



Visioning a Preferred Future for Virginia's Food System for 2027

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Executive Summary

In May 2017, Virginia Cooperative Extension's Community, Local, and Regional Food Systems (VCE-CLRFS) Team, in collaboration with the Virginia Food System Council, community partners, and friends, hosted a two-day workshop with the overarching goal of building group capacity to co-create a vision for Virginia's food system for the year 2027. Ann Lofgren and Timo Anderson of ZingTrain based in Ann Arbor, Michigan provided specific training using Zingerman's unique approach for creating a vision of greatness, creating a personal vision, and bottom line organizational change.

Participants included a cross-section of people and organizations who are working to strengthen farm and food connections, nourish individuals and families, empower communities, revitalize local economies, and protect natural resources across Virginia and beyond. The expectations for the training were to: 1) gain a new understanding of the stakeholders working toward food system change in Virginia, 2) learn Zingerman's approach to implementing and sustaining effective change in a community, organization, or network, 3) learn how to craft a clear, documented and inspiring organizational vision for the food system that provides momentum and excitement, and 4) understand how to use the Hot Pen technique to create a personal/organizational vision and teach others.

To set the table for the two-days of training, Eric Bendfeldt, Dr. Kim Niewolny, and Christy Gabbard provided an introduction and perspective from Virginia Cooperative Extension's CLRFS Team and the Virginia Food System Council. Eric outlined issues facing Virginia's food system, which included declines in farm numbers, continued loss of prime agricultural farmland, increases in adult obesity rates and

annual total costs of diabetes for people in Virginia, and that 983,880 individuals across the state were food insecure in 2014. Eric pointed out that the scale of these issues highlight the urgent need for individuals and organizations along the food value chain to collaborate in a more concerted way to have broader, meaningful collective impact and real change.

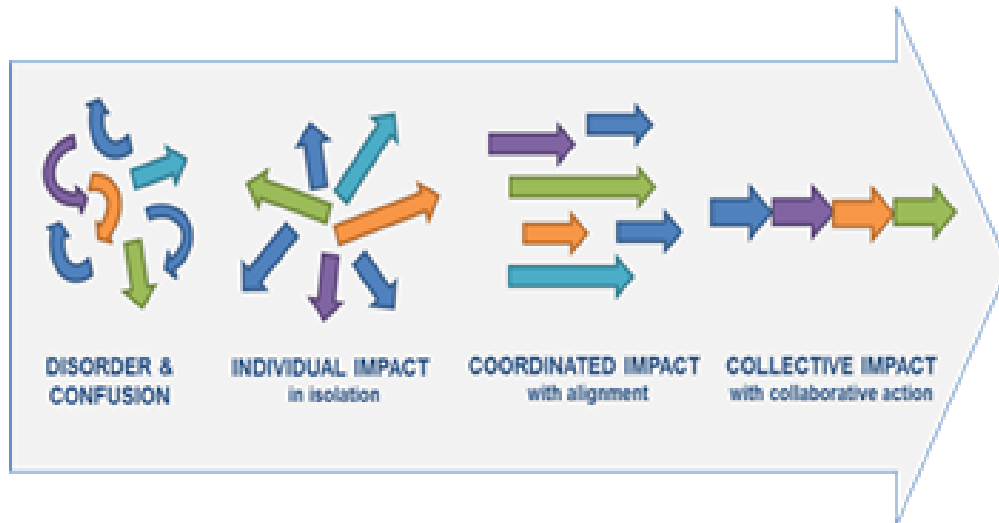


Figure 1. Source: Santa Fe Community Foundation's Birth to Career Success Program.

Dr. Kim Niewolny of Virginia Tech shared the history of the Community, Local, and Regional Food Systems (CLRFS) Team and overall initiative as a way to help Extension and food system stakeholders understand and frame the complexity of Virginia’s food system so mutually reinforcing plans and strategies can be used for more robust durable outcomes and impacts (Niewolny et al., 2016). Kim reported on the 2016 statewide CLRFS Forum and the nine listening sessions. She also explained how Whole Measures of Community Food Systems literature was utilized to logically frame Virginia’s systems-level work and seven long-term impacts: 1) healthy people, 2) viable communities, 3) thriving economies, 4) agricultural profitability, 5) food security, 6) justice, fairness, and equity, and 7) safe nutritious food. These measures served as the basis for developing a model for this food system work and efforts to support the food system value chain and facilitate values-based impacts.

VCE Model of Community, Local, Regional Food Systems



Christy Gabbard of the Virginia Food System Council and the Chesapeake Foodshed Network offered her perspective on the importance of working collaboratively and supporting local and regional food system efforts to truly have a

<http://www.pubs.ext.vt.edu/ALCE/ALCE-154/ALCE-154-PDF.pdf>

strong network of people and organizations. She also explained the Council's four focus areas of work for system-level change.

Overall, the two-day ZingTrain workshop provided an opportunity for 45 participants to work collectively to paint a picture of a preferred future and co-create what food system success will look like in 2027. Through discussion over the two-days, the following themes were identified as important to food system work: community-based food system planning; food security and equity; environmental and natural resource conservation; food justice, diversity, inclusion, and equity; distribution and scale for farm to institution connection; school and community gardens for capacity building and literacy; importance of farmland, farmers, farmworkers, and food chain workers; sustainable finance and infrastructure for farms and food; and transparency for fair labor and trade along the food value chain.

The narrative and conversations related to these themes that follow was an outcome of the training and what a preferred future for Virginia's food system looks like in 2027. We welcome your participation in co-creating this preferred future.

If you would like more information about the Community, Local, and Regional Food Systems Program and Initiative, please contact Kim Niewolny at niewolny@vt.edu and 540-231-5784; Joyce Latimer at jlatime@vt.edu and 540-231-7906; or Eric Bendfeldt at ebendfel@vt.edu and 540-432-6029 Ext. 106. For information about the Virginia Food System Council and Chesapeake Foodshed Network, Christy Gabbard can be contacted at Christine.gabbard@gmail.com.

Vision of a Preferred Future for Virginia's Food System in 2027

Preferred food, farm and waterway future

It is June 2027. People of all ages and nationalities are enjoying the sights and sounds of Virginia's food system. Virginia's food system is maturing and food security is increasing. Today, we all know community food security is truly social security. Small light manufacturing jobs and clusters of well-connected entrepreneurial businesses are thriving throughout the region and state. Everyone is involved and engaged. We protect water quality. We build soil health. We are self-reliant and care for our neighbors and for our community. It is now simply what we do and who we are!

Farmers are utilizing their land and soils for long-term ecological sustainability and productive capacity. This includes a strong focus on building soil health and resilient farming systems. Farmers produce crops and livestock to meet local culturally-appropriate food demand and optimize regional market opportunities. Farming practices are sustainable, fueled by renewable energy with solar, wind, and biogas production on site.

Every city and community in Virginia we travel through is surrounded by a green belt that grows food sustainably. Land trusts can now be found in each community to protect farmland and to provide land access for young growers and diverse community members. Abattoirs and meat processing facilities are scattered throughout the landscape. Individually quick frozen (IQF) and value-added processing

facilities are accessible in all major regions of the state, strategically located not more than an hour's drive from any farmer or food entrepreneur. All food produced is utilized in some way so food waste is minimal. Farm identity and nutritionally based practices (growing, processing, marketing, and distribution) are retained throughout the food network.

Strengthening food and farm connections

An effectively coordinated Virginia Food System and Equity Plan (FSEP), supported by the Virginia General Assembly and their constituents, now gives farmers and those dependent on land and water for their livelihoods more control than ever before on decisions that affect their farms, livelihoods, and destinies. The measures are community-focused and recognize the importance of Virginia farmers, creative capital, and access to land, incubators, and accelerators.

We're here to celebrate that farmers and communities are not just surviving -- they are thriving. These farmers and waterpeople are open, accepting, widely diverse, and are generally healthy. They eat and sell healthy food, and their everyday conversation reveals their focus on both healthy food, soils, and waterways -- preserving their land and water resources in every way for future generations. These farmers and waterpeople are diverse in every way: women, men, heritage farmers, recent college graduates new to farming, military veteran farmers, and the young and young-at-heart starting a new profession. The contributions of farmworkers and farmers of color to agriculture and the food system are recognized and valued more than ever. At the same time, families, households, and communities have taken more ownership of the food system.

Virginia is known as the food and farm leader of green energy technologies, and actively encourages on-farm innovation and community collaboration across Virginia. Virginia farms and farmers are self-reliant, resilient, and protect the renewable resources they depend on. Farmers are fairly compensated for the work they do which goes beyond the production of food to building the very fabric of society and true community.

Empowering communities and regions through food system planning

Furthermore, the Virginia Food System and Equity Plan is truly community-focused. The plan supports farmers and food entrepreneurs and increases access to creative capital, land, incubators, accelerators, and more. Nearly every community and region in Virginia has a Food System and Equity Council (FSEC) established to encourage collaboration and support stakeholders in the food and farm landscape. Local Councils are based on foodshed and watersheds instead of county lines. The Council serves as a forum to discuss land use regulations, needed infrastructure development, and tax-based policies that encourage economic development and ensure equitable food access for everyone. Virginia is very pro-food, pro-health, and pro-agriculture from the soil up. Each region is branding foods that have a distinct identity, flavor and palate of place that uniquely says Virginia!

Greater learning, appreciation, and resilience

Through the learning network provided by the FSEC Councils, adults and youth have a greater appreciation for farming and what resiliency means from a historical perspective since Virginia has been cultivating land for more than 400 years. Council events highlight place-based community and the virtues of agrarianism as espoused in any Wendell Berry book or poem. The virtues and highlights aren't exclusive to farmers, but permeate like the smell of freshly baked bread to all those who are connected to place and love their community(ies). Local farmers feel connected to the larger food system and know they can ask a question about the upcoming season. Farmers of all scales can easily connect to needed resources and networks!

During Virginia's Annual Food Systems Month, Fifth grade students are visiting farms and natural areas across Virginia to learn about food, the people who grow it, and the land that supports and protects the water and soil. They, as children who hail from all of Virginia's cities, towns, and country sides, are a tangible embodiment of a vision to bridge the urban-rural divide launched ten years ago -- about the time these kids were born. This vision was one where communities came together to build a sustainable food system.

A common story, from Guadeloupe, the owner and operator of Mountain Dell Farm, a 10 year-old example of ecological farming at its finest: "Twelve years ago, the Virginia Beginning Farmer and Rancher Coalition helped me find land and the educational resources to start farming and develop my whole farm plan for the future. I wanted to farm in a way that improves the quality of the land I worked so hard to acquire. It was around that time that Virginians came together to agree that farming is a good way to manage carbon to reduce the impacts of climate change and build real resilience into our food and farm systems."

Nourishing farm-to-table connections and economies

Local food sourcing and true sustainability is embraced by all Virginia institutions. Schools, universities, hospitals, and retirement communities know their farmers and farmers know their schools, universities, hospitals, and retirement communities. The relationship is no longer just producers and buyers, but real collaborators and partners in shaping community well-being. Healing and health are embedded in everyone's daily routine and behavior. In all these institutions, especially hospitals and others that are directly health-related, there are abundant well-researched data on the connection between good health and nutritious food.

Students enrolled in Virginia colleges and universities truly get a taste of what Virginia has to offer during their time in the state. From community college campuses, to private and large state universities, all are embracing the bounty of local food produced in Virginia. Hospital patients genuinely look forward to meal time. Gone are the days of dreading "hospital food." The very best of

Virginia is brought to them courtesy of our state's local growers. People learn and are taught young how food is medicine and how the preparation of food is a successful form of therapy to support mental and physical well-being.

Logistical arrangements, infrastructure, and friendly relationships have allowed nutrition directors to do what they love best -- serving high quality food. Producers, processors, aggregators, distributors and buyers work together to coordinate adequate volumes and consistent supplies of local food across the food chain. Small, light processing and manufacturing jobs exist to support needed food system infrastructure for rural and urban communities. At the same time, there is good communication and coordination in place. Dynamic advocates representing all generations are working across systems in rural and urban settings to help facilitate and navigate the system, to make it work for everyone -- not just those who can easily afford it.

Catalyzing land, labor, and education

Joe and Suzanne pull out of their driveway confident in the fact that everything will be okay - they have time to interact with the community today because their employees back on the farm are equipped with the confidence and knowledge necessary to carry out the tasks today, and for the days to come. Like most other neighboring farmers, they are able to maintain a small but skilled labor force on their farm. They're committed to sharing with the community and others their stories that farming is a viable career with opportunities for advancement and ongoing improvement. When Joe and Suzanne arrive at the store, they see a grocery store chock full of every seasonal option available in the

A Story of what Food Security, Justice, and Equity looks like for a Mother and Daughter

Julia and her mom sit down to enjoy a breakfast made from products purchased from the mobile farmers market: fresh milk, eggs, whole wheat bread, and fresh fruits. Julia continues to get ready for school and her mom for work. They both look forward to the new opportunities they now have since Julia's mom's health has improved greatly over the past few years. She now has a job at the university dining hall where she earns a thrivable living wage. They are able to purchase the fresh fruits and vegetables from the corner store or the market stand just a block away.

Julia smiles as she walks past the market to Stone Spring Elementary School. The neighborhood is safe and neighbors are friendly. Everyone has access to healthy food every day at home and at school. As Julia arrives at school, she waves to Farmer Jose who is setting up the farmers' market where produce from the school's community garden is available for sale. Local farmers offer unique samples and delicious new recipes for using locally sourced foods. She admires fresh foods such as strawberries and blueberries for her lunch. She saves quarters and loose change to start her own business selling locally-made ice pops and smoothies. She is also intrigued by the different cultural and ethnic food options which are made with local ingredients highlighted in the culinary curriculum.

Julia enters the school building and heads straight to the window to check on the bean plants growing in her classroom. The bean plants will soon be transplanted into the school garden. Her teacher makes an announcement: it is Julia's turn to check on the food waste from the dining commons after lunch today and transport the feedstock back to the vermicompost bin and waiting worms.

county. Everything is fairly priced for consumers and producers. Farmers have time to stop in and talk with consumers – who now function more like shareholders and co-business partners giving feedback. Joe and Suzanne’s farm is just one example of the diversity, equity, and sovereignty that exists on local farms and the community as a whole.

Farming and Finance with a Strong Future: A Kitchen Table Story

The following conversation takes place on a summer evening at any kitchen table in Virginia.

Jo: “Dad, I’ve decided what I want to do with my life. I’m going to be a farmer.”

Dad: “Jo, that’s wonderful! I’m so relieved and proud.”

Jo: “It was an easy decision. My high school agriculture and marketing classes really prepared me, on top of the farm internship I did last year.”

Dad: “Your mother and I are delighted you’ll be staying in Virginia.”

Jo: “There are so many market opportunities! It’s easier than ever to get my produce into local markets all across town. I’ll be using Market Maker to connect my products to people who want to buy them, and I am going to sell to a local hospital.”

Dad: “Your only problem might be finding land since there are so many farmers!”

Jo: “That’s okay! I found a couple of acres of land on the VA Farm Link website from an individual transitioning out of farming. I’ll be working that land while I go to college, using a local cooperative to access the equipment I might need. We’re so lucky Virginia values soil and water health and this land remained in production all these years.”

Dad: “Do you know what you’re going to produce? You need to make sure you have something to sell year-round.”

Jo: “Yes! I made a business plan in high school and have done research on what other people are growing to make sure I have my own product and market niche that suits me and my values. I’ll have hoop houses to grow year-round and there is a whole network of people available to take any surplus produce I might have and create value-added products.”

Dad: “And how are you going to pay to get this farm started?”

Jo: “I met with Virginia FAIRS (Foundation for Agricultural Innovation and Rural Sustainability) and they’re helping me take my business plan and apply for a grant. The grant will provide some initial seed money to incubate my idea. However, the details and work are in my business plan. Then I will be growing high-value crops to sell to the local hospital. When I graduate from college, I will have several career opportunities. The hospital will be able to hire me on as their full-time farmer since I will have an established relationship, their trust, and a proven record. The local high school could also hire me as the farmer for the school to teach gardening, math, and botany and offer summer camps to engage students and have helpers with garden and farm work.”

Feeding Minds and Gardening Opportunities

Almost every K-12 public school in Virginia -- from Head Start, elementary, middle, to high schools -- has a garden on site and a culinary arts class funded through local budgets and health districts that is supported by a strong volunteer community. Students, teachers, staff, parents and garden managers collaborate in many ways to prepare lesson plans and coordinate garden and culinary efforts. Thanks to great volunteers and active food incubator and training programs, many of these gardens run throughout the summer to feed community members and provide an opportunity for youth leadership programming at the agricultural trade schools. In many of the schools in Virginia, school kitchens have the essential equipment, space, and resources to cook with whole foods in large batches to feed entire student bodies. In partnership with the community college system, several public schools offer work study opportunities to high school students who want to learn how to prepare for careers in the food industry.

With support of the state legislature and local government officials, zoning requires that new housing developments and redevelopment efforts have dedicated green space for use as a community garden. This may include rooftop gardens, edible landscapes, raised beds, and the use of bucket/potted plants in shared spaces. New and existing community gardens are featured at retirement homes and in abandoned lots city wide. More correctional facilities are putting in community gardens to feed the soil, cultivate community, encourage gainful re-entry employment opportunities, and incubate renewed commitment to food. All across Virginia, community and home gardeners flock to annual fall festivals with armloads of locally grown produce. Gardeners drool at the thought of the well-attended recipe exchanges and potlucks -- a true cross-cultural bonanza.

“A community is the mental and spiritual condition of knowing that the place is shared, and that the people who share the place define and limit the possibilities of each other's lives. It is the knowledge that people have of each other, their concern for each other, their trust in each other, and the freedom with which they come and go among themselves.” — **Wendell Berry**

List of Attendees of ZingTrain Workshops

First Name	Last Name	Job Title	Company
Analise	Adams	Program Director	Shalom Farms
Susan	Belford	Branch Manager	Farm Credit
Eric	Bendfeldt	Community Viability Specialist	Virginia Cooperative Extension
Mary	Bendfeldt	Reading Specialist	Harrisonburg City Schools
Tom	Benevento	Co-Director	New Community Project
Maureen	Best	Executive Director	Local Environmental Agriculture Project (LEAP)
Elizabeth	Borst	Executive Director	Virginia Community Food Connections
Michele	Bridges	Assistant Director, Economic Development & Tourism	Rockingham County
Laura	Brown	Chief of Staff	Local Food Hub
Nicole	Carothers	Student Director	Fueled
Amanda	Chandler	Evening Manager	A Bowl of Good
Kyley	Clevenger	Knowledge Center Relations Specialist	Farm Credit of the Virginias
Marlena	Coburn	Morning Manager	A Bowl of Good
Steve	Cooke	General Manager	Friendly City Food Co-op
Cornelius	Deppe	Food Forest nurseryman	New Community Project: Vine and Fig
Katrina	Didot	Owner	A Bowl of Good
Stephanie	Diehl	Area Coordinator	Virginia Cooperative Extension
Megan	Dunford	Buy Fresh Buy Local, VA Farm to Table Coordinator	Virginia Cooperative Extension, Northern District Office
Sue	Erhardt	Executive Director	Allegheny Mountain Institute
Lynda	Fanning	Retired UVa HS Clinical Nutrition Dir.	Va. Food System Council
Christy	Gabbard	Owner/Coordinator	Local Concepts LLC/Chesapeake Foodshed Network
Bobby	Grisso	Associate Director, ANR Extension Programs	Virginia Cooperative Extension

Molly	Harris	Founder	Lulus Local Food
Leanne	Harrow	Virginia Grown Marketing Manager	VDACS
Carla	Hegwood	Title V Grant and Special Projects Coordinator	Virginia Department of Health
Kathy	Holm	Assistant State Conservationist	USDA-NRCS
Brian	Jacks	Associate State Director	AARP
Liz	Kirchner	Virginia SARE Outreach Coordinator	Virginia Cooperative Extension
Joyce	Latimer	Professor	Virginia Tech
Josh	Libassi	Manager, Send them a Meal	A Bowl of Good
Anne	Lintner	Principal	Bluestone Elementary School
Kenner	Love	Extension Agent	Virginia Cooperative Extension
Allyssa	Mark	Program Associate	Virginia Beginning Farmer & Rancher Coalition Program
Tom	McDougall	Founder	4P Foods
Caitlin	Miller	Area 5 Sales and Marketing	Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (VDACS)
Melicent	Miller	Healthy Communities Supervisor	Virginia Department of Health
Kim	Morgan	Assistant Professor	VA Tech
Kim	Niewolny	Program Director	Virginia Beginning Farmer & Rancher Coalition Program, Virginia Tech
Kathleen	O'Hara	Board Member	VA Association for Biological Farming (VABF)
Jessica	Palmer	Farm and Food Project Coordinator	Piedmont Environmental Council
Chrissy	Phillips	Corporate Controller	A Bowl of Good
French	Price	Farm to Table Coordinator	Virginia Cooperative Extension
Kathleen	Reed	Agriculture & Natural Resources Extension Agent	Virginia Cooperative Extension
Beth	Schermerhorn	Food Equity Planner	Skeo

Kelli	Scott	Extension Agent, ANR	Virginia Cooperative Extension
Lindsay	Smith	Regional Food Systems Value Chain Coordinator	Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments
Elizabeth	Spellman	Policy Director	Chesapeake Foodshed Network
Kristen	Suokko	Executive Director	Local Food Hub
Adam	Taylor	Manager	Virginia Tech Catawba Sustainability Center
Michael	Wooden	Assistant Director SFOP	Virginia State University