

North Georgia Local Food Stakeholder Forum

November 12, 2013, Rome-Floyd County ECO Center, Rome, Georgia



Local Food Panel Speakers

Keith Clark: wromeiga@hotmail.com

Mr. Clark is the owner of West Rome IGA, an independent grocery store, www.westromeiga.com. Originally from Anniston AL, Keith started working in a family "country store" around the age of 6. He attended the University of Alabama, graduating with a degree in Marketing and Management. He attended the Food Marketing Institute and has enjoyed a 34 year career in both the wholesale and retail segments of the grocery business. Keith worked for several Fortune 500 Food Wholesalers and Retailers throughout the southeast in a variety of positions before purchasing West Rome IGA 6 years ago.

- How should local be defined- 100 miles? 50 miles? Within County borders?
- Best practices- as a local independent grocery within an informal network, he can work with many farmers
- Building a local network with farmers is a need.
- Retailer must know from farmer what local produce will be available so they can price, market, advertise.
- Consumer education is needed to help customers prepare and cook fresh produce and meats. Keith gave an example of a customer, a young woman in her mid-twenties who asked, "I'd like to cook with this fresh food, but how do I do that? My mother used to do this but I don't know how."
- He would like to have a permanent Locally Grown section for local farmers' produce in his store.
- There is a need for a farmers Coop- Georgia Grown, Kentucky's Best as examples.

- Discussed retail price v. true cost of food. Prices of food grown on large scale farms may be lower than locally-grown, but the lower price may be due to subsidies as well as scale of production.

Patricia Gladney: farmersfreshfood@yahoo.com

Ms. Gladney is the manager of the Farmers Fresh Community Supported Agriculture (CSA), <http://farmersfreshcsa.com>. Farmers Fresh CSA is an independent for profit business which works directly with over 50 local farms, ranches, dairies and food artisans to help market/promote local agriculture and sustainable/organic growing practices. Farmers Fresh CSA operates a year round weekly CSA program that

delivers to the Atlanta area as well as a daily market and Farm to Fork deli located in downtown Carrollton.



- Do we truly appreciate the value and the labor that goes into food, and do prices reflect that true cost?
- Her experience was that growing food is labor intensive; her wages as a farmer were \$4.00/hr.
- Community Supported Agriculture helps fund, gather and distribute locally grown food in a convenient way to make farming sustainable.
- Farm to Fork Deli and value-added food processing operation were added to the successful Farmers Fresh CSA to utilize unsold

produce.

- Local chicken, dairy, meats are very needed, but regulations make it difficult.

Matt Granados: matt@localvendorscoalition.org

Mr. Granados is the founder and president of Local Vendors Coalition, connecting farmers and growers with the restaurant and retail community. Local Vendors Coalition, <http://localvendorscoalition.org>, brings local growers together to aggregate produce to sell to restaurants and retail outlets, giving vendors and buyers one portal to sell or purchase fruits and produce. Local Vendors Coalition meets logistical and liability insurance requirements and provides a list of in-demand produce for growers to target their production, or add on to what they are currently growing to increase local sales.

- Presented the value of retail versus wholesale prices and the end profit to the grower.
- Are farmers and growers currently running a sustainable operation for the long term?
- His model is an example of how to reach out to farmers- identify those you know, seek them out, contact others, work with the farmer.
- There is massive risk in farming.
- The systems for sustaining farm operations are in place.



Michelle Moran: harvestonmain@gmail.com

Ms. Moran is the co-owner of Harvest on Main, a Farm to Fork restaurant in Blue Ridge, Georgia. Michelle is also the Farm Director of the Cooks Farm in Blue Ridge which includes a cooking school, kids farm-to-fork camp, and sustainable living educational center. Harvest on Main <http://harvestonmain.com> features a nationally recognized chef, and relies on local farmers and seasonal ingredients whenever possible. Local farmers and growers include The Cook's Farm, Logan Turnpike Mill, Mercier Orchards, Brasstown Beef, Bramlett Farm Trout, Riverview Farms, Walt Taylor of Paw Paw's Produce. Moran and her partner Danny Mellman introduced the Blue Ridge Grocery (a café and market) in spring 2013, featuring fresh baked breads, locally roasted coffee and featuring products from local artisans from Nora Mills Granary to Pure Kneads and Arden's Garden. The grocery also offers its customers a CSA, developed by Ms. Moran with Grandma Brock's Farm in Rabun County.

- Marketing and advertising are key.
- Staying in touch with local farmers, predicting what they will provide and when, is difficult.
- It is difficult to communicate a need for a consistent, predictable supply of local food.
- She began growing a small garden for the restaurant.
- She provides cooking classes and community education efforts which contribute to the restaurant and to the community.
- Many practical experiences and lessons learned.
- She desires to reach out to local farmers and growers, educators, community members to support local food efforts.



Local Food Stakeholder Forum Breakout Groups Discussion Results

Facilitators included Steven Thomas, Georgia Tech Research Institute- Food Processing Technology Division, Keith Clark, West Rome IGA, and Bryan Hager, Crager/Hager Farm.

Participants discussed goals, barriers, and action steps related to the following questions: **Question 1:** How do we educate customers about local food? And **Question 2:** How do we

make sure farmers have the training, assistance, and connections they need to access local market opportunities?



Question 1: How do we educate customers about local food?

Goals:

- Improve Health Outcomes for Customers
- Benefit the Local Economy and our Neighbors
- Develop an appreciation of food and for the eating experience- “Real and Local”
- Personal interaction with growers, chefs
- Raising the profile of Local Growers through media, marketing
- “Georgia Grown” Brand recognition for consumers

Steps:

- What selling points are most relevant for local food?
 - Health benefits
 - Supporting local community and economy
 - Freshness
- Utilize all media:
 - “Newspaper Stories” featuring local growers
 - Co-marketing with Big Retail to take advantage of marketing efforts “Ads, Radio, TV and online”
 - Identify and enlist Social Media opinion leaders “Facebook, Twitter” for younger generation
 - Heritage Radio
 - Websites/Food Blogs
- Give samples so people can see the benefits- Farmers Markets, CSAs
- Support and promote Farm to School programs
- Utilize schools as a resource for consumer education, ex. Farm tours



- Marketing- labels for specific farms, as in Europe
- Chef demos
- Partner with Cooperative Extension services, USDA Rural Development and NRCS, Georgia Dept of Agriculture, Georgia Dept of Economic Development
- Efforts must be done at a local scale. Define locally grown in community terms.

Question Two: How do we make sure farmers have the training, assistance, and connections they need to access local market opportunities?

Goals:

- Identify trusted local contacts with our farmers and growers in our communities
- Getting the word out among farmers and growers effectively- “Info outlets” and Trusted Sources
- Educating Farmers/Growers on benefits of social media
- Understand each other’s worlds- farmers, retailers, and restaurants

Barriers:

- Time for farmers to include educational opportunities in their busy schedules
- Lack of communication between groups of local growers

First Steps:

- Find the right person to connect with our farmers at the local level
- Crop planning with farmers and growers and restaurants, CSAs, farmers market, retail and distributors
- “Demo” farm with local growing interest- hands on learning, walk and learn
- Use Social Media
 - Facebook Growers Association Page: Know your Farmer- Focus on independence of growers
 - Target a Younger Audience
- Regarding additional markets:
 - What do farmers want to do?
 - Recognize that farmers may not be business men/women, they are independent

Resources, both available and/ or needed:

- UGA Extension
- UGA Small Business Development
- USDA Grant programs
- Georgia Department of Agriculture
- Georgia Department of Economic Development, Georgia Center of Innovation- Agribusiness
- Business development class for farming
- Mentoring programs

