

**Chatham Keep Farming
Local Foods Team
Final Report
December 3, 2004**

I. Team Goals

- ❖ To investigate the local food economy in the Town of Chatham—specifically, the interrelationships among consumers, producers, wholesalers/retailers, and food servers.
- ❖ To collect survey data measuring community awareness of local foods issues and residents' relationship to the local food economy.
- ❖ To conduct personal interviews with wholesalers/retailers, food servers, and producers of value-added food products in order to learn about their relationship to the local food economy.
- ❖ To learn as much as possible about the local consumption of locally grown foodstuffs, with a particular emphasis on how they are exported and reimported.

II. Methodology

At its initial meeting, the Local Foods Team divided itself into three working groups: Residents (Matt Pirrone, David Rubel, Al Stumph), Retailers/Wholesalers (Alex Sullivan/Sue Trevellyan), and Food Servers (Deirdre Malfatto, Jason Malfatto, Karen Malina, Val Toenes). Subsequently, a fourth working group, Value-Added Producers (Elaine Khosrova) was formed. The four working groups proceeded to gather information independently.

The Residents working group created a one-page (two-sided) survey that was distributed among town residents and others who shop in the Village of Chatham. It was handed out by working group members and was posted on the Keep Farming website, but by far the greatest number of responses (about four hundred) came from a table that was set up on Main Street during the July 2004 Summerfest. The table was manned aggressively throughout the day by several volunteers at a time, who found nearly all passersby willing to take part. Many were, in fact, enthusiastic about participating. The report of the Residents working group is a tabulation of the results.

The three other working groups gathered information through personal interviews with proprietors of relevant businesses. Their reports, which compile the results of those interviews, are therefore more trend-driven than the hard Residents survey data.

III. Highlights of the Local Foods Residents Survey

About You

There were 410 total responses, most from our street solicitation during Chatham's Summerfest. The demographics of those who responded appear to match the town, although 70 percent of those who responded were woman, reflecting the fact that they do most of the shopping. The largest of the age groups responding were those residents between 50 and 64 (40 percent) and those between 35 and 49 (29 percent). Grouped by education, 36 percent of respondents had professional degrees, and 33 percent attended a four-year college.

Three-quarters of the households represented had two adults. Of those that reported children, 80 percent had either one or two. Regarding residency, 75 percent identified themselves as full-time residents.

About Your Shopping Habits

On average, how many times a week does your family shop for perishable food items such as meat, vegetables, and dairy?

(1–2) 189 (3–4) 174 (5–7) 36

On average, how much does your family spend each week on these items?

(<\$25) 32 (\$25-49) 63 (\$50-74) 85 (\$75-99) 37

(\$100-124) 61 (\$125-149) 8 (\$150+) 52

When we asked how far people traveled to reach the grocery stores at which they shopped, just under half responded that they drove at least five miles to their primary store, and 21 percent drove more than ten miles.

Of those responding, 81 percent said that their shopping habits changed during the growing season and 92 percent said that they shopped at local farm stands, but only 8 percent reported that they belong to CSA (community-supported agriculture) programs.

When asked about the factors that influenced their buying decisions, the most important by a significant margin was quality; less important, in descending order of importance, were price, where the product came from, how it was grown, and convenience (which was by far the least important).

Only 2 percent of those responding reported that they did not buy foods produced locally within Columbia County, although 16 percent said they didn't know. Furthermore, 77 percent of those responding said that they were interested in purchasing more food produced locally within Columbia County, and 88 percent said that they would always or sometimes pay a higher price for locally produced food. The most common reasons given were "to support local farmers" and "because local is better." However, in response to a question about whether they would pay more for organically grown food, only 67 percent said yes or sometimes.

IV. Food Retailers/Wholesalers

The Food Retailers/Wholesalers working group had two distinct goals. The first was to develop an import/export model of our food system. What products were being produced locally, and where were those foods going? What foods were being purchased locally, and where were those foods produced?

As a working group of the Local Foods Committee, we were asked to specifically look at food retailers and food distributors. Our task was to identify the local foods network from the perspective of food markets and food wholesalers.

Our second goal was to determine the potential for improving the connection between local food producers, food outlets and distributors.

Distributors

Our first step to acquiring the information we needed was to develop a list of questions that we could ask distributors. We used the survey that we developed for retailers and adapted it to fit distributors. Since the information we were trying to collect from the two groups was really the same, only some questions had to be worded differently. Although we asked more than a dozen questions, when we were all done we decided that only a few were valuable for working towards our goal.

Our second step was to develop a list of distributors to interview. We brainstormed ideas but the list was very small, so we turned to the internet and did a search of food distributors in New York state. Finally, we asked the Food Servers group for their list of distributors from the information they had collected. We compiled all the distributors names and narrowed down the list to only those that were in driving distance. Any that were located farther away we deemed not local. All food is local somewhere, but for it to retain its localness we decided it couldn't enter the big distribution network.

The four distributors we planned to interview were: Regional Access, located in Trumansburg, NY, which has been in business for 15 years; Ginsberg Institutional Foods, located in Hudson; Joe Angelo, whose office is located in Claverack but his storage facility is located in Philmont and whose concentration is on organic food; and Kilventon Produce, located in Stephentown. Unfortunately we were unable to reach anyone from Kilventon Produce, so we contacted three: Regional Access, which has customers throughout the state; Ginsberg, which has customers nationally; and Joe Angelo, who delivers regionally.

One of the first questions we asked was, "Please rate the top three factors that influence your buying decision." We had eight possible answers: consistent availability, convenience, customer demand, equipment required to distribute, profitability, quality/freshness, where the produce was from, and other.

Of the distributors we interviewed, customer demand was the most important but quality/freshness was a close second. Where the product is from and its profitability were tied as the third most important factor, and consistent availability was also mentioned. No one

mentioned convenience in ordering or that the equipment that they needed to distribute the product to be factors.

All of the distributors that we interviewed carried local products and were open to carrying more local products and there seemed to be a demand for local cheese in particular. The general consensus seemed to be that if customers requested a particular local item, then the distributors would consider carrying it.

The most interesting things we learned from speaking with the distributors came about when we asked if there was anything that could be done to make offering local products easier. It was obvious that they'd given this question a lot of thought already—that it was something that has been on their minds and that they've spent time working on this.

The general manager of one of the distributors said that part of its mission is to buy local products, but he explained that many producers just don't know what they need to do to make distribution of their products possible. He said that producers need to be educated about pricing structures, availability, and packaging. We can imagine a course being offered by the Cornell Cooperative Extension or the Culinary Institute of America for local food producers. It would educate them on the exact points that this general manager was making. The producer needs a clear vision of who the end user of their product is so that the distributor knows how to market it.

Another food distributor was very specific about what could be done to make offering local products easier. He cited competitive pricing, consistency of supply, and effective packaging—again, points that the first manager made. A third manager said that he is trying to get a grant to create a catalog of small New York State producers.

All of the distributor interviews were done over the phone, and everyone we spoke with seemed thrilled with what we were doing. They were enthusiastic about the idea of local food and for the idea of working with local farmers to keep the farms alive and prosperous.

Retailers

We interviewed 12 retailers: 8 specialty stores, 2 supermarkets, 2 convenience stores and several distributors. Half were located here in Chatham the other half in the surrounding area . What we found was that supermarkets and convenience stores rarely if ever, sold local products. Five of specialty stores sold local foods as 10% or less of total sales and 3 specialty stores reported selling upwards of 50% local products.

Since we had defined local as grown in Columbia County, we were also interested to see what Chatham foods we could find in the stores. We found that of 12 crops or food products that are grown and processed in Chatham, 5 are sold at the specialty markets we interviewed. They are cheese, eggs, potatoes, salad greens, and honey.

Practically all the people we spoke with expressed an interest in sell more local products even the supermarkets. Retailers reported their customers ask for local

produce and meat. They expressed interest in selling more local cheese, chutney, flowers, olives and other items. Of the challenges to selling local foods, price was less of a factor than expected. What we heard more often as obstacles to selling local products was distribution and marketing.

In the end what we realized by being a part of this project is that Keep Farming isn't just about the farmer, it's about supporting the Chatham community: the farmer by having more of their crops and products available locally, the retailer by having the opportunity to give customers what they demand, fresh, local food, and the consumer by being able to buy the freshest, most nutritious foods possible.

V. The Crop List

The following items are produced locally, but most are being imported from other areas.

Milk

Ellenville, Stuyvesant Falls, Moravia and Norwich, NY; Chelsea, Lee and Pittsfield, MA; Lafarge, WI

Cheese

Ghent, Hudson, Old Chatham and Morris, NY; Lenox, MA; Woodstock, Randolph and Westfield, VT; Mount Airy, MD; Wisconsin; internationally

Eggs

Norwich, Geneva and Kingferry, NY; Galilee and Mount Joy, PA; Lafarge, WI

Corn

Feura Bush, Eckhardt and Troy, NY; Hadley, MA; Westminster, CT

Apples

New Paltz and Troy, NY; Great Barrington, MA; Washington state; Pennsylvania; British Columbia, Argentina and Chile

Berries

Columbia County; Canada; New Jersey; Pennsylvania

Poultry

Tivoli, Hudson and Oxford, NY; Arkansas; North Carolina; Virginia

Tomatoes

Ulster, Columbia and Dutchess Counties and Troy, NY; Florida; Pennsylvania; California

Greens

Columbia and Ulster Counties, Vermont and California

Herbs

Columbia County and Pleasant Valley, NY; California; Pennsylvania

Potatoes

Idaho and Prince Edward Island

Maple Syrup

Stephentown and Beaver Falls, NY; Vermont; Massachusetts; New Hampshire

Honey

Hudson, Nundah, Berkshire and Norwich, NY; Michigan; New Hampshire

Jam

Georgia; New York; Pennsylvania; New Hampshire; New Jersey

VI. Food Servers***Key Findings******Products***

Most of the establishments that use local products buy seasonal produce and orchard fruits. The schools tend to buy apples, potatoes and salad ingredients when available. Their definition of local, however, is New York State. They receive a lot of non-local government issued food at no cost. Other commonly used items are eggs, fresh herbs, baked goods (the ingredients in the baked goods is not for the most part available locally), milk and yogurt, cider and berries.

Trends

The food servers' priorities when considering where to buy food are quality and freshness. Convenience and price are a close second. Availability is an issue with our short growing season. The growing process and where the products come from are less of a concern.

Surprises

We were pleased to find that a significant number of local establishments make an effort to buy local products when available, especially fresh produce. The desire is there to buy more local foods if some of the challenges could be surmounted.

Challenges

Prices of local products tend to be higher than agri-business fare. Obtaining the products is inconvenient. The distribution infrastructure is scattered and inconsistent. Availability presents a problem in cases of seasonal products and items such as flour or citrus fruits, for example, which are not available locally. Awareness is another issue. Marketing of these products is an important piece that up to now has been on a very small Mom and Pop level. Working directly with the producer can be difficult. The "talent", as we fondly call the producers, is not always the best at marketing or distributing their products. The motivation of individual establishments can be low as time and money are always an issue. It takes great effort to find, purchase and obtain individual food items. If a caterer has to drive around all over the county to pick up food for his jobs, he uses a lot of time and gas, the latter becoming more and more prohibitive.

Overlap with Other Working Groups

We found that local items tend to be more available for retail than in the area of food service.

VII. Value-Added Food Products

In order to ascertain the importance of local farm products to the manufacture of value-added foods in Columbia County, a survey was conducted using questions outlined below. Individual responses have also been recorded, which reveal broad enthusiasm for supporting local farm ingredients; some suppliers use as much as they can. Other manufacturers would like to buy from local farmers/growers but were inhibited by cost and/or the inconvenience of getting the goods. Seasonality was also discussed as a challenge to establishing a solid conduit between farmers and producers. In summary, the issues of food availability and distribution were most concerning whereas respondents were generally pleased with the cost and quality of local goods.

Survey Questions

Do you use local produce or dairy products in your production?

If so, what percentage of your goods sourced are local?

Which growers? Dairies?

Is cost a consideration? Are you willing to pay more for local ingredients?

Is the local supply adequate?

What obstacles do/might prevent you from using local ingredients?

Survey Responses

Beth's Farm Kitchen

Uses 97% local ingredients; Samascott Orchards; Egers Farm, Cherry Ridge, Berry Farm. Produces Jams/Condiments year round. Buys more when there's a surplus; freezes products in bulk.

Chocolate Moose

Uses dairy products from local producers exclusively.

Hudson Valley Home Town Foods

Uses local fruits and vegetables throughout season; freezes in bulk for the remainder of year. LoveApple Farm; Littleseed CSA; Roxbury. Commented that contract growing isn't easy because small farmers don't have the labor they need. "I'll pay whatever they charge."

Camphill Village

Value added products include cookies and seasonal baked goods. Most of the ingredients for these, including grains, chocolate, raisins, spices, and sugar are not available locally. Dairy ingredients, maple syrup and eggs for baked goods are produced within Camphill Village.

Hudson Valley Homestead

Uses NY State vinegar but grows all her own herbs for Specialty Vinegars.

Renner Creative Cuisine

Grows his own tomatoes for salsa, but buys jalapenos and habeneros, sweet peppers from local farms: Potts and Saulpaugh. Price is very good, cheaper than Adams. There's enough supply now, but looking to expand, so it's a question.

Go Nuts Granola

Does not use any local products in granola products but would if it was more convenient.

Hawthorne Valley Farm

Value-added products, including cheese and yogurt, prepared foods and baked goods are made from their own farm products.