Components of a Local Food System: Cooperatives & Retail Distribution
Lessons in
Starting & Sustaining Great Relationships

eastern carolina organics
your local farm to table connection
Lesson 1:

Know Your Niche

*Take broad goals and ground them in something simple and achievable
Eastern Carolina Organics was founded to cultivate a sustainable food system by providing a viable production and distribution network to our customers and farmers.

We serve consumers who aren’t going to farmers markets & CSAs and the growers who want to produce the volume to feed the wholesale market.
Lesson 2:

Honesty is the best policy

*If you don’t know- ask.

*Buyers *should* be your best teachers.
Lesson 3:
Start With What You Grow Well
(and like to grow)
Use Teamwork & Collaboration

- Identify supply opportunities
  - Consider crops, farmers, equipment, labor
  - Consider variety vs specialty production; compare demand with distance to market

- Pricing
  - Calculate costs of production
  - Conduct market research (surveys + comp shopping)
Lesson 4:

Survey Your Market

*Start Simple- What crops are they looking for?
*Protect the Community- have they talked to other farms about these crops this season?
*What price range can they generally pay?
*What weekly volume would they generally need?
Lesson 5:

Don’t Over-promise!

* Research if the acreage & labor can match the price range
* If so, follow up with what harvest window you expect to be able to deliver these items
* Also confirm in advance: weekly harvest volume, variety preferences, packaging needs
Lesson 6:

Make a Realistic Schedule

*Advanced Notice
*Pricing Check-in
*Availability Notification
*Order Deadline
*Confirming Orders
*Delivery Days/Times
*Payment Terms
Lesson 7:

Be ready for anything… and persist!

* Anticipate and Over-communicate Problems
* Crop Surprises—deal ASAP!
* Errors—deal ASAP!
Lesson 8:
The “little things” are very, very big

* Host farm tours
  * Visit the warehouse and stores, talk to all depts/levels
  * Offer ads/sales
  * Thank them for support in terms of $$
  * Offer to conduct marketing demos
Lesson 9:
Recognize we’re building a movement and changing a system

* Typical business rules don’t always apply
* Typical farming rules don’t always apply
* Keep in mind all of the components of a LFS
Lesson 10:

Surround yourself with people you like and trust

* Integrity is especially important in a value-based business