

CLEVELAND COUNTY, NC

Needs Addressed:

Cleveland County is home to a fledgling local foods movement, and needed an organized systems approach to building community awareness and involvement.

Project/Process:

NC Cooperative Extension led "Growing a Local Foods Culture", a project that:

- 🌀 Leveraged "foodies" as grassroots volunteers to develop/promote activities & events that build support for the local food system.
- 🌀 Engaged a variety of stakeholders in support of efforts to construct a permanent farmers' market shade pavilion.
- 🌀 Conducted a "Farm to Table" progressive dinner tour that connected farmers with buyers and increased institutional demand for local & seasonal foods.

Partnerships:

- NC Cooperative Extension
- Foothills Farmers' Market
- Tour Cleveland County
- County of Cleveland, NC
- City of Shelby, NC



A local foods potluck is an effective way to bring volunteers to the table...not just to eat, but to share ideas and to get involved.

Lessons Learned:

- It is fairly easy to build momentum for the local food movement. Inform stakeholders about the economic, environmental, health & social benefits of eating locally and focus on the aspect(s) they are passionate about.
- Engage local government in long-range planning. Their support is critical to fund-raising and implementation of policy that promotes the local food system.

- It can be expensive to communicate your message. Cultivating relationships with local media outlets and using internet-based tools (including social media) are cost-effective ways to keep your audiences informed.
- A vibrant, well-managed farmers' market can serve as a springboard for other initiatives, including CSA's, institutional sales, and efforts to reduce hunger and food insecurity.



Our shade pavilion will provide space for 22 vendors, public restrooms, a manager's office and solar-powered walk-in coolers.

Results:

- Volunteers were mobilized into action through "Meet Up to Eat Up", a monthly potluck supper that celebrates local farms and local foods.
- We raised \$116,890 toward construction of our shade pavilion (49% of project total).
- A diverse mix of 55 people attended the Farm to Table Tour. Two high-volume caterers and three restaurants initiated purchase of local foods (cheese, meats, vegetables, and eggs).
- Increased community awareness of the local food movement resulted in a 43% increase in foot traffic to our seasonal tailgate market and a 19% increase in vendor participation.

Next Steps:

- Conduct a local food fair that gets institutional food buyers & farmers together to explore opportunities, address barriers, and negotiate production/purchase agreements.
- Continue efforts that will lead to construction of our pavilion (grant-writing, fundraising, facility design, etc.).