

Supporting Regional Farmers as a Rural Economic Development Strategy



Presentation Outline



- Overview of Food Systems Issues and Role of Regional Organizations



- Tom Elmore, Planning Consultant/Farmer
Land-of-Sky Regional Council and Thatchmore
Farm/Thatchmore Consulting (NC)



- Cheryal Lee Hills, Executive Director
Region Five Development Commission (MN)

About NADO



- National association for 520 regional development organizations (such as Councils of Governments, Regional Planning Commissions, Economic Development Districts)
- Promote public policies that strengthen local governments, communities and economies through regional solutions
- Develop training and research resources related to:
 - Rural/small metro transportation planning
 - Regional development, environmental stewardship, and brownfields redevelopment
 - Small business finance
 - Economic development planning
 - Post-disaster economic recovery

Public
Health

Equity

Transportation

Energy

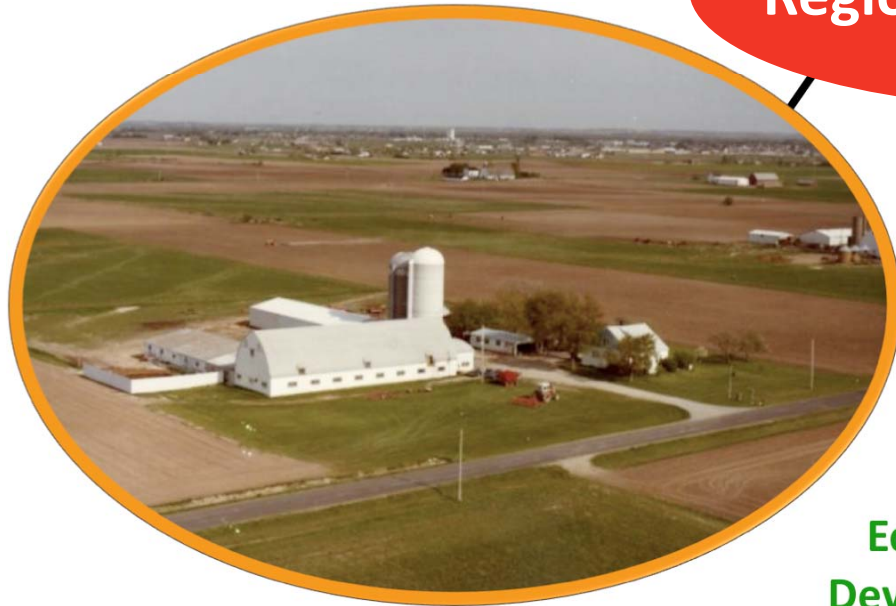
Food Safety

Regional Food Systems

Workforce
Development

Economic
Development

Land Use



Role of Regional Organizations

Regional Food Systems Infrastructure



In recent years, an emphasis on eating locally grown food has flourished. Amid concerns about the energy required to transport food around the globe, the environmental impacts of large-scale industrial farming operations, and food safety issues, many Americans have sought to direct more of their food-purchasing budget to producers located closer to home. Farmers markets, community-supported agriculture (CSA) programs, and efforts to strengthen connections between regional producers and consumers have grown exponentially to meet this demand; indeed, the number of farmers markets in the U.S. has more than tripled since 1994.¹

However, eating local is still a niche market. Even as households have increased purchases of locally produced items, large-scale institutions such as school districts, hospitals or supermarket chains

struggle to adapt their buying practices to support smaller suppliers. Significant barriers prevent small and mid-sized farmers and ranchers from connecting with the expanding base of consumers who seek locally grown food.

For example, many regions lack the transportation and distribution network required to support area producers. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, which has recently begun to emphasize the importance of connecting farmers with nearby markets through its “Know Your Farmer, Know Your Food” program, the number of slaughterhouses nationwide declined by more than half between 1992 and 2008. Simultaneously, the number of small farms has increased.²



December 2010

- Facilitate partnerships
- Corral resources
- Collect and analyze data
- Provide technical assistance
- Promote rural-urban connections

www.NADO.org

www.RuralTransportation.org

Audience Survey



- Planners
- Economic development practitioners
- Elected officials
- Federal agency staff
- Agricultural advisors
- Farmers
- Transportation professionals
- Others

Regional Economic Development for Agriculture

Tom Elmore
Land-of-Sky Regional Council
www.landofsky.org
thatchmorefarm.wordpress.com



Agricultural Economic Development

- Introductions
- The setting for agriculture in Region B
- A systems approach to ED
- Regional economic development organization role
- LOSRC activity supporting agriculture
- Activities by other organizations
- Future opportunities



Thatchmore Farm

- Ten acres in Leicester NC
- Karen, Liz and Tom
- Certified organic vegetables, fruit, and ornamentals
- About half family labor and half farm crew
- About 2/3 of our time produces about 1/3 of our income from the farm
- Outside work as teacher, student, and natural resources consultant













Land-of-Sky Regional Council

- Four counties in Western NC
- Predominantly rural but several cities
- Significant public land, mostly USFS
- 45 person staff
- Aging, volunteer, local government services, waster reduction and administration sections



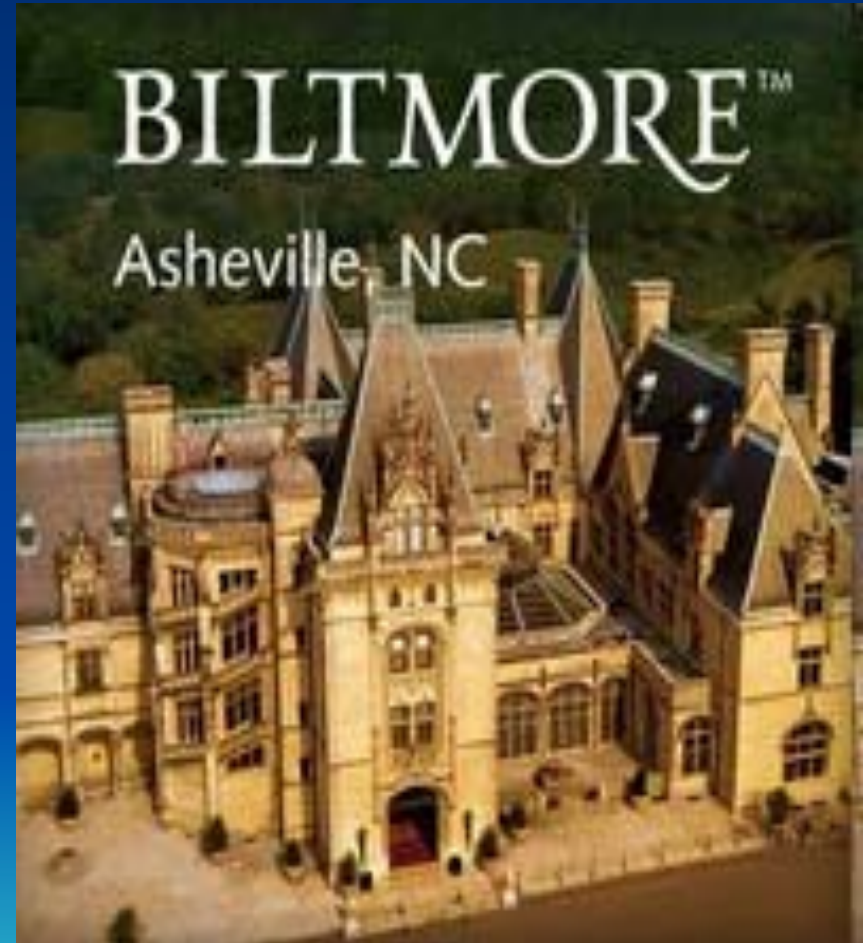
The Land-of-Sky Region

- Four counties in Western North Carolina
- Asheville is the largest city at 80,000
- Tourism, retirism, health care, manufacturing, construction, agriculture...
- Great Smokies Park, Blue Ridge Parkway
- Development boom in early 1900s
- High ratio of nonprofits to population

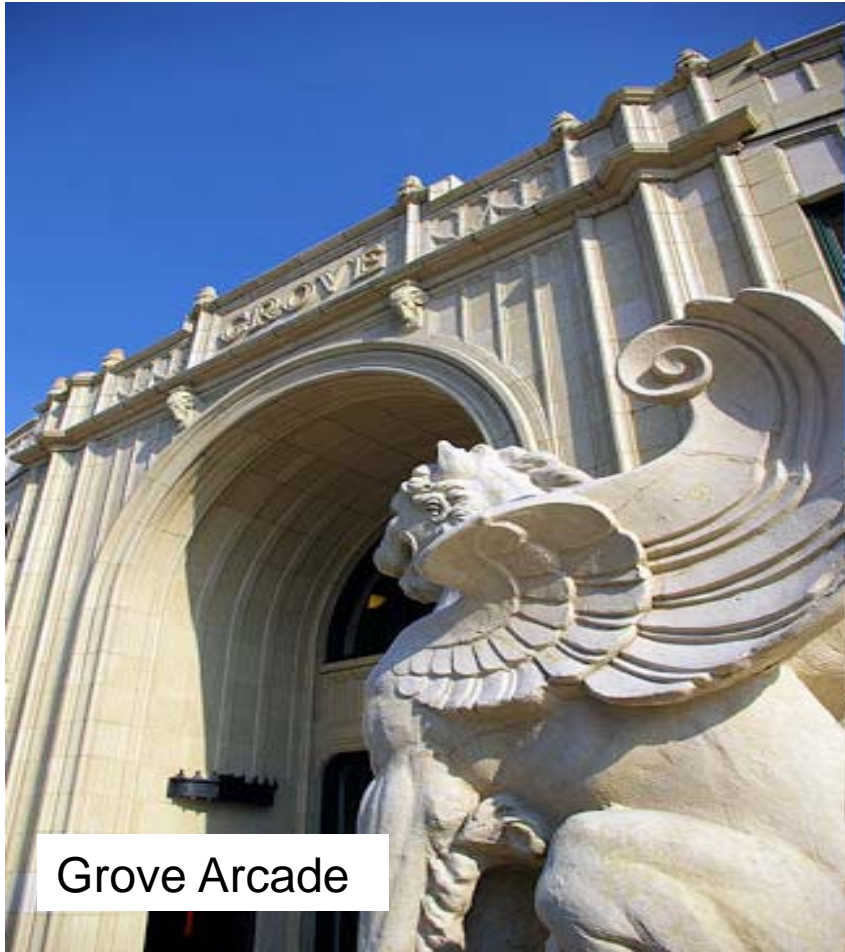


Vanderbilt Estate

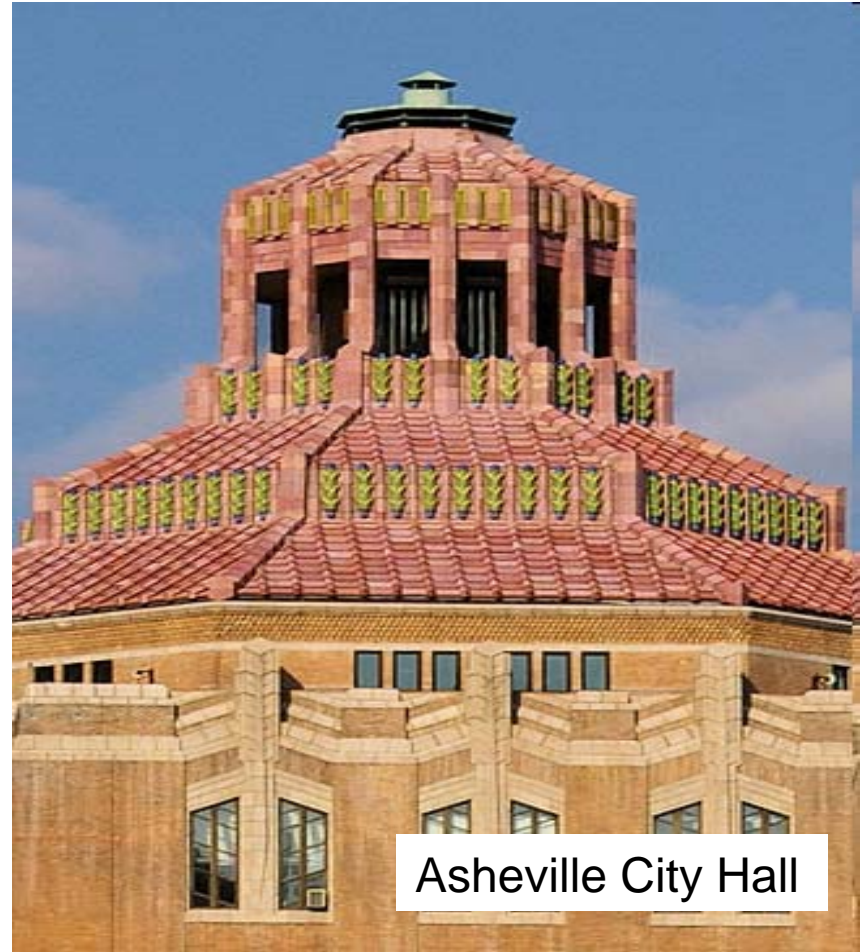
- Completed in 1895
- Grounds by Olmstead
- Hobby farm on a grand scale
- First US school of forestry
- Biltmore Dairy
- Skilled workers stayed



Architecture in Asheville



Grove Arcade



Asheville City Hall

Subsistence Farming Tradition

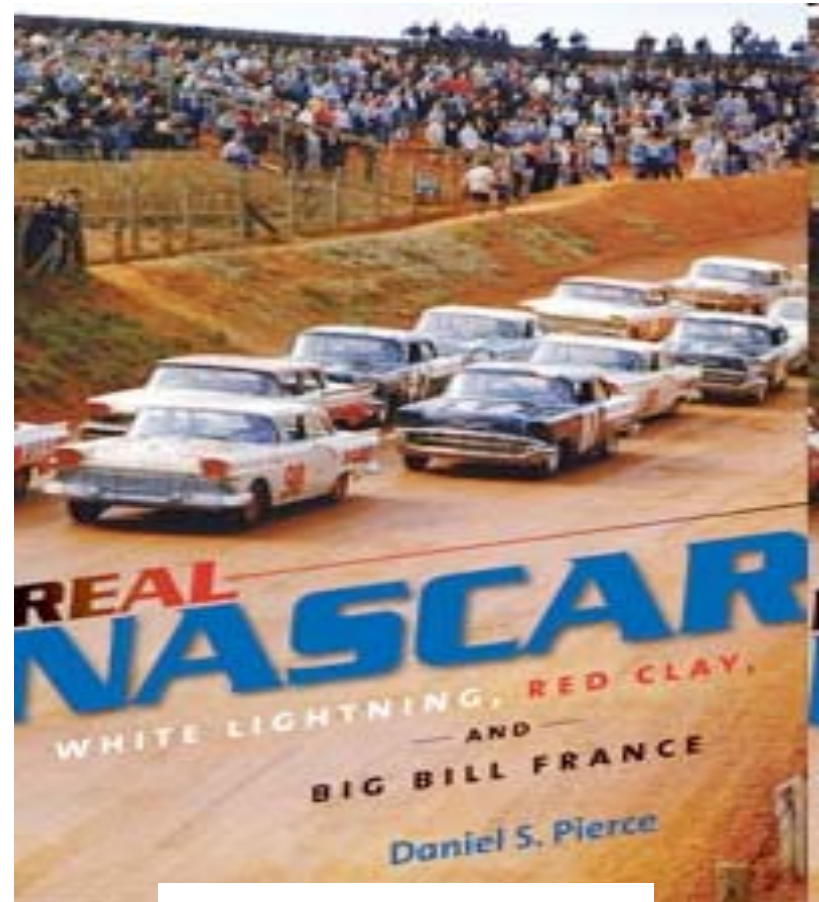
- Scotch Irish Settlers
- Traditional distrust of government
- Poor transportation for cash crops
- Limited flat land
- Led to first value added crop



Moonshine and Stock Cars



Source: A Guide to Moonshine



Source: Dan Pierce

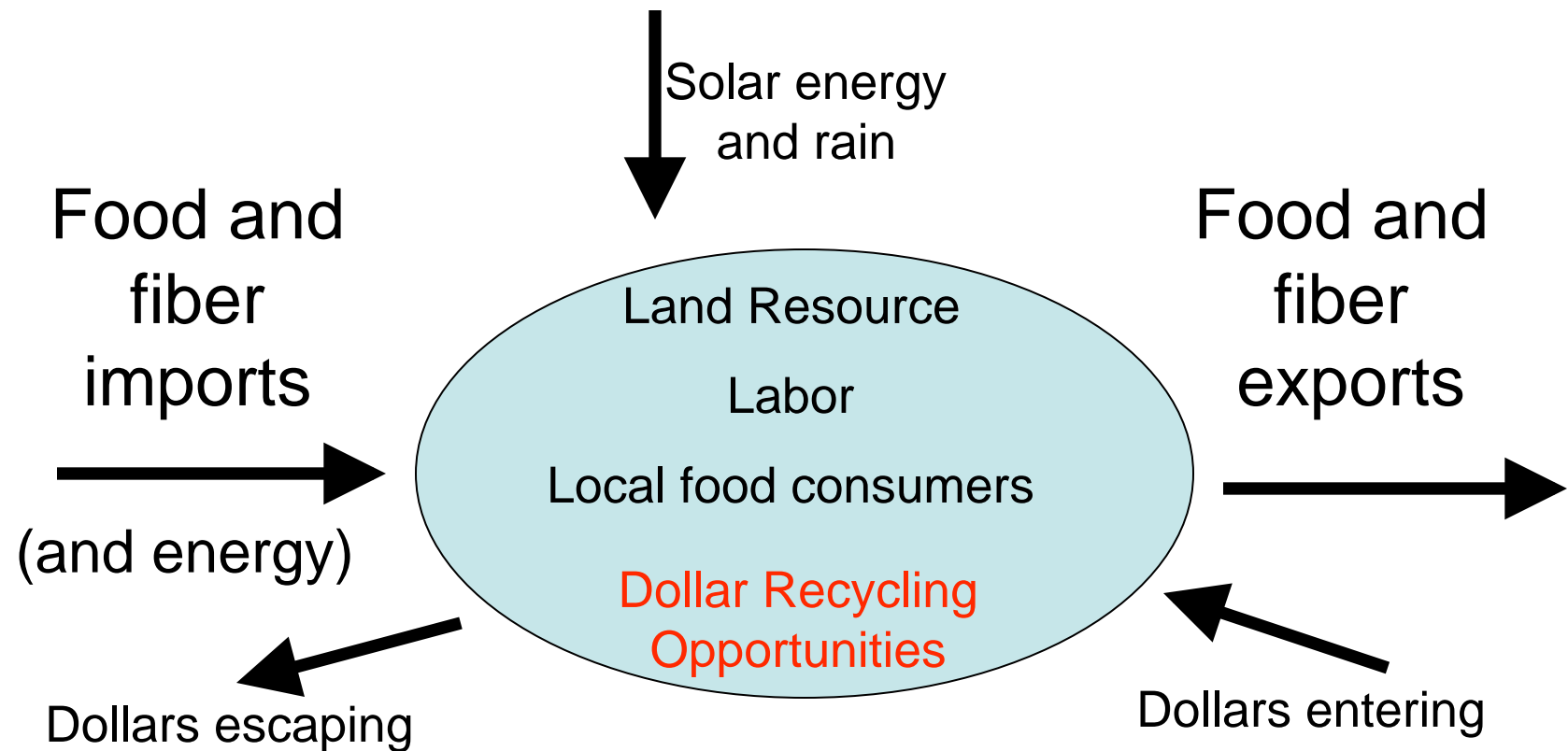
WNC Ag Economy

- 12,212 farms averaging 85 acres.
- \$543 million of farm commodities sold
- Potatoes, hay, poultry, corn, cattle, milk, apples
- 101 organic farms - \$425,000 (0.1%)
- 0.6% of food sold direct in WNC
- About 5% of food sales are local

Source: Ken Meter, Crossroads Resource Center for ASAP (2002)



Regional Economic System



Agricultural Needs

- Land
- Entrepreneurial management
- Trained workforce
- Infrastructure
- Capital
- Customers
- Similar to other businesses?





Agricultural Problems

- Intergenerational transition (land at risk)
- Public policy to keep food prices low
- Difficult to enter at a small scale
- Overlooked by some economic developers
- Agricultural support organizations are cash strapped and sometimes lack an integrated approach
- Food safety hurdles for value added products



Solving Entry Problems: Blue Ridge Food Ventures



Photo: Asheville Citizen Times

Regional Council Assets

- Strengths
 - Access to policy makers
 - Planners and communicators
 - Problem solvers
 - Fewer turf issues
 - Long term perspective
 - Economic development experience
- Weaknesses
 - Production and technical knowledge
 - Familiarity with markets
 - Communication with producers
 - No ongoing budget for agricultural work



Regional Councils as Catalysts

- Convener role
- Facilitator skills
- Grant seeking and management
- Translate agricultural issues for a broader audience
- Demonstrate emerging concepts, institutionalize, and move on



LOSRC Working Lands Program

- Henderson County Plan Ag. Chapter
- Survey of economic development approaches for agriculture (>200 +)
- Facilitation for agricultural groups
- Herbs for Commerce dryer funding
- Farm Prosperity Project
- WNC Livestock Market support
- WNC Forest Products Co-op Marketing



Herbs for Commerce Project



Source: http://www.ces.ncsu.edu/fletcher/programs/herbs/pdf/herb_dryer_leaflet.pdf



Farm Prosperity Project



William Hamilton

Farmland Protection Specialist

Source: Southern Appalachian Highlands Conservancy

WNC Livestock Market



Forest Products Cooperative Marketing Project





Photo by Ian Snider

Other Local Food Efforts

- Appalachian Sustainable Agriculture Project (asapconnections.org)
- Blue Ridge Food Ventures shared use kitchen
- Mountain Horticultural Crops Research and Extension Center
- Asheville Foodtopia Campaign





Source: Buncombe Co Tourism Development Authority

Local Food Education

- Warren Wilson College Sustainable Ag Program
- UNC-Asheville Food Cluster
- UNCA Farmland Values Project
- NC Cooperative Extension Vegetable School, Apple School and field days
- Mountain Biz Works business training
- CFSA Sustainable Agriculture Conference
- Organic Growers School CRAFT





Organic Growers School CRAFT Program
www.organicgrowersschool.org/content/1874

Local Food Businesses

- Mountain Food Products
- Leading Green Distributing
- Carolina Organic Growers Marketing Coop
- WNC Farmers Market (NC Dept of Agriculture)
- Many buyers through ASAP Local Food Guide



Many Tailgate Markets



ASAP at asapconnections.org



- Regional branding
- Local food guide
- Bumper stickers
- Farm to School
- Growing Minds Prog.
- Mixing Bowl guide
- Business consulting
- Marketing Grants

Regional Opportunities

- Woody biomass – sustainable fuels
- Political middle ground in uncertain times
- Local food sales support
 - CSA promotion example – ASAP
 - Foothills Connect example
 - Foothills Family Farms example
- Nutrition/Obesity Initiatives
- Microlending/revolving fund (kiva.org)



Final Suggestions

- Start with the big picture (what's needed?)
- Get farmer opinions
- Consult agricultural advisors
- Recognize resource strain in ag agencies
- Bring funding to the conversation
- ID problem, solve it, and move on
- Enjoy the fruits of your work first hand





Thanks for your time

Contact Information:

Land-of-Sky Regional Council
Working Lands Program

www.landofsky.org

Erica Anderson (828) 251-6622

Tom Elmore

thatchmore@main.nc.us (828)683-1180

thatchmorefarm.wordpress.com



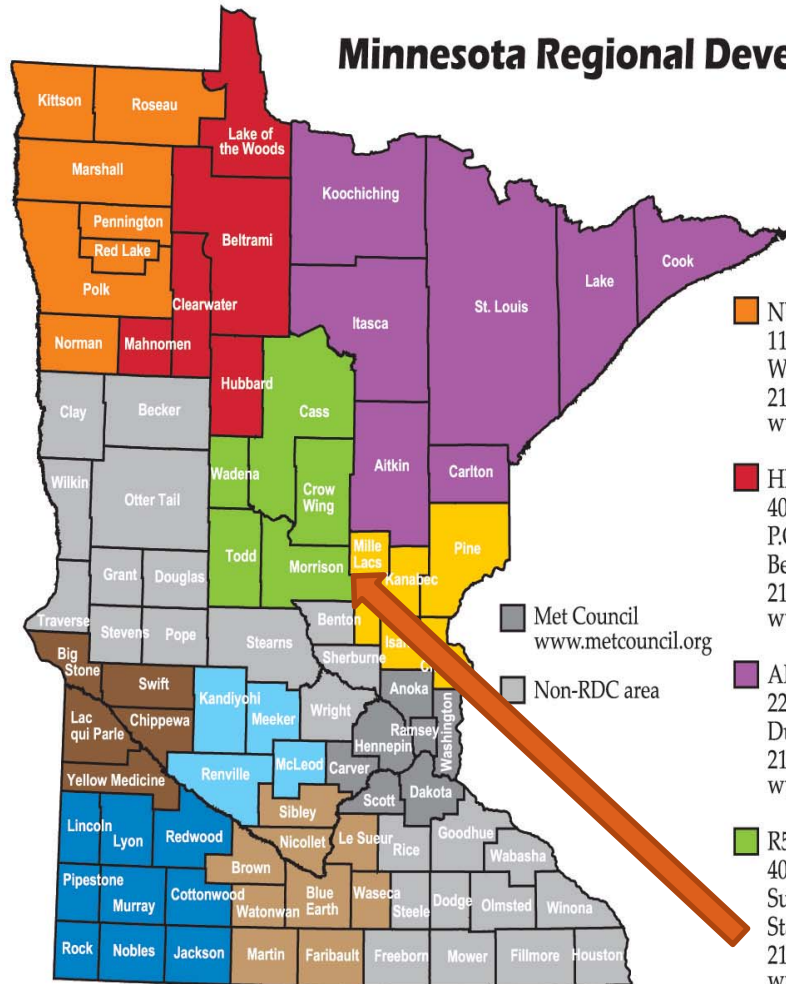


RDC's & Local Foods

The logo for Region Five Development Commission features a stylized blue number '5' with three blue triangles above it. Below the '5' is the text 'Region Five' in a bold, red, sans-serif font, and 'DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION' in a smaller, blue, sans-serif font below that.

Region Five
DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION

Minnesota Regional Development Commissions



10/2010



UMVRDC
323 W Schlieman Ave
Appleton, MN 56208
320-289-1981
www.umvrdc.org

162,000 population

5 Counties, all considered economically distressed

65 Cities, mostly all under 500 people

155 Townships

2 Tribes

9,000 miles of road

1 Local airport, 2

Community Colleges

2 hr. drive to Minneapolis.

Largest city Baxter: one of top 20 fastest growing Micropolitan's in the nation

NWRDC
115 S Main Ave
Warren, MN 56762
218-745-6733
www.nwrdc.org

MMDC
333 SW 6th St, Suite 2
Willmar, MN 56201
320-235-8504
www.mmrdc.org

HRDC
403 4th St NW
P.O. Box 906
Bemidji, MN 56601
218-444-4732
www.hrdc.org

ECRDC
100 S Park St
Mora, MN 55051
320-679-4065
www.region7erdc.org

ARDC
221 West 1st St
Duluth, MN 55802
218-722-5545
www.ardc.org

SRDC
2401 Broadway Ave
Suite 1
Slayton, MN 56172
507-836-8547
www.swrdc.org

R5DC
403 Prairie Ave NE
Suite 100
Staples, MN 56479
218-894-3233
www.regionfive.org

Region 9
10 Civic Ctr Plaza, Suite 3
P.O. Box 3367
Mankato, MN 56002
507-387-5643
www.rndc.org



Commission focus

Transportation

- Safe Routes for Schools planning
- Deliverance of transportation bill funding
- Transit, trail, rail studies with MnDOT.
- Functional Classification

Economic Development

- Lending: Revolving Loan Fund, septic systems and well water loans. (microlending ,PACE in development)
- Workforce development initiatives
- Internship programs
- Eco. Dev. Planning – CEDS
- JobZ administrator

Community Development

- Active Living & recreation planning
- History, Arts and Education coordination
- Hazard Mitigation Planning
- Micropolitan & Land use initiatives
- Broadband initiatives

Energy

- County energy assessments
- Neighborhood Energy Workshops
- GreenSteps Cities
- Project development

HUD – R5DC
Sustainable
Communities Regional
Planning

And,
Local Foods.....

Local Food efforts

Catalog

- Database of over 150 growers
- 5,000 copies

Farm-to-School

- 3 new school districts engaged in Farm-to-school sourcing.

Farm-to-institution

- 2 Local hospitals
- Several resorts and restaurants



MORE.....

Local Foods and Public Health (SHIP)

- **Statewide Health Improvement Program – focus on obesity and tobacco use. Over \$1.5 million distributed in our region, much to support local food initiatives.**

Studies

- **Completion of Farm-to-School financial feasibility study**
- **Engaged in 5-year health and behavior study**

Community Gardens

- **Education Mini-grants**
- **Convening garden managers and planning garden focus**



R5DC Local Food partners

- **Farmers Union**
- **AmeriCorps VISTA – Initiative Foundation**



How & Why??

How:

- Assessed the need, Engaged Communities
- Rallied partners
- Utilized AmeriCorps VISTA Volunteer program to build capacity

Why:

- Local foods aligns well with other R5DC initiatives
- Supports regions agricultural cluster

What hasn't worked well yet:
web based purchasing



What's next?

- Engage grocery stores and at least one higher Ed. Institution. Expand partnerships!
- Study and select a model distribution and controlled storage system. Ascertain funding to execute selected model.
- Coordinate a regional local foods Garden Gourmet Expo.



Cheryal Lee Hills
Executive Director
218.894.3233
chills@regionfive.org

