

**Report on the Findings of the
March 2024 *Framing Our Food System* Engagement Sessions
Conducted by Kerr-Tar Regional Council of Governments**

In March of 2024, Kerr-Tar Council of Governments (KTCOG) staff, in collaboration with NC Cooperative Extension, hosted five conversations, one in each of its member counties (Franklin, Granville, Person, Vance, and Warren). These conversations were titled “Framing Our Food System” and intended to accomplish three goals: 1) Updating the food system stakeholder data collected in 2019 through similar county-specific engagement sessions and one larger convening, totaling more than 200 participants; 2) Advertising the upcoming Kerr-Tar Regional Food Council (KTRFC) and its open application; 3) Serving as a catalyst for previously absent cross-discipline collaboration and continuing conversations in the food system, on county and regional scales. The completion of the first goal would inform the work of the KTRFC, as well as any needed updates to the Kerr-Tar Regional Food Policy (2020).

Attendance across the five conversations totaled more than 75 stakeholders, with attendee representation including, but not limited to, producers, business owners, farmers market managers, government agencies (such as Farm Service Agency, Health Department, and Economic Development), elected officials, municipal and county planners, farmer support organizations, personnel from county schools, community colleges, and universities, faith-based groups, food pantries, and other nonprofits.

Stakeholders were asked to speak to both the regional food system’s strengths to be capitalized on and its challenges to be addressed. Responses were categorized according to the Kerr-Tar Regional Food Policy’s six priorities: Land, Farmer Support, Value Chains, Markets, Access, and Environmental Impact/Waste Streams. While input was extensive, several themes became evident across county lines.

One of the region’s greatest strengths is its sheer number of farms, especially small farms, and the potential for knowledge sharing between its farmers. This number of farms could also lend to equipment/infrastructure sharing, as well as co-ops, CSAs, and other forms of collaboration at market. Similarly, the number of farmers markets and locally owned businesses offer potential for partnerships and scaled markets for small farmers. In each conversation, support organizations such as NC Cooperative Extension, Working Landscapes of Warrenton, and KTCOG were noted as valuable assets. Challenges included a need for education across the board (addressing each of the Kerr-Tar Regional Food Policy’s six priorities), knowledge sharing between farmers and organizations (despite the great potential for it), and an ongoing inventory of resources throughout the food system. There was thorough demand for a centralized repository containing funding opportunities, support organizations, food infrastructure resources, and educational materials for producers and consumers alike. Additional challenges included an increasing demand for labor, a lack of accessible processing facilities (especially meat), and food insecurity with diminishing numbers of distributions.

This stakeholder data should serve as groundwork for the efforts of the KTRFC, to be used as a glimpse into the Region’s food system, identifying its strengths and challenges while accounting for place-based nuance.



Scan the QR code above to view the full *Framing Our Food Systems* data in Google Sheets

Updated: May 22, 2024