



## Appalachian State University

Boone, North Carolina

Dining Services

### SCHOOL

Appalachian State University is a public, 4-year school with approximately 17,000 students located in Boone, North Carolina.

### ABSTRACT

Appalachian State University Food Services seeks to reduce the environmental impact of food procurement through creating a local and sustainable food system. The emissions from food procurement are not taken into account when measuring greenhouse gases; however procuring food from local sources directly reduces the emissions from food transportation. The anticipated benefits of a local food system are vast with important results such as limited resource use, contribution to a resilient local economy and healthier food options. There are challenges associated with this initiative such as pricing, product demands and timing.

### GOALS AND OUTCOMES

#### Goals

The ultimate goal was to implement a sustainable food system into Appalachian Food Services operations. In order to achieve that goal, Food Services has identified actions that can be taken to support the incorporation of a stronger local food system. Those actions include: collaboration with suppliers to generate a healthy, sustainable food system at Appalachian that can function without harming the resources on which it depends;

encouraging responsible farming techniques; supporting fresh, healthy eating habits; improving our contribution to the agricultural economy; and lastly establishing lasting and beneficial relationships with local farmers and producers.



#### Accomplishments and Outcomes

Integrating local foods into Appalachian's food system is an ongoing process. A report was created by a graduate student in the Office of Sustainability in partnership with Appalachian Food Services outlining reasons why local and sustainable food is important, goals for growing a local food procurement system,

and also identifiable initiatives and foreseeable challenges with this initiative. On-going actions to support this initiative include:

- conducting key stakeholder meetings,
- local food education and outreach programs,
- local food events on campus.

Key project milestones include:

- successfully bringing together stakeholders that share in the vision of providing Appalachian with a local food system,
- the publishing of a local food report that outlines goals, strengths, challenges, obstacles, and next steps for this initiative,
- conducting a “Sustaining ASU Food Services” presentation during Earth Month 2011,
- development of a local supplier/producer database to identify available products,
- creation of an “Always Local” list which will be published online,
- a logo, indicating local food options, which will be displayed in the dining units.

Because incorporating local food into the Appalachian’s food system in a lengthy goal, the efforts are on-going with notable accomplishments. Working to implement local food not only provides healthier options for the campus community but also helps to contribute to a healthy local environment and economy.

### **Challenges and Responses**

Altering an existing system within such a large organization takes tremendous effort from stakeholders and requires a detailed step-wise plan to enact. The current economic climate makes new initiatives difficult to implement. Purchasing local food could potentially create higher costs, which ultimately must be supported by the customer. State purchasing guidelines provide further challenges.

In order to respond to the aforementioned challenges, we have created an outline to reach this lofty goal. That outline contains the recommendations to develop key relationships with local producers, project correct expectations of demand, encourage price competitiveness and reaffirm the critical need for local food on our campus. Having stakeholders actively support this initiative also helps to create change for good.

### **Campus Climate Action: Your School’s Carbon Footprint**

It is our belief that the incorporation of local food into food services will have positive impacts on our health, the environment, the local community. By changing how our food comes to our plate, we can reduce Appalachian’s carbon footprint. Buying local food shortens the distance our food travels and reduces greenhouse gas emissions that contribute to global climate change. The average food product travels 1,500 miles from where it is grown to our plate<sup>1</sup>. Furthermore, conventional agriculture relies heavily on petrochemicals such as pesticides, herbicides, and fungicides that threaten both human and environmental health.

Choosing foods grown and produced without or with fewer petrochemicals reduces soil erosion, air and water pollution, and ecosystem degradation. Sustainable agriculture techniques have been shown to increase soil viability, environmental health, and biodiversity. Small-scale farms tend to use fewer

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<sup>1</sup> Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture

petrochemicals than large-scale farms. Although, there will be some farmers within our designated 250-mile radius who are not Certified Organic (due to cost) they often produce their food products following recognized best practices and low impact techniques. Local food can provide a key step in our efforts to reduce the carbon footprint of the university while protecting our natural environment.

### **Commentary and Reflection**

We realize that the sourcing local food for Appalachian is a journey that must be undertaken in small steps. Our efforts require constant communication, research and adaptation. Working together with stakeholders and prioritizing continual engagement is vital to gain and keep momentum. Communication about local food endeavors attracts the campus community to participate in local food events.

We are proud to report that our first local food event was extremely well-attended. Entitled, "Carolina Chowdown," the entire campus community showed their support, which is extremely encouraging for the support of future events.

### **ENGAGEMENT AND SUPPORT**

#### **Leaders and Supporters**

Appalachian's local food initiative is supported by staff and financial support from the Office of Sustainability, the Sustainability Council, the Sustainable Development Academic Program and Appalachian Food Services. The Office of Sustainability employed a graduate student, Cameron Farlow, whose sole focus was to investigate current policy and make recommendations on steps to incorporate local food into the system. Art Kessler, food services director, Ged Moody, sustainability director, Heather Brandon, food services specialist, and Cameron Farlow were and are key university leaders progressing local and sustainable food systems.

#### **Funding and Resources**

Appalachian State's local food initiative is supported by staff and financial support from the Office of Sustainability, the Sustainable Development Academic Program and Appalachian Food Services. Appalachian Food Services provides staff support to the local food initiative through the employment of a position where there exists a focus on Food Services sustainability with local food as the #1 priority. Recurring costs include those associated with events, such as advertising, marketing and promotion. Potential higher costs must be supported by the customer. We did not seek support through a NWF Campus Ecology Fellowship.

#### **Education and Community Outreach**

The campus community and the local community were all invited to participate in the local food event, "Carolina Chowdown." There were multiple press releases, marketing efforts and announcements made about the importance of supporting local food on our campus to both the university and the local community. In addition to the local food event, once per year a meeting of stakeholders was organized to identify strengths, barriers, challenges and solutions, making progress from one year to the next.

### **CONTACT INFORMATION**

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## **MORE ABOUT YOUR SCHOOL**

### **Campus Sustainability History**

Sustainability is more than an initiative at Appalachian State University- it is a way of life that is becoming increasingly ingrained into the campus community's individual and institutional decision-making. Appalachian has a rich history of commitment to sustainable practices. Besides having the nation's oldest, recognized Sustainable Development and Appropriate Technology academic programs, Appalachian rethinks common practices and implements state-of-the-art technologies related to energy production and energy conservation on campus. The Office of Sustainability was created in 2009. Since its inception, the university has made tremendous strides toward the overarching goal of carbon neutrality. A 50-plus member Sustainability Council was developed to help guide university operations into more sustainable practices. Appalachian was named as one of Sierra Club's "Coolest Schools" in 2011 by scoring 12<sup>th</sup> across the nation. Appalachian is participating in the Sustainability Tracking, Assessment and Rating System (STARS<sup>®</sup>), which was developed as a standards-based rating system for sustainability in higher education.

Image credit: Appalachian State University

