Photo by D. Hilchey

Research Report on the Impacts of Local and Regional Foods in the Adirondack-North Country Region:

II
Introduction

A. Overview

The *Research Report on the Impacts of Local and Regional Foods in the Adirondack-North Country Region* describes the research component of the North Country Regional Foods Initiative.[1,2] This component includes: a review of other studies about local/regional food systems; analysis of published statistics and secondary data about agriculture, food, and consumer preferences in Northern New York; and, foremost, qualitative interviews with local/regional farm and food business owner/operators and representatives of organizations that support these businesses, conducted in early 2008. Research briefs documenting our analysis of information shared by interview participants comprises the bulk of this report.

Together, the information gleaned through each of these venues helps articulate the contexts in which Adirondack-North Country local/regional food initiatives operate. This information is shared to: (1) demonstrate the reasons communities are increasingly interested in local foods and their potential to contribute to community and economic development; (2) provide an overview of the agricultural industry in the Adirondack-North Country region; and, more specifically (3) share characteristics of the Adirondack-North Country local/regional food businesses and support organizations included in this study, including their contributions to the region.

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[1] The North Country Regional Food Initiative is a one year project dedicated to understanding economic and social impacts of local and regional food initiatives in the Adirondack-North Country and enhancing the ways these initiatives positively contribute to the region. The project is a collaborative effort of the seven Cornell Cooperative Extension Associations of Northern New York (Clinton, Essex, Franklin, Hamilton, Jefferson, Lewis and St. Lawrence counties) and the Community and Rural Development Institute (CaRDI) at Cornell University.

[2] Although we recognize that "local" and "regional" food systems are not necessarily the same thing and in many, if not most, cases are very different, we couple the words "local" and "regional" herein and throughout the *Research Report on the Impacts of Local and Regional Foods in the Adirondack-North Country Region* for the following reasons: (1) Given the relative size of the Adirondack-North Country region, even a regional food system is relatively local, particularly in comparison to regional foodsheds that encompass multiple states (e.g. the Northeast Region); (2) Many communities in Northern NY border another state or another country, for people living in these communities, depending on whether or not "local" and "regional" are defined by distance or political boundaries, a distance that is local is literally local and regional at the same time (e.g.: When a NY consumer purchases apples from a Canadian orchard 12 miles away, it is a local purchase in terms of distance, though a regional purchase in terms of political boundaries.); and (3) An overarching goal of the NCRFI is to cultivate a regional approach to economic and community development - this goal is based on the understanding that communities conserve resources and gain assets by working together regionally. However, shifting from a "local" to a "regional" approach is not necessarily intuitive; by coupling "local" and "regional" we hope to cultivate a paradigm shift, one in which one's locality is seen in regional terms.

B. Research Methodology

Fifteen owners/operators of farm and food businesses and eleven representatives of organizations were interviewed by Cornell Cooperative Extension Educators. Participants in the business component of the study were identified via purposeful sampling, which selects information rich cases for in-depth study. The cases were chosen on the basis of geographic location and direct marketing/local food operation type. In addition to selecting at least one enterprise from each county to ensure for regional geographic representation, we selected enterprises representative of the commodity and marketing outlets prevalent in local/regional foods arena in the Adirondack-North Country including the following:

Commodity Type

- Dairy
- Maple syrup/honey
- Meat/eggs
- Vegetables
- Fruits

Marketing Outlet Type

- Regional identity marketing
- Farmers' Markets
- Cooperatives
- Farm to Institution
- Roadside stand
- Direct wholesale (wholesale markets, auctions, supermarkets, gourmet shops, food co-ops, restaurants, etc.)

The organizations were selected based on the criteria that one of their primary programming areas includes support for 'local and regional food' markets (retail and wholesale), or connections between local and regional producers and consumers.[3] Detailed notes taken during the interviews were compiled and analyzed. Common and recurring themes were identified and noted as signifying similar experiences among study participants. Uncommon experiences have been noted as well. The results of this analysis are presented in the remaining sections of this report.

C. Feeding a Region

1. Local and regional food impacts

As interest in producing for and purchasing within local and regional markets grows, so do efforts to understand the impacts – potential and real – of these activities. Local/regional food practitioners and scholars alike (with some being one and the same) have identified multiple potential benefits of local/regional foods as well as reasons local/regional food initiatives might not fulfill this potential. The impacts associated with local/regional food systems can be categorized in terms of how they influence the economic, social, and ecological well-being of individuals (farmers and consumers) and communities. [4, 5, 6]

[3] Interview guides for both organizations and farm/food businesses can be referenced in Appendix A of this report (see www.nnyregionallocalfoods.org).
[4] Pretty, Jules (2001). *Some Benefits and Drawbacks of Local Food Systems. Briefing Note for TVU/Sustain AgriFood Network*, November 2nd (Accessed 07/14/08 at: http://www.sustainweb.org/pdf/afn_m1_p2.pdf).
[5] Hilchey, Duncan (2008). Fact Sheet 3: Potential Community Impacts of Regional Foods. An outreach- publication of the North Country Regional Foods Initiative. (See Appendix B of this report: www.nnyregionallocalfoods.org)
[6] Anderson, Molly (2007). *The Case for Local and Regional Food Marketing*. Issue Brief. Farm and Food Policy Project. Accessed 07/14/08 at: http://www.farmandfoodproject.org/.

Table 1: Potential Benefits of Local/Regional Foods

	Economic	Social	Health/Environment
Individual Level – Farmers	Farmers receive a higher percentage of the cost to consumer	Farmers have the opportunity to develop relationships with their customers	Relationships with consumers increase mental well-being of farmers
	Job creation as more producers and processors are needed to meet consumer demand for local/regional food		
Individual Level - Consumer	Consumers may pay more for direct markets	Consumers have the opportunity to develop relationships with the farmers/producers growing their food	Consumers have greater access to fresh fruits and vegetables when food is grown and sold locally/regionally
	Consumers may pay less through direct markets		Consumers have the peace of mind of knowing where their food comes from
		Consumers improve cooking skills by learning how to cook new and different products	Consumers may increase consumption of produce, if it is grown locally/ regionally and made available to them soon after it has ripened, as fresh food usually tastes better than food that is not fresh.
Community Level	Local/regional food markets circulate dollars within the community and region versus permitting them to leak outside of the region.	Relationships between producers and consumers extends to other aspects of community life, creating a sense of community and shared commitment to broader community development goals	Through conversations with those growing their food, consumers are often exposed to the realities of farming and in particular the connections between the food they eat, the environment, and public and ecological health, increasing their awareness of environmental issues.
		Consumers and producers better understand one another's needs and, as such, work together to meet the needs of both	Locally/regionally grown food is, by definition, essential to food security; that is, when food is grown locally/ regionally, it is at the very least, available for citizens in the region to consume. When food is not grown locally/regionally, citizens are less food secure and at greater risk of hunger because food grown elsewhere may not be readily available.
		Farmers that live where they produce have a vested interest in their community and regularly support their community in multiple ways.	Farms that market directly to their consumers are held accountable for their management practices by those consumers and, therefore, use practices which enhance the environment.
			Locally/regionally produced and consumed food reduces agriculture's contribution to global climate change as less fuel consumption is required to get food from farm to plate and less packaging waste and landfill costs are created

While Table 1 (see previous page) focuses primarily on the positive claims about how local/regional food initiatives can contribute to individuals and communities, researchers and practitioners alike have questioned whether or not local/regional food systems really live up to these ideals. These questions have been explored through research that suggests local/regional foods, in fact, do not always fulfill the promise with which they've been credited and identifies reasons why they fall short. Reflecting on her personal experience as a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) producer, for example, Laura Delind (1991) articulates several ways CSA is less of a community effort than it is purported to be, including the tendency for producers to assume the risks that are, in theory, to be shared by producers and members alike.[7] Jennifer Wilkins (n.d.) examines claims about health impacts of local/regional foods, making the case that whether or not locally/regionally produced and consumed food is healthier than food which travels thousands of miles before it is consumed, depends on several factors, including production methods, variety, ripeness at time of consumption, post harvest handling, processing and packaging, and storage.[8] Other researchers have questioned whether or not locally/regionally produced foods are really that much better than foods transported over long distances when it comes to reducing greenhouse gases. Weber and Matthews (2008) argue that purchasing locally/regionally produced foods may be less important to reducing contributions to global warming than modifying the type of food one eats.[9]

2. Studies of local/regional food system impacts

While at least one of the aforementioned studies has examined the impacts of specific local/regional food market *outlets*, others, like ours, have, sought to examine the impact of these outlets as a *system* (comprised of multiple local/regional market outlets) operating across a region. Examples of two such studies include "Why Local Linkages Matter, a study of the Seattle Local Food System" and "Growing Local: Expanding the Western North Carolina Farm and Food Economy."[10]

The study of the Seattle food system examines "the dollar flows and economic linkages of food-related businesses in the Central Puget Sound region of Washington State. The analysis shows that locally directed spending by consumers more than doubles the number of dollars circulating among businesses in the community. This means that *a shift of 20% of…food dollars into locally directed spending would result in a nearly half billion dollar annual income increase in King County alone and twice that in the Central Puget Sound region.*" It also concludes that locally and regionally based food markets forge a "a relationship-based economy." Relationship-based economies are important because "the more dollars circulating locally, the greater the number of community linkages and the greater their strength." Furthermore, "research indicates that more and stronger linkages provide for a healthier, more diverse and resilient local economy. Simply put, *locally directed buying and selling connects the community's resources to its needs resulting in relationships that serve to restore the land and regenerate community.*" [11]

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[7] Delind, Laura (1991). Close Encounters with a CSA: The reflections of a bruised and somewhat wiser anthropologist. *Agriculture and Human Values*. 16:3-9, 1999.

[8] Wilkins, Jennifer (n.d.). "Is Local More Nutritious?" It Depends." *Healthy and Sustainable Food*. Harvard Medical School's Center for Health and the Global Environment (Accessed 07/14/08 at http://chge.med.harvard.edu/programs/food/nutrition.html)

[9] Weber, Christopher L. and Matthews, H. Scott (2008). *Food-miles and the Relative Climate Impacts of Food Choices in the United States*. Environmental Science and Technology, 42(10), 3508-3513.

[10] Laura D. Kirby, Charlie Jackson, and Allison Perrett (2007). *Growing Local: Implications for Western North Carolina. Appalachian Sustainable Agriculture Project*, August. (Accessed 07/14/08 at http://www.asapconnections.org/special/research/Reports/Implications.pdf)

[11] Sonntag, Viki (2008). *Why Local Linkages Matter: Findings from The Local Food Economy Study. Sustainable Seattle.* (Accessed 07/14/08 at http://www.sustainableseattle.org/Programs/localfoodeconomy).

The report on the North Carolina study, states at the outset that it is based on the premise that local/regional foods are making positive contributions to local economies. Based on this premise, it "looked at: (1) what food and farm products are currently produced in the region; (2) how much of what is produced is also consumed in the region; (3) the potential for increasing local consumption of locally-produced food and farm products as a way to strengthen the regional farm economy; and (4) where investment of resources or other actions could eliminate barriers currently impeding the purchase of local food."

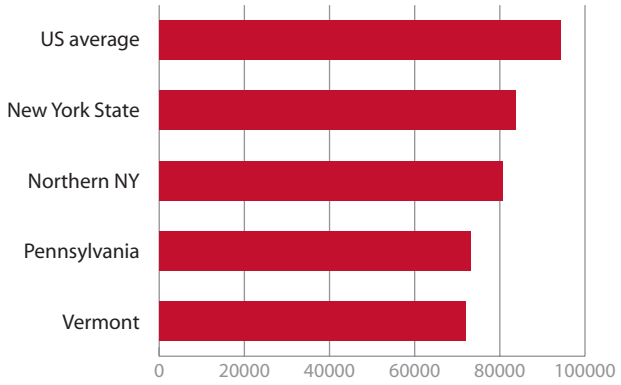
The study concludes that there is tremendous economic opportunity in strengthening connections between producers and consumers for the purpose of sales of local/regional foods: "If just half of [Western North Carolina's] families spend $11 each week on locally-grown food for four months of the growing season over $36.5 million stays in the local economy helping sustain [their] family farms."

We used these studies and others as a starting point for exploring the impact of local/regional foods in the Adirondack-North Country region with the clear understanding that limited time and financial resources prevented us from employing the comprehensive analysis included therein. At the same time, while our study was significantly more limited in scope, it is important to note that the results of our research lead to some of the same conclusions as these studies: Local/regional food initiatives are contributing to the well-being of individuals and communities but the degree to which they fulfill the promise associated with them is limited by multiple factors - factors which, if addressed at a regional level, through community-based resources, could increase the chances that the promise of local/regional foods be fulfilled.

D. Food & Agriculture in Northern NY[12]

Statistical data on agriculture in Northern New York (NNY) reflects farms and farming operations in the six counties including Clinton, Essex, Franklin, Jefferson, Lewis & St. Lawrence. The 2002 Census of Agriculture data for NNY provides a snapshot of agricultural production here. NNY has 1,292,493 acres of land or approximately 17.7% of the Adirondack-North Country region and 16.9% of NYS's farmland spread across 4,572 farms, which amounts to 12.3% of farms in New York State. For 2,966 farm operators, farming is their primary occupation. The average age of all principal operators across the region is 53.38 years old.

Figure 1: Average farm size in NNY by market value of products sold ($1000s)



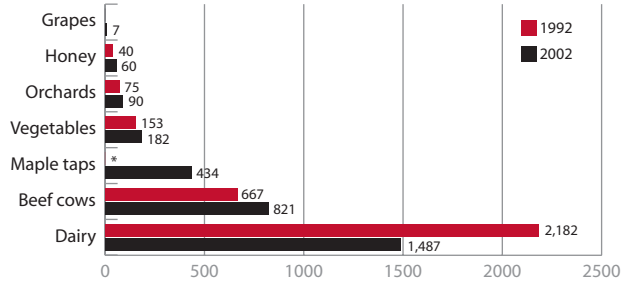
Source: 2002 Census of Agriculture

Most farms in Clinton, Essex and St. Lawrence Counties have between 50 and 179 acres; in Franklin, Jefferson and Lewis Counties, the greatest number of farms have between 180 and 499 acres. All six counties have some farms with less than 10 acres and some with more than 1,000 acres. Figure 1 depicts a comparison of NNY farms with those of NY and other states based on average value of products sold. The region's total market value of production is more than $406.5 million.

[12] Adapted from *Northern NY Agricultural Development Program Fact Sheet : Six-county Regional Profile*

Changes in farming have resulted in new opportunities arising for those interested in agriculture in NNY. In particular, dairy, the largest sector of the agricultural industry in the region has seen decreases in numbers of farms while experiencing increases in the total market value of dairy products sold between 1992 ($262,661,000) and 2002 ($300,884,000).[13] Some of the reduction in numbers of dairy farms has been due to consolidation of smaller farms into larger operations, thereby showing an overall decline in numbers. Figure 2 illustrates this change along with increases in other types of farms, representing an overall diversification in farm types across NNY. Not included in this data are farms with agritourism operations as it is not collected through the Ag Census, though, this too would reflect the diversification of farm types and changes in agriculture in the region.

Figure 2: Number of farms by agricultural product in NNY



Source: 1992, 2002 Census of Agriculture
* Data not available

Direct to consumer sales in this region have also changed dramatically. Direct market producers sold almost $3.5 million in food directly to residents and visitors to the region in 2002. This represents a near doubling (83% increase) over the 1997 figures of $1.89 million (see Appendix B, Fact Sheet 2: *Local Food and Agriculture Trends* , at www.nnyregionallocalfoods.org, for a more detailed analysis of this data). In addition, the numbers of farms selling direct to consumer increased from 441 to 506 during this same period.[14]

As a result of this changing landscape, there are in the Adirondack-North Country region, today, "hotbeds" of local/regional foods activities that didn't exist ten years ago. The Adirondacks have summer tourists who support their local farms through their purchases at markets, restaurants, and summer events. Adirondack Harvest, a regional 'buy local' campaign, has helped make these connections. St. Lawrence County has institutions like SUNY Potsdam and St. Lawrence University interested in buying more local/regional products. GardenShare and North Country Grown Cooperative, two organizations committed to promoting local/regional food initiatives, have helped make that happen. In Lewis County, marketing efforts have increased the area's reputation for local/regional products such as maple syrup. A fast growing Jefferson County has a lot of untapped potential for local marketing of food with Ft. Drum, Thousand Islands and Tug Hill Plateau as areas that draw a lot of people either seasonally or as permanent residents. Throughout the area there are additional restaurants, schools, and colleges/universities interested in buying local products.

[13] 2002 Census of Agriculture
[14] 2002 Census of Agriculture

These activities have been driven by the growing producer and consumer interest noted above as well as the response of agencies and organizations that recognize the positive ways these businesses can and do contribute to the region. Cornell Cooperative Extension, for example, working with partners, has collaborated regionally to provide a series of events designed to strengthen direct market farms, build relationships between producers and consumers in the region, and help communities capitalize on the ways these local food initiatives contribute to the region.

Starting with a conference in 1995 ("21st Century"), wherein a long range planning process identified the need to support local and regional food businesses to preserve the working landscape, producers, consumers, community service agencies, non-governmental organizations, and local officials have come together through various forums to support and strengthen the food system, and the local/regional food component in particular. Most recently, Cornell Cooperative Extension and partners have hosted annual regional programs designed to build awareness of opportunities in this arena. Highlighted in *A Select History of Local Foods Events in Northern New York* (see Appendix C at www.nnyregionallocalfoods.org) is an event sponsored in 2008 through the North Country Regional Foods Initiative: **The Role of Adirondack-North Country Foods in Community and Economic Development**. This event was designed to build on previous efforts by broadening awareness about the impacts of local/regional foods among local and state officials and community and economic developers, and strengthening relationships among these individuals, farmers, and institutional representatives. Specific steps for moving forward as a region to strengthen local food initiatives were identified during the conference, and have been incorporated, when appropriate, within the recommendations at the end of this report (see Section IV: *Conclusions and Recommendations*). The conference also led to the creation of a listserv designed to support peer learning and provide connections among Northen New York's local/regional food stakeholders. The forty-five conference participants who asked to be subscribed to the listserv demonstrate the growing interest in regional collaboration in this arena.[15]

As a result of these events, we have seen the formation of farm-to-school committees, new farmers' markets, local/regional food events, a new growers' cooperative, a Seaway Wine Trail, a regional Maple Weekend, and new local/regional food guides. We have also seen the emergence of several recurring themes: (1) consumers want to be able to purchase fresh, locally produced foods; (2) growers need support (education and infrastructure) to be able to meet an increasing demand for consistent quality and quantity, and (3) communities can benefit from working together, on a regional level, to capitalize on the positive ways local/regional foods can and are contributing to the region. Given this interest, it is important to examine in more detail the current and potential impacts of these initiatives in the Adirondack-North Country. The remainder of this report documents the results of our efforts to do so.

[15] To subscribe to the listserv (cce-nnylocalregionalfoods-l@cornell.edu) send an email to Bernadette Logozar (bel7@cornell.edu) with the words "Add me to the NNY Local/Regional Foods List" in the subject line.

E. Characteristics of Northern NY Local/Regional Foods Farms and Food Businesses

With the goal of providing a general sense of the characteristics of the farms and food businesses employing direct market strategies in the Northern New York, Table 2 presents general business summaries of the 15 case studies.

Table 2: Business data (n=15)*

Trade area **	Years in farm/ food business	Legal structure	Annual payroll	Off farm employment	Gross farm/ business receipts, 2007	Acres in production (maple, vegetables, hay, orchards)
< 25 miles: 2	0-4 yrs: 1	Sole proprietorships: 8	7 do not have established annual payrolls	5 have at least one spouse with part-time position off farm	$5,000 – $19,999: 1	5 or less: 3
25 – 50 miles: 6	5-9 yrs: 3	Corporations: 2	6 with annual payrolls, range from $2400 to over $120,000, from 1 employee to 14 full time and part- time/ seasonal	8 have both spouses with positions off farm (at least part-time)	$20,000 – $39,000: 1	6-10: 1
Local to Regional: 2 Local to State: 1 Local, Regional, National to International:4	10-14 yrs: 2 15-19 yrs:2 20+ yrs:6	Cooperative corporations: 3 Partnership:2			$40,000 – $99,999: 2 $100,000 -$249,999: 3 $250,000 or more: 2	11-20: 0 21-50:1 51-200:3

* Responses not totaling 15 reflect questions not answered by interviewees.
** Trade area definitions were provided by interviewees, some responded in actual distances and others in descriptive terms.

The following descriptions outline the business evolution for the owners/operators of these farms/food businesses, both in terms of their personal growth and that of their operations. Table 3 provides some examples in terms of products carried/sold.

In addition to noting some of their quantifiable characteristics, to more fully understand these farm and food businesses and the roles they play in Northern New York, it is helpful to consider how/why their owners/operators got into farming, the ways the businesses have evolved since their inception, and the types of things their owners/operators consider as they make decisions about the future of these enterprises. These matters are summarized below:

The primary owners/operators of the farm/food businesses involved in this study got into farming/food business by:

- Being born into business or having grown up on a farm.
- Marrying into it
- Retiring into it.
- Following their educational background or long term interest.

Changes that occurred in the business over the time of the primary owner's/operator's involvement:

- Diversification and business expansion (new additions to operation – animals, crops, varieties).
- Adding value (new product development).
- Lifestyle choices (life changes affecting business decisions – retirement, working towards self sufficiency).
- Maturation and development of business model and farm itself.

Table 3: Composite of responses to changes in products sold/produced

Start (ranges from 1988 – 2005)	**2007**
20 head of beef	70 head
0.25 acres vegetable production	2 acres
4 hives honey production	20 hives
30 fowl – poultry production	300 fowl
2 dozen eggs	3500 dozen
3 horses (boarding)	20 horses
0.25 acres mixed vegetable	3 acres mixed vegetables
3 acres maple syrup production	40 acres maple syrup production
10 head of beef	over 100 head of beef (buy in from 2 other farms)
$8,000 maple syrup sales	$17,000 maple syrup sales
$7,191 tomatoes sales	$10,521 tomatoes sales

Motivation for business decisions:

- Self-sufficiency/something of own (looking to avoid economic downturns in off-farm jobs).
- Lifestyle and quality of life.
- Consumer awareness and interest in food quality (which affects decisions regarding production techniques, such as use of pesticides/herbicides).

F. Concluding Comments

In the next sections of this report, we build on this introduction to local/regional food businesses in the Adirondack-North Country to explore in more detail how they contribute to our communities and the challenges and opportunities involved in doing so. We also explore the ways Northern New York can, as a region, support these businesses and capitalize on their positive contributions.

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