



*How to Advocate  
Locally  
to Support  
Sustainable  
Food & Farms*

*A Brief How-To Manual*

carolina farm   
stewardship association

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# INTRODUCTION

## *A Recipe for Success*

The Carolina Farm Stewardship Association (CFSA) is a 30 year old organization that provides resources for training, networking and advocacy. Our goal is a stronger and more sustainable food and farm system. Today we have over 2,000 farmer and citizen members in North and South Carolina.

This document is designed to offer a systematic method to farmers and food advocates about effective advocacy at the local level. The process and tips we offer are based on research we have conducted, advice from experienced activists and our own experience. It is our belief that there is a method for organizing in the most effective way. Do this first, do that second, gather these skills, do this analysis, etc. We also believe that as the movement matures, food advocates will exhaust the easy, low-hanging fruit and will face more resistance to make deeper changes. Effective strategy is essential.

There are lots of great resources already available for food system organizing and we praise that work. However, we believe that too much of the literature, advice and training about food system organizing is stories and

anecdotes. While stories are very important, we can get bogged down in endless stories with little analysis. This document is more than anecdotes and case studies. It focuses on analysis and a methodology, and adds a few case examples and activist profiles to illustrate the method. This is not the only method to follow and undoubtedly has flaws. At the least, we hope this pushes the discussion toward what are effective methods and away from which case study is the most important.

It is easier to bake a cake with a recipe. This document, we hope, is one recipe for success.



# Project Background

This work comes out of CFSA's Sustainable Ag Leadership Development (SALaD) Project. This project was designed to empower farmers and consumers to demand institutional change at the local and state level. It has been working on local level change since 2008 and worked intensively in Alamance and Person Counties in North Carolina.

SALaD was initially inspired by the local activism which happened in Chatham County, NC. In the early 1990s, CFSA members and others in Chatham County realized they could influence the policy of the county Cooperative Extension office by serving on the local Cooperative Extension Advisory Board. As a result of their efforts, the County created the first extension agent in the Carolinas dedicated solely to sustainable agriculture.

Activists also persuaded the local community college to begin the now famous Sustainable Agriculture Program at Central Carolina Community College. From these beginnings, changes continued to happen in Chatham County and around North Carolina to create the vibrant local farm scene we see today.



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# OVERVIEW OF THE PROCESS

The following pages outline a method for doing organizing at the local level -- to build a better local food and farm system. We break things into two parts: getting ready and taking action. We offer step by step instructions for each part. We also present four stories of activists. These are included to inspire you.

We list lots of resources and encourage you to check these out. Unfortunately, there are not as many organizing resources as there should be. Many of the resources lead to more anecdotes and examples. We think it is best to stay focused on the basic method and not get too distracted by the many good projects out there.

## *The Basics*

The method assumes the following things, which are important:

- It takes very few people to spark change. One, two, three, five people could make a huge difference. The issue is quality, not quantity.
- Trust with your key allies is very important.
- Focus on issues, not personalities, and know that people may support you on some items and not others. Everyone is a potential ally on something.
- The method is not focused on organization building per se, but more on citizen action.
- The process must always be non-violent, respectful and sensitive to other people's needs and issues.
- The method assumes that certain people and/or institutions have power and want to retain it.
- This method is especially for the harder tasks. The easy projects and changes don't need a bold strategy. Bigger change will likely meet more resistance. That

is where strategy and prep is essential.

- We think this method works best in a certain order. It is best to go step-by-step. But use your own judgment and skip around if you think it is necessary.
- The devil is in the details. For example, when we suggest doing initial meetings in private, doing them in private is important. When we suggest asking for more than you want when negotiating, that is a key point.

We welcome comments, suggestions and criticisms. Send those to [fred@carolinafarmstewards.org](mailto:fred@carolinafarmstewards.org).

# Part One: Getting Prepared

This is the heart of the method we want to discuss. If the proper background work is done, the chances of success for any effort will be greatly enhanced. This first part consists of four important steps.

*Step 1: Support local food and farmers -- personally "walk the talk"*

*Step 2: Learn how the local food and farm system works and who holds power*

*Step 3: Hone negotiating skills to get more of what you want*

*Step 4: Keep up with sustainable farming programs, policies and practices*



# Step 1: Support Local Food & Farmers – Personally Walk the Talk

Change starts with you! Personally supporting local food and farmers is the first and most important step to making change on a bigger scale. You'll be able to make a much stronger case if you're walking the walk and not just talking the talk.

Credibility is very important.

This will be a rich source of stories and anecdotes.

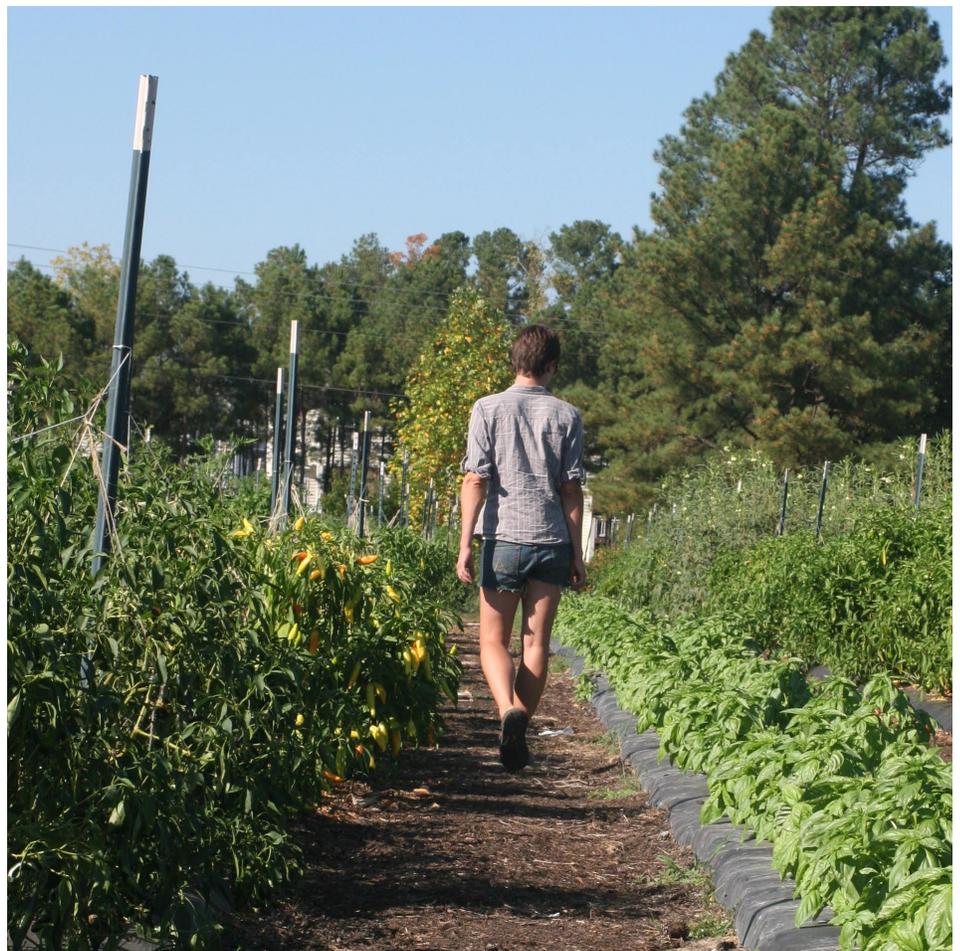
- Do you know who grows the food you eat?
- Are you a part of a CSA or do you shop at a local farmers' market?
- Which restaurants in your area use local and seasonal ingredients? Do you eat there?
- Are you cooking more at home?
- Are you reducing your fast food / chain restaurant meals?
- Have you visited many local farms?

## Action Item

Find farms, farmers' markets, CSAs and restaurants that source local food in your area and go visit them! Give them your business.

## Resources

- Local Harvest ([www.localharvest.org](http://www.localharvest.org))
- CFSA's Local Food Finder ([www.carolinafarmstewards.org](http://www.carolinafarmstewards.org))



# Step 2: Learn how the local food system works and who holds power

Creating real change means that you have to understand the current power structure. Who holds power? Which institutions have influence? Who wins and who loses if things change? Are there new players on the local scene? Have any powerful folks publicly supported local food and farms? This is where you start to do your research.

This is a critical step and we devote several pages to explaining this process.

We recommend four activities in this step:

## **A. Identify your key allies and have private conversations**

## **B. Research public information about your community**

## **C. Bring your allies together for a deeper discussion**

## **D. Understand the context of the issues as part of a larger social movement.**

### *A. Identify your key allies through private conversations*

Use your existing networks. Find people you trust who are committed to sustainable farming practices and local food issues. These folks could be foodies, farmers, business owners, community leaders or citizen activists. They can form your core group.

This is a similar process that would occur with starting a political campaign. Keep your cards close. Going public too soon just gives any opposition, if present, the opportunity to prepare a response.

**Action Item:** Set up informal meetings with your contacts

- Ask about their interests, concerns, involvement and their motivation for being involved in the movement.
- Ask for their view of the local political system. Which decision-makers support sustainable agriculture and local food initiatives? Which don't?

- Who are key people they think you should know in your area? For example, county commissioners, county managers, cooperative extension agents, community college representatives, soil and water conservation representatives, farm service agency staff, etc.
- Ask farmers or restaurant owners which policies or rules affect how they do business.
- Ask for other local contacts whom they trust, so you can build a network of allies.
- Focus on quality, not quantity.
- Don't forget to assess your own strengths, weaknesses, interests and knowledge. Play to your strengths when possible and appropriate.

### **Resources**

- Personal connections
- Find CFSA members (<http://carolinafarmstewards.org/advanced.shtml>)
- NC Sustainable Food System Network (<http://ncfoodnet.com/>)

## B. Research public information about your community

In addition to knowing people, it will be helpful to know information about local government staff, policies, programs, and funding opportunities. You can find most of this information on the Internet or at the public library.

Once your data is compiled, organize it into strengths and weaknesses so you can clearly see what may impede your progress and what county characteristics work in your favor.

### Resources

- County website
- USDA Census of Agriculture State and County Statistics (<http://www.agcensus.usda.gov/>)
- County Farmland Preservation or Economic Development plan

#### Action Item:

Do basic research on the farm infrastructure and food system in your community

### County data

Using the USDA Census of Agriculture (<http://www.agcensus.usda.gov>), find out who is growing food in your community and what methods they use. Search your county and surrounding counties, in addition to learning what agriculture looks like in your state.

- How many farmers are there in your area? How does the total number of farmers break down by gender, race, and age?
- How many farmers use sustainable/organic methods?
- What are key commodities grown in your area? Which fruits and vegetables? Livestock?
- What are the trends regarding the number of farms, farm size, and total farm acreage? Are these numbers increasing or decreasing?

	Strengths	Areas for Improvement
<b>Sustainable Agriculture Leadership</b>	<p>County has a farmland preservation plan in place</p> <p>Cooperative Extension actively supports sustainable agriculture by providing helpful programming</p>	None of the county commissioners are advocates for sustainable agriculture
<b>Resources</b>	<p>Land is cheap compared to surrounding areas</p> <p>Close to existing farmers' markets</p>	<p>Farm numbers and size are decreasing</p> <p>State/local budgets are weak</p> <p>Few organic farms</p>



## Action Item:

Research key committees and boards in local government

Decisions are made every day about policies and programs that affect the supply and quality of our food, and the ability of local farmers to make a living using sustainable methods. To affect decisions, you need to know who makes them.

- What is the purpose of each decision-making group?
- Which group members have power and influence to affect decisions?
- What is the group's relevant decision-making history?
- Do any sustainable agriculture allies already sit on the board or committee?
- Is it worthwhile to seek a seat on the board or committee?

## Resources

Your city or county may have some of these committees and boards related to agriculture, food, and land use.

- Cooperative Extension Advisory Council (<http://www.csrees.usda.gov/Extension/>)
- NC Soil and Water Conservation District Board of Supervisors (<http://www.nacdnet.org/about/districts/directory/nc.phtml>)
- Farm Service Agency County Committee (<http://offices.sc.egov.usda.gov/locator/app>)
- County Planning/Visioning Board
- Voluntary Agriculture District Board

## Action Item:

Research existing programs

There's no need to take on a project that already exists! Find out what supports for farmers and consumers are already in place. Are they effective?

## Resources

- Use your personal connections to see which programs and projects have benefited farmers in your area.
- Check your county or state website and compare with our list of potential organizing projects
- NC county & municipal land preservation ordinances (<http://www.cals.ncsu.edu/wq/lpn/ncordinances.htm>)

## Action Item:

Research your community's budget and funding sources

Projects and programs usually require funding. You and your allies need to know how much money your county has, and who receives it. The budget is a blueprint of local priorities.

- Find out when the county's budget is set for the next fiscal year.
- What money comes from the county, state, or federal government?
- What are the main expenditures in your county?
- How much money is already funneled through agricultural programs? What are they?
- How does this year's allocation compare with previous years?
- Who makes the budget recommendation?
- Who has the ultimate power to decide how funds are distributed?
- Are there private companies, institutions or foundations that grant money in your area or work in food and farm policy?

## Hint

City and county managers and department heads have a lot of budgetary power.

## Resources

- City and county website
- City and county budget office

## C. Get Together with your Network of Allies

Once you have a network of trusted people established and have done basic research, hold an informal meeting. This lets your key allies meet one another, share information that you've researched, pick issues to pursue and discuss strategy.

People are busy and hate meetings. Keep the meeting short and focused. Have food, snacks or a potluck. Pick a convenient time and avoid times that are tough for farmers if they are part of the group.

Pick a private place to meet, not the local cafe or restaurant.

Have a focused agenda. Give a brief review of goals and what has been learned. Focus on the actions to happen next.

Make sure all have a chance to talk. Quiet folks may have the most to contribute.

You may want to do a virtual meeting or just exchange emails. However, building trust is probably better done with face-to-face meetings. Trust is very important to this process.

### Action Item:

Host a local food ally meeting or potluck

### Resources

- Your network of allies
- Your research on local government personnel, existing programs, and budget/funding sources.
- A private place to meet



## D. Understand the Context of the Issues as Part of the Larger Food Movement

Your efforts to make change at the local level are nested within broader changes at the state, national and global level. These larger movements are moving rapidly and are of course worth keeping up with. Is there a road map to better understand how this is all developing? It can be very confusing to try and follow the story as it unfolds. Are we going forward or moving back?

In the 1970's, Bill Moyer (not the PBS reporter) developed a very helpful model of how social movements usually develop (see next page). He outlined eight stages.

We recommend that you familiarize yourself with these eight stages to better understand what is happening in your community and with the national food movement. Moyer brilliantly summarizes the key stages of any social movement. The food movement fits the pattern very well.

Note that you may be able to ride the wave of changes happening nationally or in your state. For example, national TV coverage may be highlighting food and farm innovations. This could be an opportunity to make progress faster in your area. In other cases, a set-

back with the national movement may make it seem harder to reach your goals. Nationally, forces are aligning against the food movement, threatening to move things backward. This is to be expected.



# From “Doing Democracy”

by Bill Moyer et al., New Society Publishers, 1991.

## The Eight Stages of Social Movements

### 1) Normal Times

- A critical social problem exists that violates widely held values
- Powerholders support the problem: Their “Official Policies” tout widely held values but the real “Operating Policies” violate those values.
- Public is unaware of problem and supports powerholders
- Problem/policies not a public issue

### 2) Prove the Failure of Official Institutions

- Many new local opposition groups
- Use local channels - courts, government offices, commissions, hearings, etc. - to prove they don't work
- Become experts; do research

### 3) Ripening Conditions

- Recognition of problem and victims grows
- Public sees victim's face
- More active local groups
- Need pre-existing institutions and networks available to new movement
- 20 to 30% of public opposes powerholder policies

### 4) Take-Off!

- Trigger event
- Dramatic non-violent actions/campaigns
- Actions show public that conditions and policies violate widely held values
- Nonviolent actions repeated around country
- Problems put on social agenda
- New social movement rapidly takes off
- 40 percent of public opposes current policies/conditions

### 5) Perceived Failure

- It will appear like not much is happening. Activists might despair over unachieved goals, less evident enthusiasm (in demonstrations) or continued powerholder opposition because they are unable to see the overall success.
- This may cause some to become cynical, negative rebels unhelpful to the overall movement with combative tactics.
- Realize that this is a time period of a larger transition within the movement toward the majority stage, with a different set of skills, roles and practices not previously utilized during the previous stages.

### 6) Majority Public Opinion

- This begins a lengthy and prolonged period of different forms of engagement.
- Focus attention to formulating a strategic program (in twelve phases), with the main goal of shifting public opinion against the status quo policies and powerholders.
- Over time, the intention is to garner more support from the mainstream. Beware of powerholders in their attempt to promote the public's fear of alternatives.

### 7) Success!

- The end-game can be identified when a growing number of powerholders shift positions toward support or new, sympathetic powerholders take office. At this point, the rising tide makes it more beneficial to support alternatives.
- Beware that many powerholders may try to initiate reforms or slower, incremental changes rather than paradigm shifts in the process. Press them further and be able to articulate the difference.

### 8) Continuing the Struggle

- Celebrate the victories, but also encourage further advancement.
- Watch out for backlashes and prepare for them.
- Continue to work on sub-issues or sub-goals.

# Step 3: Hone your negotiating skills to get more of what you want

After finding out who holds power in your community, you'll need to figure out how best to influence them. Give yourself a better chance of succeeding by knowing who and how to ask for what you want. The following strategies are powerful, time-tested tools for negotiating your interests. Identify a handful of people in your network of allies who have a knack for negotiating, and encourage them to brush up on these basic concepts and techniques. Here are a few common strategies for success.

## A. Take advantage of good timing

If you are plugged into local or national trends, you may be able to use popular opinion and momentum in support of your issue or proposal. When an opportunity presents itself, take it!

### *Case Study 1*

In March 2009, the White House staff installed an organic kitchen garden on the South Lawn. Immediately following this news, food activists suggested that their community start an organic garden at a local school. Relating to the national news was a smart strategy; because of the timing, the project was approved.

### *Hint*

Prior to elections, candidates may be more sensitive to constituent requests. They're also interested in positive public relations opportunities. This may be an effective time to invite your local or state representatives to come see the work you're doing in the community and ask for their continued support.

## B. Ask for more than you want

Remember that negotiations usually end as a compromise, so no one gets everything or the amount they want. It is better to ask for more than you actually

want so that you have a better chance of achieving your aims. Don't lie, but do create bargaining room.

### *Case Study 2*

After assessing the situation, citizen advocates in a rural county felt ready to request funding for a county staff person to help grow the local farm economy. The advocates wanted a full-time person. However, they felt that a 3/4 or half-time position would be a good start. So when the citizens approached the county, they made a strong case for a full-time position, plus support funds. With growing pressure from citizens, the county wanted to offer some assistance and not be viewed as opposed to the local food movement. They agreed to fund a half-time position on a pilot basis and added a small amount of support funds. Neither side got exactly what it wanted, but both felt satisfied with the outcome.

## C. Use different tactics for public sector and private sector issues



### Public sector strategy

A few tips and common mistakes to avoid:

- Make sure to identify and contact the department that can actually do something about your request or complaint.
- Everybody has a boss! If you don't feel like you're making progress, move up the chain of command.
- Bureaucrats who are administratively closer to elected officials (such as department heads) are often more concerned with their public image and may be easier to influence or at least more recep-

tive to hearing your case.

- Make strategic regulatory or budgetary requests. During times of economic growth, focus requests on projects and programs that require more substantial investment and funding. When budgets are tight, focus efforts on regulatory change.

### Private sector strategy

Take advantage of private sector opportunities. Sometimes the public sector lacks the motivation, power, or resources to respond to the public's request. Power in the city or county may be located in the private sector: businesses, institutions, or universities. Approach the private sector if the public sector is unresponsive or the private sector is the more appropriate actor.

### Case Study 3

Community residents were interested in starting a farmers' market, but the county government did not have the resources (available land, money) or political motivation to address this request. However, they noticed that a big-box retailer had ample parking space, and knew that the company was in need of some good PR. Residents approached the store manager with a detailed plan, and after negotiations he allowed them to operate a farmers' market on the far end of the parking lot.

## D. Focus on interests, not positions

According to the Harvard Negotiating Project, "your position is something you have decided upon. Your interests are what caused you to so decide." Interests bring people together; positions drive them apart.

This process is sometimes called "Getting to Yes," from the book that is the gold standard of how to negotiate well and fairly, in order to achieve good outcomes for all involved. So how does this work in practice?

Interests are open-ended and flexible. They focus on the goal. For example, it is in the farmers' interest to have a robust training system in the county. It is an interest to have adequate funding for cooperative extension.

Positions are rigid and narrow. They focus on a set way of achieving a goal. A position could be that a certain amount be budgeted for a program or that a certain trainer be brought to the area. Focusing on the position can lead to a breakdown in communication and getting nothing done.

Going into the process make a list of your interests and focus on those. Make a list of possible positions and realize that those are probably not all achievable, because someone else will have a different position!



## E. Understand barriers and benefits

Barriers prevent or discourage a change in behavior. Perceived benefits motivate change. When trying to change policy or advocate for a project or new program, it is helpful to think about how your negotiating partner understands the barriers and benefits to change. Reducing barriers and/or increasing benefits makes a more persuasive argument.

By mapping out the benefits and barriers to these various options, you can more easily identify opportunities to decrease barriers or increase benefits. For instance, if you could find a local hardware store that would donate gardening supplies and seeds, that would eliminate one of the barriers to starting a school garden.

### Resources

"Fostering Sustainable Behavior," by Doug McKenzie-Mohr, is a great book explaining these strategies.

	<b>Barriers</b>	<b>Benefits</b>
<b>Start school garden</b>	Insurance; danger; need land; cost of supplies, cafeteria not set up to handle fresh produce; have to meet federal guidelines for school lunches	Healthy food available to students; opportunity for hands-on math and science lessons; interactions with community volunteers
<b>Buy local food for cafeteria</b>	More expensive to purchase; cafeteria not set up to handle fresh produce; Have to meet federal guidelines for school lunches	Healthy food available to students; Supports local economy



## F. Using the Media to your Advantage

There is a vast literature on how to use the media. These are just a few tips to improve your media presence.

- Practice public speaking and answering questions for a print, audio and video format. Public speaking is mostly a skill, not a gift; practice and use good public speaking methods and you will do better than most who are featured in the media. Speak slowly and choose your words carefully for print stories. Toastmasters International is an excellent resource to improve these skills.

- Use press releases or advisories to make it easier for a reporter to write his/her story. Make it easy for local media outlets to run a story about your events and achievements or follow up with you for a feature. Be sure to include 24 hour accessible contact information. Keep press releases brief and lively. They may be quoted word for word.

- Op-Eds and letters to the editor are inexpensive ways to get your message out.

- Tell a story and offer data. Stories and statistics make a good message. The Ag Census is full of great data points; you will have unearthed lots of good data in your research. Add stories for flavor and interest. See the book "The Story Factor" by Annette Simmons, which points out how to communicate with stories.

- Use social media like Facebook and Twitter to publicize your message through more informal channels and connect with sympathetic folks in your area. But remember that established media outlets still drive a lot of the content that appears in social media sites. Don't put all your eggs in the social media/blogosphere basket. Which media sources do key decision-makers read and follow?

- Develop local media contacts at your local newspapers and TV station. If you let them know what you and your allies are working on, they'll know who to come to when they need an interview. Meeting with an editorial board ahead of your activities can grease the wheels.



# Step 4: Keep up with sustainable farming programs, policies and practices

Become a reliable expert. If you are to be trusted and have influence, you should be seen as at the least somewhat knowledgeable. Are you someone that others can turn to for information?

A big part of this is becoming a good referral source. Get to know some experienced sustainable growers. Do you know any technical researchers at the land-grant schools? Do you know people who work at sustainable farming associations or think tanks, or who put together public policy on these issues? Cultivate contacts with sympathetic growers, researchers and policy-makers.

You do not need to know everything about sustainable farming, but you should at least know the basics and know where to find more in-depth information. Can you answer basic questions of how, what and why? (How to grow organic/sustainable, what programs are aiding organics/sustainable ag, and why we should choose organic/sustainable products?)

## THE HOW?

On the technical side, a good place to start is to become familiar with the basics of good soils. Basic knowledge of sustainable growing techniques and/or pasture-based livestock is also important. Regularly taking a class or classes on these topics is highly recommended.

The ATTRA website is a great technical resource. This website is the hub for the National Sustainable Agriculture Information Service and is operated by the excellent National Center for Appropriate Technology. [www.attra.org](http://www.attra.org)

Another great technical resource is the Rodale Institute, a non-profit farm research organization with expertise in organic farming. [www.rodale.org](http://www.rodale.org)

The magazine "Growing for Market" is an excellent resource publication to learn about small scale horticulture practices. [www.growingformarket.com](http://www.growingformarket.com)

For livestock, check out the various national associations of small-scale and pasture-based producers. An excellent resource is the American Grassfed Association at [www.americangrassfed.org](http://www.americangrassfed.org). Also of note is the American Livestock Breed Conservancy, championing rare breeds of livestock. [www.albc-usa.org](http://www.albc-usa.org)

## THE WHAT?

Keep track of programs and policies that work. There is a huge amount of innovation going on at the program and policy level. The web makes it easy to learn about program and projects across the country.

Remember to keep tabs on programs and projects in key places. States to pay attention to include Vermont, California, Wisconsin, Oregon, New York and Pennsylvania.

Join local groups and listservs. Stay on top of the hot topics, local events, and community concerns. What issues are getting people worked up and engaged?

## Resources

### **American Farmland Trust, search by state**

(<http://www.farmland.org/programs/states/>)

### **Colleges & University Sustainable Agriculture Programs**

(<http://www.nal.usda.gov/afsic/pubs/edtr/EDTRCollegesA.shtml#tocA>)

### **Cornell University Local and Regional Food Systems Initiatives & Resources**

([http://guides.library.cornell.edu/local\\_food](http://guides.library.cornell.edu/local_food))

### **Farmland Information Center, search by state**

(<http://www.farmlandinfo.org/states/>)

### **National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition**

(<http://sustainableagriculture.net>)

### **National Sustainable Agriculture Information Service**

(<http://attra.ncat.org/index.php>)

Weekly internet radio show  
(<http://attra.ncat.org/audio/radio.php>)

### **Sustainable Agriculture and Resource Programs: Find your state program**

(<http://www.sare.org/about/regions.htm>)

### **Slow Food USA: Find a local chapter**

([http://www.slowfoodusa.org/index.php/local\\_chapters/](http://www.slowfoodusa.org/index.php/local_chapters/))

### **UC Davis Small Farm Program**

(<http://sfp.ucdavis.edu/>)

### **Other Resources**

- CFSA - join to have access to our members-only listserv
- NC Sustainable Food System Network  
(<http://ncfoodnet.com/>)
- CFSC  
(<http://www.foodsecurity.org/>)



## THE WHY?

Keep up with policy arguments in favor of and against organic and local food. You will need to be prepared to state the good things about local and organic food, and dispel myths.

The University of Minnesota has a publication that is a good place to start. "What is Organic Food and Why Should I Care?" ([http://swroc.cfans.umn.edu/prod/groups/cfans/@pub/@cfans/@swroc/documents/asset/cfans\\_asset\\_292359.pdf](http://swroc.cfans.umn.edu/prod/groups/cfans/@pub/@cfans/@swroc/documents/asset/cfans_asset_292359.pdf))

The Organic Consumers Association (<http://www.organicconsumers.org>) and the Rodale Institute [www.rodale.org](http://www.rodale.org) also do a good job with this information.

Be prepared to answer two key questions: 1) Can organic and local feed the world and, 2) is local and organic food affordable for most people? You will hear the argument that organic food is not sustainable if shipped in from far away (usually not) and that local food is not sustainable if produced in the dead of winter in heated greenhouses (only sometimes). Expect these questions and be prepared.

A response to the feed the world question is that there is currently enough food to feed the world, but that distribution and problems of poverty create the hunger problems we now face. Plant crops fed to livestock or used for biofuels means that food that could be feeding more people is simply feeding animals and going into fuel. Also, there is grow-

ing evidence that crop yields of organic crops equal or exceed conventional crops in many cases. The Rodale Institute, among others, is conducting ongoing trials to research this question. Building good soil long-term and farming with less fossil fuels is a better path than conventional farming that is ever more dependent on outside inputs.

A response to the affordability issue is that people will need to shop and cook differently to make local and organic food affordable and it can be done. Eating less meat and prepared foods, and buying in season are key strategies. A great resource is [www.cookforgood.com](http://www.cookforgood.com), the website of Linda Watson, a NC-based writer and cook.

Jim Prevor's thought-provoking Perishable Pundit blog is a good resource to investigate to see what arguments are being made against the local food movement. [www.perishablepundit.com](http://www.perishablepundit.com) Progressive Farmer magazine is another source to learn about the ideas and arguments of the conventional farming world. [www.dtnprogressivefarmer.com](http://www.dtnprogressivefarmer.com)

## Resources

International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements ([http://www.ifoam.org/growing\\_organic/1\\_arguments\\_for\\_oa/arguments\\_main\\_page.html](http://www.ifoam.org/growing_organic/1_arguments_for_oa/arguments_main_page.html))

CFSA's Why Local and Organic? (<http://carolinafarmstewards.org/friends.shtml#whyorganic>)

Joel Salatin on "Foodie Elitism" (<http://flavormagazinevirginia.com/foodie-elitism/>)

"The Facts about Organic Agriculture" by the Midwest Organic and Sustainable Education Service (MOSES) <http://www.mosesorganic.org/attachments/productioninfo/fs-FactsreOrganicAg.html>

### Books/Publishers:

Books by Michael Pollan, especially *The Omnivore's Dilemma* and *In Defense of Food*

Books by Mark Winne on community food systems

Publishers: Chelsea Green, Highland Press, Rodale Press

### Journals/Magazines:

Growing for Market  
Urban Farm  
Small Farm Today  
Small Farmer's Journal  
Organic Gardening  
Progressive Farming

# Part Two: Take Action

If you completed the steps in Part One, then you have done the bulk of the work to make change. But don't stop there. Now you are ready to take advantage of all the prep work you have done. This very brief section takes the foundation you have built and uses it as a springboard toward a successful outcome. This section also includes an extensive list of projects and resources.

**Step 1: Fine tune your goals and stay focused**

**Step 2: Set a strategic timeline, using events creatively as they unfold**

**Step 3: Check back in with your allies**

**Step 4: Launch your efforts**

**Step 5: celebrate victories and evaluate your successes and failures**



## ***Step 1: Fine tune your goals and stay focused***

Pick an issue or issues based on your painstaking research into the needs of your local community, your knowledge of state and national trends, and the expertise of you and your allies. Assess whether your project focuses on demand for local products (consumer focus), or the supply of local goods (farmer/processor focus). Are you going after low-hanging fruit or something tougher? Based on that and your other goals, is it still the best choice? Don't be distracted by all the possible projects and policy changes. Narrow your focus to what you think is most important and/or strategic.

## ***Step 2: Set a strategic timeline, using events creatively as they unfold***

Taking into account your knowledge of political and corporate calendars. Government budgets are generally set in the spring. Most but not all elections happen in the fall. Summertime can be a great time to find bureaucrats who are more relaxed and open to new challenges, if you can find them amidst summer vacations. Corporations also have a yearly rhythm based on when their fiscal year ends and when their busy season hits. Holidays with a food angle like Thanksgiving are

a natural time to bring up food issues. And you may choose to enter the conversation if there is a food safety scare or new study on obesity or diabetes or something similar.

## ***Step 3: Check back in with your allies***

Solicit the support of friends that you have developed through your own initial contacts. Endeavor to have folks on the same page regarding your organizing project. Keep allies informed of your key message points and your timelines. Let your supportive media contacts know about your issue and campaign at an appropriate time.

## ***Step 4: Launch your efforts***

After all your preparation, research and network-building, don't miss your chance to actually launch the effort. Avoid paralysis from analysis. There will never be a perfect time to make your ask, request or demand. For some, it can be scary to actually put your idea or campaign out there. But at some point, you have to stop researching and planning, and engage the system. If you have done adequate preparation, you are likely to have success. Be confident!

## ***Step 5: Celebrate victories and evaluate your successes and failures***

Congratulations! You did it. Great things happened! Now step back and take time to think about your accomplishments. Celebrate victories, no matter how small. Many activists burn out because they neglect to do this. Thanks helpers, thank yourself and have some fun. Take some credit for the work that you have done.

When the dust has settled, take some time to reflect on what could have gone better. Talk to third parties who can give you an objective read on how the effort went. Do you need some more formal evaluation or polling? Can you do a before and after evaluation, to gauge your effectiveness? In this way, you will build on your successes and avoid repeating mistakes.

# Project and Program Examples

## Those that Support the Supply of Local Food

The following examples are designed to give you ideas for possible projects for your community. Some of these projects may already be happening in your area; others may be totally new ideas. New project types are emerging all the time, so keep your ears open and be creative. This is not a comprehensive list, but does list many of the most popular and effective projects and programs. Some of these programs are land planning related and may be less familiar to those in the food movement.

### **Cost of Community Services Studies**

A cost of community services study provides a relatively inexpensive snapshot of the revenues and costs associated with different types of land use (agricultural, residential, commercial, etc.). A COCSS can't predict future revenue or costs, but can help local officials and residents make an informed decision about land use policies in relation to the county's budget.

American Farmland Trust - Cost of Community Services Studies Factsheet ([http://www.farmlandinfo.org/documents/27757/FS\\_COCS\\_8-04.pdf](http://www.farmlandinfo.org/documents/27757/FS_COCS_8-04.pdf))

Find existing COCS for NC counties (<http://www.cals.ncsu.edu/wq/lpn/cost.html>)

### **Voluntary Agricultural District/Enhanced Voluntary Agricultural District**

VADs and EVADs give landowners the option to voluntarily protect farmland from nonfarm development in return for multiple benefits to the farmer. Not all states have enabling legislation.

NC Voluntary Agricultural District Brochure (<http://www.ncadfp.org/documents/VADBrochure.pdf>)  
Find existing VADS in NC (<http://www.ncadfp.org/vadprogram.htm>)

Model Voluntary and Voluntary Enhanced District (<http://www.cals.ncsu.edu/wq/lpn/modelordinances/county-modelagdistrictordinanceenhanced.pdf>)

### **Farmland Preservation Plan**

A Farmland Preservation Plan is a tool to ensure that local land will be available to those who grow our food. It may describe the current agricultural activity in a county, challenges to maintaining it, and opportunities to support it. A comprehensive plan should include a timeline for implementation and identify potential funding sources.

NC Dept. of Ag - Farmland Preservation Brochure Website (<http://www.ncadfp.org/FarmlandPreservation.htm>)

NCSU - Model Land Ordinances (<http://www.cals.ncsu.edu/wq/lpn/modelordinances.htm#plan>)

Alamance County, NC - Farmland Protection Plan (<http://www.ncadfp.org/documents/FarmlandProtectionPlanbound2.25.pdf>)

Check whether your NC County has a Farmland Protection Plan ([http://www.ncadfp.org/documents/Farmland\\_Protection\\_Plan\\_Map\\_4-20-2011.pdf](http://www.ncadfp.org/documents/Farmland_Protection_Plan_Map_4-20-2011.pdf))

## **Agriculture Development Plan**

Going beyond a preservation plan, farm or agricultural development plans can focus more on the economic aspects of local farming. They analyze land issues, but also consider the strengths and weaknesses of agriculture in your county, and make recommendations regarding the best ways to ensure the continued viability of agriculture. If a stand-alone agricultural development plan does not exist, you may sometimes find one as part of a broader economic development or comprehensive plan for your county.

Agricultural Development Plan for Johnston County, NC ([http://www.johnstonnc.com/files/soilandwater/Johnston\\_Agricultural\\_Development\\_Plan\\_January.pdf](http://www.johnstonnc.com/files/soilandwater/Johnston_Agricultural_Development_Plan_January.pdf))

Durham County, NC Agricultural Development and Farmland Preservation Plan (<http://www.co.durham.nc.us/departments/swcd/Documents/Durhamfarmplanpublicdraft2.pdf>)

## **Dedicated Staff - Farm and Agricultural Development**

Chatham County Agricultural Extension Agent Debbie Roos works with farmers to promote increased awareness, understanding, and practice of sustainable agriculture through monthly educational workshops, a website, on-farm visits, and other consultation. See her website, "Growing Small Farms." [<http://www.ces.ncsu.edu/chatham/ag/SustAg/index.html>] Noah Ranells is the Orange County (NC) Agriculture Economic Development staff person. Aaron Newton is the Cabarrus County

(NC) dedicated staff person for growing farms.

## **Community College curriculum**

Advocate for your local community college to add Sustainable Agriculture courses in order to support farmers. There is a growing list of Sustainable Ag programs to provide inspiration for curriculum, program structure.

Kansas - Johnson County Community College (<http://www.jccc.edu/home/catalog.php/default/careerprograms/VC-SUSTAINAG>)

NC - Central Carolina Community College (<http://www.cccc.edu/curriculum/majors/sustainableagriculture/>)

## **Value Added Food Processing Centers**

Value-added food processing centers are shared-use, commercial kitchens that farmers can rent to process their own raw produce, without having to buy industrial-grade ovens, sinks, and other kitchen equipment. Value-added products include cheese, bread and pastries, jams and jellies, roasted coffee, etc. By processing raw ingredients, farmers can earn more money from the sale of a final product to the consumer. In addition, it allows them to market a greater variety of products throughout the year.

Blue Ridge Food Ventures - Western NC ([http://www.advantagewest.com/content.cfm/content\\_id/144/section/food](http://www.advantagewest.com/content.cfm/content_id/144/section/food))

Piedmont Food & Agricultural Processing Center - NC

(<http://www.orangecountyfarms.org/pfap/>)

## **Cooperative Extension programming - FFA, 4-H**

Ask questions about how programs like Future Farmers of American and Cooperative Extension's 4-H are preparing future farmers to use sustainable farming methods.

## **Crop Mobs**

(<http://cropmob.org>) Crop mobs are regular gatherings of farmers and gardeners willing to lend out their time, knowledge and labor to other farmers in their community toward a collective farm activity (i.e., planting, harvesting, barn-raising). This harkens back to the strong social support which has existed in agrarian communities over the years.

## **Incubator farms and support for beginning farmers**

Incubator farms are places where new farmers can grow food and fiber, meet other new farmers and learn from themselves and outside experts. Several wonderful projects exist around the country. See [www.orangecountyfarms.org/plantatbreeze.asp](http://www.orangecountyfarms.org/plantatbreeze.asp)

## **Web portals for information for farmers and support services**

Some communities have strong websites that help farmers and citizens know what farm and food resources and programs are available. Other communities make it very difficult to find relevant information. For good examples, see Orange and Chatham County NC web portals.

# Those that Support the Demand for Local Food

## **Community Food Security Assessment**

A food security assessment looks systematically at the sources, availability, and accessibility of food in a particular community. It provides the jumping off point for a community to determine areas of need and to address them most effectively using the information that they've gained.

USDA Community Food Security Assessment Toolkit (<http://www.ers.usda.gov/Publications/EFAN02013/>)

## **Farm-to-School Initiatives**

These initiatives connect farmers and schools with the goal of providing economic support to local farmers and high quality, healthy meals to students. Note that many schools require certifications from farms to address food safety concerns. These certifications (such as GAP) may reduce the number of farms that can participate. Some programs exist in name only.

Farm to School - Find programs in your state (<http://www.farmentoschool.org/states.php>)

Farm to School Guide for Parents ([http://caff.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/07/FTS\\_parentguide\\_caff.pdf](http://caff.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/07/FTS_parentguide_caff.pdf))

Western NC Farm to School Project (<http://growing-minds.org>)

National Farm to School Network (<http://www.farmentoschool.org/aboutus.php>)

## **Farm to institution**

Arrangements to increase local purchasing at prisons, senior centers, child care centers, convention centers, hospitals. Lots of potential to move beyond just the farm to school model.

## **School Gardens**

School gardens provide children with a hands-on way to learn about where their food comes from. They can provide an outdoor lab where science, poetry, math, history and more can be integrated into the curriculum.

USDA: Sustainable Ag curriculum resources for children ([http://afsic.nal.usda.gov/nal\\_display/index.php?info\\_center=2&tax\\_level=2&tax\\_subject=300&topic\\_id=1436](http://afsic.nal.usda.gov/nal_display/index.php?info_center=2&tax_level=2&tax_subject=300&topic_id=1436))

CEFS: 4-H Sustainable Ag curriculum (<http://www.cefs.ncsu.edu/whatwedo/foodsystems/4hsustainableag.html>)

Durham, NC - Elementary School Garden (<http://www.dpsnc.net/channel-4/this-is-how-we-do-it/edible-garden>)

Kids Gardening: Curriculum & Project Resources (<http://www.kidsgardening.org/>)

## **Starting Farmers' Markets**

Farmers' markets continue to grow in popularity, and provide farmers with a direct market where they can sell what they grow at retail price. You might consider starting a market in your area, if you and a committed group of community members have time, knowledge and money to invest.

USDA - Farmers Market & Local Food Marketing Resources (<http://www.ams.usda.gov/AMSV1.0/FARMERSMARKETS>)

MO Cooperative Extension - Farmers' Market Q&A (<http://mda.mo.gov/abd/fmkt/>)

## **Farm tours and other agri-tourism events**

Farm tours are a great way to educate consumers and decision-makers. They are not always easy to organize, so plan carefully. Farm open houses are a simpler way to reach similar objectives. Ag tourism website -- Martha Glass at North Carolina Dept of Ag and Consumer Services <http://www.ncagr.gov/NC-products/CatSubDirectory.asp?CatNum=1011>

The Carolina Farm Stewardship Association operates three farm tours per year. [www.carolinafarmstewards.org](http://www.carolinafarmstewards.org)

# Stories of Community Advocates: Harvey Harman



Harvey Harman is a farmer, green builder and activist based in Chatham County. In the early 1990s, Harvey started the Sanford Farmer's Market in Lee County, and that market is still going strong. Harvey also encouraged Chatham County Cooperative Extension to dedicate a full time person to sustainable agriculture—the first of its kind in the Carolinas. In the mid-1990s, Harvey initiated

and facilitated the development of Central Carolina Community College's (CCCC) Sustainable Agriculture Program in Pittsboro, NC. The program has become a popular curriculum for beginning farmers desiring practical education and hands-on opportunities throughout the country. Harvey taught many of the Sustainable Agriculture classes in the early years of the program. Addition-

ally, the Harman family operates Sustenance Farm based upon a permaculture model. Since 1991, Sustenance Farm has hosted and trained more than 70 farm interns from all over the world. Harvey currently is involved in energy-efficient, green building and integrating local food production and self-reliance into neighborhoods and communities.

**CFSA:** What lessons did you learn organizing community members in Chatham County for sustainable agriculture?

**Harvey:** Keep putting good ideas forward. Sometimes the timing isn't right, or you need to change the direction to make it happen. We offered the first class at Central Carolina Community College in 1995 and called it "How to Maximize Return on Small Acreage" and no one signed up. We offered the same class in 1996, wrote an article about it in the local paper the week before it started and called it "How to Make \$5,000/acre Farming" and had 30 people sign up for the class, which provided the initial interest that led to the development of the Sustainable Farming Program at CCCC.

**CFSA:** What advice would you share for analyzing the people or positions of power within our agricultural establishments?

**Harvey:** Sustainable Agriculture is more accepted now than it was 20 years ago. Twenty years ago I had some agricultural leaders that didn't want to even shake hands with me. At least in Chatham County I don't think that animosity exists anymore, which is great, but it still might be present in other communities. My advice if people don't want to talk to you or feel threatened by what you are doing is not to take it personally. Keep doing what you feel is important to do without being critical of others who might follow a different path.

Sometimes you just have to move forward on an idea whether the agricultural establishment is

behind it or not. When I talked to the Lee County Cooperative Extension Office about a Farmer's Market in Sanford the local ag agent told me, "You'll never start a Farmer's Market in Lee County because there aren't enough farmers anymore for a local market." We went out and found enough farmers and it has been a good local market ever since.

When we were thinking of starting ag classes at CCCC I called the person in Raleigh in charge of all the ag programs at Community Colleges for the whole state to tell him what we were thinking about. He told me, "You will never have a program in sustainable agriculture because the community college system is closing down ag programs not starting up new ones." Well, five years later the program at CCCC had developed into a two year Associate Degree program and continues to keep developing.

**CFSA:** You were certainly a trailblazer in the field and in our state. What kind of argument(s) or negotiation skill(s) did it take to convince others to support sustainable agriculture within their institutions?

**Harvey:** It took being persistent and also having good communication skills. It also was helpful to have some skills in organizing and running effective meetings. It also took some willingness to put in volunteer time meeting, talking, and organizing.

**CFSA:** How did you decide to prioritize among many possible initiatives, choosing to work on the community college and a co-

operative extension agent? What line of reasoning was in mind?

**Harvey:** We have done many initiatives, from organizing farmer support groups, starting a local farmer's market, supporting and developing new ideas for CFSA and other agricultural organizations. Some of them took hold and continued and some didn't. With the program at CCCC we didn't start out with the goal of starting a whole program. We had a farmer support group that met monthly. We noticed that we often got requests from people who wanted to visit our farms and also wanted information about how to grow crops. We came up with the idea of teaching a class or two at the local community college to address this interest. Once it got started we kept growing it.

**CFSA:** How would you recommend people stay well-informed with local agricultural issues or policies, and the latest in the sustainable agriculture movement?

**Harvey:** Connect with local initiatives. Connect with statewide organizations like CFSA. Read as much as possible. And start growing things, even if you have limited space. Growing food in a sustainable way is a radical activity. In my mind it is one of the most powerful things we can do to transform the present economic system into one that more matches the world we want for the future.

# Stories of Community Advocates: Eric Henry



Eric Henry, president of TS Designs, is well known in North Carolina for his dedication to sustainability; In 2009, he won the Sustainable Champion Award from Sustainable North Carolina. Through TS Designs, he has diligently worked to provide a T-shirt product using all organic, NC grown cotton using the triple bottom line business philosophy (people, planet, profits). The company even has its own organic farm. Eric also founded the Burlington Biodiesel Co-op, and runs his own car on biodiesel or vegetable oil. He devotes a lot of time to furthering the sustainable agriculture agenda in his county: he serves on various community organizations and local government boards, as well as on the Board of Directors for Company Shops Market, a co-op grocery in Alamance. Eric is a true champion for system-wide change towards sustainability.

**CFSA:** How did you become knowledgeable about sustainable agriculture so that you could be an effective advocate?

**Eric:** Through my apparel business I learned about the importance of a local and transparent supply chain. This made me want to learn more about sustainability and local agriculture. I began to educate myself on sustainable issues through research and by connecting myself to people of the same mindset. I am a member of Carolina Farm Stewardship Association and attend their annual Sustainable Agriculture Conference; working with them has proven to be a great way to stay up to date on sustainable agriculture issues. I also regularly talk to sustainable farmers whom I know.

**CFSA:** How did you find out who held the power in Alamance, so that you could determine how to make changes in your local food system?

**Eric:** I have lived in Alamance County for over 50 years and I'm involved in a lot of civic groups ranging from Elon University to the Chamber of Commerce. I also met with the County Manager and other members of local government as a way to gauge who in county government were sympathetic to sustainable agriculture. I go to lots of local community

meetings to keep up with what is going on.

**CFSA:** How did you prioritize the projects that you have undertaken?

**Eric:** Alamance already had a farmland protection plan and a good group of organic farmers. We were ready to go to the next level. I personally put in a lot of time working on getting off the ground the Company Shops Market, a co-op grocery in Burlington. I wanted to help to build a local living community and I thought that linking local farmers to local consumers via a retail store was ambitious, but doable. Another project that I took on was creating a large organic garden at TS Designs. This created a way for me to share sustainable agricultural practices with customers of our shirts and healthy eating information with our employees.

**CFSA:** How did you negotiate with those in power to affect the changes that you wanted to see happen around sustainable agriculture in Alamance?

**Eric:** When we were organizing the Company Shops Market we had to do a lot of negotiating with local government and others as we worked to locate the shop in downtown Burlington. I had to convince officials that this

was something that was going to be good for the downtown area and would be good for local businesses. We had to be forceful in our negotiations and eventually convinced decision-makers that this would be great for local business, farmers and consumers. One thing we did was invite in another county manager, one who is sympathetic to local food, and introduce him to our manager. That helped build trust. Also we invited Michael Shuman, a national economic development consultant, to talk with local folks about local food economies.

**CFSA:** Looking back, can you talk about some successes and failures, as well as reflect on anything that you may have done differently in your efforts to promote sustainable agriculture?

**Eric:** The biggest success was establishing Company Shops Market and creating a place that connects citizens to local foods. Our challenge is still that sustainable, local agriculture is a very small part of our local food system. We need to do a better job of selling local food as economic development and job creation. We need more allies and to continue to educate the broader community about this goal.

# Stories of Community Advocates: Kathryn Spann



Kathryn Spann's family grew tobacco in Durham County for generations. After some years of practicing law in New York City, Kathryn decided to return to her roots. She purchased a farm in Rougemont with her partner David Krabbe. Now in their fifth year of production, Prodigal Farm raises goats and specializes in handcrafted farmstead cheeses, breads and cheesecakes, as well as Animal Welfare Approved goat meat. Kathryn has been a very active voice in the Durham community and is involved with many community groups and boards, such as the Durham County Farmland Preservation Advisory Board and the Soil and Water Conservation District Board. She has developed tours and events

to educate elected officials and fought overly-restrictive water regulations that were affecting her dairy project.

**CFSA:** How do you stay up to speed on sustainable agriculture issues?

**Kathryn:** I subscribe to several area listservs, including the local foods action plan listserv, the farmers' market listserv, the agrotourism networking association listserv, and of course CFSA's own. I also subscribe to some national listservs. No one can read all of these, but it helps me keep abreast of upcoming workshops, events, legal and regulatory developments, and even business opportunities. The workshops in

turn, like ASAP's Marketing Opportunities for Farmers and NC Choice's Carolina Meat Conferences, help me to develop more in-depth knowledge on target areas. And my service on area boards helps to develop community networks that bring issues to my attention.

**CFSA:** How did you find out about the different Durham County Boards that you are involved with, and how did you figure out which positions held power over sustainable agriculture

**Kathryn:** I was initially approached by the staff Director of Durham's Soil & Water Conservation District about a non-voting Associate Supervisor position on that board. Even in a non-voting position, if you show yourself to work hard and be a reliable source of information, other board members will defer to your knowledge on issues about which they don't know as much. As you get a reputation for solid service on one board, you find yourself with invitations to serve on other boards. I, in turn, keep an eye out for good folks to recruit for boards on which I serve.

As for figuring out which positions hold power, the bulk of my knowledge has come from observation "from the inside." You can also learn by befriending someone with long experience in area land use-related boards and picking their brain – sort of growing your own fairy godmother.

**CFSA:** How did you prioritize what you saw as pressing needs for sustainable agriculture in Durham County?

**Kathryn:** I look for what farm-supporting programs or resources are most in jeopardy of being cut or most in need of being developed. Best to focus on potential cuts first, because it's easier to keep a program than to start something new, especially in a down budget cycle. Our Farmland Protection Board has a microscopic budget, but it can influence elected officials by showing, rather than telling. We've done farm tours for our elected officials and high-level bureaucrats (such as the county manager and school officials who manage career and technical training such as ag ed programs.) These have created more willing, motivated champions of our cause than dozens of letters ever could.

Our Farmland Board also held a retreat for Board members earlier this year, with a facilitator who helped us articulate the areas where we most wished to target our efforts.

**CFSA:** What kind of negotiating have you done in an effort to affect the changes that you see as necessary in your county?

**Kathryn:** I try not to do any negotiating – I try to win hearts and minds before it ever gets to a negotiating stage. I try to understand the personal and political motivations of each elected official who has power over something that affects our issues. In every interaction with those officials, I try to show them – live and in technicolor if possible – how the things for which I advocate advance the causes they care about. Is this a county commissioner with a principal urban,

African-American constituency who is less interested in environmental issues, but does care about jobs? I want them to see programs like the urban SEEDS Garden, and students learning leadership through hands-on farm-related programs. I want them to see the first African-American owned Century Farm and hear about farming as an entrepreneurial activity in which an individual can be their own boss. I want them to make contact with wellness programs that seek to improve access to fresh, local foods in food-insecure neighbors – and I want my board to be seen having outreach on those issues.

# Stories of Community Advocates: Gerry Cohn



Gerry is the Southeast Coordinator for Organic Valley/CROPP Cooperative, recruiting new organic farmers and providing technical assistance to dairies across the region. As the former regional director for American Farmland Trust, Gerry helped communities plan for an agricultural future and slow unregulated suburban growth; he led the legislative changes to expand North Carolina's Farmland Preservation Program, emphasizing the importance of county Voluntary Agricultural District Boards. Previously, with RAFI-USA, he worked

with farmers developing new enterprises to reduce their dependence on tobacco income. Gerry wrote Durham County's Farmland Preservation Plan, as well as contributing to similar efforts in Alamance, Buncombe, Franklin, and Wake counties. He serves on the Alamance County Cooperative Extension Advisory Council. In addition, Gerry operates Matzah Rising Farm, a diversified organic farm in Alamance County.

**CFSA:** What kind of negotiating lessons have you learned in working with various agricultural

communities in the state?

**Gerry:** Before you take action, be a good listener. Understand the priorities and concerns of the people who have been farming locally for generations. Your efforts must enhance their profitability and capacity to survive, not threaten it.

**CFSA:** What initiatives do you think are the most important and effective for activists to focus upon to influence the overall course of a county toward sustainable agriculture? In other words,

how would you prioritize the many issues?

**Gerry:** It's the economy, stupid! Frame your issue as a driver of economic development – new businesses, investment, quality of life. The environment is very important to me, but it may not be the top priority for many of those I'm trying to influence.

**CFSA:** You have been involved as a consultant for numerous counties. What advice would you share about assessing how to work with powerful people in agricultural establishments (e.g., county advisory boards)?

**Gerry:** Become a part of the agricultural establishment. Be a contributor to the agricultural economy (through product sales and purchases of inputs from local businesses), and participate in conventional ag programs and organizations.

**CFSA:** What kind of argument(s) did it take to convince others to support sustainable agriculture within their institutions?

**Gerry:** It really helped to show decision-makers that what I was growing brought new farmers and customers to the county. When my livestock extension agent came out to my heritage turkey field day, he saw 100 customers wandering around my farm, paying big money in advance for Thanksgiving orders. That demonstrates an untapped local opportunity.

**CFSA:** How would you recommend people stay well-informed with local agricultural issues or

policies, and the latest in the sustainable agriculture movement?

**Gerry:** Attend your county Voluntary Agricultural District meeting. Drop in and visit your extension agents and soil and water conservation district employees. Follow the Chatham-based Growing Small Farms listserv and the CEFS-run Local Foods listserv.