



*North Country Rising is a planning effort led by North Country Council to develop strategies and solutions for a more resilient, inclusive, and caring economy that can withstand, adapt, innovate, and transform in the face of natural and human disasters.*

## Food & Agriculture Focus Group

The Food & Agriculture Focus Group met in February 2021 and included participants from the NH Food Alliance, NH Farm-to-School, NH Forest Society, UNH Cooperative Extension, Littleton Food Cooperative, Meadowstone Farm, Roots and Fruits Farm, White Mountain Forager, White Mountain Apiary, Taproot, and the Root Cellar, Littleton Food Pantry, and the Rocks. Additional interviews were conducted at the Conway, Gorham, Lancaster, and Littleton Farmers' Markets.



### Resiliency

Resiliency for the region's food and agriculture industry was defined as supporting local food production, access to land for the new generation of farmers and education for new farmers, home gardeners and homesteaders, and the general public on the importance of supporting local food. A resilient food and agriculture system would include strengthening the supply chain, investing in regional processing facilities, identifying and building a network of shared food storage and preparation spaces around the region, reducing food waste, and ensuring everyone has access to healthy, local food.



### Assets

- We have great Natural Capital in the North Country for wild/foraging foods and conservation of agricultural spaces. We need to find ways to conserve more land for sustainable and regenerative agricultural production and foraging.
- Schools, grocery stores, and other institutions have shared their food storage spaces with local food pantries providing a place to stock food donations for those in need.
- The Food Cooperative Model has worked well in the region to create jobs, support the community, give back where needed and provide a place for local producers to sell their products. Food Cooperatives in our region are also mentoring new food cooperatives, seeing this model is important for a resilient food and agriculture industry not as competition.
- Some local producers have found additional revenue through Agro-Tourism, yet as a region, we need to balance increasing yields for visitors with meeting the long-term basic needs of our residents.
- The Food and Agriculture industry has great educational organizations that are working to support local producers, protect the natural environment, reduce food waste and support the next generation of farmers and growers in a sustainable and regenerative way.
- Our region has strong Individual and Cultural Capital – Yankee ingenuity, frugality, hard-working – which are important skills in the food and agricultural industry.
- Our Farmers Markets are a great asset for exchanging ideas and educating the general public on the importance of supporting local producers while also being a great place for the intersection of community assets (food, music, art, business, etc.)

## Needs

- Engaging our youth in the food and agriculture industry as an important career path including partnering with schools to provide education and skill-building, increasing access to land for the next generation of farmers, and developing mentorship programs between older farmers and those beginning as farmers and growers.
- Learn from and respect our agricultural history by gathering stories from our older farmers, valuing their knowledge in tried and tested innovations, and ensuring their wisdom is shared with the next generation of farmers and growers.
- We must understand what we have in our region for food storage, processing and preservation through inventorying what we have and planning for what we need including shared kitchen preparing and storage, processing plants, and seed libraries.
- Public education on the importance of buying and growing local produce from both the economic impact to our region and the strengthening of community
- Utilizing the food cooperative model to support the development of other forms of cooperatives in the region for economic stability and resiliency.
- Developing regional and community composting facilities as well as consumer education on food waste, gleaning programs, and the importance of building soil and carbon sequestration.
- Ongoing collaboration and support for the food and agriculture industry in the North Country as a whole ensuring every producer and grower is heard and supported.

## Project & Program Ideas and Solutions

- Develop a North Country Food Council that can address common needs and challenges around food insecurity, access to agricultural land, education, and infrastructure needs while also creating a shared voice for the food and agricultural industry.
- Develop an integrated educational program that includes working with local schools on building curriculum for food and agriculture education and skill-building, programs to support home growers and producers, and educating the public on the importance of buying local food and supporting local growers and producers.
- Inventory existing food and agriculture infrastructure throughout the region for communal food storage, preparation, and preservation and develop a plan for needed infrastructure to fill the gaps.
- Help develop and support the next generation of farmers including workforce development training of our youth at existing agricultural sites, engaging in policy decisions on processing plants and identifying agricultural land throughout the region, and creating the means for the next generation of farmers to access that land to meet our regions' food needs and grow the food and agriculture economy.

If you have any questions regarding the economic recovery and resiliency planning work, please contact Stacey Doll, Community Resiliency Planner, at [sdoll@nccouncil.org](mailto:sdoll@nccouncil.org).



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