

NORTH COUNTRY REGIONAL FOODS INITIATIVE*

Fact Sheet 2: Local Food and Agriculture Trends



Photo by D. Hickey

Adirondack-North Country Local Food and Agriculture Trends

Using USDA Census of Agriculture data we can generate indicators or benchmarks which help us see trends in the viability and growth or decline of local food and agriculture production.

Local Food Producers and Sales on the Rise in the Region

The number of local food producers and their sales have experienced dramatic growth in the Adirondack-North Country[†]. While the total number of farms declined between 1997 and 2002 in the region (the latest period we have USDA Census of Agriculture data), the number of farmers selling direct-to-consumer (“D2C”) grew 15% (see Tables 1 and 2). Anecdotal evidence suggests that this growth has continued since 2002.

Table 1. Number of All Farms in Region

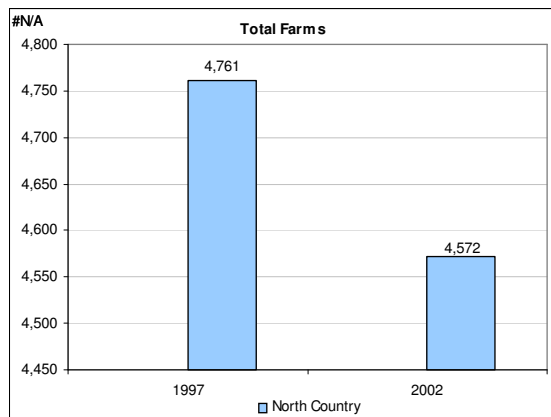
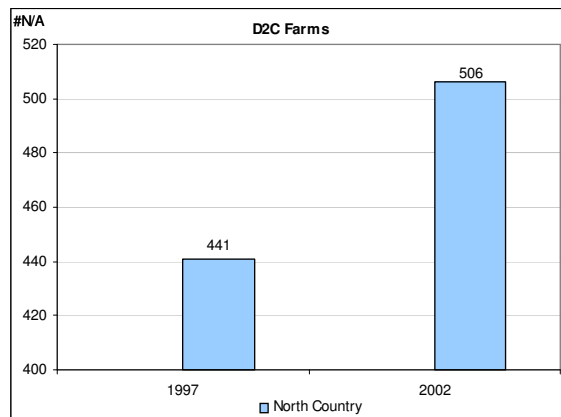


Table 2. Number of Local Food Producers



There are perhaps several reasons for this growth trend. For example, farmers in the region might see direct marketing of fresh and value-added products as a source of additional income to offset potential losses on commodity products. There is also a growing number of new farmers who find direct marketing (e.g. in farmers’ markets) a low cost and low risk entry into agriculture. In 2002, the Adirondack-North Country had a larger share of D2C farmers than New York State as a whole (11.7% versus 10% respectively) and the growth rate in the number of D2C farms is faster than the State as well.

Local Food Sales

D2C producers in Adirondack-North Country sold almost \$3.5 million in food directly to residents and visitors in 2002. This represents a near doubling (83% increase) over the 1997 figure of \$1.89 million (see Table 3.).

* 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 or rlh13@cornell.edu, or visit www.oed.cornell.edu. To learn more about the North Country Regional Foods Initiative Project, contact Katherine Lang at 315-379-9192 x261, or Heidi Mouillesseaux-Kunzman at 607-255-0417.

† Adirondack North Country (or North Country) includes Lewis, Jefferson, St. Lawrence, Franklin, Hamilton, Clinton, and Essex Counties.

Table 3. D2C Sales, 1997 and 2002

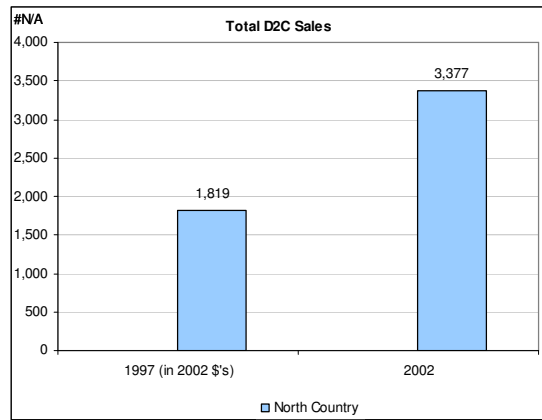
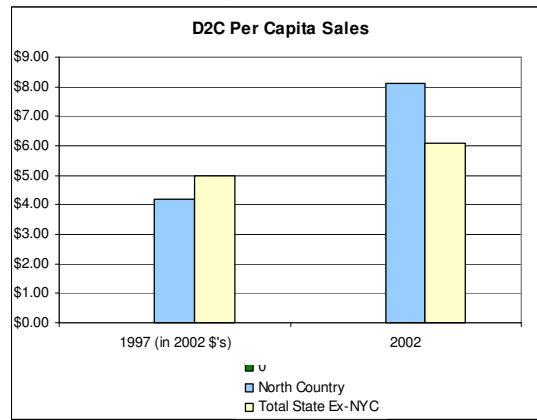


Table 4. Per Capita D2C Sales



Furthermore, per capita direct-to-consumer sales in the region grew at a faster rate than the state as a whole from about \$4 to \$8. This figure may rise even further between 2002 and the 2007 census currently taking place.

Local Food Share of Total North Country Grocery Purchases and Total Agricultural Sales

A valuable way to understand the scale of local food is in the context of its share of total grocery purchases and total agricultural sales in the region (see Tables 5 and 6). In 2002, D2C sales were a little over one-half of one percent (.59%) of total groceries purchased by residents of the Adirondack North Country. It should be noted that this share is larger than the state as a whole and grew faster than the state as a whole between 1997 and 2002.

Table 5. D2C Sales, 1997 and 2002

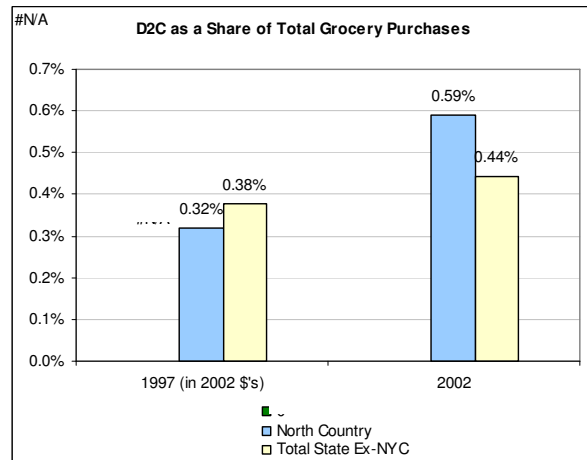
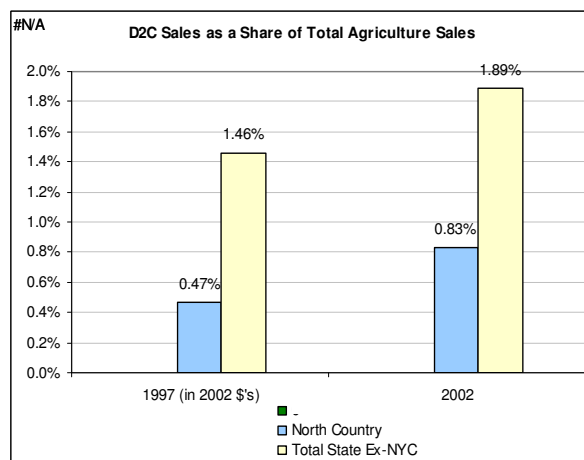


Table 6. Per Capita D2C Sales



However local food's share of the region's total agricultural sales is a different story. While D2C sales constituted 1.89% of total agricultural sales in New York State in 2002, they were less than one-percent of total agricultural sales in the Adirondack-North Country region (.83%).

Conclusion

Local food production, as measured by USDA Census of Agriculture data on direct-to-consumer sales between 1997 and 2002, is in a growth phase in the Adirondack-North Country. Most indicators point to robust growth when compared to the state as a whole. However, the data also indicate that local food production (i.e. direct-to-consumer sales) is a tiny fraction of the overall agriculture and food system and there is much room for continued growth. The indicators presented in this fact sheet may be generated for future comparison using 2007 Census of Agriculture data to measure if the growth trend in D2C farms and sales continues.