



NC GROWING TOGETHER

*Connecting Local Foods
to Mainstream Markets*

June 25, 2013

Hello everyone,

Greetings and we hope this message finds you well! This message kicks off regular communication with the project team. We are six months in and our new staff is hired, most of the subcontracts are in place, committees are formed, and the work is well underway! ***Beginning next month we will send out our project updates via listserv; if you prefer NOT to be added to the listserv please reply to this email with "no listserv" in the subject line.***

Because there is more than one "AFRI" project in the state and nationally (that's the name of the USDA grant program of which this is a part), we have selected a name and logo for the project : *NC Growing Together* (NCGT for short), with our tagline: *Connecting Local Foods to Mainstream Markets*. The website is under development and will be a place for you to keep up-to-date on, and share with others, information about the project's progress.

A whole lot of things have happened in the first 6 months:

As discussed when we were together at the all-partner meeting in December, this project has a number of components, with the overarching goal of connecting small and mid-sized NC producers of produce, meat, dairy, and seafood products to the supply chains of two models of food distribution: A grocery model, represented by NCGT project partner Lowes Food Stores and its sister company, distributor MDI; and a military model, represented by project partner Fort Bragg and two of its major food suppliers, Foster-Caviness and US Foods.

Over the past three months, project staff has held seven kickoff meetings. Three of these were advisory team meetings for produce, meat and seafood. Each of these teams consists of producers, project staff, and project partners including food hubs, Cooperative Extension and other agricultural educators, and NC Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services personnel. Advisory teams meet quarterly to guide project work. We have also had a preliminary meeting with Dairy Advantage to begin formulating the work we will do around dairy.

Four kickoff meetings were also held between project staff and major project partners Lowes, Foster-Caviness, US Foods, and food management personnel at Fort Bragg. These

meetings were designed to identify top priorities and short and long-term strategies for building supply chain links to small and mid-sized producers, both directly and through food hubs.

Other activities:

- The Consumer Research team is conducting an evaluation of this summer's grocery store farmers-day events, and beginning a long-term study of consumer loyalty based on grocery stores' commitment to sourcing local foods.
- The project has funded two NCGT MBA fellows. Their research on local food supply chain development will be guided by Dr. Robert Handfield, Director of the Supply Chain Resource Cooperative at the NCSU Poole School of Management. Dr. Handfield will also teach a new course on local food supply chains in Spring 2014.
- The Produce Team is organizing a set of "round the table" meetings in the Southeast and Fort Bragg area with Cooperative Extension, an initial small cohort of small and mid-scale farmers, and NCGT partners Lowes Foods and Foster-Caviness. These meetings will initiate the NCGT project market channel research for produce and will provide information on training needs that can be filled by Cooperative Extension in the future. Later this year, the produce team plans to work with NCDA and Cooperative Extension, utilizing a model similar to their successful 2012 and 2013 grower/buyer networking events, to introduce other growers in these areas to NCGT partner buyers.
- The project is in discussion with members of the NC Fresh Produce Safety Task Force and the Carolina Farm Stewardship Association to determine how we can complement and support their efforts to deliver food safety training and support to small and mid-sized farmers.
- The project is working with NC Choices to summarize the results of a survey of 250 niche meat producers across the state, and to connect NCGT project partners with niche meat producers in NC.

Meeting Notes

Each month we will send out the most recent staff and Management Team meeting notes. Attached please find a summary of staff meeting notes from January until April, as well as Management Team meeting notes from April and May.

Project Contact Information

Feel free to contact us with questions or if you'd like more information about NC Growing Together.

General questions about the project or its research components:

Rebecca Dunning, Project and Research Coordinator, NC Growing Together

rebecca_dunning@ncsu.edu
919-389-2220

Questions about the project's academic components:

Michelle Schroeder-Moreno, Academic Coordinator, NC Growing Together
michelle_schroeder@ncsu.edu
919-513-0085

Questions about the project's extension or training components:

Joanna Lelekacs, Extension and Training Coordinator, NC Growing Together
joanna_lelekacs@ncsu.edu
919-244-5269

Questions about the project's main retail and food service partners (US Foods, Foster-Caviness, Lowes Foods, and Fort Bragg):

John Day, Retail and Food Service Partner Liaison, NC Growing Together
john_day@ncsu.edu
704-785-6670

Other questions about this or other CEFS projects:

Nancy Creamer, Co-Director of the Center for Environmental Farming Systems, NC State University; and Project Director, NC Growing Together
nancy_creamer@ncsu.edu
919-515-9447

John O'Sullivan, Co-Director of the Center for Environmental Farming Systems, NC A&T State University; and Co-Principal Investigator, NC Growing Together
johno@ncat.edu
336-334-7957

Many thanks and Happy Summer!

Sincerely,

The NC Growing Together project staff