess their course interest areas

Planning Timeline



Two Weeks Ahead:

- Confirm speakers and speaker needs (photocopies, A/V)
- Confirm all details of the schedule with the instructor
- Continue to market!

One Week Ahead:

- Print all materials (including additional info page copies for those who may not bring them).
- Create each course agenda with speaker bio
- Check registration for a final head count and send the total number of meals needed to the caterer.
- Send final reminder email to all participants and include directions, parking information, and the agenda or schedule for the day.
- Share participant interest survey with instructor

Sample Flyer and Postcard Format



SCC's Small Business Center **2017** **Appalachian Farm School**

Tuesday's Jan. 10-Feb. 28 • 6-9 p.m. • Swain Center

Training for new and existing farmers.

Turn your interest in growing vegetables, fruits, herbs, other crops and livestock into a sustainable agriculture-based business. This practical hands-on approach gives you the skills needed to create and strengthen a successful business venture.

Topics include:

- Farm Evaluation & Goal Setting
- Marketing and Pricing
- Understanding the Numbers
- Rules and Regulations
- Resources and Funding Options

Register at www.southwesterncc.edu/sbc
t_henry@southwesterncc.edu
828.339.4426



This Small Business Center has created a brand for their Appalachian Farm School. Program graduates receive a certificate with the logo; stickers for their vehicles and market stands; and the use of the replicable logo for brochures, web sites and social media.

A local graphic designer who had studied at the community college did the design work and donated part of her fee in exchange for advertising her company – this may be a good model for other community college centers!

Evaluation

- Create a course evaluation for each session and an evaluation for the entire course.
- As the course continues, ask students about their business planning progress, assessing the need for additional resources or course content that may easily be added to the current program agenda. Subject matter experts may be able to address their specific needs if given enough lead time.
- Course participants are encouraged to follow up with the SBC director and specific guest speakers to assist in moving their business plan forward.

“We are following up with our students 45 and 90 days post course to assess their progress and offer guidance on the next steps,” says Lee Woodard, Duplin County SBC Director.

“I learned so much in the first course, I developed my farm business and began to market. I returned for the third course hoping for guidance on how to expand. I got it!”

- Swain County Participant, Orchard Slope Family Farm



SBC Programs Currently Offering Agripreneurship Programs

Thank you to the following SBC Program Directors for their guidance and participation in developing this guide.

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More Information

This guide was created by NC Growing Together (www.ncgrowingtogether.org) an initiative of the Center for Environmental Farming Systems (CEFS), in conjunction with the SBC directors listed on the previous slide.

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.

A special thank you to REAL AG Southwestern CC graduate Megan Eberly from Orchard Slope Family Farm, and Ken Dawson, Maple Spring Gardens Farm, for sharing farm and marketing photos.

Find additional supporting resources at: <https://www.ncgrowingtogether.org/ncgt-resources/hosting-food-farm-business-training-programs-at-community-colleges/>.

For information and support on holding this training in your community, contact the SBC counselor at your local community college, or contact: Laura Lauffer, North Carolina Growing Together Project, Center for Environmental Farming Systems, North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University, at ldlauffe@ncat.edu.

