

North Country Regional Foods Initiative

www.nnyregionallocalfoods.org



Research Report on the Impacts of Local and Regional Foods in the Adirondack-North Country Region:

IV Conclusions and Recommendations

A. Overview

This final section of the *Research Report on the Impacts of Local and Regional Foods in the Adirondack-North Country Region* presents recommendations related to a study of **local/regional foods operations and the organizations that support them** in Northern New York.^{1,2} It is focused specifically on *strategies for addressing challenges and capitalizing on opportunities for enhancing local/regional food businesses and the ways these businesses contribute to broader community and economic development goals in the region.* The recommendations come from a combination of sources including: (1) *the farm/food business operators/owners and local/regional foods organizational representatives interviewed during the study*; (2) *ideas shared during the North Country Regional Foods Initiative's April 18, 2008 conference for community and economic developers on The Role of Adirondack North Country Foods in Community & Economic Development*; and (3) *the experiences of the research team members, all of whom work to strengthen farm and food businesses in Northern New York.* There are many New York farmers who are interested in direct marketing and local/regional foods. Furthermore, there are many consumers who are interested in knowing where and how their food is produced. The overall goal of this research is to better understand and document the impacts this type of production and marketing has on individual farms and food businesses, and the roles these businesses and markets play in Adirondack-North Country community and economic development. Community leaders are also exploring ways to support these local/regional food businesses, wanting to

¹ The North Country Regional Food Initiative is a one year project dedicated to understanding economic and social impacts of local and regional food initiatives in the Adirondack-North Country and enhancing the ways these initiatives positively contribute to the region. The project is a collaborative effort of the seven Cornell Cooperative Extension Associations of Northern New York (Clinton, Essex, Franklin, Hamilton, Jefferson, Lewis and St. Lawrence counties) and the Community and Rural Development Institute (CaRDI) at Cornell University.

² Although we recognize that "local" and "regional" food systems are not necessarily the same thing and in many, if not most, cases are very different, we couple the words "local" and "regional" herein and throughout the *Research Report on the Impacts of Local and Regional Foods in the Adirondack-North Country Region* for the following reasons: (1) Given the relative size of the Adirondack-North Country region, even a regional food system is relatively local, particularly in comparison to regional foodsheds that encompass multiple states (e.g. the Northeast Region); (2) Many communities in Northern NY border another state or another country, for people living in these communities, depending on whether or not "local" and "regional" are defined by distance or political boundaries, a distance that is local is literally local and regional at the same time (e.g.: When a NY consumer purchases apples from a Canadian orchard 12 miles away, it is a local purchase in terms of distance, though a regional purchase in terms of political boundaries.); and (3) An overarching goal of the NCRFI is to cultivate a regional approach to economic and community development - this goal is based on the understanding that communities conserve resources and gain assets by working together regionally. However, shifting from a "local" to a "regional" approach is not necessarily intuitive; by coupling "local" and "regional" we hope to cultivate a paradigm shift, one in which one's locality is seen in regional terms.

capitalize on ways they can benefit communities. With the goal of helping this region better support farm and food businesses utilizing local and regional markets and enhance the positive ways these businesses contribute to the region, the results of this analysis are intended as a resource for other farmers, food business owners/operators, consumers, policymakers and community & economic developers working to enhance and sustain agriculture in Northern New York.

B. Recommendations

Specific to enhancing food and farm businesses

Improve farmer collaboration

- Establish a regional network of farmers for communication, buying cooperatively, mentoring one another, and education; include a newsletter.
- Develop sources of funding to support mentoring programs and study groups.

Improve farmers' access to information and resources

- Use the Cornell Small Farms Program publication "Guide to Farming in NY" to develop a farmer-accessible guide to regionally specific information on resources for:
 - Insurance
 - Financing
 - Professional development/professional associations
 - Marketing
 - Enterprise analysis
 - Equipment and supplies
- Look into travel stipends and scholarships for farmers to attend conferences outside of the region, include money to attend trainings/events in grant budgets.
- Adapt or create revolving loans and micro loan opportunities for farmers to access capital for short term or smaller sums.

Build regional infrastructure for distribution and processing

- Create a task force of representatives from the six northern counties to specifically look at regional infrastructure needs for local/regional products and devise options to address them:
 - Production
 - Processing
 - Grading
 - Transportation/Distribution
 - Handling
 - Storage

Specific to enhancing community and economic development through local/regional foods

Identify shared goals and develop a collaborative regional model to achieve them

- Establish a regional network of organizations working in support of local/regional agriculture and broader community food issues; share regular communications of related local and statewide

organizations, programs and policy issues via cce-nnylocalregionalfoods-l list serve; and host annual meetings (consider a combination of venues/technologies to achieve this).

- Identify mutual and individual benefits to be achieved through regional collaboration, including long and short term objectives.
- Strengthen existing local/regional food organizations by including representatives on community and economic development boards, planning boards and committees.
- Conversely, be sure that local/regional food related issues are taken to community and economic development arenas, as well as placed on local legislative agendas.

Connect local and regional food markets to broader community and economic development initiatives

- Further link tourism and agriculture - support food, farm products and farms themselves as part of regional identity, history, arts and culture.
- Help tourism businesses (e.g. restaurants/hotels) understand the potential value of working with local/regional food businesses, given consumer interest in regionally produced products.
- Include diverse farming options in promoting business development (including recruiting new farmers) within the region.
- Explore the local/regional food network and related activities with local officials and community and economic developers as a model of or, even a means to, regional collaboration to achieve other community and economic development goals.

Support local, state and national policies that encourage local and regional food production, marketing and sales

- Support training for planning boards on agricultural issues including agricultural districts and farmland protection.
- Raise awareness of policies that impact local/regional food and farm issues.

Specific to enhancing both businesses and communities

Highlight successes

- Identify and share examples of successful individual local/regional food enterprises and collaborative businesses (cooperatives, distribution systems, processing centers), both from within and outside of the region and state with area farmers/food entrepreneurs. Use these as models/guides or mentors for area farmers. Include thorough enterprise analysis and business information as part of learning guide.
- Identify and share examples of public support for successful local/regional food initiatives with municipal, county and regional leaders.

Educate Consumers on...

- New and changing farm enterprises
- Nutritional information relating to local/regional foods
- Connections between health, diet, and local/regional foods
- Connections between local/regional foods and community and economic development opportunities

Conduct further research to further our understanding of

- The overall economic impact of local/regional food businesses in the region
- The market potential for local/regional foods

C. Conclusions

The North Country Regional Foods Initiative research highlights the multitude of models and ideas underway in the Adirondack-North Country region for furthering a sustainable local/regional food and agricultural system. It is evident that direct market farmers and those using regional identity marketing are building on an agricultural tradition in the Adirondack-North Country that emphasizes the social and ecological, as well as economic, contributions that farms, food businesses, and their owners/operators make to their communities.³ These business people are working to attain a quality of life for themselves in a way that also lends itself to building trust and confidence in their products among their customers and neighbors, and intentionally contributes to the communities and region they share.

The farmers, food business owners/operators, and organizational representatives interviewed for this work as well as conference presenters and participants at the April 18th, 2008 event in Tupper Lake, NY recognize the potential for and the hard work involved in re-establishing a regional food system. Agriculture and farming are an integral part of life in Northern NY, for those pursuing farming as a livelihood and for consumers interested in reconnecting with their food sources. Communities also benefit from these pursuits. The research and recommendations referred to throughout this report are intended to help create a regional environment wherein these related goals - production for local/regional food markets, consumption of locally and regionally produced foods, and community and economic development - can be achieved.

As Extension professionals we look forward to working together, in a regional partnership, with Northern New York communities, to support the pursuit and achievement of these goals.

³To learn more about these businesses refer to the Research Briefs in Section III of this report at: www.nnyregionallocalfoods.org.

Prepared for the North Country Regional Food Initiative by Katherine Lang (Cornell Cooperative Extension) & Heidi Mouillesseaux-Kunzman (Community and Rural Development Institute), Cornell University. For full report visit www.nnyregionallocalfoods.org.

Funding for the North Country Regional Foods Initiative is from the U.S. Department of Commerce through the Economic Development Administration University Center designated for New York State at Cornell University and hosted by Cornell's Community and Rural Development Institute (CaRDI). For more information on CaRDI, contact Rod Howe, (607) 255-2170, rlh13@cornell.edu or visit www.cardi.cornell.edu. To learn more about the North Country Regional Foods Initiative Project, contact Bernadette Logozar (518) 483-7403 or Heidi Mouillesseaux-Kunzman at (607) 255-0417.



Cornell University
Cooperative Extension



Cornell Cooperative Extension provides equal program and employment opportunities.