



## **North Georgia Local Food and Local Farms**

*Helping to grow North Georgia's local food and farm economy*

The farming tradition in Georgia dates back over two centuries with agricultural production playing a dominant role in Georgia's economic history. The North Georgia Region, home to 14,839 farms on nearly 1.5 million acres of farmland, is a living legacy of Georgia's farming tradition and heritage. Though North Georgia is one of the top poultry producers in the country, and farm receipts exceeded \$2.8 billion dollars in 2007 (the most recent year of the United States Department of Agriculture's Census), the area has seen a steady decline in the number of farms and farmland over the past decade. The majority of the regions farms are smaller family farms of 10 to 180 acres and the long term sustainability of these smaller farms depends on their ability to compete in the marketplace and attract customers.

A bright spot for these family farms lies in the rise in popularity of local food and farm products, which can provide an avenue for increased profits and lower production and distribution costs for farmers. By expanding local markets for local farm products, local markets can both increase the value of farm products—by enabling farmers to earn a premium for locally grown foods—and reduce total costs by shortening the transaction chain between farmers and end consumers. There is potentially more demand than supply for many types of food that are produced by North Georgia farmers. Many residents, businesses, and organizations indicate a desire for more locally grown food than they can currently buy. Based on 2012 population estimates, the residents of North Georgia spent \$418 on fruits and vegetables while North Georgia farms grew the equivalent of just over \$100 million worth of fruits and vegetables.

### **WHAT RESIDENTS HAVE TO SAY**

North Georgia residents' desire for local food can be seen in the results of a 2013 survey conducted by ASAP (Appalachian Sustainable Agriculture Project). A total of 741 area residents participated in an online survey asking about their perceptions of local food and farms, views and values related to local agriculture, and local food purchasing habits. The results show that North Georgia residents value local food; they believe buying locally contributes to the local economy and helps to support local farms. They also value local because it's "fresher," "healthier," and "buying local food, services, and retail benefits the local economy and our future viability."

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In addition to stated preferences for local foods, the survey results show that there is already an abundance of local food purchasing already happening in the region. Of the 741 participants who responded to the survey, 69 percent said they purchase local food at farmers markets, 53 percent purchase local food from roadside stands, and 43 percent said they purchase local foods from grocery stores. Survey participants also expressed interest in having local food available in other community locations including restaurants (96 percent), public schools (92 percent), and hospitals (88 percent). Overall, the survey demonstrates that high levels of demand exist for local food in North Georgia.

### WHAT YOU CAN DO

While residents who participated in the community survey expressed their support of local food in their communities, they also showed a desire for more locations where they could purchase locally grown food, and an interest in a greater variety of local products. Whether you are a professional working directly with farmers, a government official, or a local food advocate, there are many ways that you can support the growth of local food in North Georgia:

- **Support direct-to-consumer outlets:** Promote and support local farms by shopping at local farmers markets, roadside stands, or by purchasing a CSA share.
- **Connect with local food efforts:** Reach out to local food and farm advocacy groups in your community to learn about the particular sets of challenges local farms face, and ways that you can help. Offer to volunteer for special events or to conduct outreach into the community.
- **Ask for local products:** Let your local grocer, your favorite restaurant, or the cafeteria manager at your office know that you would like to have local food options available.
- **Support business that support local:** Patronize restaurants, caterers, grocers, and other food businesses that use local farm products, and tell the owners that you choose to patronize their establishment because of their support for local food and farms.
- **Outreach to you friends and local community:** Identify yourself as a local food and farm advocate in the broader community.
- **Visit a local farm:** Reconnect with how your food is grown and who is growing it in your community.

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