

# ***The link between improving healthy food access and economic opportunity: challenges and opportunities***



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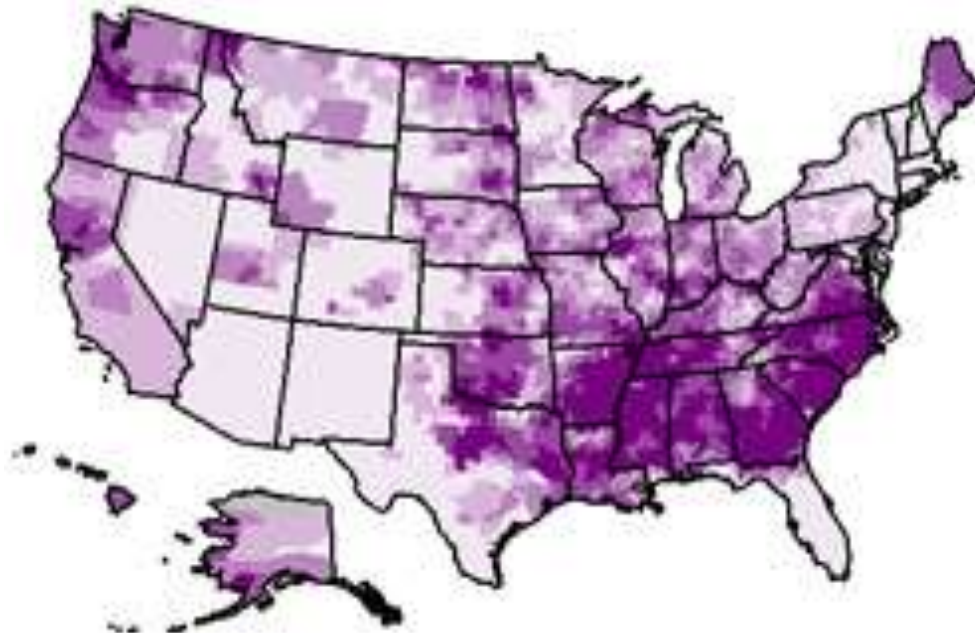
# Hunger and Health



- Limited access to healthy food - paradox:
  - Malnutrition: illness susceptibility, impaired learning
  - Obesity: filling up on cheap, high calorie food
- Both result in:
  - Increased chronic disease (cancer, diabetes, CVD)
    - ↓ work productivity -> ↑ absenteeism, presenteeism
  - Adverse community economic impact
    - Higher health care costs
    - Lower quality of life
    - Obesity rates discourage business relocation

# North Carolina

- 17<sup>th</sup> highest in adult obesity
- 11<sup>th</sup> highest in child food insecurity
- In the buckle of the stroke belt:



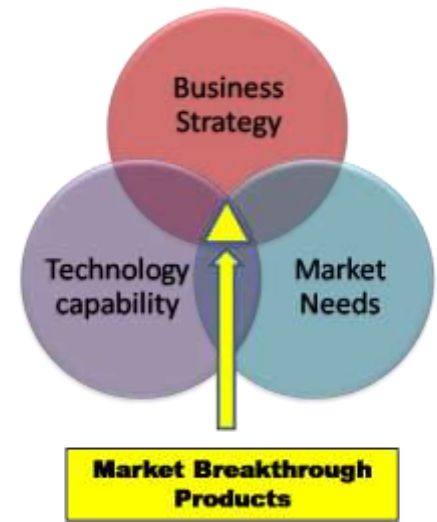
# North Carolina Farms

- Transitioning from tobacco
- Need new product and market opportunities
- Growing in interest in local food offers potential
- Despite being one of the most diverse agricultural states, much of the food we consume in NC comes from elsewhere
- Average age of NC farmers: 57





# Sweet Spot



- Increase healthy food access with NC grown crops
  - Fresh, wholesome, good tasting food
  - \$ stays in the state
  - Decreases transportation and storage costs
  - Reduces adverse environmental impact
  - Creates many opportunities for business expansion or start-ups to replace current inefficient systems or cross continental shipping (food hubs, value added processing, distribution, retail)



# Challenges



- Small to mid-size formerly tobacco dependent farms at greatest risk
  - NC has suffered among the most rapid farm loss in US
  - Don't need to replace big farms but need a fair chance
- Many zoning and food safety regulations are designed for large operations and pose major challenges to
  - Smaller farms
  - Community and urban agriculture
- Balancing act: fair return to farmers with affordable price to lower income consumers





# Leveraging federal food benefit programs



- SNAP (formerly Food Stamps) and WIC bring millions of dollars into the state that benefit NC farmers and retailers as well as recipients
- USDA child nutrition program (school breakfast and lunch)
  - Breakfast and summer programs significantly underutilized – much money left on the table
  - NCDA Farm to School program – unique service
    - Potential to expand to childcare and universities
- BUT If you sell or serve it “will they buy it, store it, cook it, and eat it?”
- DHHS/DPH programs and Cooperative Extension - critical coordinated statewide support to assure effective use of nutrition-related resources at the local level



# Opportunity: SNAP-Ed

- Funded by USDA to increase purchase and consumption of healthy food with SNAP dollars
- 2014 NC allocation - nearly \$3 million
  - This will more than double in the next 3 years
  - New guidelines for program allow multiple opportunities to encourage/facilitate use of NC grown foods (cooking classes, Farmer's market outreach, community gardens etc.)
- NC program would benefit from more partnerships with nutrition/agriculture-focused agencies. Recommend:
  - External advisory committee to work with DSS staff to:
    - Determine most appropriate administrative home
    - Create a state-wide plan for maximum use of SNAP-Ed dollars
    - Develop strategies to leverage new guidelines to better support the interface between healthy food access and NC agriculture





# Zoning opportunities and challenges



- Gardens (individual and community)
  - Promote community spirit and renewed skills/self-sufficiency... Victory Gardens come-back?
  - Kids who grow and cook their food are more likely to eat it
  - Often used to increase healthy food access
- Urban agriculture revitalizing inner-cities
  - Aquaculture and vegetables - integrated production
  - Urban farms combined with housing developments
- BUT- many zoning challenges
  - If land not zoned for gardens-> prohibited
  - Greenhouses and trellis' subject to building ordinances
  - Zoning/regulations often create barriers for small food businesses: farmer's markets, farm stands, food trucks



# Many entrepreneurial opportunities

- Food hubs
  - Warehouse to aggregate NC grown food, store, light prep, package, and ship out
    - Farm to school/hospital/worksite... “institution”
    - Supply Food banks, pantries, soups kitchens
- Farmers markets
  - Often increase revenue for neighboring businesses
  - SNAP (Food Stamps) can be used via EBT (electronic benefits transfer)
    - Of the 229 markets in NC << 1% of sales due to EBT
    - Other states doing much better
    - Need for a state level effort to provide TA re EBT transactions, marketing, outreach to SNAP consumers. Partnership developing
- Community supported agriculture/fisheries (CSAs/CSFs)
  - Don't forget seafood!



# Financing Food System Businesses

- Ultimately they must be self-sustaining, but businesses serving low income customers may need a jump start.
- Dept. of Commerce, foundations, other funders can put a priority on food system start-ups or business expansions
  - Small investment -> multiplier food system benefits
- Self-Help Credit Union headquartered in Durham, is one of the Country's leading community development lenders, making loans statewide and is actively working to make more capital available for this emerging market
- Food Trust – corner store initiatives and healthy food financing: Policies to increase healthy food access
- Businesses and philanthropies can offer “market matches” for CSAs/EBT use at Farmers Markets



# Small food retailers (Corner Stores) could help increase healthy food access if...

- Distribution systems deliver smaller volumes of produce (new business opportunity!)
- They can leverage federal food benefits
  - SNAP for prepared/frozen NC grown food products
  - WIC, including produce
  - Education and outreach through SNAP-Ed
- Creative and risk taking entrepreneurial strategies are supported with grants and loans





## **In summary we need to:**



- Support the sweet spot between healthy food access and NC agriculture in tackling food deserts
- Give smaller food and agriculture businesses a fair chance in terms of loans, regulation, and zoning
- Support start-up entrepreneurial efforts to rebuild local food economies
- Leverage federal food benefit dollars to increase healthy food access AND support local business
- Recognize the value & potential of southern food!

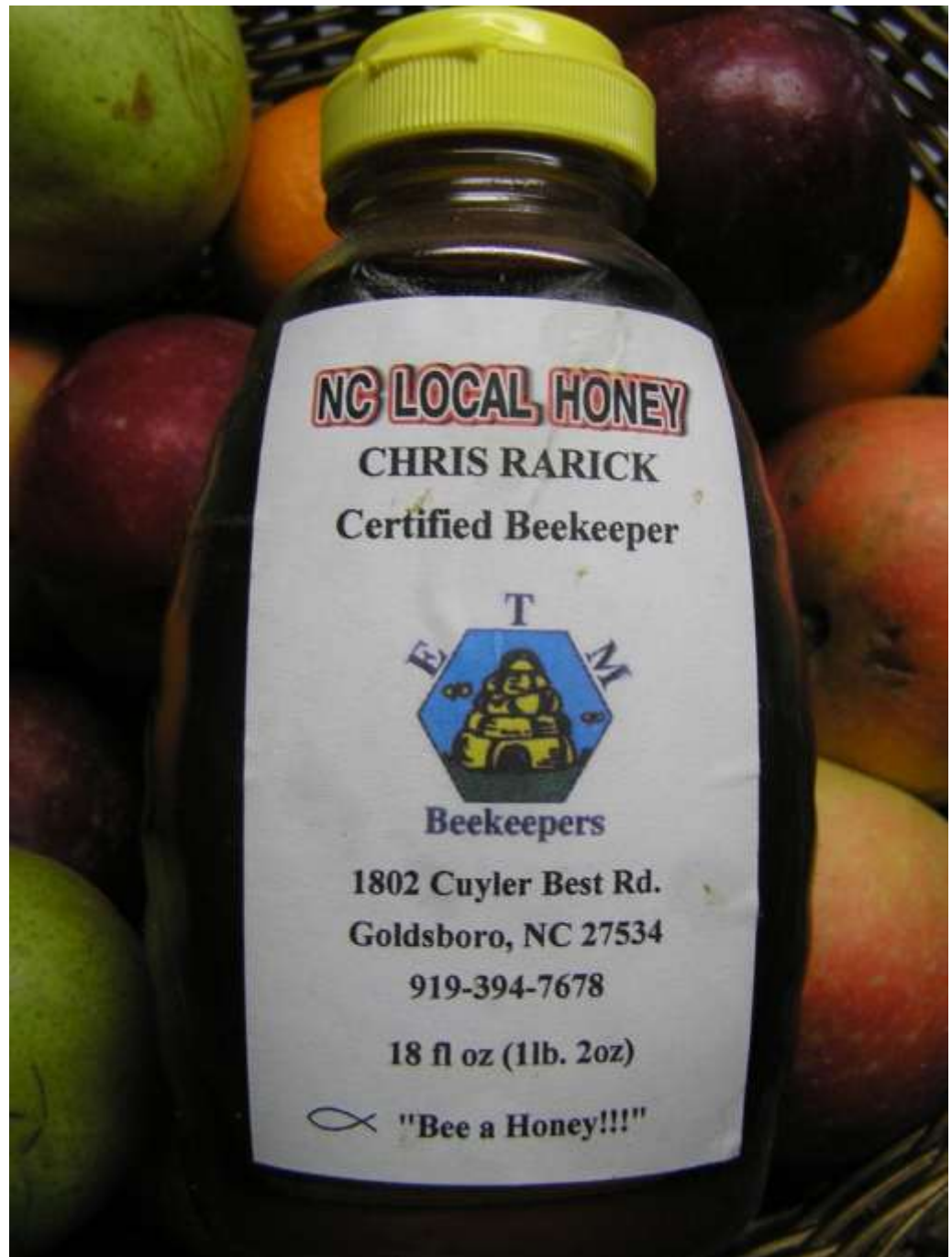


# Heart Healthy BBQ and Hush Puppies



85% approval  
rating

Creative marketing  
strategies are key to link  
obesity prevention with  
local food systems!



Credit to: Angeline Stuckman  
Aka Aunt Angie: 11/12/13-1/13/13