

CONCLUSIONS

WHAT WE LEARNED

In 2008, then Senator Obama identified local food systems as a tool to create jobs and spur economic growth. His commitment to these systems has spread throughout the Federal government, with USDA taking a lead role in supporting local food efforts in the field. The track record of this work has only grown stronger over the past three years; the innovation of farmers, ranchers, food businesses and community groups across the country, coupled with the enthusiasm of consumers looking to support their local economy through food purchases, has taken local food efforts to new heights.

Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack and Deputy Secretary Kathleen Merrigan launched the Know Your Farmer, Know Your Food initiative in 2009 as a way to harness USDA's resources and publicize them widely. Since its launch, as this document illustrates, KYF has advanced USDA's understanding of and support for local and regional food efforts in important ways. Some of the top lessons of this work include:

Local and regional food systems are generating jobs, reinvigorating rural economies, and fostering a sense of community—in thousands of communities. Based on a survey of producers, USDA's Economic Research Service reports that almost 110,000 farmers and ranchers nationwide are selling into local food markets. Large, midsized and small farms are all engaged, and local food generated nearly \$5 billion in sales in 2008. The market has only continued to expand since then. In 2011 alone, USDA has counted over **7,100 operating farmers' markets** in the country and over **170 food hubs**. And when states submitted funding requests to USDA's Agricultural Marketing Service through the Specialty Crop Block Grant program in 2011, all but one requested funding for projects related to local and regional foods. Across the country, communities are developing these markets and seeking support for their efforts.

Chuck Hanagan has worked for USDA-Farm Service Agency for 25 years and operates a family farm in Swink, Colorado. Having an abundance of fresh vegetables has given his office the opportunity to participate in the Department's 'Share Your Harvest' campaign. The pumpkins pictured are in bins awaiting shipment. Many of them ended up with the families of deployed troops on the Army base at Fort Carson.



Shepherd's Grain producers in WA and OR grow much of their wheat for export, but between 15 and 30 percent of their crop is high-quality hard red spring wheat that is processed and sold regionally, offering the farmers a better return and local bakeries a popular product.

Local food is a window to a broader national conversation about food and agriculture. The KYF initiative grew out of a recognition that producers, consumers and food-related businesses are looking for local and regional food opportunities. Consumers want to know more about where their food comes from and support their local economy. Producers recognize the potential to reach new markets when they connect more directly with local consumers.

Savvy entrepreneurs see the gaps that prevent these opportunities from being realized and are stepping in to fill them. And everyone is talking about it.

USDA has an important role to play in encouraging this national conversation. The renaissance of interest in local foods has spurred a long-overdue conversation about American agriculture more broadly—about the people and processes that bring us food, the many ways that food travels from farm to plate, and the benefits that come from investing in this sector of our economy. Consumer-producer relationships foster greater understanding of the work that goes into producing food and the role that farmers and ranchers play as stewards of our natural resources. Such a connection benefits all of agriculture. Through KYF, USDA fosters these connections, disseminating information and resources to build strong relationships between consumers, producers and food businesses.

Stakeholders are putting USDA resources to work for local and regional foods. USDA has identified at least 27 USDA grant, loan or loan guarantee programs authorized to support work on local and regional foods and found that stakeholders have been utilizing these resources to significant effect. See the [KYF map](#) for

some of the many projects that USDA is supporting nationwide related to local food. Again, these projects are widely geographically dispersed, showing the breadth of interest in developing strong local food systems.

Demand for local and regional food is creating important new business opportunities. Demand for local food, as measured by the growth in farmers' markets and sales figures as well as by industry sources such as the National Grocers Association and the National Restaurant Association, is growing exponentially. Research finds that local food networks drive economic activity in other parts of the economy as well. Revenue tends to stay in the local economy and be reinvested in supplies, labor, and other spending. For that reason, meeting the demand for local food can have significant payoffs in terms of local economic growth.

A [recent study](#) by the Economic Research Service finds that produce and nut growers selling into local and regional markets generate thirteen full time operator jobs per \$1 million in revenue earned, for a total of 61,000 jobs in 2008. Additional farm labor is not included in this figure. In contrast, farms that do not sell into these markets generate only three full time operator jobs per \$1 million in revenue. These findings highlight



Third generation farmer CJ Isbell takes runs Keenbell Farm in Rockville, VA. He sells pastured pork products at the Fall Line Farms food hub.

the importance of local food market development to the President's broader jobs agenda and to the ongoing work of the [White House Rural Council](#). Local food systems are also a key component of USDA's work to reinvigorate rural economies, expand job opportunities in agriculture, and strengthen the sector overall.

There are still many barriers to success, but the barriers are also opportunities for innovation and collaboration. Infrastructure gaps at the regional level, lack of access to land or credit, lack of experience developing and running local food businesses, and the challenges posed by the diversified and seasonal nature of local and regional food production are just some of the challenges that communities continue to face. USDA is supporting the people, businesses and organizations that are field-testing innovative new solutions to these challenges. By continuing to fund research, share knowledge between and across communities, support the development of efficient regional supply chains, and offer technical assistance, USDA can help enhance farm profitability and expand food access through strong local and regional food systems.

Coordination, transparency and responsiveness are good governance. KYF marked the start of a new way of doing business at USDA. By bringing together staff from across the 7 mission areas and 17 agencies, KYF has fostered a level of coordination, transparency and efficiency fitting for "the people's department."

Regular meetings of the KYF task force, made up of agency representatives from across the Department, help USDA employees coordinate and accelerate efforts

to meet common goals and respond to stakeholder feedback. Task force subcommittees grapple with questions and coordinate efforts that require the involvement of more than one agency. KYF is a resource for USDA field staff looking for information on the many programs—some outside of their own agency's purview—available to help their local producers. On one centralized website, KYF offers resources to stakeholders interested in exploring funding opportunities from more than one of USDA's agencies.

The [KYF map](#) is perhaps the best illustration of the multi-faceted nature of the Department's work on local and regional food. With strong support from Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack and Deputy Secretary Kathleen Merrigan, KYF has helped amplify and build on the work taking place around the country and within USDA's offices.

GET INVOLVED

Across the country, communities are using local food systems to increase job opportunities, access healthy food, revitalize local economies, spark new business ventures, and keep more wealth in their local communities. The Know Your Farmer, Know Your Food initiative shares these stories, supports new efforts, and coordinates USDA's work to harness the enthusiasm for local and regional food and develop new market opportunities for all of agriculture. Food and farming matters to everyone: to the producers who grow and raise our food, to the businesses that store, process, distribute or sell it, and to the families that consume it.

[Join the national conversation.](#)



ENDNOTES

- 1 National Grocers Association. 2011. National Grocers Association Consumer Survey Report. Available online at <http://www.supermarketguru.com/public/pdf/Consumer-Panel-Survey-2011.pdf>.
- 2 Blythe, Bruce. 2011. "Local produce near top of hot menu trends." *The Packer*, May 24. Available at <http://www.thepacker.com/fruit-vegetable-news/122513864.html>.
- 3 National Farm to School Network. Farm to School Programs in the US (Estimated). Available online at <http://www.farmtoschool.org/index.php>.
- 4 USDA Agricultural Marketing Service. National Farmers' market Directory. Available at <http://farmersmarkets.usda.gov>
- 5 Obama for America. 2008. "Barack Obama and Joe Biden on the Environment." Fact sheet.
- 6 U.S. Department of Agriculture. 2009. Strategic Plan FY 2010-2015, at 2. Washington, DC: USDA. Available online at <http://www.ocfo.usda.gov/usdasp/sp2010/sp2010.pdf>.
- 7 USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service, Livestock Slaughter Annual Summaries for 1990 and 2010, available at <http://usda.mannlib.cornell.edu/MannUsda/viewDocumentInfo.do?documentID=1097>. These totals represent the annual number of Federally-inspected establishments that slaughtered cattle, calves, hogs, sheep and/or lambs.
- 8 Michelle M. Ratcliffe, K.A. Merrigan, B.L. Rogers and J.P. Goldberg. "The effects of school garden experiences on middle school-aged students' knowledge, attitudes and behaviors associated with vegetable consumption." *Health Promotion Practice*, Vol. 12 No. 1, 36-43, January 2011.
- 9 USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service. Quick Stats: Farm numbers—total farms, land in farms, average farm size, United States, 1980-2010.
- 10 NASS, Agricultural Land Values and Cash Rents, 1999-2003; NASS, Land Values and Cash Rents 2010 Summary.

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