Addressing Food Systems Resiliency in Virginia Together

BUILDING RESILIENCE IN VIRGINIA'S FOOD SYSTEMS: STATEWIDE STAKEHOLDER PRIORITIES AND PATHWAYS FOR ACTION

Lia Kelinsky-Jones, Shadrack Yartey, Katie Trozzo, Carla Cash, Kim Niewolny, Kathryn Lee, Jessica R. Spence, Eric Bendfeldt, Jean A. Parrella, Pratyoosh Kashyap, Elli Travis, & John Ignosh

COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURE AND LIFE SCIENCES
CENTER FOR FOOD SYSTEMS AND COMMUNITY TRANSFORMATION
VIRGINIA TECH

Mid-Atlantic Food Resilience & Access Coalition
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Natural disasters, public health emergencies, economic disruptions, and policy changes can affect how food is produced, processed, distributed, and accessed across Virginia. These shocks and disruptions highlight the need to better understand how Virginia's food systems can strengthen their capacity to prepare for, respond to, and adapt to future challenges. From 2025 - 2026, the Cultivating Rural Vitality in Virginia's Food Systems (CRRV) project engaged stakeholders across the Commonwealth to identify opportunities to strengthen food systems resilience. Findings are based on 12 listening sessions involving 266 participants and the Connecting for Resilience Summit, co-hosted by the Virginia Tech Center for Food Systems and Community Transformation and the Mid-Atlantic Resilience and Access Coalition (MAFRAC), which brought together 90 stakeholders to validate findings, identify priorities, and develop shared strategies to advance food systems resilience across Virginia. These engagements revealed several priority areas for strengthening Virginia's food systems resilience.

Key Recommendations

1. **Virginia needs coordinated, statewide food systems policy work:**
Stakeholders consistently identified the need to strengthen statewide food systems policy and coordination capacity. Many questioned the potential of the existing Virginia Food Systems Council to engage in policy, but the existing council was never designed to engage in policy. Nonetheless, participants seek a food systems policy entity to:

- Serve as a coordinating body for statewide food systems planning and implementation.
- Elevate regional priorities, challenges, and opportunities within statewide decision-making processes.
- Inform and support implementation of the Virginia Farm and Forest Prosperity Plan.
- Strengthen connections between food systems initiatives, the Commonwealth's Office of Resilience, and other state agencies and programs.
- Advocate for shared statewide priorities while remaining responsive to the diverse needs of Virginia's regions and communities.

2. **Support Farm and Regional Economic Viability for increased Resilience:**
Participants consistently emphasized that resilient food systems depend on economically viable, sustainable small farms and food businesses that form the foundation of regional supply chains. Priorities included:

- Expanding farm-to-school and institutional purchasing.
- Supporting the long-term sustainability and economic viability of small and mid-sized farms through improved access to financial resources, technical assistance, and succession planning.
- Investing in shared infrastructure, cooperative business models, and regional marketing to strengthen local and regional food supply chains.
- Supporting programs such as the Adopt-a-Farmer Family Farm Box Initiative that keep food dollars within local communities while strengthening markets for farmers and improving food access.

3. **Investing in Infrastructure:**
Stakeholders identified continued need for both cooperative and dedicated infrastructure to support regional supply chains and resilience, including processing facilities, aggregation, cold storage, commercial kitchens, workforce housing, and cooperative infrastructure that allows farmers and small food businesses to share resources, reduce risk, and build resilient regional food systems.

4. **Strengthen regional food systems coordination:**
While Virginia has many successful local and regional initiatives, they are not in all regions of the Commonwealth. Participants expressed a desire for more coordination within their regions around food systems to connect efforts, share knowledge, reduce duplication, and elevate regional priorities to statewide decision-makers.

Project Team Next Steps

Food Systems Resilience Policy and Planning Steering Committee

The Virginia Tech Center for Food Systems and Community Transformation and the Virginia Food Access Coalition plan to co-convene a statewide Food Systems Resilience Policy and Planning Steering Committee to assess pathways for sustained statewide planning and policy coordination to identify strategies, partnerships, and organizational structures capable of advancing long-term food systems resilience in Virginia.

Regional Economic Viability Action Group

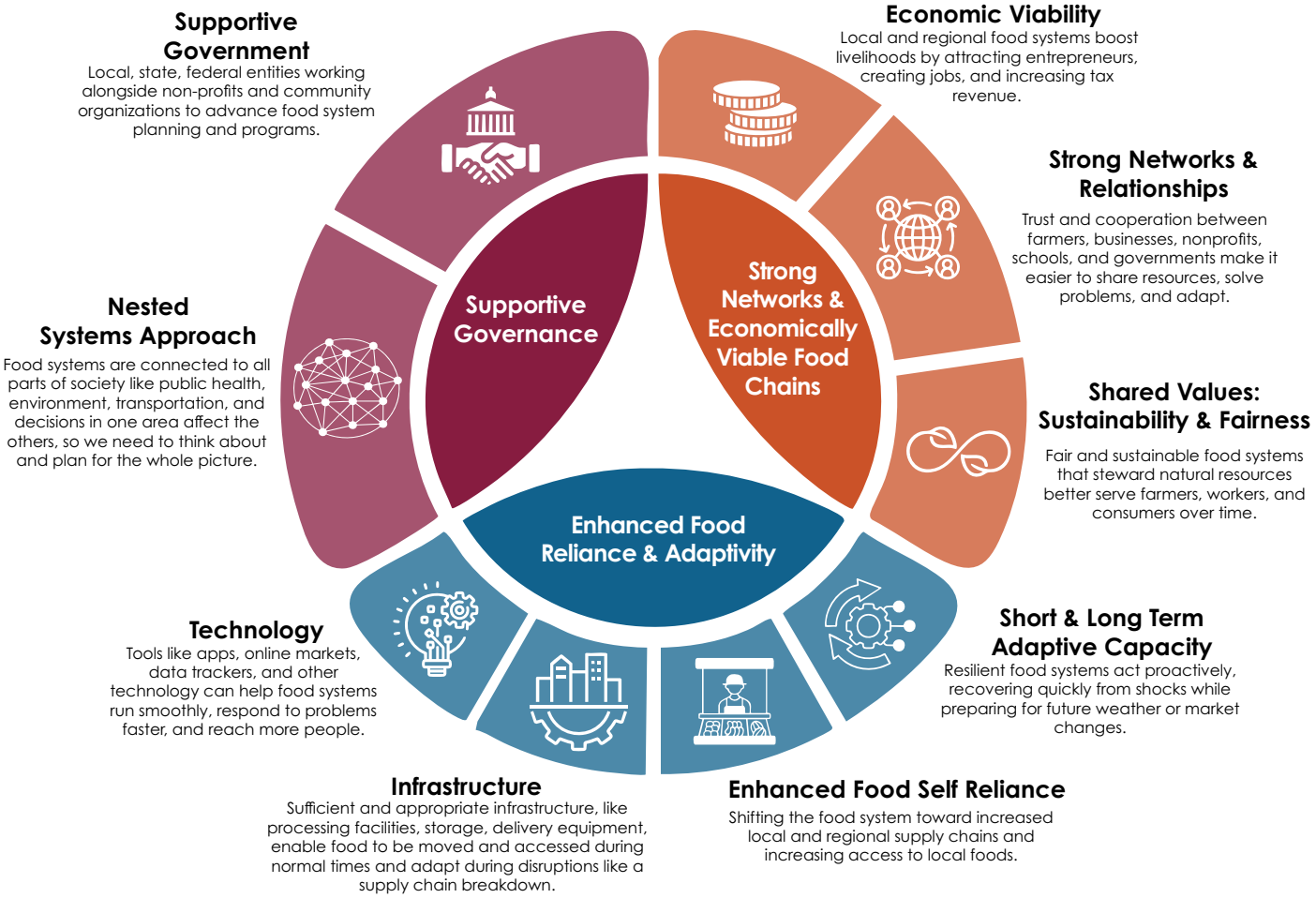
MAFRAC plans to convene a Regional Economic Viability Action Group to identify, prioritize, and collaboratively advance implementation of these priority actions across the Commonwealth, such as the Adopt-a-Farmer program.

WHAT IS FOOD SYSTEMS RESILIENCE

Based on input from people across Virginia's food systems and existing research, food systems resilience means:

- Ensuring consistent access to affordable, appropriate, and nutritious food.
- Supporting thriving farmers, workers, food businesses, and communities.
- Being able to adapt to disruptions, including economic shocks, policy decisions, and environmental changes.

Regional Food Systems Resilience Elements



Note: These principles of regional food systems resilience are derived from Keegan and colleagues (2024) *Exploring resilience concepts and strategies within regional food systems: a systematic literature review* and this image was originally published by Kelinsky-Jones and Spence (2026).

While local food systems play an important role in building resilience, regional food systems often provide greater resilience because they connect multiple local food systems across a larger geographic area. This broader scale supports greater diversity in production, markets, and supply chains; strengthens connections among communities and economies; and provides more options when disruptions affect one part of the food system.

What makes resilience different from other approaches to improving food systems is its focus on helping the system adapt and continue to provide food and support livelihoods during and after disruptions. Building resilience requires strong relationships and networks, fair policies, sustainable practices, and diverse regional food supply chains.

Because food systems are complex, resilience does not happen on its own. It requires intentional planning, coordination, and collaboration among people and organizations across food systems. This initiative and the subsequent next steps are important first steps toward developing a coordinated statewide plan to strengthen the resilience of Virginia's food systems (Tendall et al., 2015; Clancy & Ruhf, 2010; Ruhf & Clancy, 2022).

STATE-LEVEL RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FOOD SYSTEMS RESILIENCE IN VIRGINIA

Grounded in priorities surfaced through statewide listening sessions and the Connecting for Resilience Summit, the following statewide recommendations translate an aspiration for resilience into collaborative action. Four interconnected focus areas capture where sustained attention is needed at the state level to strengthen the resilience of Virginia's food systems:

1. **Institutionalized governance and coordination** structures to lead and align statewide direction;
2. **Strategic market development** to attract and protect necessary investment;
3. **Coordinated capital** to make investments durable rather than one-time; and
4. **Measurement and accountability** through a shared database providing the agility needed to serve the interests across Virginia's multiple food systems to ensure desired outcomes.

I. Institutionalized Governance & Coordination

Establish durable entities endorsed by a legislative foundation to set shared direction and align efforts across agencies, regions, and sectors over multiple years.

1. **Establish a Virginia Food Systems Policy Council.** Create a statewide, multi-stakeholder Food Systems Policy Council to coordinate statewide food system policy discussions, strengthen collaboration among sectors, and provide a forum for addressing shared food system priorities based on stakeholder input and available scientific evidence. To ensure durability across administration changes and budget cycles, we recommend establishing the Council in statute rather than relying on executive action or an existing non-statutory body alone.
    i. This effort could build upon the existing Virginia Food Systems Council by expanding its scope to include policy efforts.
    ii. Effective statewide coordination also depends on strong regional engagement. Consider supporting regional food system policy councils or similar collaborative structures that can elevate local and regional priorities to inform statewide decision-making (e.g., New York Statewide Network of Local Food Councils: $2 Million in the FY27 NY State Budget).
    iii. Consider a hybrid structure that pairs a statutory council with an executive-led initiative, enabling both long-term governance stability and flexible, rapidly deployable programming (e.g., Colorado's codified Food Systems Advisory Council alongside New Mexico's executive-led Food, Farm, and Hunger Initiative).
2. **Create an Agency-Level Virginia Food Systems Resiliency Coalition.** Develop a state-agency level Food Systems Resiliency Coalition, connected to Virginia's Office of Resilience, to coordinate food systems resilience planning across state agencies and in coordination with a Virginia Food Systems Policy Council (e.g., Maryland Food System Resiliency Council).
    iv. Strengthen Coordination Across Existing State Initiatives. Align food systems resilience planning with the Secretary of Agriculture and Forestry's Farm

STATE-LEVEL RECOMMENDATIONS, CONT'D.

and Forest Prosperity Plan, the Office of Resilience, VDOE, VDSS, and other relevant statewide initiatives, including Virginia Cooperative Extension, to maximize collaboration and implementation.

3. **Consider a Virginia Food, Farm, & Health Bill.** Explore comprehensive legislation that brings together food, agriculture, health, and food security priorities into a coordinated statewide framework that advances long-term food systems resilience (e.g., Pennsylvania Farm Bill and Iowa Farm Act). Such legislation could serve as the consolidating vehicle for the statutory elements recommended here including codifying the Food Systems Policy Council and establishing a dedicated Food Systems Fund within a single coordinated framework.
4. **Augment Statewide Farmland Preservation Strategies.** Build on Virginia's existing statewide initiatives, including the Office of Working Lands Preservation, to protect the agricultural land base needed for long-term food systems resilience. Increase support for conservation easements and local agricultural land-use planning, particularly in areas experiencing growing development pressure from residential growth, energy development, and data centers. Connect farmland protection strategies with farm viability, succession planning, and land access to ensure that protected land remains available for agricultural production and the next generation of farmers (e.g., Maryland's Agricultural Land Preservation Foundation and Pennsylvania Agricultural Security Areas).
5. **Consider Virginia's Position Within the Southeastern and Mid-Atlantic Regional Food Systems.** Where possible deepen coordination with regional food policy and research networks (e.g., Southern SARE) to align disaster response and share data and technical assistance. This ensures that state-level planning and action is nested within and reinforced by a broader regional resilience strategy rather than a purely intrastate plan.

II. Market Development

Create and protect the necessary demand that makes regional food and farm businesses viable and investable. Strengthen value chain assets that regional food production and distribution depend on.

1. **Expand Support for Regional Food Systems Infrastructure.** Increase investments in both dedicated infrastructure (such as processing, aggregation, storage, and distribution facilities) and cooperative or shared infrastructure (such as shared commercial kitchens, equipment, and cold storage) to strengthen regional supply chains, improve their resilience to future disruptions, and expand opportunities for institutional procurement, including Farm to School programs.
    i. Expand existing state investments, including by increasing the maximum grant award available through the Agriculture and Forestry Industries Development (AFID) Infrastructure Grant Program.
2. **Formalize Long-Term Institutional Market Commitments via Regional Food Procurement.** Support schools, food banks, hospitals, universities, and state facilities in securing and funding durable, multi-year procurement commitments for regional food. Predictable demand de-risks producer investment and makes regional food and farm businesses more investable. Build on Farm to School, the Virginia

Agricultural Food Assistance Program (VAFAP), and Food is Medicine procurement as a demand anchor.

   i. Explore state-supported food distribution models that connect Virginia farmers with schools (e.g., North Carolina Department of Agriculture & Consumer Services Food Distribution Program).

3. **Safeguard Nutrition-Security Programs Against Federal Funding Disruptions.** As a resilience measure, use state flexibilities and contingency appropriations to protect the continuity of established food access programs and nutrition education facing federal cuts, stabilizing both vulnerable households and the demand these programs create for Virginia producers.

III. Coordinated Capital & Investment

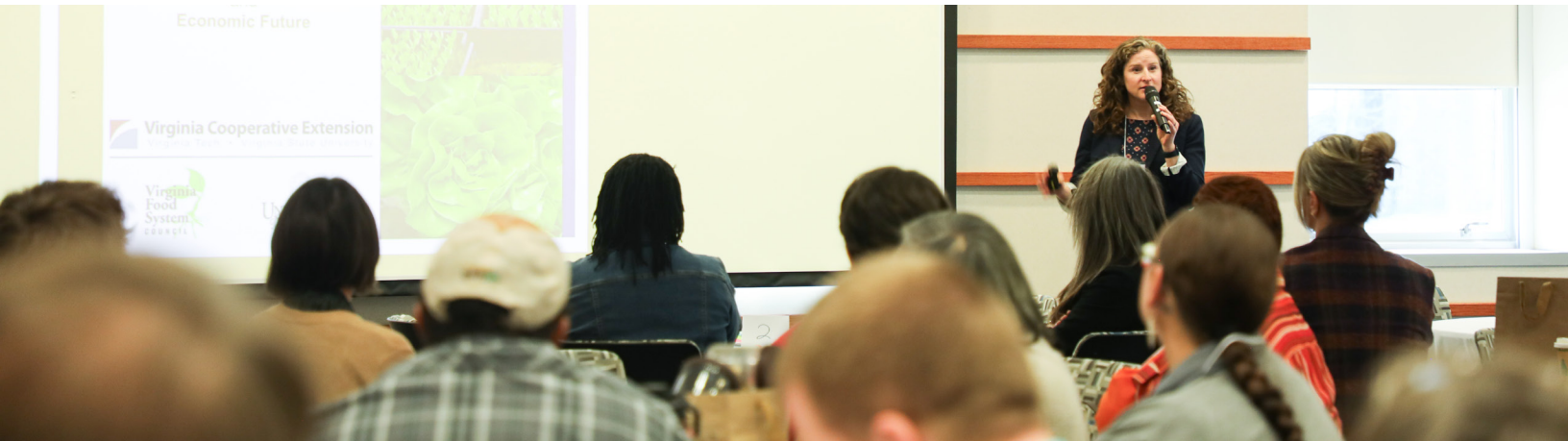
Provide the coordinated financing to scale investment from one-time grants to singular food/farm enterprises into a durable, self-sustaining regional food economy.

1. **Design a Statewide Food Systems Capital Deployment Strategy and Dedicated Fund.** Complement infrastructure and governance investments with a coordinated financing strategy that blends public appropriations with private and philanthropic co-investment. For example, enhance the existing Virginia Food Access Investment Fund (VFAIF) to attract private co-investment alongside state dollars, broaden eligibility across the full value chain, and introduce revolving capital vehicles that recycle repayments into new lending – transforming a grant program into a self-sustaining investment tool. Pair this with a dedicated, continuously appropriated Food Systems Fund (e.g., Colorado's Food Systems Advisory Council Fund) with authority to accept federal, philanthropic, and private contributions, giving the strategy durability across administrations and budget cycles.

IV. Measurement & Accountability

Establish a shared evidence base to target resource investment, track progress, and adapt over time.

1. **Build a Shared Evidence Base and Cross-Agency Dashboard.** Commission a comprehensive statewide food system needs assessment and establish a cross-agency dashboard to track food system needs, program performance, and public and private investment in real time (e.g., New Mexico's Food Initiative Dashboard).



LISTENING SESSIONS OVERVIEW

Across sessions, participants converged on a shared understanding of resilience that extends beyond food production alone, and emphasized that resilience depends on strong networks, equitable policies, sustainable practices, and diversified local and regional supply chains. Across Virginia's many food systems, resilience means:

- Ensuring consistent access to affordable, appropriate, and nutritious food
- Supporting thriving farmers, workers, and communities
- Being able to adapt to disruptions, including economic shocks, policy decisions, and environmental changes

Participants

Thank you to all who participated in the listening sessions across Virginia. Your willingness to share your experiences, perspectives, and ideas made this work possible. We appreciate your time and your commitment to building stronger, more resilient food systems in Virginia.

BY THE NUMBERS

- 266 participants
- 12 total sessions
- 5 regional in-person sessions
- 2 in-person conference sessions
- 5 virtual sessions

Approach

From fall 2025 to early winter 2026, the VT Center for Food Systems and Community Transformation connected with people across Virginia's food systems to better understand what "food systems resilience" means in real life and how it can be strengthened across the state. We held 12 listening sessions with 266 participants. **These participants included people from agriculture, nonprofits and community organizations, local and state government, funding organizations, and others involved in growing, processing, distributing, and accessing food**. We began each session by asking participants to respond to a shared prompt: "I will feel Virginia's food system is resilient when…"

Next, we introduced 10 principles of food systems resilience (see Figure 1). Each principle was displayed on a poster around the room. Participants were asked to respond to two questions for each principle:

- What are our strengths: what are we doing well that we should continue or expand?
- Where are the opportunities for improvement that we need to build or strengthen?

After this individual activity, participants worked in small groups to discuss priority actions. This section brings together the main themes from these discussions, which were also used to inform the Connecting for Resilience Summit. All materials from the sessions, including the presentations, transcribed notes and data, and photos are available on this website.

Partners

We are grateful to the many partners who helped host and support these listening sessions across Virginia. Their local knowledge, relationships, and commitment made it possible to bring together a wide range of voices and perspectives. This work would not have been possible without their collaboration. Thank you to the Chesapeake Bay Funders Network, Path Foundation, Rappahannock-Rapidan Regional Commission, Virginia Association for Biological Farming, Virginia Association of Planning District Commissions, Virginia Beginning Farmer & Rancher Coalition Program, Virginia Fresh Match, Virginia Funders Network, Virginia Municipal League, Virginia Seafood Agricultural Research & Extension Center, and William & Mary Virginia Institute of Marine Science.

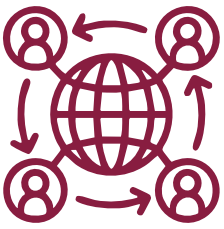
LISTENING SESSIONS RESULTS

Strengths of Virginia's Food Systems

Participants identified a wide range of existing strengths to build on across Virginia's food systems.

Supportive Governance

- Local initiatives such as community gardens, zoning policies for land use, and support for farmers' markets
- Regional coordination through committees and commissions
- State-level policies and efforts that support producers and markets



Networks

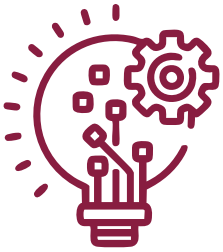
- Established local, regional, and statewide networks and coalitions that connect stakeholders across food systems
- Knowledge sharing through educational farms, Extension programming, and farmer training initiatives
- Cross-sector collaboration among nonprofits, producers, funders, and community organizations

Infrastructure

- Cooperative infrastructure, including commercial kitchens, shared storage, and emerging models such as community canneries
- Food hubs and aggregation systems that connect producers to markets
- Farmers markets and independent grocers that increase access to local food

Economic Viability

- Collaborative business models, including cooperatives and government programs that support their development
- Communication of values along supply chains, such as Buy Fresh, Buy Local campaigns and agritourism operations
- Farm-to-institution programs connecting producers with schools and other institutions

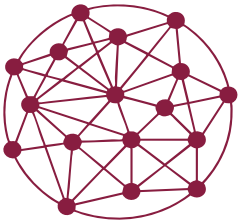


Technology

- On-farm technologies that support production and resource efficiency
- Digital applications that connect producers and consumers and redirect food waste
- Networking platforms that facilitate coordination among stakeholders across food systems

Shared Values

- Sustainability, including regenerative practices, composting, and biodiversity efforts
- Fairness, including volunteer-led food production, food distribution programs, and initiatives that connect local food with communities in need



Nested Systems

- Regenerative and agroecological practices that improve environmental outcomes and farm resilience
- Efforts that link food production with food access
- Recognition that many parts of our food systems – and many stakeholders–contribute to overall resilience

Local and Regional Food Systems

- Growth of urban farms and small-scale production
- Strong regional distribution and market channels for local products
- Efforts to increase equitable access to local food, including partnerships between farms and food access organizations

LISTENING SESSIONS RESULTS, CONT'D.

Opportunities to Strengthen Virginia's Food Systems

Participants identified a wide range of opportunities to strengthen Virginia's food systems.

Networks

Knowledge Sharing

- Enhance education for public officials, agency staff, and local leaders to support informed decision-making
- Expand farmer-focused training and technical assistance, including business planning, and farm transition support
- Develop youth pipelines through K-12 programs focused on resiliency and cooking

Cross-Sector Collaboration

- Strengthen collaboration among food banks, pantries, producers, community organizations, and local governments
- Expand regional coalitions and cross-sector partnerships
- Identify entities or roles to support ongoing communication across stakeholders

Connections Across the Supply Chain

- Strengthen connections between food distributors and trucking companies
- Improve access to capital through connections with mission-based lenders
- Develop systems to redirect surplus food to reduce waste and increase access

Economic Viability

Farm-to-Institution Support

- Expand procurement of local food by schools and hospitals
- Support policies and contracts that prioritize local and value-aligned sourcing
- Strengthen relationships and funding to support partnerships between producers, institutions, and distributors

Communication and Marketing

- Strengthen regional branding of local food by highlighting quality and diversity
- Expand use of communication tools such as social media, advertising, and coordinated campaigns
- Develop and distribute resources to support consumer awareness (e.g., buy local guides)

Technology

- Expand use of automation and emerging technologies (e.g., AI, drone delivery)
- Invest in energy and water technologies (e.g., microgrids, solar backup systems, water reuse)
- Expand communication technologies (e.g., apps for food rescue and resource sharing)

Supportive Governance

Local: Land Use and Zoning

- Involve farmers in zoning decisions
- Improve long-term land use planning across communities
- Address zoning and permitting barriers to support farmland access and preservation

Local: Capacity and Investment

- Increase local government capacity through dedicated staff and coordination efforts
- Expand use of local funding and budgeting mechanisms (e.g., grants) to support food system initiatives
- Strengthen local government involvement through support for farmers, engagement in food distribution networks, and regular assessment of regional food systems

State: Support and Incentives

- Expand state-level support for small farms and development of new markets
- Create incentives to connect local producers with food access programs
- Sustain and strengthen food assistance programs (e.g., SNAP, WIC, Virginia Fresh Match)

State: New Administration Priorities

- Elevate food systems as a priority within the new administration and across state agencies
- Integrate food systems into the Commonwealth's Office of Resiliency
- Establish consistent, long-term policy direction and explore targeted policy opportunities (e.g., organic acreage and certification)

Food Policy Councils

- Establish local and regional food policy councils, boards, or commissions to support food systems work
- Explore the revitalization of a statewide food systems council that is adequately resourced to coordinate and align efforts across stakeholders

Nested Systems

- Strengthen whole-system approaches by improving education of local leaders, planners, and commissions
- Break down silos across services and better connect different partners within food systems
- Support community engagement, ownership, and food sovereignty and justice efforts

LISTENING SESSIONS RESULTS, CONT'D.

Opportunities to Strengthen Virginia's Food Systems (cont'd.)

Adaptive Capacity

Data and Risk Assessment

- Improve baseline data on social vulnerability, food stocks, and food insecurity
- Assess risks related to major shocks and gaps in available support (including federal support), and develop strategies to address vulnerabilities
- Improve understanding of climate change impacts on food systems

Emergency Planning

- Include food systems in emergency preparedness planning
- Improve coordination with federal nutrition assistance programs (e.g., SNAP, WIC, school meals)
- Expand disaster preparedness and recovery efforts (e.g., training policies, guidelines for producers and communities)

Sustainability

- Improve food waste systems, including redistribution efforts and regional composting programs with food establishments
- Support soil health practices, including incorporation of traditional ecological knowledge

Fairness and Access

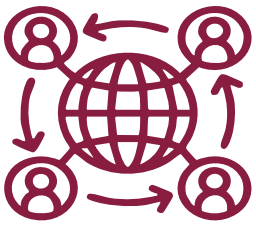
- Expand access to local food through programs and partnerships, including farm-to-school initiatives and community-based distribution (e.g., pop-up sites)
- Address affordability as a structural barrier, including for households not served by existing food assistance programs

Local and Regional Food Systems

- Expand market access for local producers, including entry into larger retail markets and increased direct-to-consumer sales opportunities
- Support growth and diversification of producers, including small-scale operations and nonprofit community farms

PRIORITY ACTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

Across discussions, participants emphasized several priority actions that could strengthen food systems resilience in Virginia. These actions build directly on the strengths and opportunities identified and point to areas where coordination, investment, and leadership are most needed.



Strengthen Networks

Improve coordination across food system organizations and expand opportunities for dialogue at local, regional, and statewide levels, building on existing networks.

Advance Supportive Governance

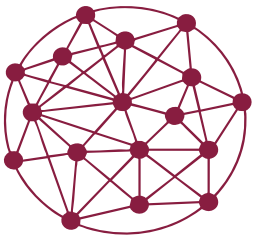
Engage funders and policymakers, strengthen food policy councils or a statewide coordinating entity, and bridge the gap between producers and planners.

Support Economic Viability

Expand collective marketing and branding, strengthen regional markets and farm-to-institution pathways, and leverage tourism and economic development.

Invest in Infrastructure and Access

Expand processing and cooperative infrastructure and improve access to local food through markets and distribution systems.



Take a Whole-System Approach

Strengthen coordination across efforts and align funding to support long-term sustainability.

FOOD SYSTEMS SUMMIT: MOVING FROM LISTENING TO COLLECTIVE ACTION

Building on the statewide listening sessions, the Virginia Tech Center for Food Systems and Community Transformation and the Mid-Atlantic Food Resilience and Access Coalition co-hosted Connecting for Resilience: A Virginia Food Systems Summit on April 7, 2026, at Blue Ridge Community College in Weyers Cave, Virginia. The summit was designed to move beyond identifying strengths and challenges toward developing shared priorities and collective action to strengthen Virginia's food systems resilience. It was planned with guidance from a steering committee and facilitation design team. The summit brought together stakeholders across Virginia's food systems to reflect on findings from the listening sessions and identify priority action areas statewide and regionally.

Stakeholders included: state agencies (e.g., Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (VDACS) and Virginia Department of Education (VDOE)); Funders (e.g., philanthropic institutions and Community Development Financial Institutions); Farmers (e.g., small and mid-sized farmers); Food businesses & Cooperatives (e.g., wholesale food distributors and local markets); Extension (e.g., agents, specialists and administrators); Researchers (from both public and private institutions); Non-profits (e.g., American Heart Association & Local Environmental Agriculture Project) and Local Governments and Regional Commissions (e.g., Agricultural Development Planners and Urban Agriculture Specialist).

SUMMIT-IDENTIFIED PRIORITY ACTION AREAS

Building on the listening sessions' findings, summit participants identified several priority action areas to strengthen food systems resilience across Virginia. These priorities reflect opportunities for coordinated action over the next several years, and have informed both the project team's next steps and the state-level recommendations presented in this report.

Regional Economic Viability

Participants emphasized strengthening the economic viability of farms and food businesses by:

- Expanding and replicating initiatives like the Adopt-A-Farmer Family Farm Box Initiative that works directly with local farmers to provide produce boxes that provide locally grown food for underserved households while strengthening small farms.
- Supporting small and mid-sized farmers through technical assistance related to marketing and market development alongside regional market and brand development efforts.
- Leveraging farm to school and farm to institution purchasing power to support small and mid-sized farms
- Investing in food systems as a driver of regional economic development, including collaborative and cooperative business models.

Governance Policy and Advocacy

Participants prioritized stronger coordination between local, regional, and state efforts by:

- Exploring how to build the capacity of the Virginia Food Systems Council, or similar entity, to elevate regional priorities and inform statewide policy and planning.
- Developing a statewide food systems resilience strategy that aligns regional and local planning efforts, in coordination with the Farm and Forest Prosperity Plan and Virginia Office of Resilience.

Infrastructure

Participants highlighted investments needed to strengthen regional food systems and provide support to small and mid-sized producers, including:

- Workforce housing for farm workers and low-income food system workers.
- Cooperative infrastructure: commercial kitchen and equipment sharing

Systems Thinking

Participants emphasized integrating food systems into broader community priorities by:

- Strengthening connections between food systems and health entities through food-as-medicine initiatives.

Communications and Research

Participants identified opportunities to:

- Improve evidence-based communication and better translate research into accessible information for producers, practitioners, and policymakers through digital media.

REGIONAL PRIORITIES

Participants also identified regional priorities that complement the shared statewide action areas and reflect the distinct needs of different parts of the Commonwealth. Please note: *Regions reflect participants' self-identification and do not represent project-defined regional boundaries. Representation from Virginia's Eastern and Coastal regions was limited at the summit and should be expanded in future engagement efforts.*

Region	Priority Areas
Central Virginia	• Preserve farmland and support farm succession amid pressures from data center development • Strengthen regional markets and branding • Develop a Central Virginia food systems council or network to connect upward to a re-energized statewide council
Southwest Virginia	• Increase regional coordination and networking including through digital engagement • Develop a Southwest Virginia council or network to connect upward to a re-energized statewide council • Strengthen producer-university research partnerships
Northern Virginia	• Regional food system resilience department • Regional coordination and action planning with representation from stakeholders across the food systems sectors • Develop a Northern Virginia regional council or network to connect upward to a re-energized statewide council
Shenandoah Valley	• Increased processing and shared infrastructure including commercial kitchen for value added products • Research informed by regional priorities and the experiences of marginalized farmers with James Madison University. • Develop a Shenandoah Valley regional council or network to connect upward to a re-energized statewide council
Statewide	• Strengthening the VA Food Systems Council to share top regional priorities and challenges • Developing statewide food systems assessments, including landscape, value chain, and production analyses.

VIRGINIA FOOD SYSTEMS RESILIENCE INITIATIVE NEXT STEPS

Additional Next Steps

Through the support of a United States Department of Agriculture National Institute for Food and Agriculture seed grant, the Center for Food Systems and Community Transformation alongside current and future partners will continue advancing a statewide food systems resilience planning process for Virginia by:

- Hosting regional convenings across Virginia to strengthen regional organization
- Conducting a statewide value chain analysis
- Developing and implementing a statewide food systems resilience assessment
- Hosting another statewide resilient food systems summit in 2028

The Mid-Atlantic Food Resilience and Access Coalition is leading the Roots to Table Adopt-A-Farmer Family Farm Box Initiative which aims to strengthen small family farms while increasing access to healthy, locally grown foods for underserved families in Culpeper County and Fauquier County, Virginia. The project aims to distribute 100-pound local farm boxes every two weeks to eligible households. In support of expanding this statewide, MAFRAC will also co-host a regional economic viability action group based on these recommendations.

Recommendations for Future Engagements:

- **Expand engagement in underrepresented regions**, particularly Virginia's coastal food systems, including wild-caught fisheries and aquaculture.
- **Increase participation from Tribal Nations** to better understand Indigenous perspectives, priorities, and opportunities for strengthening food systems resilience.
- **Broaden engagement with mid-sized and larger-scale producers** to better understand the opportunities and challenges they face and identify strategies that strengthen regional food systems resilience across the full spectrum of Virginia's agricultural sector.
- **Continue connecting regional priorities to statewide planning and action** through ongoing convenings, shared learning, and coordinated implementation.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We sincerely thank all of the participants who shared their time, experiences, and insights throughout this project. Your contributions were invaluable in shaping the findings and identifying priority actions for strengthening food systems resilience in Virginia. We are especially grateful to the small-scale farmers who participated during the busy spring growing season.

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Bob Leonard, Virginia Tech School of Performing Arts
Jon Catherwood-Ginn, Virginia Tech Center for Communicating Science & School of Performing Arts
Carla Cash, Cinnamon McKann, Lisa Steele, Yolanda Thomas, & Miriam Boateng, Mid-Atlantic Food Resilience and Access Coalition
Katie Trozzo, Kim Niewolny, & Lia Kelinsky-Jones, Virginia Tech Center for Food Systems & Community Transformation
Joy Truskowski, Singer-Songwriter & Song Leader
Michael Rohd, Applied Theater Practitioner & Process Design Consultant

Facilitation:
Eric Bendfeldt, Roberto Franco, Pratyoosh Kashyap, Marian Dalke, William McCausland, Madisen Plunkert, Frank Adusei, Shadrack Yartey, Enrique Lopez, Lydia Martins, Elli Travis, Jean Parrella, & Mary Sketch Bryant

Photos and Video:
Jessica R. Spence, Pratyoosh Kashyap, & Shadrack Yartey

LEARN MORE & CONTACT

For questions or comments on this publication, please contact:
Dr. Lia Kelinsky-Jones
Research Assistant Professor | Agricultural, Leadership, and Community Education
Assistant Director for Research | Center for Food Systems and Community Transformation
Virginia Tech | kelinskyjones@vt.edu | 540-231-1534

Click here for the project website.

Open access to all data, including videos of the listening sessions and summit, referenced in this report can be found at the Open Science Framework website. Scan the QR code for direct access.

Declaration

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