

Local Foods

Submitted by Alexis Baker, Environmental Programs Coordinator

As environmental programs coordinator for Henderson County, I am constantly trying to find interconnections between our community and natural environment. While considering the best ways to protect our natural environment, I also think about how good environmental stewardship practices can save money and create or retain jobs.

Lately, we have heard a lot in the news about erosion and air quality issues. Have you considered that what you are eating could mitigate some of these issues, save money, and retain jobs? When you shop for food, do you consider where it comes from? Some of the foods we purchase are from miles away. Now, think about the pollutants that are created from foods flown, trucked, or shipped in. A lot of these farms are large corporations that may pay no attention to soil conservation or even the local economies and workers they may affect.

Interestingly, North Carolina is the eight largest agricultural state. According to the Center for Environmental Farming Systems (CEFS), our state is rapidly aging out. The average age for a farmer is 56 years old. We are also seeing a large loss in agricultural lands. From 1999 to 2006, North Carolina lost 10,000 farms and close to 500,000 acres of farmland. In Henderson County, the estimated total acreage in 1987 was 59,232 acres and in 2007 approximately 37,947 acres. Over this 20-year period, the average annual percent change was -1.8% with a total of -35.93% lost during the 20-year period. Moreover, according to the Henderson County Comprehensive Plan, it is expected that the farming base will decline by half in 2017 by 23,000 acres if current trends continue.

There are several environmental and fiscal benefits to eating locally and supporting local farmers. Responsible farming reduces erosion caused from construction and development. Eating locally can also save 17-20 pounds of carbon dioxide in the air for each gallon of fuel saved from transportation. Many times the food on our table can come from thousands of miles away. Additionally, growing crops and plants cut carbon emissions. Healthy soils are the third most important carbon sink. The oceans and fossil fuels, themselves, are the other two largest carbon sinks. Even more so, frozen food can take six times the energy to keep frozen as buying fresh.

Additionally, we cannot forget the community component. Henderson County is known for its farming families and rural heritage. Supporting local farmers supports their farms, workers, our economy, and maintains our beautiful scenery. While eating locally is often times thought of as expensive and inconvenient, the best deals on local produce and meat can be found at local farmers' and tailgate markets. Additionally, many farmers in our area are part of community supported agriculture (CSAs) organizations. In CSAs, fresh produce is delivered to your house. Normally, such subscription can cost \$400-650 for 20-22 weeks. This evens out to around \$30 per week for enough produce to feed a large family. And anyone who has eaten fresh, local foods realizes that they taste better too. For more information on CSAs visit the <http://www.buyappalachian.org/>

In 2009, North Carolinians spent \$35 billion on food. It is estimated if residents spent 10% of their food dollars on local foods (\$1.05 per day), approximately \$3.5 billion could go back into the local economy to support farmers and their business (CEFS 2010). For more information on the 10% campaign, please visit the Center for Environmental Systems' website at <http://www.nc10percent.com/> . Let's take this summer to think about our local farmers by buying 10% locally.

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