

Strategies for Growing Central Louisiana's Food Economy

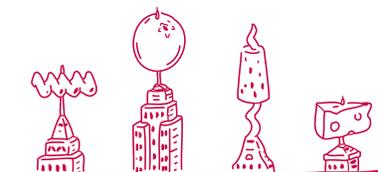
April 2015

PREPARED FOR

Central Louisiana Economic Development Alliance

BY

Karp Resources



KARP RESOURCES

PROJECT TEAM

Karp Resources

Founded in 1990, Karp Resources is a food business consultancy with two divisions: Our *Good Food is Good Business* division supports the healthy development, execution, and operations of food businesses and initiatives in the public and private sectors. Our services include strategic sourcing, feasibility analysis, market research, business planning, project management, and evaluation.

Our *Good People are Good Business* division builds leadership and organizational effectiveness in the food sector through talent and performance management, organizational assessment, capacity building, executive coaching, recruiting, and employee engagement services.

Karp Resources' clients include corporations, government agencies, small businesses, non-profits, and educational organizations. For more than 20 years, Karp Resources has spearheaded and has been integral to the development and execution of food businesses, policies, and partnerships in the United States and in the United Kingdom.

Senior Consultant Shayna Cohen and Consultant Ben Kerrick were the lead researchers on this project, with support from Eleni Fischer, Consulting Project Coordinator. Karen Karp, President, provided guidance, project oversight, and thought leadership over the course of the project.

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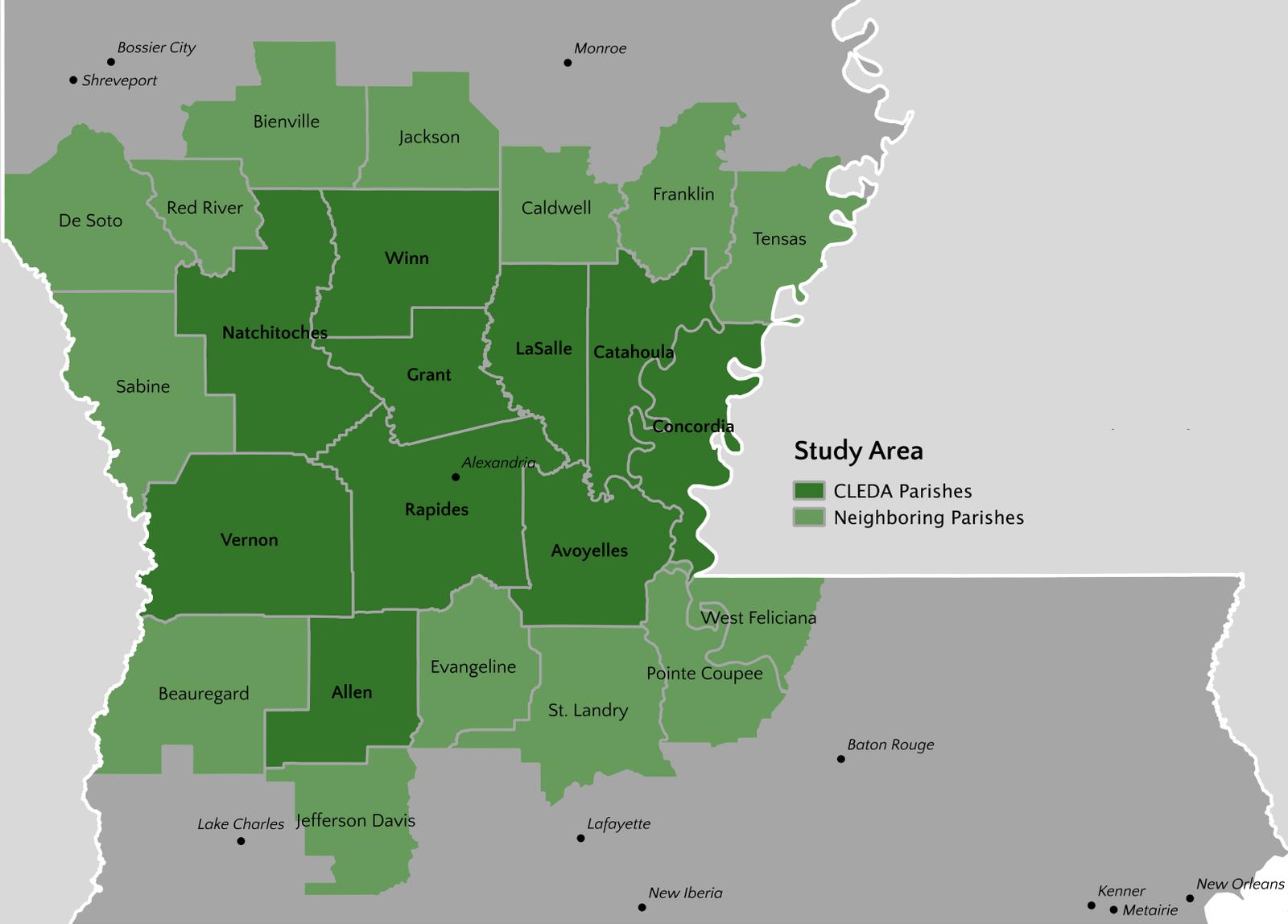
Cabbage is one of many vegetable crops grown by Up to Grow Good Farm.

INTRODUCTION

PROJECT BACKGROUND

The Central Louisiana Economic Development Alliance (CLEDA) pursues the mission “to help people prosper in vibrant, thriving communities.” Over the past three years, CLEDA has launched the Central Louisiana Local Foods Initiative, with funding from the Blue Cross Blue Shield of Louisiana Foundation and the Rapides Foundation and with key partners including the Food Bank of Central Louisiana, the Louisiana Public Health Institute, MarketUmbrella, the Good Food Project, the Cane River Green Market, the Winnfield Housing Authority, the Winn Farmers Market, and the Leesville Main Street Market and Garden on Third. This initiative demonstrates a commitment to realizing the potential of local and regional food and agriculture to serve as an economic driver, while broadly enhancing quality of life in the region. The Local Foods Initiative programming has included the creation of a food policy council (the Central Louisiana Local Food Working Group), the hiring of a regional food systems planner (housed within CLEDA), farm-focused entrepreneurship training, development and expansion of a Nutrition on Wheels Truck, introduction and expansion of EBT/SNAP access and the MarketMatch incentive program at targeted farmers markets, establishment of a Kids Café site in Winnfield (featuring healthy food/snacks, as well as educational programming focused on gardening and healthy eating), and a “Fresh Central” initiative that promotes consumer and commercial buyer connections to local food sources and activities.

While CLEDA values business growth and economic growth as a priority, the organization also embraces a more expansive view of the characteristics of a thriving community: one that includes human health, accessible and affordable food, and broader quality of life characteristics. This perspective informs the nature of their work in the food space, the kinds of partnerships they are



The CLEDA region includes 10 parishes.

building, and one reason why food and agriculture represent a significant opportunity to them. This level of engagement is impressive for an agency and region of their respective sizes, and demonstrates a progressive and visionary approach to the potential of the region’s food system.

In November 2014, CLEDA issued a Request for Proposals for a “Food Hub Feasibility Study/Plan.” Although the RFP explicitly used the term “food hub,” the text acknowledged that the organization is “committed to avoiding trends and only undertaking work that is sustainable and enhances the region’s economy,” and is thus “cautious about investing anyone’s funds in infrastructure that may not be needed.” CLEDA was seeking a “clear path forward”: research-informed next steps for supporting and encouraging growth of the regional food economy, whether or not those steps included new physical infrastructure.

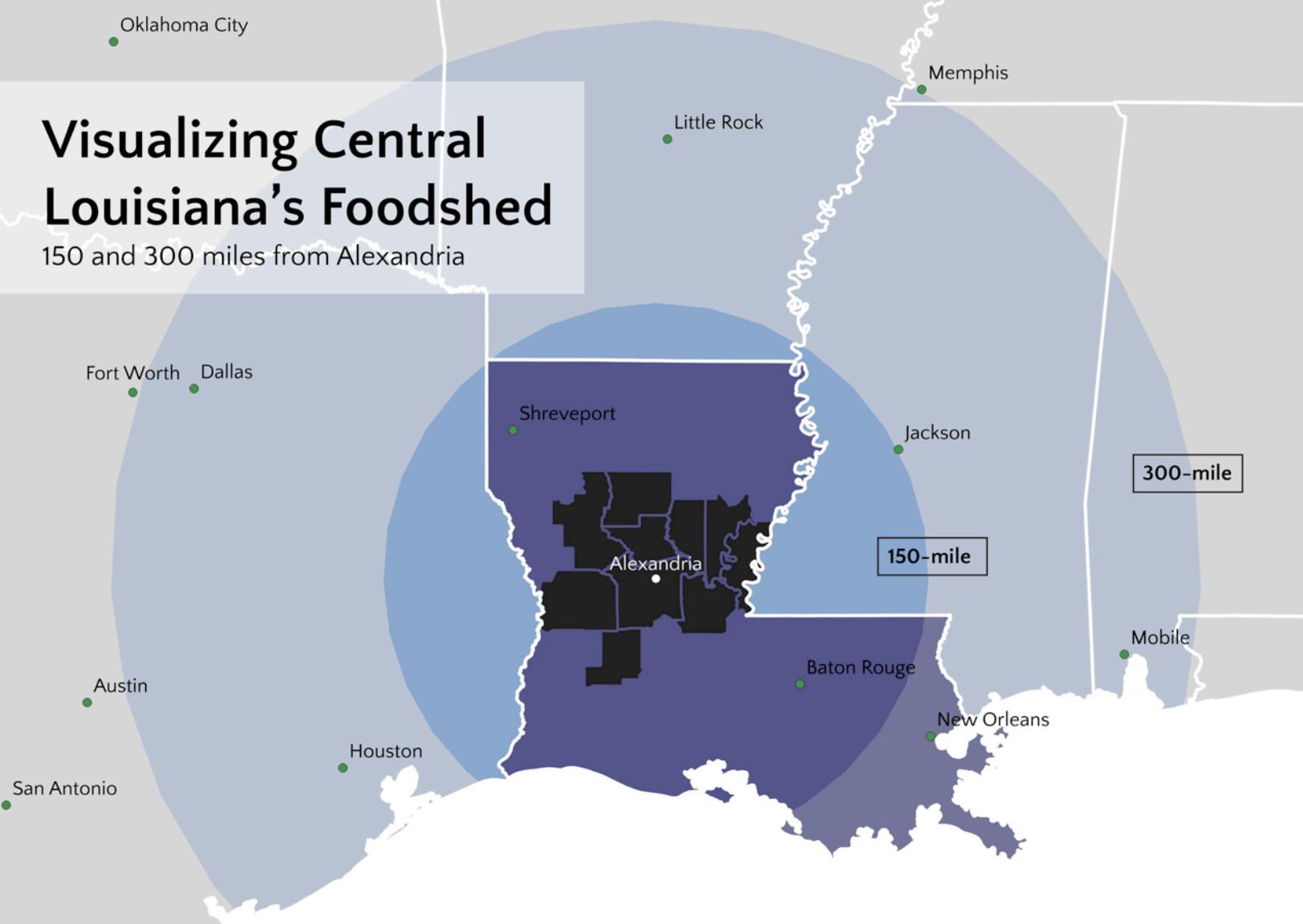
Karp Resources, a national food and agriculture consultancy based in New York and working nationally, submitted a phased proposal and was selected to execute the first phase of the study.

PROJECT OBJECTIVE, ACTIVITIES, AND TIMELINE

This report presents the findings and recommendations from Phase One of what is planned to be a three-part study. The objectives of Phase One are:

Visualizing Central Louisiana's Foodshed

150 and 300 miles from Alexandria



Central Louisiana has several major urban markets within 300 miles.

- To gain a deeper understanding of both the supply and demand sides of the region's food economy, through interviews with farmers, buyers, and others, as well as review of secondary data and previous reports.
- To identify challenges and opportunities for growth in the regional food economy based on this research.
- To develop strategic models that would promote a strong regional food system, representing a range of infrastructure and non-infrastructure based solutions.

Phase Two will assess these proposed models in greater depth and test them (e.g. in focus groups) with key stakeholders, and Phase Three will lay the groundwork for executing prioritized strategy or strategies.

Phase One kicked off on January 26, 2015 with a visit to the region by Shayna Cohen and Ben Kerrick from Karp Resources. Additional research, including phone interviews, a second trip to the region by Ben Kerrick, and review of secondary reports and data, was conducted January through March. Findings and recommendations are issued in this report, submitted March 31, 2015.

METHODOLOGY

This study incorporates extensive primary qualitative research, analysis of secondary data, on-the-ground observations of food activities in the region, a review of relevant prior studies, and reflections from key players and stakeholders in the region's food movement and food economy. The project kick-off event was a stakeholder meeting held on January 26, 2015 at the Rapides Foundation in downtown Alexandria, facilitated by Karp Resources with 13 attendees representing diverse food system sectors, including farmers, restaurant owners, infrastructure operators, the Louisiana State University (LSU) AgCenter, the Local Food Working Group, local food advocacy organizations, and food and health organizations.

Supply and demand research interviews were conducted in person and by phone with 18 farmers from 17 farms representing a mix of agricultural scales of production, production methods, products, and marketing channels, as well as 23 commercial food buyers (including restaurants, food distributors, food services companies, and retailers) and infrastructure operators (including area slaughterhouse and meat processors) from 21 businesses/organizations, and five sector experts (including an LSU Extension Agent and NASS field agent). Interviewees were not chosen randomly but were selected by the research team with feedback from the client and kick-off meeting attendees to be representative of regional food activity. The research team reached out to 51 farmers and 36 buyers, experts, and infrastructure operators in order to complete the project interviews. Potential interviewees who were not easily reached or who did not respond directly to outreach were contacted by phone and email approximately five times each.

Secondary data from the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the LSU AgCenter was reviewed to provide an understanding of the region's current agricultural context, including volumes of production and farm-gate revenue by crop, number and scale of operations, and overall product diversity. Observations, review of previous studies (including two food assessments conducted over the course of the past three years, described in a later section of this report), and conversations with key food system players helped to flesh out and ground-truth the analysis from our interviews and secondary data sources.

For most purposes, this study defined "the region" as CLEDA defines it, a 10-parish area comprised of Allen, Avoyelles, Catahoula, Concordia, Grant, La Salle, Natchitoches, Rapides, Vernon, and Winn Parishes. During the facilitated discussion at the kick-off meeting, it was agreed that this study should focus on – but not be limited to – these parishes. An outcome of that meeting was a definition of the Central Louisiana foodshed that centers on 10 parishes' farmers and buyers, but which leverages the potential buying power of nearby large markets (New Orleans, Houston, Baton Rouge, e.g.) and also leverages producers beyond the 10 parish region to the extent that collaboration with them could drive increased production, opportunity, and economic growth within CLEDA's parishes of focus.

Thus, the majority of interviewees were located within the 10 parishes, but the research team also spoke with some entities outside of this core area.

Also included in Karp Resources' original work plan was an investigation into existing infrastructure (e.g. warehouse and cold storage) using parish and state level licensing lists. After multiple unsuccessful efforts at obtaining these lists from the Department of Health and Hospitals (including Records and Retail License divisions), the Department of Agriculture and Forestry (including the Food Distribution division), and the LSU AgCenter, Karp Resources and CLEDA elected to utilize the

supply and demand interviews as the primary mode of identifying potentially underutilized infrastructure in the region and to reallocate the time allotted to this task to recommendations/models.

THE FOOD HUB CONCEPT

Although this project is not strictly a food hub feasibility study, it evaluates the appropriateness and potential of functions that are associated with the food hub model. The USDA defines a *food hub* as “a business or organization that actively manages the aggregation, distribution, and marketing of source-identified food products primarily from local and regional producers to strengthen their ability to satisfy wholesale, retail, and institutional demand;”¹ while Merriam-Webster defines a *hub* as “a center of activity; focal point.”² The research team took a broad approach to the food hub concept, one that can include both bricks and mortar as well as decentralized, networked functions of aggregation, distribution, and marketing, as well as processing, retail, education, information-sharing, and networking. In approaching this feasibility study, the research team explored the culture, temperament, and needs of this specific community, including its farmers, businesses, buyers, and eaters, in order to shape models that are appropriate for Central Louisiana’s food system in its current state.

¹ Barham, J. et al., *Regional Food Hub Resource Guide*. U.S. Dept. of Agriculture, Agricultural Marketing Service. Washington, D.C. April 2012. <http://dx.doi.org/10.9752/MS046.04-2012>

² <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/hub>



Mayhaws and sugar cane are two of Central Louisiana's signature crops.

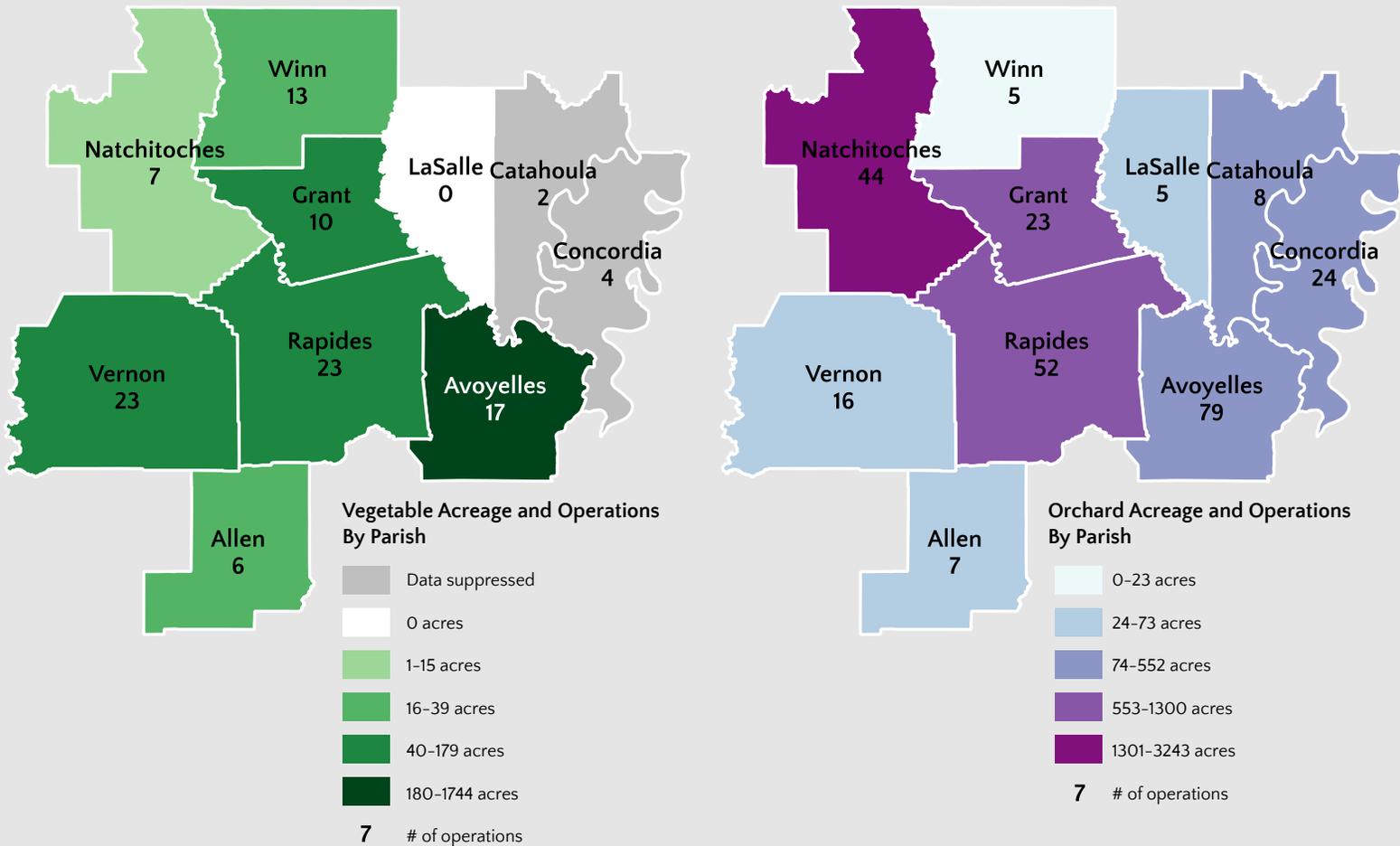
CONTEXT: CENTRAL LOUISIANA'S FOOD ECONOMY

With over 1.4 million acres in agriculture, amounting to nearly one-fourth of the region's 9,115 square miles, Central Louisiana is undeniably an agricultural landscape. Total farm revenue exceeded a half billion dollars in 2012, including \$41 million in horticulture products, one of the region's specialties. Of Central Louisiana's 375,000 residents, almost a third live in Rapides Parish, home of the region's largest city, Alexandria (pop: 48,426).

The area's most significant employer is the U.S. Department of the Army's Ft. Polk military base located in Vernon Parish (14,572 employees, not including businesses that provide support services to the base). Among the area's other major employers pertinent to this project are hospitals and schools (significant institutional food buyers) as well as Pilgrim's Pride Corp., one of the world's largest poultry companies which operates a processing facility in Natchitoches (employing 500 people).

The regional food economy in Central Louisiana is nascent but growing. A number of new small farms (most less than 15 acres) have emerged in recent years, and they are focusing on local markets. The region has a handful of farmers' markets, most of which have emerged on their own without coordinated organization, and a small number of restaurants are buying small percentages of their food from local producers. Although conversations with farmers and food professionals from multiple sectors did not yield descriptions of a regional food economy that is currently robust or mature, there was a nearly universal sense that it is growing and has potential to grow significantly more.

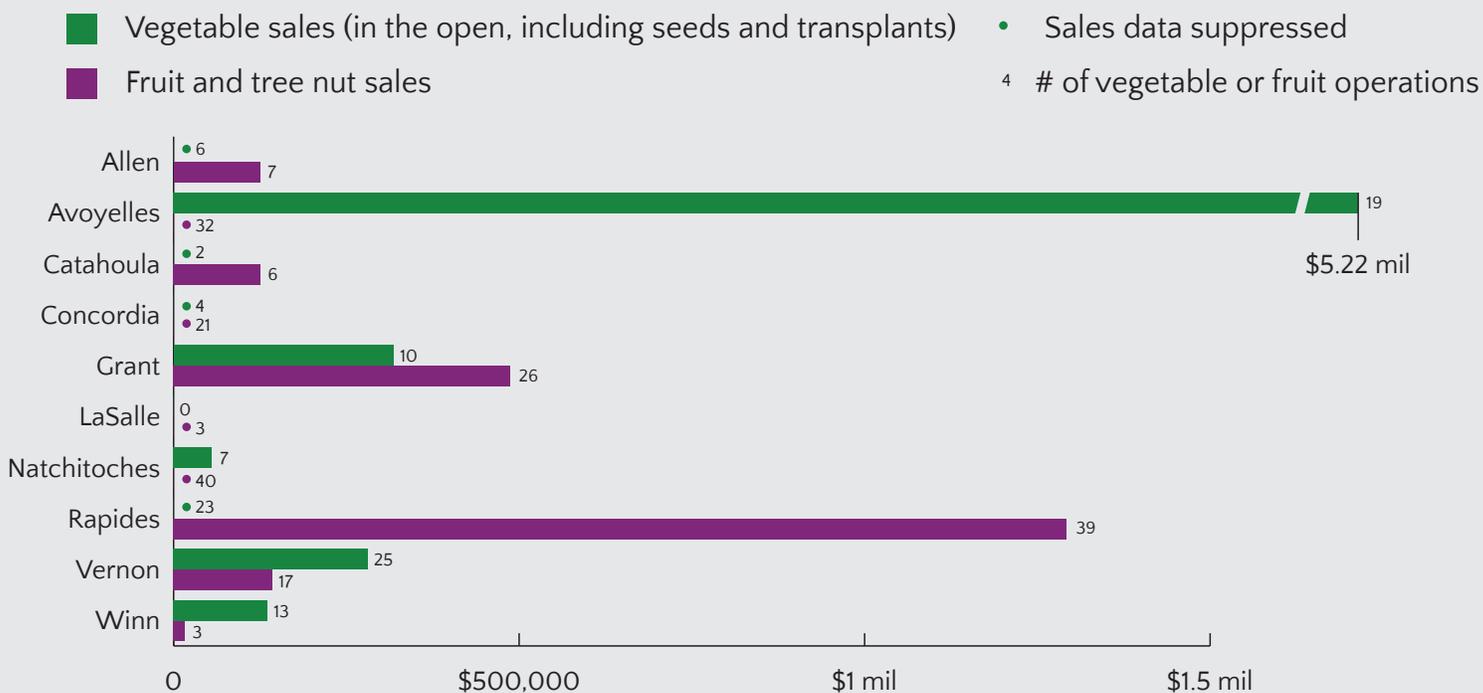
CLEDA, as previously mentioned, has already demonstrated meaningful investment and commitment to the food economy's potential as a driver for growth in the region through a diverse roster of efforts. Many of these efforts have been undertaken as part of the Central Louisiana Local Foods Initiative, which was initially funded by the Rapides Foundation and the Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Louisiana Foundation.



VEGETABLE AND ORCHARD PRODUCTION IN CENTRAL LOUISIANA PARISHES. *Total acreage and number of operations by parish. Orchard production includes orchard fruits and tree nuts. Source: USDA 2012 Census of Agriculture.*

These efforts include:

- **Fresh Central**, a two-pronged initiative with a branding campaign and a farm-to-restaurant pilot.
- **Tuesday Farmers’ Market in Alexandria**, with vendors and producers from around the region, developed by local producers, especially Inglewood Farm (one of the region’s largest and highest profile farms focusing on local markets, with 2,200 acres: about 25 acres in certified organic vegetable production or transition to organic, 800 acres in grains for livestock feed and human consumption, a pecan orchard, and a substantial grazing base for cattle, hogs and chickens), with support from CLEDA.
- **Eat Local groups**, a foundational effort for grassroots participation from each parish in the Local Food Regional Working Group.
- **Central Louisiana Local Food Working Group**, a food policy council comprised of stakeholders, farmers, gardening organizations, and health organizations, which meets monthly to develop strategies for local food promotion.
- **Harvest of the Month**, a federally funded program launched in January 2015 with lead partner LSU AgCenter, promoting a single in-season vegetable at public schools each



VEGETABLE AND FRUIT/NUT SALES IN CENTRAL LOUISIANA PARISHES. Fruit and tree nut sales include berry sales, with the exception of Rapides Parish fruit and tree nut sales, which excludes berry sales for data suppression. (Thus, the Rapides fruit/nut sales figure is a low-end estimate.)
 Source: USDA 2012 Census of Agriculture.

month (in the classroom and cafeteria). North Bayou Rapides Elementary School is the region’s only pilot site for this program.

- **Foodapalooza**, an annual regional food summit for producers and consumers focused on local food celebration, experiences and skill-building workshops (on topics such as profitable planning for market, engaging youth in gardening, worm casting, and connecting farmers and buyers).
- **Business Acceleration System Farmer Group**, which provides business training and farm coaching to a small cohort of practicing farmers in the region. This group has seen impressive success thus far: combined revenues for farmers in the program for more than one year increased 109% over the prior year. CLEDA has also hosted workshops entitled “So You Want To Be a Farmer?” at which interested people can explore the potential to run a farm as a business. The last such workshop had more than 60 attendees.

All of these initiatives have laid a strong foundation for this research and report, which evaluates appropriate next steps in regional food system development.

Two previous reports were helpful in providing additional background about Central Louisiana’s food system and economy. The first, *Food and Health in Central Louisiana: A Food Systems Assessment*³, provides a clear and thorough overview of existing secondary data relevant to Central Louisiana’s food system, including food production, sales, and demand; demographic characteristics; health attributes; and food access. Unlike our study, *Food and Health in Central Louisiana* does not include Concordia parish. Some key observations from this report include:

³ Central Louisiana Local Foods Initiative. *Food and Health in Central Louisiana: A Food Systems Assessment*. Central Louisiana Local Foods Initiative, February, 2013. <http://freshcentral.org/pages/stayinspired>



AQUACULTURE SALES EXCEEDING \$100,000 IN CENTRAL LOUISIANA PARISHES. *Aquaculture products are a significant source of revenue for some parishes in the region.*
 Source: LSU 2013 Parish Totals.

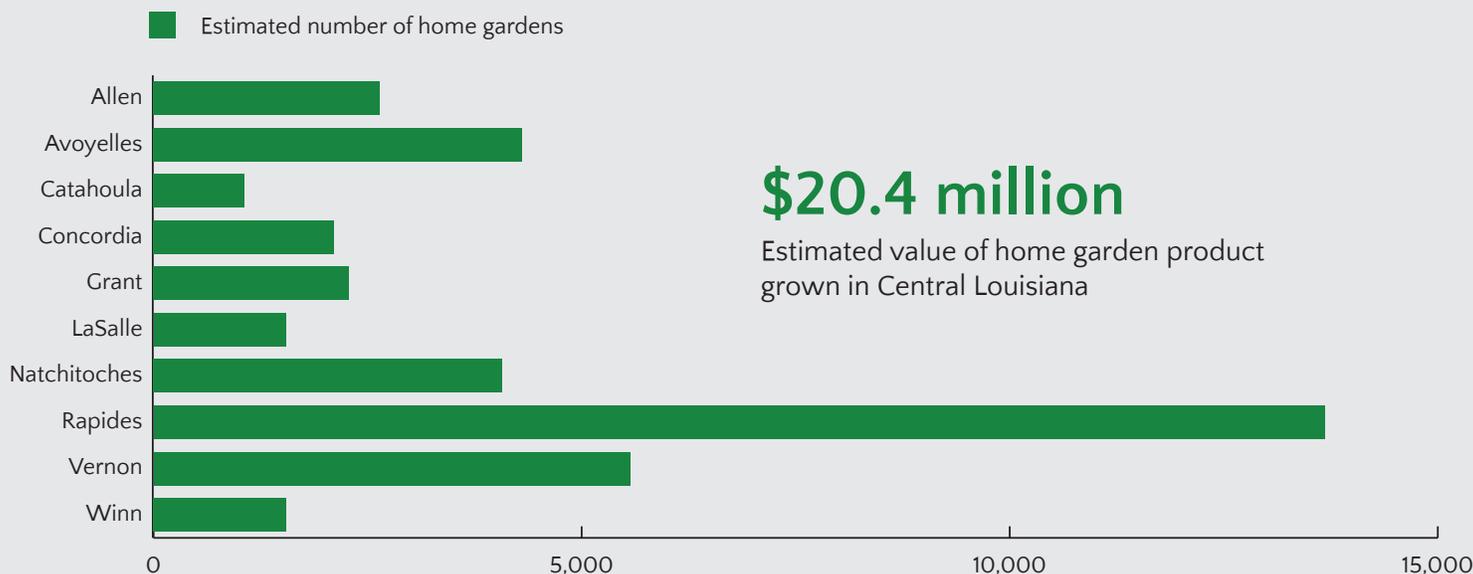
- Grant, Avoyelles, and Catahoula parishes lead the region in farm acreage, with 763,471 acres combined.
- Avoyelles far exceeds other parishes in the region in vegetable production acreage (1,744 acres).
- 70% of farms in the region have annual gross sales of less than \$10,000.
- 179 farms in the region engage in direct sales to consumers, amounting to \$887,000 in sales. These farms are 4% of farms in the region, less than the U.S. average of 6.2%.
- Fruit and vegetable consumption in the region is significantly higher than the state average—in Central Louisiana, 32.8% of adults consume at least five servings of fruits and vegetables daily, compared to just 16.9% statewide⁴.
- Incidence of low access to a grocery store⁵ is 31.1%, higher than the state average of 25%.

The second report this project team reviewed is the result of research conducted by Ken Meter of Crossroads Resource Center⁶. This presentation, given at the 2013 Foodapalooza, highlights the economic potential of a more robust local food economy, noting a net loss of \$900 million from the region each year (for both food imports and farm input purchases, including offsets for subsidies and food exports), and pointing out that “if each resident bought \$5 of food directly from local farms each week, farms would earn \$91 million of new revenue.”

⁴ The report does not include data, anecdotal evidence, or speculation about why might be the case.

⁵ “Limited access” is defined as living 1 mile or more away from a grocery store in an urban area or more than 10 miles away from one in a rural area.

⁶ Meter, Ken. *The role of “local” foods: growing businesses and economies*. Crossroads Resource Center (Minneapolis), presented at Central Louisiana Foodapalooza, April 26, 2013.
<http://freshcentral.org/pages/stayinspired>



ESTIMATED HOME GARDENS IN CENTRAL LOUISIANA PARISHES. LSU estimates the number of home gardens in Louisiana, and projects the value of home garden product based on an assumption of \$525/garden. *Source: LSU 2013 Parish Totals.*

These two reports illustrate some of the fundamental challenges and opportunities in the region. While direct sales are below the national average, the prevalence of small farms suggests potential for growth in sales direct to consumers, to the extent that farmers have the land base and desire to grow more food. The region's higher consumption of fruit and vegetables, in combination with currently low levels of food access, indicates that increased access to regionally produced fruits and vegetables could be an effective leverage point to increase local food economic activity for the region.

A closer look at more recent data provides additional context (both reports described above were based on the 2007 USDA Census of Agriculture). In our review of data from the USDA 2012 Census of Agriculture and LSU's 2013 Parish Totals, we focused on fruit, nut, and vegetable production, as these are often the first product sectors to drive local food activity. In its published Census data, the USDA suppresses some data to protect the privacy of individual producers- for example, in an area where just a few producers grow vegetables (as is the case in several Central Louisiana parishes), gross sales data is not made available. The research team spoke with a National Agriculture Statistics Service (NASS) agent for Louisiana to see if a custom data set for the 10 parish area combined might be available, and the NASS agent recommended instead that the LSU Parish Totals be used as a solution to the data suppression problem. The findings below are, thus, based on USDA data as available and, secondarily, LSU data.

Avoyelles Parish is the clear leader in vegetable and melon acreage (1,744 acres) and sales \$7,804,000, with the high numbers driven primarily by sweet potato production—the parish is also a significant producer of potatoes, mustard greens and garlic. Rapides follows, with Vernon and Grant each also having more than 50 acres of vegetable and melon production, however the value of agriculture production by acre varies tremendously across these three parishes, with Rapides agriculture in this category averaging \$124/acre in farm revenue and Grant averaging \$7,107 (there was insufficient data on Vernon Parish in these data categories). Broadly speaking, Allen, Avoyelles, Grant, Rapides, Vernon, Winn and Grant Parishes all appear to have vegetable and melon sales

exceeding \$100,000, with important crops being sweet potatoes, tomatoes (both field and greenhouse), sweet corn, and melons. La Salle parish had no vegetable or melon production identified by the 2012 USDA Census of Agriculture.

Natchitoches Parish leads in orchard acreage (with 3,243 acres), with Rapides following with 1,300 acres; Grant and Avoyelles also each have orchard acreage exceeding 500 acres, with the majority devoted to pecans. Every parish in the region, in fact, has some level of orchard production. Rapides Parish is a leader in fruit and tree nut sales with \$1,292,000 in annual sales. USDA acreage data suggests that these sales are driven by pecans, but LSU does not provide 2013 pecan data for Rapides (reason unknown). USDA suppresses fruit and tree nut sales data for Natchitoches and Avoyelles parish, but based on LSU data they are likely regional leaders in the same general range as Rapides. Along with these three lead parishes, Allen, Catahoula, Grant and Vernon parishes all have fruit and tree nut sales exceeding \$100,000. Pecans are an important crop in several parishes, with mayhaws, blueberries, and peaches generating important revenue for some. Winn Parish was historically a significant peach production area, according to the region's NASS agent, but little production of scale exists in the area any more. Anecdotal evidence from interviews suggest that the majority of the region's pecan production is sold through brokers to processors domestically and internationally.

Livestock and animal products are also important revenue generators for some Central Louisiana parishes. At the state level, "poultry and eggs" and "cattle and calves" are ranked 3rd and 4th for market value, respectively earning \$574 million and \$250 million for the state's producers. Natchitoches (\$81 million) and Winn (\$16.4 million) parishes are ranked fourth and eighth, respectively, in value of poultry and egg production, while Natchitoches (\$15.6 million), Rapides (\$10.6 million), and Avoyelles (\$9.2 million) rank in the top five for value of cattle and calves. Vernon and Avoyelles are both ranked in the top three parishes for inventory of goats⁷. Anecdotal evidence from interviews revealed that while these production numbers are high, little of this product is processed or sold within the region.

We did not undertake analysis of commodity production, but it is clear from even the briefest glance at LSU's parish totals that feed grains (corn and sorghum), cotton, soybeans, rice, hay, and sugarcane all occupy a tremendous amount of acreage in the region. Although these crops do not flow into the regional food supply chain, the land they are grown on is a significant resource for future scaling up of regional food production.

Although this study does not focus on aquaculture, the chart on the preceding page illustrates that it is a significant source of revenue for the region. Future research could evaluate and assess aquaculture supply chains and identify opportunities to encourage local aquaculture production for local consumption.

LSU provides estimates of home gardening activity in each parish, with an estimate of nearly 39,000 home gardeners in the region. Using a multiplier that assumes an average garden product value at \$525, LSU estimates the value of home garden production in the region at \$20,270,525⁸. Not only does this activity generate substantial local food production for local consumption and engage residents in the food system, it also represents a potential resource for scaled up production and new farmers.

⁷ All figures in this paragraph from USDA 2012 Census of Agriculture Parish Profiles.

⁸ This estimate is an increase over recent years, due in part to a change in methodology beginning in 2011.

	Top Crops by Acreage		Top Crops by Sales		Top Crops by # of Operations	
	Crop	Acreage	Crop	Sales	Crop	# Operations
Allen	Watermelon	57	Watermelon	\$293,809	Peaches	9
	Cantaloupe	15	Cantaloupe	\$134,564	Cantaloupe	7
	Sweet Corn	14	Sweet Corn	\$33,828	Watermelon	7
Avoyelles	Sweet Potatoes	1,686	Sweet Potatoes	\$7,785,435	Pecans, native & seedling	100
	Pecans, native & seedling	322	Pecans, improved	\$124,200	Pecans, improved	22
	Pecans, improved	160	Blueberries, tame	\$123,750	Sweet Potatoes	9
Catahoula	Pecans, improved	95	Pecans, improved	\$55,390	Pecans, native & seedling	8
	Pecans, native & seedling	70	Tomatoes (field)	\$38,491		
	Tomatoes (field)	2	Pecans, native & seedling	\$15,561		
Concordia	Pecans, improved	20.1	Pecans, improved	\$11,095	Pecans, improved	30
	Pecans, native & seedling	19.4	Pecans, native & seedling	\$4,365	Pecans, native & seedling	10
Grant	Pecans, improved	350	Mayhaws, native	\$271,688	Pecans, improved	25
	Pecans, native & seedling	375	Pecans, improved	\$101,250	Pecans, native & seedling	15
	Mayhaws, native	4	Watermelon	\$41,760	Okra	15
LaSalle	Mayhaws, native	35	Mayhaws, native	\$122,500	Mustard Greens	15
	Southern peas	10	Southern peas	\$15,150	Mayhaws, native	15
Natchitoches	Pecans, native & seedling	2374	Pecans, improved	\$996,734	Southern peas	15
	Pecans, improved	1777.9	Pecans, native & seedling	\$480,735	Pecans, native & seedling	75
Rapides	Sweet Potatoes	60.2	Sweet Potatoes	\$388,286	Pecans, improved	50
	Sweet Corn	40	Tomatoes (field)	\$228,906		
			Tomatoes (greenhouse)	\$120,000	Cowpeas	16
Vernon	Mayhaws, native	20	Blueberries, wild	\$127,875	Collard Greens	10
	Peaches	10	Peaches	\$66,038	Okra	9
	Blueberries, wild	5	Mayhaws, native	\$41,200		
Winn	Southern Peas	18	Blueberries, tame	\$123,750	no data	
	Watermelon	15	Tomatoes (field)	\$102,060		
	Potatoes	8	Watermelon	\$61,854	Southern Peas	16
				Sweet Corn	8	
				Potatoes	8	
				Mustard Greens	8	

TOP CROPS IN CENTRAL LOUISIANA PARISHES BY ACREAGE, SALES, AND NUMBER OF OPERATIONS.
Source: LSU 2013 Parish Totals.



Fresh kale is sold at Alexandria's Tuesday Farmers' Market.

SUPPLY AND DEMAND RESEARCH FINDINGS

Our supply and demand research began in earnest at the aforementioned kick-off meeting, the goal of which was to “take the temperature” of the food context of the region, and to identify key players, activities, efforts, challenges, assets, and opportunities. The engagement and enthusiasm of the meeting’s attendees underscored the notion that the region is well-poised to grow its food economy. Attendees were keen to make connections and push the movement forward. That enthusiasm and the interest in making connections (between food and health, farm viability and product affordability, farmers and buyers, Central Louisiana and markets beyond) and other key themes that emerged in the initial kick-off conversation were consistent with what we learned in the research interviews, and are presented below.

KEY FINDINGS: SUPPLY

The foundation of any regional food economy is, of course, its farmers. Supply and demand research has demonstrated that regional agricultural supply is outstripped by demand in most regions in the U.S.⁹, and Central Louisiana is no exception. Farmers here who are producing for local or regional markets typically have small operations and are new to the local supply chain, and many are taking steps toward scaling up.

In interviews with area farmers, common assets, challenges, and themes emerged.

Assets

The region is prime for agricultural production. With a subtropical climate, high quality soil, ample water, and affordable land, Central Louisiana is highly suitable for a diverse array of crops. Buyers report that Central Louisiana has a climate slightly warmer than the parishes around Baton Rouge

⁹ Karp Resources’ work in Louisville, KY, Northwest Arkansas, and New York City demonstrated this, and numerous Wallace Center (<http://www.ngfn.org/resources/food-hubs>) and USDA Agricultural Marketing Service (<http://www.ams.usda.gov/AMSv1.0/getfile?dDocName=STELPRDC5091489>) reports address the need for regions (such as those in Kansas and Wisconsin in the report links herein) to increase agricultural supply to meet burgeoning demand for local food.

and New Orleans, with product available two weeks earlier in the spring and a few weeks later in the fall. This is a market advantage regional producers can leverage.

“We could take the place of California” – a local farmer, describing the region’s natural resources and potential

There is potential for growth. Many of the farmers we spoke with have scaled up their operations in recent years, and still feel they are not yet tapping all available demand. Farmers believe that demand will continue to grow, and many plan to incrementally grow with it.

Most – but not all – farmers have access to additional land for scaling up in the foreseeable future. Unlike some other parts of the country, where available land is sparse, fragmented, and expensive, most farmers we spoke with had access to the land they needed, and enough land to scale up to some extent. This was not universally the case, however: a handful of interviewed farmers indicated that wanted to scale up were limited by a lack of appropriate or available land.

Central Louisiana’s geographic location positions it well to access a number of markets with large populations and/or interest in local foods. We spoke with producers in the region who are currently selling into the Lafayette, Baton Rouge, and New Orleans markets. The region’s proximity to these markets – and others, like Jackson, Houston, and Dallas – presents important opportunities for its farmers.

CLEDA is well-respected and well-situated to play a role in advancing the regional food economy. CLEDA’s local food efforts have earned the organization respect from farmers. It is seen as a valuable resource and a networking hub capable of facilitating collaboration among farmers and with other food system stakeholders.

Challenges

Farmers have difficulty identifying and accessing appropriate markets. Because so many of the region’s producers are relatively new to producing for local markets (especially wholesale markets), they struggle to find the right markets. Farming is time-intensive work, and most farmers have other, off-farm employment. Finding time for marketing activities and knowing how to tap into appropriate markets can be a challenge.

Current infrastructure is insufficient for current operations and/or near-term plans to scale up. In particular, lack of access to cold storage limits farmers’ flexibility and ability to expand their operations. For example, some farmers we spoke with described how access to cold storage could change their approach to farmers’ markets – they could chill and store unsold product for sale at a later date, rather than feeling pressure to sell all product transported to market. Cold storage can also provide flexibility for harvest scheduling, and it allows farmers to grow and store product at sufficient volumes for larger wholesale markets.

Farmers have difficulty accessing necessary capital. Farmers need capital – in the form of loans or grants – to scale up their operations. But according to farmers we spoke with, lenders in the region are strongly oriented to commodity producers and are skeptical of small or mid-scale production (especially vegetable production) for local markets. Part of the issue is that producers at this scale have a number of capital needs for smaller-ticket items totaling, in the case of one farmer we spoke with, approximately \$20,000. These capital needs are quite distinct from those of a large

commodity producer looking for a single large sum for a single piece of equipment. Some national grant and loan programs target small and mid-scale producers, and some farmers we spoke to have pursued these resources (e.g. FSA Microloans, NRCS High Tunnel program), but identifying and applying for these programs can be time-consuming and competitive.

The region's consumers, by and large, aren't seeking out local food. Nearly every farmer we spoke with said that consumers in the region are "behind the curve" on interest in local food, and that low consumer awareness is an obstacle to growth in the local food economy. Several farmers noted that while local *food* is not culturally top of mind, support for local business more broadly is. Central Louisiana residents' commitment to support small-scale, local, community-based businesses can be leveraged to grow support and demand for local food. As one farmer new to the area noted, "I have never lived anywhere where the word local is thrown around as much as (here). There's a big community of people who want to be supporting local businesses- this is the best place I've seen (in that regard). Whether that kind of buying actually happens, I don't know."

"I can't move enough product to sell through a distributor. I'm too small. But if I enlarged, I'd have to hire someone, then I'd have to more than double to stay even." – a local grain farmer

Labor can be a key barrier to scaling up. Farmers on the verge of scaling up can find themselves in a catch-22 with respect to labor: they need more labor to handle the increased scale of production, but they are not confident that there will be sufficient revenue to cover the additional labor expense. Finally, Central Louisiana's farmers are aging and many lack succession plans for their businesses- as a result, many are reluctant to grow their operations. These two points are, again, very similar to the dynamics in many other regions across the country trying to grow their local farm and food economies.

Opportunities

Direct markets are a big opportunity for growth. Farmers are interested in selling through direct markets, most notably farmers' markets and wholesale-direct to restaurants or other small scale wholesale buyers, and believe that the consumer base has a lot of room to grow. Many farmers enjoy the direct relationships experienced through farmers' markets and CSAs.

Farmers are interested in education and agritourism. Many farmers we spoke with are willing to be mentors to new and younger farmers, and are interested in the potential of agritourism as a way of educating consumers as well as providing additional farm revenue. Many farmers also expressed interest in bringing more wholesale buyers to their farms, to promote their farm product, educate buyers on seasonality and product availability, and generally build close business-to-business, farmer-buyer relationships.

Farmers are hungry for connections and willing to collaborate. Farmers in the region are open to partnerships that might help them tap into new markets or new resources. There is one formal farmer cooperative just outside the CLEDA region in neighboring Point Coupee Parish, the Pointe Coupee Minority Farmers Cooperative, comprised of 13 African-American growers (none with production exceeding 15 acres) who aggregate product for sale to Hollygrove, a local food delivery service and market in New Orleans. There is an opportunity to support this coop further and build

on their success through relationship-building and inclusion in farmer support programming; for minority farmers in the CLEDA region, there is also an opportunity for membership in the coop.

Additional themes and findings

Commodity growers are beginning to have an interest in diversifying to vegetable production. With so much acreage in commodities (548,510 acres, or 39% of all farmland in the region¹⁰), this is an important area of potential for increased production. However, the burden of investing equipment, time, and money in two separate crop systems may be a difficult barrier to overcome. The Forest Hill area of the region is home to a substantial greenhouse horticulture industry. While these producers did not respond to our outreach, we heard anecdotally that producers are interested in diversifying some portion of greenhouse space into food/vegetable production. The greenhouse infrastructure held by these businesses is significant, and thus these growers represent a significant opportunity for season extension and new food production.

Farmers' markets struggle to balance consistency with flexibility. Markets want to be able to offer consistency to their customers in terms of farms and products. But small and emerging farms are not always operating at a scale to confidently commit to weekly participation in markets. Finding an appropriate balance between commitment and flexibility – or finding ways to bridge the gap – will be an important step in increased farmers' market success in the region.

Many backyard gardeners are marketing excess product, especially through farmers' markets. Some of these gardeners are interested in scaling up to farm-level production (indeed, some current farmers in the region have come to farming through this route), while others have no interest in expanding. In either case, gardeners' products can or do play a role in the local food economy. The farmers' markets in Colfax and Natchitoches both sell produce from backyard gardeners.

Alexandria can play a role as a central hub of activity – but services and infrastructure shouldn't be too centralized. Farmers – especially new and smaller-scale farmers – expressed reluctance to travel far for shared infrastructure and/or resources. Some producers felt that CLEDA has focused too much on programming in Alexandria, and would like to see more energy put into reaching outlying communities. Willingness to travel may be a function of size, however: one mid-scale farm expressed willingness to travel 45 minutes to Alexandria if there were shared cold storage available there.

The region's signature crops appear to be skipping local markets. Some of the region's signature crops like pecans and rice, even when produced and marketed as specialty items, are sold primarily on the national market through internet sales and distributors. Creating channels for these producers to reach local markets may increase local consumption of these goods. One local farmer, who has received much national attention for his product but who lacks strong local markets, noted, "When you get all this national publicity and you still just barely survive? People (here) are just still not ready to pay for what good quality food is worth."

What is the balance between supply and demand in Central Louisiana? Some farmers we spoke with felt that there was insufficient demand in Central Louisiana for their product, and they needed to go outside the region to tap into larger markets. At the same time, other farmers spoke of how few farmers in the region are producing for local markets, and that supply needs to be ramped up.

¹⁰ Including soybeans, corn, sorghum, oats, sugar cane, rice, and wheat acreage. Source: USDA 2012 Census of Agriculture.

Farmers, in some cases, feel paralyzed by the chicken-and-egg nature of growing supply and demand (i.e. which should happen first?). Although the precise balance between current supply and current demand is uncertain, it is safe to say that markets both in and outside of Central Louisiana present opportunities for growth for its farmers.

Inglewood Farm is seen as a major player and anchor farm in the region. Inglewood was mentioned – unprompted – in almost all of our interviews. The farm is seen as an important and powerful influence in the local food movement. Many farmers respect its work and its significant role in advancing the cause and profile of local foods, and see abundant opportunity for Inglewood to anchor broader local food activity and market access for other growers in the region. As is the case in any system, Central Louisiana’s food system is comprised of players of various scales and resources. Several interviewees expressed the hope that the powerful players in Central Louisiana’s food system will proceed in their growth and work with an eye toward the needs, experiences and great potential offered by the smaller farms and players.

Farmers are interested in shared infrastructure – but some have contamination concerns. Some farmers we spoke with market their value added products as, for example, gluten-free or peanut-free. Farmers who market their product in such ways are less willing to utilize shared infrastructure for fear of losing confidence over these claims.



Value-added products allow farmers and other food entrepreneurs the opportunity to earn a higher premium on their product, and are currently produced primarily in home kitchens.

KEY FINDINGS: DEMAND

Our conversations with commercial buyers revealed additional dynamics in the region's food economy – much of which resonated with farmers' perspectives. In speaking with commercial buyers, infrastructure operators, and industry or food system experts, we identified the following themes.

Assets

Direct relationships with farmers are treasured by some buyers. Buyers who are deeply engaged and committed to local sourcing value their direct relationships with farmers, and view these relationships as collaborative partnerships. This commitment to working with local producers is a key feature of a resilient local food economy.

Consumers appreciate local foods, and demand is growing. Although some wholesale buyers noted that their customers aren't vocally asking for local products, these customers do appreciate local foods when they are offered. In general, buyers felt that consumer interest in local was small but growing.

Challenges

The price of local foods is a significant barrier for buyers. Nearly all buyers we spoke with lamented the high price of local foods, and said price was the key barrier to buying more local product. Many were reticent about passing that premium on to their customers. Although some buyers are willing to pay a little more for local product (particularly those for whom local food buying is a part of the

brand or company identity), others said they would only buy local if it could compete with prices for product they are currently sourcing through major supply chains or corporate commissaries. Several noted that because they receive volume discounts when they order from their company's lead suppliers or central warehouse, local food prices would be hard-pressed to compete, making local food a more appropriate "treat" or "specialty" item, rather than a volume source for staple fresh products. Several buyers also noted that they believe many farmers are setting their prices based on a certified organic pricing model, which is not an appropriate model for all farmers. However, even with these pricing challenges, one retailer estimated that he could buy about two pallets per week of local produce (approximately 10% of his total produce buy), if he could find reliable local suppliers of high quality product in sufficient volumes.

"People want to buy 'locally grown' because it's helping the community, but they wouldn't pay more for it. And I have to compare (local food) with prices from (my company's warehouse). There's no premium for local food- it's more work for me and I can't pass that on to my customers." – store manager for a local grocery chain

Consistency and availability of product are also key concerns. Buyers note that with the current scale of supply in the region, product availability is inconsistent and limited. This makes buyers hesitant about incorporating local offerings into their menus/product lines. Many buyers specifically noted that Louisiana growers can grow many crops year round, yet are not currently doing so.

Buyers don't have access to information about local farmers and product availability, and they have limited bandwidth for finding and aggregating product. Buyers expressed interest in working with more local producers, but don't know how to go about finding and reaching out to them. Many buyers purchase some local foods from local distributors such as Capitol City Produce in Baton Rouge or Robertson Produce in Monroe (neither company responded to requests for an interview for this project). Time shortages prevent them from spending significant time on outreach efforts, and also limit their ability to aggregate product from multiple small producers. Some buyers described that local agriculture doesn't have a clear identity, that they're not sure what's grown and sold regionally- as one distributor who does not buy much local food but who is interested in buying more put it, "Louisiana is crawfish, cane and rice. Little else is on my radar."

"I wish we had a better way to know where all the farmers are, who they are, and what they grow. Many farmers never leave their farms." – a farmers' market manager

Most farmers are not planning their crops or adjusting their product mix to suit the needs of the market, primarily because they don't know what buyers want. Buyers have noted specific products, such as Brussels sprouts, spinach, asparagus, and kale, that area farmers are not experienced in producing and reluctant to incorporate into production, but which are in high demand in some markets. One retailer who already sends trucks to the region noted that she could purchase up to 500 pounds per week of specific products (e.g. cauliflower) if local farmers could grow them.

While beef cattle and feed grains are among the state's top ten agricultural commodities, **most cattle are sold at auction and little local meat stays in local food supply chains.** As a result, slaughter

and meat processing infrastructure (for custom slaughter and cut) is small to mid scale and, anecdotally based on interviews with operators, these businesses are operating at close to full capacity. These businesses struggle to find and keep reliable skilled laborers. While producers and buyers interviewed agree that there is a high demand for grass-fed beef in the region as well as a willingness to pay a premium for it, meat production was the only production category for which producers and processors noted that natural resources of the area are *not* an asset for increasing production- key challenges include extreme heat in the summers, a soil mineral base that is not ideal for feed grasses, and lack of sufficient land for grazing. Poultry too is a “top ten” agricultural commodity in the state, but Central Louisiana producers who are selling into local markets are slaughtering their birds on-farm.

Opportunities

Buyers want to collaborate with farmers. In particular, restaurant and retail businesses that promote local foods are interested in working collaboratively and planning production (specific products and volumes) with farmers. Flexibility and openness to working with buyers is key on the part of farmers. Relationships of mutual trust, commitment, collaboration and frequent, honest and clear communication are crucial to successful local sourcing.

Buyers would be interested in a supplier that aggregates local product from smaller producers. Such a supplier could overcome a number of challenges for buyers, such as insurance requirements, inconsistency of supply, and buyers’ lack of capacity and/or willingness to vet and work with numerous small-scale producers.

Buyers can phase in local offerings incrementally. Buyers who are uncertain about consumer interest can test and develop the market by incrementally offering more local product. For example, one restaurant has plans to roll out a “chef’s menu overlay” which will be in addition to its current menu, and will feature local foods at a higher price point.

Buyers are hungry for more choices. Buyers who are already sourcing locally are eager to add more farms to their roster of sources – not to supplant their current sources, but to add diversity and scale to their offerings.

Local products buyers want more of include:

- Asparagus
- Artichokes
- Beets
- Brussels sprouts
- Cauliflower
- Cured onions and garlic
- Heirloom or diverse varieties
- Leafy greens
- Micro greens
- Okra
- Potatoes (fingerling)
- Proteins (especially grass-fed beef and chicken)
- Satsumas
- Tomatoes
- Season extension

A meaningful local branding campaign could be effective. In addition to CLEDA’s Fresh Central, Certified Cajun was also mentioned as a local branding campaign that could be leveraged for increased activity around regional foods. Some farmers and buyers we spoke with said that local

branding “with teeth” – participation criteria, clear meaning and enforcement – would be most effective.

Restaurants can be a key sector of focus for the Central Louisiana local food movement’s next phase of growth. Consumers look to restaurants for new food experiences and innovation. At the same time, restaurant purchasing is at a small enough scale that it is not overwhelming to small farmers. Thus, restaurants provide a crucial opportunity for increasing consumer awareness and shining a light on local food in a way that aligns with the current scale of production in the region. In particular, the Fresh Central Farm-to-Restaurant pilot is a good jumping-off point for facilitating more purchasing of local foods by restaurants.

Additional Themes and Findings

Retail

Price and insurance coverage are key concerns for retailers. Retailers buy most products from corporate warehouses or distribution centers, and are incentivized to do so. National and regional grocery chains have efficient and low-price supply chains in place, and price is usually the primary consideration for these buyers. They are not likely, at this point, to incorporate significant amounts of local product unless it can compete with these prices. These businesses also often have liability insurance requirements that small-scale local producers are currently not able to meet.

Several buyers serving the CLEDA parishes have company headquarters and/or corporate warehouses in Texas, which impacts their “local food” buying in Louisiana. Texas retail and distribution companies have historically tended to seek Texas producers to align with a state-line definition of “local” and because the scale of Texas agriculture makes developing supplier relationships there easier. This also impacts backhaul opportunities, in that the companies’ warehouse procurement officers are sending delivery trucks into Central Louisiana but are not currently seeking Louisiana product to supply the regional commissaries with food that will be identified as “local”. Buyers note that while the region’s current small scale of production limits opportunities to supply corporate warehouses, opportunities exist for Louisiana growers to do business with the companies’ individual stores in the region.

Restaurants

Innovative and enthusiastic new restaurants are emerging as a showcase for local foods, but they have not yet formed sufficient farmer relationships or established menu flexibility for working with farmers. As previously mentioned, restaurants are a key area of potential for advancing the local food movement. Right now, restaurants in the region that are interested in local have not been able to forge relationships with enough farmers, and have not prioritized menu flexibility, which is key for incorporating the seasonality of local food.

Restaurants are primarily purchasing fresh whole product. Unlike some other classes of buyers, which seek products with at least some minimal processing (food service and retail increasingly seek chopped, washed, peeled produce, e.g.), restaurants usually have the capacity and skill to handle this kind of processing in-house. This characteristic makes restaurants a good wholesale customer for small and emerging farms.

Distributors

Distributors are interested in buying from an aggregator, cooperative or another entity pooling product from multiple farmers. Food safety is a central concern for large-scale food distributors, and they have high liability insurance requirements for approved vendors. As one distributor with over 1,600 accounts in Central Louisiana alone noted, “Our company priorities are food safety first, then profitability, and then food safety. Again.” Companies of this kind of scale and with such rigorous criteria for selecting suppliers are generally not well-positioned to source from multiple small producers. An aggregating entity that offers this necessary insurance coverage would help overcome this barrier for distributors. This is a common role for food hubs to play, whether their services are centralized under a bricks and mortar roof or are more dispersed.

SUMMARY

In summary, across sectors and perspectives, the following conclusions emerged:

- Agricultural supply is currently limited in its ability to meet the needs of wholesale markets; production capacity and volumes will need to grow to support next steps in the region’s food economy.
- Increased consumer awareness of, exposure to, and education about local foods will be crucial in developing the regional food system.
- Direct markets and small-scale direct wholesale market development present scale-appropriate opportunities for developing regional supply and demand.
- Targeted investments, increased communication between farmers and buyers (e.g. on product availability, or for crop planning), and increased aggregation of local food products and local food information could go a long way toward meeting existing needs for infrastructure and resources.

These conclusions form the basis for the models proposed in the following section.



Up to Grow Good Farm, where past-season okra has dried on the bush, has room to grow and plans to incrementally scale up in the coming years.

STRATEGIES FOR GROWTH IN CENTRAL LOUISIANA'S FOOD ECONOMY

INTRODUCTION

Based on the findings of our primary and secondary research, we have developed three broad strategies for advancing the regional food economy in Central Louisiana. Each strategy is comprised of two specific, implementable models and includes a breakdown of the kinds of partnerships, infrastructure, internal capacities (at CLEDA), and immediate steps required for successful implementation. These models are presented with the assumption that they will be tested with potential partners, as well as farmer and buyer participants, in a Phase Two study.

The strategies are not meant to be mutually exclusive or implemented in any particular order; no one model or strategy would need to be implemented first in order for the others to be useful or successful. Rather, we present what follows as an integrated approach that can build on the region's current strengths and momentum, while leveraging the potential of the region's food system (as we've captured and described it throughout this report), via multifaceted strategies. While there is no "magic bullet" in building vibrant healthy regional food systems, the research team believes that all of the models described below would serve CLEDA's desired goal of growing the local food economy as means of enhancing quality of life in the region.

CLEDA's Fresh Central brand offers potential to unite these strategies under a single identity, which can maximize visibility and association of efforts for participants and community members. We recommend considering a broadening of the Fresh Central identity and a commitment to it as the face of CLEDA's diverse local food efforts in Central Louisiana.



Shared infrastructure, such as trucking and cold storage, could allow the region and its farmers to make the most of its investments.

STRATEGY 1: NETWORK AND LEVERAGE INFRASTRUCTURE

Over the past three years, CLEDA has made a significant and broad-based investment in growing the local food system by building partnerships and coalitions, developing farmer business acumen, supporting food business entrepreneurship, and developing Fresh Central as a brand under which all these activities can live and connections can be made. Food production remains very small-scale across the region, micro in most cases, with just a handful of professional diversified producers who are already selling into wholesale markets. Because of this, in combination with a regional history of plantation and commodity agriculture, there is little existing infrastructure for local food supply chains, such as space and equipment for best practices in post-harvest handling, packing, transportation logistics, communication (e.g. about product availability), cold storage, and general professional, wholesale grower know-how. However, significant opportunities exist to network and coordinate small growers in formal and informal ways, using anchor growers and infrastructures that already exist or are in development as foundations to build upon.

Model 1: Aggregate farm product

Key Activities: Train and leverage CLEDA's new hire to facilitate and "broker" new market opportunities that mutually benefit farmers and buyers; build on informal aggregation already happening at anchor farms; strategically locate small-scale cold storage infrastructure around the region for aggregation.

Key Partners: Anchor/larger growers, small scale growers and backyard gardeners, the Acadiana Food Hub (in planning stages), retailers known for buying local foods, like-minded organizations to host cold storage infrastructure.

The language used to describe this strategy matters. In Karp Resources' experience, most small and mid-scale American farmers balk at the concept of joining a cooperative. They tend to hear in the term a loss of autonomy of decision-making about pricing, production, and markets, and echoes of the history of commodity crop pricing structures. However, when the idea of partnership is focused on aggregation, not legal cooperative structures, and is posited as a loose coalition, focused on aggregating product to access a specific market or meet a customer's required volume or product range, farmer willingness to participate in partnerships can increase.

This trend held true in interviews with producers for this project, several of whom already partner with other farmers to access markets they couldn't otherwise reach. In most cases in Central Louisiana, one farmer anchors the partnership, in terms of developing the market relationship, making the sales, and producing the majority of the product, then "buys in" smaller quantities of specific products to round out his offerings. We also found an example of a farm serving as an aggregation point for several other producers serving the same buyer – Hollygrove, the New Orleans-based local produce box service and market, picks up product twice each week in New Roads (Pointe Coupee Parish) at Glaser's Produce, where product from a handful of other farms (including Up to Grow Good) is aggregated. The aggregation strategy that follows builds on these already existent and well-functioning approaches.

CLEDA has received funding for and is currently interviewing candidates for a new position, a person whose full time job it would be to develop market opportunities for Central Louisiana growers and match farmers with buyers. This position is essential and should be leveraged to also match growers with each other to develop aggregation points across the region. In past projects, Karp Resources has referred to this kind of a role as "the public interest broker". A public interest broker communicates and facilitates across food system sectors (growers, processors, distributors, retailers, institutional buyers) to connect the dots and build strong, lasting, and mutually beneficial local supply chain relationships, in the public and private sectors. This person should be in frequent contact with growers to support their growth and align their production with market demand; and the broker should be in regular contact with buyers to identify opportunities, eliminate obstacles, and generally learn buyers' business practices, logistics, infrastructure, motivations, priorities and needs to identify ways that local products and producers can become reliable, invaluable, responsive suppliers. In the course of coordinating aggregation activities, CLEDA may seek to develop an online platform (for collecting orders, pooling product availability information, etc.), however such a platform should be seen a tool for the "broker," not a replacement for this position.

As this new hire begins coordinating aggregation activities, the aggregation points can start out with no infrastructure, with farmers strategically picking up and dropping off products to align precisely with deliveries or buyer pick-ups. For example, in alignment with when trucks come in from New Orleans or Lafayette to buy from Inglewood or Up to Grow Good, or conversely when those farms are sending out trucks to more distant buyers, CLEDA's aggregation coordinator would gather availability information from growers and ensure that diverse product is being represented, reach out to buyers to promote product, and coordinate logistics between anchor and auxiliary growers. While cold storage does offer flexibility and is an important component of post-harvest handling and thus product quality and shelf life, many food hubs around the country have started without this type of infrastructure. Instead, they harvest product to order, and they hold none.

A second stage of development for this kind of aggregation would include small scale, minimal cost infrastructure such as packing tables or walk-in coolers so that product can be gathered and held, to ensure product quality and ability to fill orders in full consistently. Prior to and as a part of this research, there has been much discussion about the potential to share or sublease warehouse, loading dock and refrigeration space from the Food Bank of Central Louisiana, building on the successful partnership the Food Bank and CLEDA have built in the course of Local Food Initiative activities¹¹. Part of the national Feeding America network, the Food Bank has a broad local reach (serving 104 member agencies and distributing more than six million pounds of food annually); has a strategic programmatic focus on breaking the cycles of poverty that contribute to poverty and hunger in the region; is already receiving local foods direct from farmers; and is in the process of a significant facility expansion that will include a client service center, increased space for volunteer activity, and an increase in cooler and freezer space that will more than double their current capacity. All of these assets and characteristics position the Food Bank as a high potential partner for CLEDA in future local food related work. Though this infrastructure will be underutilized as the Food Bank grows into it, there are obstacles to sharing it. For example, because donated product does not always arrive in anticipated volumes or at expected times, the extent to which cooler space or loading dock infrastructure are available for sublease (e.g. to an aggregation initiative) shifts dramatically and unpredictably. Another obstacle relates to how additional activity in the warehouse would or would not align with the Food Bank's staffing strategy and availability. In sum, the two organizations are committed to the partnership they are building, their shared work in growing the local food system, and increasing access to affordable, healthy and local foods, but the Food Bank is not currently ready to share infrastructure. The project team recommends that this conversation be revisited as the Food Bank progresses toward its new facility.

In the meantime, the region's need for cold storage and/or packing infrastructure can be built on anchor farms or – if investment in infrastructure on one farm were to be seen as exclusive, inaccessible to all, or as a kind of favoritism (a distinct possibility) – coolers could be placed in a more neutral location, such as land affiliated with LSU AgCenter or a like-minded nonprofit (or on a newly formed farm incubator). Because farmers do not currently view extensive travel (i.e. 30+ minutes) to market as feasible, this infrastructure should be small and redundant rather than larger and centralized, with three to five small aggregation points around the 10-parish region. Locations should be chosen to ensure easy access for farmers and for buyers, taking into account specific buyers' routes (those who are already committed to local purchasing, such as Whole Foods, Rouse's, Hollygrove and Good Eggs) and taking advantage of backhaul opportunities¹² where possible.

The Fresh Central brand could be used to identify the aggregator/aggregation activity, or it could be used on the product cases themselves, perhaps co-branded with participating farm names and logos where applicable.

¹¹ Other food hubs around the country, such as Common Market (www.commonmarketphila.org/) and Greenmarket Co. (<http://www.greenmarketco.org>), have partnered with local emergency food organizations to share or sublease food distribution infrastructure.

¹² The research team explored backhaul opportunities in all relevant commercial buyer interviews, but no immediate specific opportunities were identified. Most companies interviewed backhaul product only for existing suppliers (i.e. not as a fee-for-service in order to minimize their own logistics costs). Other backhaul obstacles are described in the Demand Findings section of this report. As deeper relationships with commercial buyers are built and as more farms reach wholesale markets, backhaul arrangements can be explored once again.

Phase Two research will determine the appropriate scale and other operational details of these aggregation points. Research in this phase revealed that small aggregation points will meet buyers' immediate and medium-term future needs: several buyers indicated that they require a minimum order in the range of \$300-500 to warrant a pickup and noted that they are currently traveling to and through Central Louisiana in underutilized cargo vans, not box trucks or tractor trailers. They noted that they would most likely increase the number of times per week that they pick up product in Central Louisiana, rather than increasing the size of their fleets, meaning that relatively small amounts of product would be aggregated per order. Product aggregation can help increase buyer traffic in the region and support farmers in meeting these minimum order requirements.

Currently in planning stages in Lafayette is the Acadiana Food Hub and Culinary Center. Led by Brian Gotreaux of Gotreaux Family Farms with the support and interest from the Lafayette Economic Development Authority (LEDA), the food hub is expected to be a for-profit model with approximately 7,200 square feet housing storefront retail activity, a small café, a studio kitchen (for cooking demos and classes), commercial kitchen for value added product, as well as warehouse space for aggregation, washing, packing and storage for a full range of products. Farmers interviewed for this project generally saw Lafayette as inaccessibly distant, and Lafayette buyers saw Central Louisiana farms as similarly too far afield at this point. If the Acadiana Food Hub is built as expected, Central Louisiana aggregation efforts can serve as a satellite hub, aggregating product for delivery to Lafayette.

A strong example of diverse food hub activities combined with a burgeoning aggregation effort with a key farm as an anchor is Lucky Dog Farm¹³ in New York's Hudson Valley. With 160 acres in certified organic vegetable production, a retail store, inn and café, Lucky Dog received a significant grant from the USDA's Local Food Promotion Program to aggregate local farm product for weekly delivery into New York City. The hub also receives administrative support from the Center for Agricultural Development and Entrepreneurship (CADE, a long standing nonprofit in the region). This is a particularly relevant model for CLEDA because Lucky Dog and partner farms are close enough to New York City that it's an alluring marketplace (much like Central Louisiana farmers are well positioned to take advantage of local food demand in Baton Rouge, New Orleans, and Houston), but far enough away (3 hours driving, without traffic) that developing market relationships there is not a viable option for most area farmers. The project grew out of the farm's need to create efficiencies, namely, to fill its truck for the weekly trip to New York City.

Lucky Dog aggregates dairy, meats, and produce from about 20 local farmers. Farmers post product availability on Fridays, orders are placed on Tuesdays, product is aggregated on Thursday mornings, and on Thursday afternoons and Fridays deliveries are made across the five boroughs of New York City, including distribution at a booth at one of the city's premier farmers' markets (see Strategy 2 for more information about the high potential of wholesale trade at farmers' markets). No product is held or stored on-farm. Farmers have the option of being included in the aggregated availability list that goes out to buyers, or they can take advantage of the hub's fee-based transportation service to farmers who already have established customers in the hub's delivery area for a fee of 15% of the value of gross product transported. Each farm sets its own pricing, defines its production practices, and features its own farm name and story. With funding from the USDA's Local Food Promotion Program (LFPP), the hub also offers one-on-one technical assistance at no charge for farmers who are interested in taking advantage of the hub's services but who are not confident they're ready to

¹³ <http://www.luckydogorganic.com/>

do so—this technical assistance includes financial planning, marketing, pricing, and production-related support. The hub has clear, simple packing, labeling and billing standards and protocol.

In Central Louisiana, product can and should also be aggregated from backyard market gardeners. The Cane River Green Market in Natchitoches currently organizes the Community Table, a farmers' market stall at which Natchitoches gardeners and farmers can sell excess produce on consignment, with consignment fees covering the costs of the stall fees. Another example further afield is in Rhode Island, where in 2011 the Southside Community Land Trust's Community Growers Coop, a coalition of backyard gardeners and urban farmers, aggregated product for sale at farmers' markets and (informally and somewhat off the books) to Providence-based community grocers and corner stores. That coop's work led to the creation of the Little City Growers¹⁴, a network of small farmers (all less than two acres) who sell at area farmers' markets and restaurants.

A barrier for entry into wholesale markets beyond small restaurants (food service, retail, distributor) is insurance requirements, typically a minimum of \$1 million in per incident liability insurance, which can cost a business many hundreds of dollars each year. For Central Louisiana's small farmers to enter big markets, these growers will need to be represented by insurance held by either the anchor farms in the area or an outside entity (the aggregator, Fresh Central) who holds liability insurance for the group. The USDA's Agriculture Marketing Service¹⁵ and the Wallace Center¹⁶ both offer excellent case studies and resources on best practices in product aggregation, including the technicalities and legalities of insurance coverage.

Buyers interviewed for this project were almost universally interested in purchasing from an entity that aggregates local food from local growers, assuming buyers' criteria (price and insurance, in particular) are met.

Partners and Roles

- **Anchor growers** (e.g. Inglewood or Up to Grow Good): Communicate with partner growers and CLEDA's new hire to coordinate orders to buyers in nearby marketplaces that those farmers are already accessing (e.g. Lafayette and New Orleans), with their products anchoring the volume of each order
- **Acadiana Food Hub**: Recipient/re-distributor of aggregated Central Louisiana product; an opportunity exists for Central Louisiana growers (individually or in aggregate) to begin working and planning with this food hub as it develops
- **Retailers already known to focus on local foods** (Good Eggs, Whole Foods, Hollygrove, e.g.): Purchase increasing amounts of local food; plan/coordinate with aggregators and producers; communicate clearly with producers about products they are seeking and purchasing criteria
- **Neutral (non-farm) but likeminded organizations**: Host small scale cold storage infrastructure for regional aggregation

¹⁴ <http://littlecitygrowers.org/>

¹⁵

<http://www.ams.usda.gov/AMSV1.0/ams.fetchTemplateData.do?template=TemplateA&navID=WholesaleandFarmersMarkets&leftNav=WholesaleandFarmersMarkets&page=FoodHubResearchReleasesBlogs&description=Food%20Hub%20Research.%20Releases.%20Blog%20Posts.%20and%20Articles>

¹⁶ <http://www.ngfn.org/resources/food-hubs/food-hubs-solving-local>

Infrastructure and Internal Capacity

- CLEDA staff person with strong communication skills to facilitate communication among/between participating farmers, potential buyers and cold storage sites. Expertise in project management, coordination and logistics will also be required.
- Small scale cold storage (e.g. walk-ins)
- Criteria and protocol for aggregated product to ensure consistently high product quality, uniformity of pack, etc.
- Strong Fresh Central brand to support and complement each farm's brand/identity

First Implementation Steps

1. Answer the following questions in Phase Two:
 - Who are the participating farmers, what/how much do they currently grow, and to what extent are they interested in accessing wholesale markets?
 - Under what circumstances would they be interested in participating in an aggregation initiative (e.g. how far and to where will they travel, who should run it, how should it work)?
 - Based on farmer interest in participating and anticipated pace of farm enterprise growth, what capacity should cold storage infrastructure have, and where should it be located?
2. Develop complementary relationships between anchor farmers and smaller growers based on product mix and geographic location
3. Develop aggregation protocol, structures and criteria for participation
4. Test and develop partnerships with aggregation host sites/organizations, with clearly outlined roles and responsibilities
5. Build out small scale aggregation points strategically throughout the region (-3 with cold storage)

Model 2: Support product development and value added processing

Key Activities: Support the Central Louisiana Business Incubator's development of incubator programming for commercial kitchen users; research food processing businesses of all scales in the region to understand their ingredient needs and purchasing patterns.

Key Partners: Central Louisiana Business Incubator, new and established food entrepreneurs, Local Food Working Group.

A number of farmers interviewed for this product are already making and selling value added products. Most are producing in home kitchens that are not certified, limiting their scale of production as well as the kinds of markets they reasonably and legally serve. These producers as well as non-producer food entrepreneurs can be supported in creating high quality products with strong brands and sound marketing plans, and the infrastructure to provide this support is already being built.

The Central Louisiana Business Incubator (CLBI) has built a certified commercial kitchen that is currently utilized just 8-16 hours per week, by caterers who rent by the hour. However, the CLBI is in the process of building up the kitchen's capacity to include a packing and bottling line (for liquid, dry and granulated product), steam tables, nutrition analysis capacity, and labeling equipment, in addition to the ranges, convection ovens, stockpot burners, fryers, warmers and walk-in coolers the

facility already has. This additional capacity should be completed by summer 2015. CLBI currently also offers business classes and expects to offer these to kitchen users as part of an incubator program, the details of which are still in development.

CLBI is interested in partnering with CLEDA to find and cultivate farmer kitchen users, make connections between food entrepreneurs and farmers who could be their suppliers, and provide business supports and workshops to incubator participants. CLEDA can play role in encouraging CLBI to partner with someone with food-business-specific experience and savvy to make CLBI's current business training resources specific to food and farm businesses needs (much as CLEDA partnered with production experts in the form of Farm Coaches to complement in-house Business Acceleration capacity). CLBI's space and programming are still in development and the organization is hungry for partners. CLEDA has the opportunity to shape this kitchen and the programming that surrounds it into an infrastructure that serves existing and aspiring food and farm businesses well. One immediate opportunity is to learn more about the food companies in the region to identify opportunities for increase purchasing of locally grown ingredients. Understanding what ingredients these companies use and how they make purchasing decisions (e.g. what they buy, in what volumes, at what time of year, at what price and with what other key characteristics) will help CLEDA, CLBI and partners connect local farmers with local food entrepreneurs.

Strong examples of commercial kitchen ventures that are linked to agricultural production abound around the country, as do toolkits for their successful implementation¹⁷. Though there is interest among local food advocates in the region in minimal processing for institutional markets, the scale of production is currently too small to meet that sector's volume requirements and price point. As farms and food businesses scale up, the institutional market place can and should be pursued.

Partners and Roles

- **CLBI:** Manage kitchen infrastructure, programming and activities; provide food specific business coaching and supports; work in partnership with CLEDA and other food and entrepreneurship-focused entities to promote the kitchen and ensure efficient and high utilization; host strategic business to business networking events featuring kitchen tenants' products
- **Established food entrepreneurs:** Lead workshops; serve as mentors for entrepreneurs being "incubated"; provide information on ingredients usage and current suppliers; consider increased purchasing of local ingredients
- **Food entrepreneurs** (farmer and non-farmer): Utilize the kitchen; take advantage of business supports and trainings to develop new products and access new markets
- **Central Louisiana Local Food Working Group:** Undertake research to identify food entrepreneurs and understand their production and purchasing patterns

Infrastructure and Internal Capacity

- Research on food processing businesses of all scales in the region, to understand their ingredient needs and purchasing patterns
- Food business expertise to complement broad business supports
- Staff to "match make" between food entrepreneurs and producers who can supply their ingredients (including aggregated product)

¹⁷ <http://www.leopold.iastate.edu/sites/default/files/pubs-and-papers/2014-09-shared-use-kitchen-planning-toolkit.pdf>

- Staff to link food entrepreneurs with locally produced ingredients as possible (role for new aggregation specialist, in concert with CLEDA's Regional Food Coordinator), and support CLBI on food and agriculture specific/relevant business and marketing support

First Implementation Steps

1. Answer the following questions in Phase Two:
 - Who are the region's established and emerging food entrepreneurs (including farmers producing value-added products), what products are they making, and where are they making them?
 - What would it take for them to use the CLBI kitchen infrastructure, and what kind of technical assistance offerings would they utilize (and under what circumstances)?
 - What expertise exists regionally that can be leveraged in support of the kitchen and its support programming?
2. Define partnership parameters with CLBI and others
3. Undertake research, among farmers and existing food businesses of all scales, to understand their current and projected future product lines, their purchasing patterns (on a product by product basis)
4. Develop support programming for kitchen users
5. Develop new supply chain relationships with area growers (such as Up to Grow Good's new relationship selling tomatoes to Two Sisters Salsa)
6. Create access to new marketplaces for value added products through by participation in regional product aggregation efforts, under the banner of Fresh Central.



Farmers' markets, like Alexandria's Tuesday Market, provide an opportunity for consumers and farmers to directly interact, building interest and demand for local foods.

STRATEGY 2: BUILD DEMAND FOR LOCAL FOOD

Farmers' markets are springing up and taking root across Central Louisiana, and are received enthusiastically by residents seeking local foods. These markets, however, are currently not coordinated or networked with one another. They vary tremendously from town to town and (even within one market) from week to week, in terms of oversight, capacity, range of vendors and products, criteria for participation (and product quality), and consistency. Up to now, farmers' markets have been primarily grassroots undertakings, generating enthusiasm, energy and sales.

Central Louisiana markets are at a critical point where they could benefit from targeted strategies to support their growth and consistency, for the benefit of farmers and consumers. This model focuses on direct marketing for two reasons. First, the scale of diversified fruit, vegetable, and nut production in Central Louisiana currently is well matched to direct marketing and small-scale direct wholesale strategies. And second, though farmers' markets, farmstands, CSAs and other direct marketing purchases will always represent a small percentage of most households' total annual food spend, the experiences that people have with local food and local markets change their relationship to food more broadly, and thus have the potential to shift a community's dominant food culture.

Model 1: Grow direct marketing opportunities

Key Activities: Coordinate existing farmers' markets to increase consistency and access for producers (including backyard market gardeners) and consumers; structure and promote farmers' markets as opportunities for direct wholesale food trade.

Key Partners: Market Umbrella, farmers' market managers and vendors.

From 2013 to 2014, Louisiana saw a 12.5% statewide increase in farmers' markets (compared of 1.5% nationally), one of the fastest rates of growth in the country. The Cane River Green Market in Natchitoches was, in 2014, named as one of the 101 "Best Farmers' Markets in America" by the travel/food/lifestyle website TheDailyMeal.com¹⁸. Most Central Louisiana markets are run exclusively by unpaid volunteers, while others have a permanent place in a town budget with paid staff- Cane River Green Market is a project of the town of Natchitoches, and the new Alexandria market appears to be headed toward city support, oversight, and resources. Some Central Louisiana markets are populated primarily by square foot gardeners or home gardeners selling excess product, while others are anchored by one or two of the area's mid scale growers. While some markets (e.g. Cane River and Leesville markets) do charge a stall fee for participation, none that we found require farmers to make a participation commitment.

Examples of coordinated farmers' market networks in American urban and peri-urban areas abound: Farm Fresh Rhode Island¹⁹ (which operates in the larger cities in the northern part of that state), Grow NYC's Greenmarket²⁰ in New York City, The Food Trust²¹ in Philadelphia, Market Umbrella²² in New Orleans, City Seed²³ in New Haven, CT, Fresh Farm Markets²⁴ in and around the Washington, DC area, and to some extent the California Certified Farmers' Markets²⁵ throughout that state.

What most of these coordinated market systems have in common is a neutral, non-producer, non-profit entity (with the exception of California Certified, which is a government entity) with paid staff who define the parameters and definitions of local, coordinate and communicate with vendors and ensure a balanced product mix and consistent farmer participation, visit the farms regularly to support crop planning and to ensure that production criteria are being met, and plan in order to ensure that the market system is fairly geographically distributed across the region served, that there are markets on a range of days and times, and that market locations are strategically selected to ensure success. When markets offer this consistency, consumers know that when they come to the market, the farmers will be there and that the product offered is guaranteed to be local; farmers can be confident that the market is being promoted and that no one farm's interests will trump another's – under these conditions, trust and sales increase.

Unified oversight can take many forms and need not include a sole set of rules or management. The USDA Farmers' Market Promotion Program funded a project in Oregon's Columbia River Gorge²⁶ to support the creation of a regional market network, the goal of which was to strengthen and support existing and emerging farmers' markets in a five county rural area (total population 75,000, notably smaller than Central Louisiana and spread over a large geographic area). While the network did not provide unified governance or oversight, it provided training to farmer vendors and market staff, and facilitated shared resources and solutions to common market problems. Over the course of two funding years, with this networked coordination and support, the area grew from have eight to

¹⁸ <http://www.thetowntalk.com/story/news/local/2014/08/14/farmers-markets-central-louisiana/14035709/>

¹⁹ www.farmfreshri.org/

²⁰ <http://www.grownyc.org/greenmarket>

²¹ <http://thefoodtrust.org/>

²² www.marketumbrella.org/

²³ www.cityseed.org/

²⁴ <http://www.freshfarmmarkets.org/>

²⁵ www.cafarmersmarkets.com

²⁶ <http://www.gorgegrown.com/>

thirteen farmers' markets, and gross sales at the largest market more than doubled. Several of the system's markets offer "community tables" for backyard gardeners to sell excess produce²⁷.

In addition to their farmers' markets, with strong relationships with area growers, some of these organizations (GrowNYC, Farm Fresh RI, and City Seed, notably) diversify their direct marketing strategies through various forms of Community Support Agriculture or produce box subscription programs with pick-up sites in or deliveries to community gathering spaces, schools, or significant workplaces. The gathering of producers under one umbrella can enable a mix of direct marketing opportunities.

And these direct marketing opportunities are not limited to consumers. At established farmers' markets around the country, small-scale wholesale trade is burgeoning as well. The Santa Monica, California Farmers' market (in operation since the early 1980s), for instance, has grown to include designated parking for chefs and other wholesale buyers. Farmers reported that 25-70% of what they bring to market in an average week is sold to restaurants or other wholesalers, through advance orders²⁸. This practice has grown organically in the Greenmarket farmers' markets in NYC as well (a coordinated market system launched in the 1970s), with chefs in their whites loading carts and vehicles with the market's freshest and best²⁹. In both cases, advance orders are fulfilled "behind the table", to minimize interruption of consumer shopping, while chefs with flexible menus may browse for specials along with other customers. Farmers ensure that product that has been pre-sold is not part of the display, because when customers see and want pre-sold product or if pre-sold product differs from other market offerings, trust between farmers and consumers wanes.

Market Umbrella, which manages and supports the Crescent City Farmers Market system in New Orleans, is currently exploring the possibility of growing into a more regional actor in food systems development and farmers' market oversight. Having worked with CLEDA to bring wireless EBT infrastructure to three Central Louisiana farmers' markets, Market Umbrella is interested in pursuing the possibility of continued and expanded work with CLEDA to grow the existing farmers' markets in the region, grow the number of markets serving CLEDA's 10 parishes, and provide the training, marketing materials, oversight and governance to grow those markets' consistency as well. In interviews with Central Louisiana farmers' market managers as part of this project's research, this concept was tested and interest was there- one market manager described it as "a dream come true", while one other thoughtfully (and accurately) noted that any unified or coordinated farmers' market system would need to be shaped to respect and protect each town's and market's best assets and character.

Partners and Roles

- **Market Umbrella:** Work with CLEDA, market managers and other key stakeholders to identify key market development needs and co-develop appropriate solutions; provide a mix of market manager training, vendor training and support, market coordination, EBT infrastructure and marketing supports, oversight and technical assistance

²⁷ <http://www.ams.usda.gov/AMSV1.0/getfile?dDocName=STELPRDC5097701>

²⁸ <http://ucanr.edu/blogs/blogcore/postdetail.cfm?postnum=7104> Small Farm New. UC Small Farm Program. Volume 1, 2012.

²⁹ A Study on Development of a New York City Wholesale Farmers' market. Market Ventures, Inc. and Karp Resources. January 2006.

- **Existing farmers' market managers:** Manage markets, recruit farmer vendors to grow the market, work with existing farmers to get "buy in" on coordinated market system, communicate and collaborate with Market Umbrella's on-the-ground staff
- **Farmers' market vendors:** Participate, with Market Umbrella and market managers, in the process of establishing new market guidelines, communication and planning and governance structures

Infrastructure and Internal Capacity

In thinking through this possibility hypothetically (but enthusiastically), Market Umbrella staff assembled a rough budget for building a coordinated six farmers' market system Central Louisiana over the course of three years. These numbers were assembled not as a binding proposal, but for the purpose of starting a conversation about partnership possibilities. Approximately \$235,000 over the course of three years would support:

- Resources and funding for a full time market system manager and three part time market assistants in Central Louisiana
- Resources and support from the New Orleans headquarters
- Equipment and supplies, including (but not limited to) computers, cell phones, printers, design services, market tokens, EBT wireless terminals, bank fees, travel, communications, marketing and evaluation

Internally, CLEDA would leverage the following key infrastructures and capacities:

- Staff (Regional Food Coordinator and new procurement position) to support vendor outreach and coordination, and to coordinate with Market Umbrella staff
- Fresh Central- When the markets are ready, promote markets as potential wholesale trade venue to participating restaurants
- Relationships with farmers' market managers, farmers, Local Food Working Group members and other food system advocates and players

First Implementation Steps

1. Answer the following questions in Phase Two:
 - What are market managers' and vendors' current needs and interests, and how could market coordination activities and protocol support them best?
 - What characteristics would a coordinated farmers' market system need to have in order for it to serve consumers well?
 - To what extent, under what conditions, how often and at what locations are wholesale food buyers interested in purchasing local food at farmers' markets?
2. Explore partnership possibilities and parameters with Market Umbrella
3. Seek funding to support the Market Umbrella partnership
4. Increase coordination (market days, times, locations); grow markets to enable wholesale trade; grow existing markets (# of vendors, sales per market day, length of market season)

Model 2: Build consumer awareness of local foods and markets

Key Activities: Build on existing assets and programming (e.g. Foodapalooza, Fresh Central website and brand, Harvest of the Month); **engage nearby “hubs” of local food activity** (Shreveport, Lafayette, New Orleans) in this programming; **increase Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)** and other food benefit enrollment and utilization at farmers’ markets to broaden local food access.

Key Partners: Market Umbrella, SNAP and other benefit enrollment offices, Well Ahead/Wellspots, The Food Bank of Central Louisiana, Local Food Working Group.

At the launch of this project, CLEDA staff estimated that the local food movement in Central Louisiana is about 10 years behind the local food movement nationally, in terms of market development, mid-scale production, and overall demand for and awareness of the benefits of local food. Key to the success of any model in Central Louisiana will be growing demand for local foods through consumer education and awareness campaigns.

As described in other sections of this report, Central Louisiana’s local food movement is growing within a broader context of large-scale commodity crop production. Several commercial food buyers interviewed noted that a significant cultural shift is needed (and is beginning to be seen), toward quality, healthy and local food, and away from all-you-can-eat, bargain basement pricing, and a disconnect between agriculture-as-exportable-commodity and agriculture-as-local-food. This has been overcome in other commodity-heavy regions of the country.

The Northeast Iowa Food and Fitness Initiative³⁰, which grew out of community stakeholder conversations about health, food and economic development, is now a W.K. Kellogg Foundation funded initiative that has increased sales of local food by local farmers in 6 counties from less than \$10,000 in 2006 to over \$2 million in 2010, with over \$8 million is estimated economic impact as of 2013.^{31, 32} A regional, multi-stakeholder strategic planning process, along with producer engagement and a multi-sector approach to marketing, education and engagement has shifted the culture of food in that region dramatically. Key areas of programming within this initiative to build demand for local food include early childhood education curricula, partnership with school wellness teams, farm to school (education and procurement activities), outreach to and resources for parents on purchasing and preparing healthy and local foods, investment in the creation and maintenance of the Upper Iowa Local Food Directory to link consumers with local food vendors inside and close but outside of the region (the directory is self-sustaining, paid for by membership fees from listed vendor).

CLEDA has strong assets to build upon to increase consumer awareness of and demand for local foods. As described in the introduction to this section of the report, the project team views the Fresh Central name and brand as an underutilized and high potential asset in building demand for local food. It would be an effective umbrella under which Central Louisiana local food activity can thrive and through which it can be identified. Further investment in developing the website and directory and ensuring that all vendor information is up to date would strengthen that tool. Cultures and habits shift slowly. Repeated sightings of a consistent brand like Fresh Central that is identified with

³⁰ <http://www.iowafoodandfitness.org/>

³¹ Know Your Farmer (KYF) Case Studies:

http://www.usda.gov/wps/portal/usda/usdahome?contentidonly=true&contentid=KYF_Compas_Case_Studies_1.html

³² <http://www.iowafoodandfitness.org/site/data.html>

vibrant community activity and fresh food (at farmers' markets, retail, restaurants, emergency food providers, school lunch lines) will be meaningful.

Harvest of the Month has been successful as an anchor farm-to-school activity, and is seen as "doable," effective, and poised to grow beyond its pilot scale. Additional curriculum and extracurricular food-based educational and recreational experiences for children and families (at farmers' markets, farms, schools, social service organizations, community organizations) have been shown around the country to be successful strategies for building demand for local foods, including culinary demonstrations, farm visits, hands-on cooking classes focused on local and seasonal foods, and distribution of samples or "taste tests." Louisiana was recently selected as one of three states to receive a \$1.5 million grant from the Walmart Foundation to grow farm to school efforts³³. The state Farm to School coordinator will be selecting pilot sites across the state to act as "hubs" and demonstration sites for farm to school. The project team recommends that CLEDA lobby aggressively on behalf of the region's school districts to host on of these hub locations.

CLEDA's Foodapalooza as a celebration of local food and skill-building conference is an annual anchor event with the potential to spin off into more frequent splinter or specialized satellite events, perhaps even in combination with farm and food related business acceleration programming. In interviews for this project, people across sectors on the supply and demand side identified three "hubs" of local food activity and demand in Louisiana: New Orleans, Lafayette and Shreveport. Strategic marketing of Central Louisiana local food activity to residents and businesses of those towns seeking local food or local food experiences could increase the potential pool of participants. Ft. Polk too represents an opportunity- with a population of 10,000 (as described above), the base represents a significant potential market for local foods and related events. Coordinating with the base's Community Promotions office to align local food events (such as farmers markets, agritourism offerings, Foodapalooza, etc.) with the base's existing healthy food promotion priority and services could boost participation as well.

Berkshire Grown³⁴ in Massachusetts can serve as an interesting example of how Fresh Central could potentially grow. With a strongly identified brand and a mission focused on promotion local agriculture as a "vital part of the Berkshire community, economy and landscape", the organization has grown into a one-stop-shop for local food activity, information and resources. Berkshire Grown is a membership organization with about 270 members, including farms, community kitchens, school districts, retailers, restaurants, food processors, inns, landscapers and other businesses committed in one way or another to local food. Members are connected to each other through a business-to-business directory and annual networking events (opportunities for producers and buyers to match-make). And member businesses are promoted to the public through media outreach throughout the year, a farm-to-pantry program which supplies local food to emergency food providers, and an interactive mapping tool linking consumers to farms, CSAs, farmers' markets, pick-your-own ventures, and shops and restaurants that feature local foods.

Given the high rate and value of home gardening in the area and the prevalence of home gardeners already selling at farmers' markets, self-sufficiency focused gardeners are primed to be engaged as ambassadors of local food and markets.

³³ <http://www.farmtoschool.org/seedchange>

³⁴ <http://berkshiregrown.org/>

Almost all Central Louisiana parishes have higher poverty rates than state average rate (which is already higher than the national average at 19.1%), with some dramatically higher (31.8% of Concordia's population lives in poverty). Given that demographic reality and the broad perspective that CLEDA takes in drawing connections between economic development, quality of life and community health, a key part of growing demand for local food and increasing local food sales could be increasing utilization of SNAP, WIC and Senior Farmers' market benefit dollars at farmers' markets. Across the 10 parish area, with just 20.6% of SNAP eligible households are enrolled, food purchased with SNAP dollars accounts for \$2.9 million in sales; if 100% of SNAP eligible households were enrolled in the program and were redeeming SNAP dollars at the same rate as currently enrolled households, SNAP annual expenditures in Central Louisiana would account for an additional \$11 million of economic activity. This pool of money is an underutilized infrastructure.

In partnership with Market Umbrella and with funding and support from CLEDA, the Blue Cross Blue Shield Louisiana Foundation, and The Rapides Foundation, several markets offer the MarketMatch program, through which up to \$20 worth of weekly market purchases can be matched, "while supplies last." In interviews, farmers' market managers estimated that while SNAP/EBT and match money utilization at farmers' market is increasing rapidly, currently 30 transactions per market day would be a busy day. Similarly, Senior and WIC Farmers Market Nutrition Program eligible households can receive \$24 in farmers' market coupons per year, but redemption is (anecdotally) very low. The EBT infrastructure, in combination with growing the region's farmers' markets (as described in the preceding strategy), represents a tremendous opportunity for growth and increased utilization given the high rate of poverty in the region. In addition to bolstering the food economy, this approach would yield increased food dollars and access to fresh local foods for households living in poverty.

Partners and Roles

- **Market Umbrella:** Support area farmers' markets with SNAP/EBT infrastructure and outreach as well as MarketMatch incentive dollars, increase outreach to eligible and registered households throughout the region
- **SNAP and WIC enrollment offices:** Increase enrollment in federal food entitlement programs and promote use of benefits at farmers' markets (parish level Council on Aging for SFMNP, state Department of Children and Family Services for SNAP and WIC),
- **Well Ahead/Wellspots:** Coordinate with Department of Health and Hospitals' successful campaign to further feature food as a health solution by promoting farmers' markets (and the possibility of SNAP utilization) at health care facilities
- **Food Bank:** Increase enrollment in federal food entitlement programs, work with network of partner agencies to promote use of benefits at farmers' markets
- **Farm to School:** Expand the Harvest of the Month program beyond the pilot level full participation across CLEDA parishes; seek to become pilot site of new "hub" approach
- **Nonprofits and universities:** Nonprofits or universities with programming or curricula related to food and health (or capacity to develop same) can be key partners in developing and implementing new education programming
- **Central Louisiana Local Food Working Group:** Local food promotion under the banner of Fresh Central, cultivation of strong partnerships within the region and across the state (with likeminded organizations, e.g. Market Umbrella), increased community engagement

Infrastructure and Internal Capacity

- Leverage the Fresh Central brand for local food recognition
- Continuation and growth of Foodapolooza and other events that celebrate local food and train people on how to grow it and find it
- Strong partnerships with entities listed above

First Implementation Steps

1. Answer the following questions in Phase Two:
 - How does local food activity reach Central Louisiana residents (which communities are or are not currently engaged and what assets do partners have to engage them further)?
 - How can each model or strategy implemented be designed to maximize access and participation by Central Louisiana residents of all backgrounds and income levels?
2. Explore partnership potential with entities listed above
3. Lobby to become a farm to school demonstration site
4. Exploratory research into expanding and further defining the Fresh Central identity



Inglewood Farm, where this pecan orchard is located, produces one of the few cold-pressed pecan oils in the U.S., according to farm manager Lee Weeks, but the farm has had difficulty tapping into adequate demand.

STRATEGY 3: SUPPORT AND ENCOURAGE INCREASED REGIONAL FOOD PRODUCTION

The need for increased agricultural supply in the region was a consistent theme that emerged across our interviews, data review, and on-the-ground observations. Some farmers are producing on a very small scale, sometimes less than an acre, while farms producing for local markets at larger scales are very small in number, which makes a one-size-fits-all model inappropriate. Some farmers are content at their current size, but many expressed interest in scaling up their operations. Buyers currently purchasing local food, or interested in doing so, were eager to forge new relationships with farmers and to tap into a larger supply.

Increased production in the region will come through four avenues:

- New farmers
- Existing farmers, already producing for local markets, scaling up their operations
- Existing farmers, currently producing for commodity or horticultural markets, transitioning some of their production to food for local markets
- Improved production practices and season extension across farmer experience levels

The needs of each of these farmer groups are distinct, and we recommend targeted approaches to appropriately support and encourage their efforts. New farmers might be backyard gardeners who

want to start producing on a larger scale, or less experienced residents who want to start a new endeavor. These new farmers will need access to land and infrastructure, technical assistance, and scale-appropriate markets. Current farmers, whether they are scaling up from smaller locally-oriented operations or transitioning from commodity markets, will need access to capital, more robust infrastructure, business planning and mentorship, and markets. We recommend a two-pronged approach for supporting and encouraging these groups of farmers. For both of the strategies described below, we wish to highlight two relevant resources: the Start2Farm website³⁵, a clearinghouse of resources for new and emerging farmers, and the Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program (BFRDP)³⁶ of the USDA, which will award \$20 million in funding each year 2014-2018 in support of programs precisely like the strategies we describe below. LSU AgCenter, along with CLEDA and Market Umbrella, have applied for this year's round of funding. Included in the application project would be a one-year "cohort" of growers in Central Louisiana gathering for twelve trainings specific to horticulture and vegetable production.

Model 1: Provide integrated support for farmers looking to increase scale and/or access to new markets

Key Activities: Partner with other entities to bundle farmer services and support including access to capital, marketing support, technical assistance, business coaching, succession planning, and institutional support; create and maintain a clearinghouse of grant and loan opportunities for farmers; pilot a small grant or micro-loan program for farmers scaling up; meet with local lenders and advocate for more flexible lending practices

Key Partners: LSU AgCenter, Local Food Working Group, Market Umbrella, local funders, banks and other lenders, locally-oriented buyers.

We recommend providing integrated support and resources as a kind of "one-stop shop" for current farmers in the region that plan to scale up, shift production practices, and/or access new markets. Farmers we spoke with had a diverse range of needs and challenges, and were often limited by lack of awareness of opportunities and limited time to seek out resources. By creating a formalized hub of information and services, CLEDA could help these farmers more efficiently access necessary resources.

Bundled resources and services could include the following:

- **Access to capital**

Farms need capital to scale up their operations, but lenders in the region are more oriented to commodity growers, and national funding sources are competitive and take time to identify. Of the farmers we spoke with who have invested in scaling up, most have been largely self-financed. Obstacles to capital could be mitigated with the following approaches:

 - **Create and maintain a clearinghouse of grant and loan opportunities for farmers.** By aggregating information about funding opportunities, and assisting farmers in identifying and applying for appropriate programs, CLEDA can increase farmers' access to capital for scaling up. The Beginning Farmers website³⁷ compiles funding

³⁵ <http://start2farm.gov/> Start2Farm is a project of the National Agricultural Library and American Farm Bureau Federation with fiscal support from USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA).

³⁶ <http://nifa.usda.gov/funding-opportunity/beginning-farmer-and-rancher-development-program-bfrdp>

³⁷ <http://www.beginningfarmers.org/funding-resources/>

opportunities for farmers and illustrates the range of funding sources available, and the USDA also maintains a “Small Farm Funding Resources” page³⁸ that can serve as a jumping-off point for compiling opportunities. Workshops could be held to support producers in navigating the grants.gov application filing process and in preparing competitive applications.

- **Pilot a small grant or micro-loan program for farmers scaling up.** As farmers mentioned in our interviews, their capital needs are specific and distinct from those of commodity farmers: their planned purchases are numerous but relatively small in price, unlike commodity farms that might seek a loan for a single large piece of equipment. A new specialized grant or loan program could meet these needs. Slow Food chapters in St. Louis, Missouri and Fayetteville, Arkansas offer micro-grants to farmers³⁹, and Capital for Opportunity and Change (CEI) in Maine⁴⁰ is an example of a Community Development Financial Institution (CDFI) that supports rural business development. CLEDA could seek funding for a re-grant program, or partner with a local lender to provide targeted loans.
- **Meet with local lenders and advocate for more flexible lending practices.** According to farmers we spoke with, lenders in the region are not accustomed to the needs of small producers growing for local/regional markets. As the regional food economy develops, CLEDA can maintain a dialogue with area lenders who might be open to adjusting their lending models to better meet the needs of these producers. Success stories and demonstrated growth will build a strong case for ongoing and increased lending to these farms.

- **Marketing support**

As farmers scale up, they need access to new and/or expanded markets. Maintaining a working knowledge of local-food-oriented buyers and their specific needs will allow CLEDA to make connections that farmers might not otherwise be able to make. The local procurement position for which CLEDA is currently hiring will be key in providing this support. Conversations with both buyers and farmers confirmed that getting them “at the table” together is a key step in forging effective relationships. A “meet the buyers” event (see examples in Illinois⁴¹ and Vermont⁴²) could help initiate this dialogue.

- **Technical assistance**

Scaling up production often requires shifts in practices. Technical assistance and training will help farmers effectively make these adjustments and continue to hone their techniques and productivity. Our interviews confirmed that area farmers learn from each other; this information sharing can be supported through programs and events like Foodapalooza and the farm coaching component of the BAS farmer group. Partnerships with LSU AgCenter or other educational entities can provide additional ongoing training. Some locally-focused buyers we spoke with expressed willingness to work more closely with farmers to align on crop quality expectations and market-specific planning. Visits from regionally or nationally recognized experts or practitioners, offering workshops or one-on-one farm visits, can bring new expertise and perspective to the region. CLEDA, along with several partners, will

³⁸ <http://ric.nal.usda.gov/small-farm-funding>

³⁹ <http://www.slowfoodstl.org/our-projects/biodiversity-micro-grants/>;

<http://www.ozarkslowfood.org/micro-grants/>

⁴⁰ <http://www.ceimaine.org/>

⁴¹ <http://web.extension.illinois.edu/units/event.cfm?EventID=67556&UnitID=629>

⁴² <http://www.wcax.com/story/28610743/vermont-farmers-food-producers-to-meet-with-buyers>

be applying for Specialty Crop Block Grant funding to bring FamilyFarmed.org's Wholesale Success farmer training module to Central Louisiana, consistent with this recommendation. Findings in this report can inform a customized Wholesale Success workshop. Topics for technical assistance might also include crop planning, season extension, and organic transition. Several buyers interviewed for this study indicated that they cannot find sufficient supply of organic product anywhere in the state, and that even pesticide-free product (not certified organic) would be in high demand— technical assistance could support farmers in meeting that demand.

- **Business coaching**

CLEDA has established a solid foundation of business coaching for farmers with the BAS farmer group. We recommend continued investment and development of this program.

- **Succession planning**

Aging farmers (including commodity farmers) in the region may not have a succession plan in place, while young or new farmers may have difficulty accessing land. Landlink efforts like those in Ohio⁴³, New England⁴⁴, and elsewhere⁴⁵ are helping to match aging farmers with those seeking land in order to keep land in agriculture. Iowa State University offers an extensive toolkit for transition planning⁴⁶, much of which could be relevant for farmers in the region.

- **Institutional support**

As the regional food economy develops, well-documented successes will help CLEDA and the Local Food Working Group partner with other entities like LSU AgCenter and the Louisiana Department of Agriculture and Forestry to leverage greater institutional support for small and mid-scale farmers.

The scope of these resources is ambitious, and clearly CLEDA is not necessarily the best-positioned entity to lead all of these efforts; however, with targeted and strategic partnerships, CLEDA and Fresh Central could serve as a hub for a range of services.

Partners and Roles

- **Local/regional funders:** Support for pilot re-grant program for farmers scaling up
- **Banks and other lenders:** Partners for pilot micro-loan program; collaborate to increase loan access for farmers focused on regional markets
- **Locally-oriented buyers:** Participation in marketing assistance programming; frequent communication with farmers to increase farmer knowledge of wholesale buyers' needs and expectations; participation in technical assistance/guidance for farmers, e.g. speaking at workshops, etc.
- **LSU AgCenter:** Technical assistance to increase farmer knowledge of production practices, equipment, business planning, GAP certification, etc.; offer use of infrastructure as appropriate; advocate for greater institutional support, especially funding, from relevant government entities and other organizations
- **Local Food Working Group:** Advocacy for greater institutional support from relevant government entities and other organizations; facilitate communication between working group members for coordinated farmer resources

⁴³ <http://www.cvcountryside.org/>

⁴⁴ <http://www.smallfarm.org/>

⁴⁵ <http://www.farmtransition.org/netwpart.html>

⁴⁶ <https://www.extension.iastate.edu/agdm/wdbusiness.html>

- **Market Umbrella:** Partner for importing expertise from national resources and organizations in support for the region's and the state's farmers; contribute to marketing training for farmers
- **Organizations nationally with agricultural technical assistance expertise:** Technical assistance/guidance/training for farmers including crop planning, best practices, certifications, business planning, etc.

Infrastructure and Internal Capacity

- Well maintained and frequently updated website to serve as targeted information clearinghouse for regional farmers.
- Strong relationships with local funders and lenders, and capacity to adequately represent the needs of farm and food businesses.
- Extensive outreach program to ensure that farmers receive time sensitive information and support (i.e. grant deadlines, workshop/coaching opportunities)
- Frequent communication with buyers committed to local, to build farmer-buyer relationships and support new market/supply chain development.

First Implementation Steps

1. Answer the following questions in Phase Two:
 - Who would be interested in these resources/services, and what are their most pressing needs?
 - Are there local lenders who are open to accommodating the needs of small and mid-scale farmers in the region?
 - What funders might fund a re-granting program for farmers in the region?
 - What experts – in the region and nationally – have appropriate knowledge and are willing to provide technical assistance?
2. Explore possibilities and limits of partnerships with entities defined above, specific to including protocol for ongoing communication.
3. Seek funding for micro-loan program and to provide support and content expertise to lenders.
4. Design outreach program/effort to ensure farmers know resources exist and how to tap in to them as needed.
5. Monitor and measure activity and success (what works and, as importantly, what doesn't).

Model 2: Create an incubator farm for new entry-level farmers

Key Activities: Develop a farm incubator program targeted at new farmers, offering land, technical assistance, business planning, marketing assistance, and access to shared tools and infrastructure.

Key Partners: LSU AgCenter, established farmers, locally-oriented buyers, public and private landowners (see also key partners from Model 1 in this strategy).

Like the previous model, an incubator farm would provide a “one-stop shop” for resources and services, but in this case tailored to the needs of entry-level farmers, whether they are “scaling up” from backyard gardening or are entirely new to farming their own land. A diverse range of models for incubator farms exists, and most offer land, technical assistance, business planning, marketing assistance, and access to shared tools and infrastructure.

Cultivating Community's New American Sustainable Agriculture Project (NASAP)⁴⁷ in Maine offers shared land, equipment, training, and marketing assistance to refugees and immigrants who want to start farming. These farmers' products are sold through a combined CSA and are also aggregated for wholesale buyers including schools and restaurants. In Rhode Island, the Southside Community Land Trust's (SCLT) Urban Edge Farm⁴⁸ is an incubator location for seven farms. The land is protected by the state's Open Space Preservation Act and owned by its Division of Agriculture; SCLT manages the property for the state. North Carolina State University's Center for Environmental Farming Systems created an Incubator Farm Project that supports incubator farms across the state. Their website⁴⁹ provides profiles of incubator farms across North Carolina and the U.S. The Agriculture and Land-Based Training Association (ALBA) in California offers a robust and phased curriculum of programming that shepherds new farmers from beginning to independence. After completing a 9-month course, participants are eligible to enter an apprenticeship and then enroll in the incubator program, which provides land (.5-8 acres), equipment, education, and business planning. As participants progress through the 6-year program, their lease subsidy decreases, allowing them to gradually build self-sufficiency. ALBA also has a strong food hub aggregation and distribution component of their work, through which program graduates can access markets. Local Food Hub⁵⁰ in Charlottesville offers grower services, an earlier iteration of which functioned more like an incubator. The incubator and aggregation service were launched simultaneously, but in the end did not integrate seamlessly with one another. Speaking to leadership of that organization to understand what worked and what did not could be an important part of a research and planning phase for this strategy.

Both ALBA and the New Entry Sustainable Farming Project (NESFP), another farm incubator in Massachusetts, have developed detailed toolkits for other organizations interested in starting a farm incubator program. These toolkits, along with an informative infographic of national incubator data gathered by NESFP, can be found online⁵¹.

Many of the services described in the previous strategy could also be adapted for participants in a farm incubator program. If basic on-farm infrastructure (such as cold storage, packing or washing lines) is established on an incubator farm, they could be offered to other producers in the region as well.

Partners and Roles

- **City or parish governments:** Donation or subsidy of land for incubator farm with long-term commitment
- **Private landowners:** Donation of land or reduced-rate lease with long-term commitment
- **Locally-oriented buyers:** Participation in marketing assistance programming; frequent communication with farmers to increase farmer knowledge of wholesale buyers' needs and expectations; participation in technical assistance/guidance for farmers, e.g. speaking at workshops, etc.
- **LSU AgCenter:** Technical assistance to increase farmer knowledge of production practices, equipment, business planning, GAP certification, etc.; offer use of infrastructure as

⁴⁷ <https://www.cultivatingcommunity.org/grow-food-with-us/refugee-immigrant-farmer-training/>

⁴⁸ <http://southsideclt.org/urbanedge>

⁴⁹ <http://www.cefs.ncsu.edu/whatwedo/foodsystems/beginningfarmers.html>

⁵⁰ <http://localfoodhub.org/>

⁵¹ <http://start2farm.gov/node/1659>; <http://nesfp.nutrition.tufts.edu/food-systems/national-incubator-farm-training-initiative>; http://nesfp.org/sites/default/files/uploads/farm_incubator_infographic_2013.pdf

- appropriate; advocate for greater institutional support, especially funding, from relevant government entities and other organizations
- **Established farmers:** Serve as mentors to beginning farmers by providing one-on-one guidance on production practices, crop and business planning, etc., and by inviting mentee farmers to their farms for observation and training
 - **Market Umbrella:** Potential aggregation of incubator farm product for sale at region's farmers' markets
 - *See Partners and Roles from Model 1 in this strategy as well*

Infrastructure and Internal Capacity

- Land: For farm incubator production activities and training. According to NESFP's overview infographic, incubator programs in the U.S. range from .15 to 170 acres, with a median size of 10 acres, and incubator plots (for individual farmers) average between .25 and one acre.
- Funding: For micro-capital needs of participants; on-farm infrastructure, materials and supplies; programming staff and overhead
- On-farm infrastructure: washing, packing, and cold storage, as well as production related tools and equipment
- BAS program: Business training
- Incubator oversight: coordinate business, production and marketing resources, trainings, activities and relationships
- Procurement position: Link incubator participants with appropriate markets

First Implementation Steps

1. Answer the following questions in Phase Two:
 - What is an appropriate scale in terms of land and number of farmers, based on demand in the region?
 - How much funding will be required to launch and maintain the program?
 - Prioritize components of infrastructure, and determine if/how it will be shared with non-participant farmers.
 - Who would be interested in the program, and what are their top needs/desires that the program could meet?
2. Research model programs in more detail, including conversations with program operators.
3. Identify and secure the land base necessary (elicit donations).
4. Secure funding for on-farm infrastructure (elicit donations).
5. Develop and design program curriculum, offerings, protocol and criteria- conduct a "deep dive" into comparable programs elsewhere to understand successes and predict/prevent common pitfalls.
6. Develop strong relationships with agricultural technical assistance providers locally, regionally and nationally.



Brian Gotreaux and Gotreaux Family Farms, where these high tunnels are located, have plans to create a new food hub in Lafayette within a year. If the project moves forward as planned, the hub could provide a prime opportunity for Central Louisiana producers to access new markets.

CONCLUSION

These three strategies provide a unified and integrated approach for advancing Central Louisiana's food economy by supporting its farmers, building consumer demand, and strategically leveraging existing and targeted new infrastructure. All of these models would serve the region well. A crucial next step, to be undertaken in Phase Two, will be to test these models with their proposed partners and beneficiaries to gain a deeper understanding of needs, priorities, and best approaches for viable implementation.

Successful execution of the models will rely on diverse and robust partnerships, engaged networking, and ongoing communication. CLEDA already has a strong reputation for this way of working; these models present opportunities to build on these foundations for well-paced long-term growth in the region's food economy, and to create greater opportunities for the region's farmers, food entrepreneurs, and all of its residents.



Earl Roy Produce is one of the region's largest sweet potato producers.

APPENDICES

Attendees at kick-off meeting

Interview guide: Farmer

Interview guide: Buyer

Interviewees

ATTENDEES AT KICK-OFF MEETING

January 26, 2015

Ingrid Scott, Central Louisiana Business Incubator
Anne Champney, Central Louisiana Local Food Working Group
Teresa Dennis
Kate Dickey, Good People Kitchen
Jennifer Gilchrist, Central Louisiana Healthy Communities Coalition
Lee Gwinn, Spirits Restaurant
Linda Hutson, Food Bank of Central Louisiana
Shelley Johnson, Food entrepreneur and community gardener
Fredie Manes, Swindler Creek Farms
Christine Meshell
Boyd Padgett, LSU AgCenter
John Sheppard, Hill of Beans Farms
Lee Weeks, Inglewood Farm
Jayne Wright-Velez, Food Bank of Central Louisiana

INTERVIEW GUIDE: FARMER

I. OVERVIEW OF CURRENT ACTIVITIES

Production

Tell us about your farm.

What products do you grow?

How would you describe your practices?

What is the land/property like? (acreage and characteristics)

How have your operation and/or practices changed over the last 5-10 years?

What are your plans for the coming years?

Marketing and Economics

How do you sell your product?

Who do you sell to? Where are your customers (cities and distance)?

Who are your key buyers?

How is your product transported?

Is your product differentiated at market? (farm brand, "local/natural/organic", etc.)

How has your marketing changed over the last 5-10 years?

What changes have you seen in the marketplace/demand in that time?

Have you attempted to reach new markets (such as restaurant, wholesale, schools, etc.), or markets in new cities (New Orleans, Houston)? If so, what has worked? What hasn't?

Describe the economic picture of your farm operation.

What is your most profitable product? Least profitable?

What are your key barriers to greater profitability?

Infrastructure

What infrastructure do you currently have on your farm? (e.g. washing, cold storage, processing, etc.)

Do you utilize any off-farm infrastructure? If so, describe (what, where, cost, quality of service, gaps in services).

Are your current infrastructure resources sufficient to meet your current needs? Projected future needs? If not, what specifically is insufficient?

Is there infrastructure of any kind that you are aware of in the region that is currently underutilized? (e.g. cold storage, backhaul opportunities, commercial kitchen space, etc.)

Partnerships with farmers

Do you currently partner with any other farms or farmers? If so, please describe.

(Examples: coordinating routes/transport of products, equipment sharing, co-branding, etc.)

Are you open to these kinds of partnerships, or do you prefer to work independently?

Resources/supports

What resources or supports do you currently use?

(Examples: technical assistance, grants or capital loans, knowledge, infrastructure, etc.)

What resources or supports might you utilize if they were available?

II. OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

Are you interested in expanding your operation? If so, how? If not, why not? (e.g. new crops, new acreage, new infrastructure, new markets)

What efforts have you made toward expansion?

What are your main barriers to expansion? Discuss:

- Land access

- Access to capital

- Infrastructure

- Limits of current markets

- Access to new markets

What supports or resources would be most helpful in expanding your operation?

From your perspective, what are the top 3 things that could be built, services that could be provided, or supports that could be offered that would help Central Louisiana's food and agriculture economy grow?

III. PROFILE

Location of farm (address, city, ZIP):

Products (X by each category they produce):

- Vegetables

- Fruit/nuts

- Grains/legumes

- Meat

- Dairy

- Other (cotton/tobacco/horticulture?)

Acreage:

- Total:

- Owned:

- Leased:

- Breakdown by crop/use:

Farmer age:

Tenure on property (years):

Annual Revenue:

Wholesale/Retail/Restaurant/Direct (FM/CSA) split:

Number of employees:

- FT:

- PT:

Most profitable product(s):

IV. CONCLUDING QUESTIONS

Are there any other thoughts / ideas / suggestions you would like to share?

Who else should we talk to? (Emphasize buyers and owners of key off-farm or on-farm infrastructural assets, e.g. slaughter.)

INTERVIEW GUIDE: BUYER

I. PROFILE

Name of business:

Location of business (address, city, ZIP):

Business type:

- Restaurant
- Institution (school, hospital, etc)
- Retail market
- Distributor
- Processor/manufacturer
- Other

Number of customers/meals served per ____:

Annual Revenue (or gross sales):

Number of employees:

- FT:
- PT:
- Seasonal:

II. BUSINESS OVERVIEW & SOURCING

Describe your business. (Size, volume of customers, customer base, price point, etc.)

Describe your brand or marketing angle for your company and/or product(s).

Who purchases the food for your company, and how are purchasing decisions made?

What factors are considered when purchasing? (e.g. price, quality, local, organic, flavor, nutrition, seasonality, flexibility in menuing or lack thereof, etc.) Which are most important?

What types of food do you buy? (general overview, how much raw/fresh/frozen vs. processed, etc.)

How much in-house processing/preparation do you do (or can you do)?

What do you require of your suppliers?

- Food safety requirements (GAP, HACCP, etc)
- Packing/Packaging
- Nutrition specifications
- Certifications
- Insurance
- Other

Who are your current suppliers? Distributors, direct from farmers, etc? (As much detail as possible, break down by volume and product, etc.) (i.e. criteria, specifications, approved vendors, contracted distributors)

About how much do you spend on food each year?

III. LOCAL

Are you currently buying any locally grown/produced/processed product? If so, what?

(IF NO) Have you ever purchased local foods in the past?

(YES OR NO) Please describe your experiences with/perceptions of local food. (prompt for product quality, pricing, service from farmers, shelf life, flavor etc. in comparison with food from outside the region)

(IF NO) What would increase your likelihood of buying local product?
How do you source these local products, and how do these products get to you? (Direct from producer, through distributor, etc.)
Who are your suppliers? (Get specific farm names or distributor names; get detail about relationships)
Would you like to buy more local foods?
What are the barriers to purchasing more local foods?
Why do you buy locally produced foods? (OR) What keeps you from purchasing locally produced foods?
Are you willing to pay more for local food? How much? Can you pass that price along to your customers?
Are there any specific products you would like to get locally but can't? (due to availability, consistency, price, etc.)
Are you seeing demand for local from your customers? How has this changed over the past 5-10 years? How do you expect this to change in Central Louisiana in the next 5 years?
What is your definition of local? How flexible is this when sourcing/marketing "local" product?
Do you explicitly market local product as "local"? (Get detail- by farm, parish, mile definition, region, state) How does that affect popularity/demand for that product?
How valuable would minimal processing (such as cut squash, tomato sauce, broken-down poultry) be for your needs?
What kinds of services, resources, or physical places/infrastructure would make it easier for you to purchase more local food? (prompt if necessary: knowing how to find farmers, knowing what's available, distribution service, etc.) – if physical infrastructure is described, get detail on where it should be, if they would come there, etc.
Can you imagine any programs, incentives, resources, or supports that would help you to purchase more local product?

IV. CONCLUSION

To what extent do you think that investment in Central Louisiana's farm and food economy could drive broader economic development in the region? What would it take for it to do so? Please describe.

Are there any other thoughts / ideas / suggestions you would like to share?

Who else should we talk to? (Emphasize buyers- other buyers who buy local, key buyers in the area, suppliers, etc.)

INTERVIEWEES

Farmers

Sarah Bailly, Bayou Farms
Brady Broulleite, Up to Grow Good
Will Butterfield, Butterfield Farms
Anne Champney, C&C Mini Farm
Michael Chatelain, Deep South Honey
Marguerite Constantine, WesMar Farms
Autumn Bankovic, Bankovic Backyard Grangers
Brian Gotreaux, Gotreaux Family Farms
Paul Lyles, Up to Grow Good
Fredie Manes, Swindler Creek Farms
Stephen Norman, Rosalie Pecans
Jay Pearson, Gray Walk Farms
Karen Richardson, Richardson Brothers Pecans
John Sheppard, Hill of Beans Farms
Kurt Unkel, Cajun Grains
Lee Weeks, Inglewood Farm
Lester Williams, Pointe Coupee Minority Farmers Cooperative
Ryan Yerby, Taureau Farms

Buyers

LaToya Amaya, Ft. Polk Health Promotion Office
Samantha Bonette, Cane River Green Market
Burrel Book, The Markets
Cory Bourgeois, Dark Roux Restaurant
Mike Chapoy, Rapides Regional Medical Center
Erma Davis, Rapides Parish Schools
Kate Dickey, Good People Kitchen
Mark Dowdy, Market Basket
Lee Guin, Spirits Restaurant
Angelina Harrison, Hollygrove Market and Farm
Kelly Landrieu, Whole Foods Market
Kevin Leroux, Sodexo
Tess Monaghan, Good Eggs
Garrett Perkins, Wildwood Pizza
Robert Pierce, Kroger
Brett Spivy, Reinhart Food Service
Ryan Trahan, Dark Roux Restaurant
Anonymous produce manager at Alexandria location of a national grocery chain

Infrastructure Operators

Charlie McCain, McCain Slaughter

Chip LeMieux, McNeese CAMP

Joseph Page, Central Louisiana Business Incubator

Ingrid Scott, Central Louisiana Business Incubator

Jayne Wright-Velez, Food Bank of Central Louisiana

Experts

Kathy Littlepage, Colfax Farmers Market

Terry Mathews, NASS

Donna Morgan, LSU Ag Center Rapides Parish Extension

Katie Mularz, Louisiana Farm to School

Emery Van Hook, Market Umbrella