



## Barriers to Local Food Marketing: A Survey of National Family Farm Coalition Members

July 2009

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## Summary:

The National Family Farm Coalition (NFFC) and its Local Food Committee conducted a survey of member groups and farmers to help identify barriers to local food marketing to help NFFC formulate its role in the local food movement. The survey had 59 respondents from 25 of NFFC's 26 member groups, 71 % of whom are farmers while the remaining 29% work directly with farmers through an NFFC member group.

A few major points that came from the report:

- 18 NFFC member groups have a formal or informal local food campaign.
- Almost every respondent confirmed that farmers and producers in their area are interested in selling locally.
- The lack of slaughterhouses, processing plants, local food safety regulations, and well developed local food markets are the largest barriers to selling food locally for farmers.
- Access to credit varies greatly based on state, size, and type of farm operation.
- 55% of respondents said that either they or their neighbors have been victims of discrimination or bias when trying to access credit or other assistance.
- 8 NFFC member groups have access to a mentoring program for new and beginning farmers.
- 73% of respondents said there are farmers in their region that would be willing to take part in a mentoring program.
- 64% of respondents said there were farmers in their region who are either in the process or are considering a transition to more sustainable methods of farming.

The National Family Farm Coalition and its Local Food Committee have an important role to play in the emerging local food movement. All too often, the concerns of consumers are placed center-stage while those of the actual producers of the good food everyone desires are ignored. By focusing on increased access to local food markets, credit, discrimination, and mentoring programs NFFC can fill an important niche in the local food movement and help raise public awareness of the challenges facing farmers across the country. In many regions throughout the country, demand for local food far outstrips current levels of supply.

By helping farmers to overcome the logistical barriers of local food marketing, NFFC can help farmers enter emerging local markets that provide local food to consumers while creating a new source of income for producers. Local food systems have to become the norm, not a niche. NFFC and its member groups have the knowledge, skills, and experience to represent the needs of producers across the country and to help these producers sell locally within their community to help both consumer and farmer alike.

## Introduction

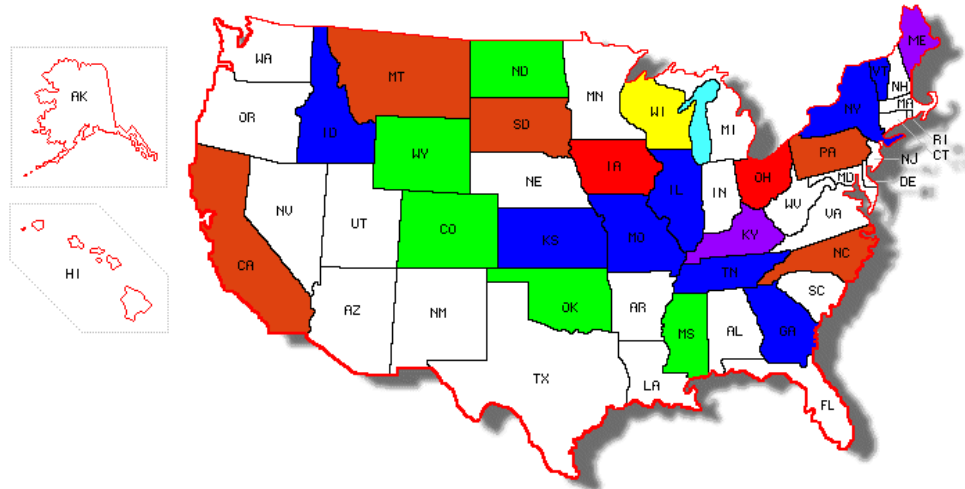
The National Family Farm Coalition (NFFC) and its Local Food Committee conducted a survey of member groups and farmers to help identify barriers to local food marketing to assist in the formulation of NFFC's role in the local food movement. The questions were written by members of the Local Food Committee and the survey was administered by NFFC's Emerson National Hunger Fellow through phone interviews. A copy of the survey questions can be found in the appendix at the end of this report.

The survey had 59 respondents from 25 of NFFC's 26 member groups (missing is the National Hmong American Farmers). Respondents included board members of the Coalition, organization staffers, and farmers. In addition to discussing barriers, questions focused on access to credit and mentoring programs.

Below is a map showing the number of respondents from each state and a distribution of NFFC member groups from across the country:

Number of Respondents

- - 1
- - 2
- - 3
- - 4
- - 5
- - 8



The data presented in this report is anecdotal and far from scientific, but trends do emerge that highlight challenges farmers across the country are facing when trying to sell their products locally, including access to credit, discrimination, and a lack of mentoring programs.

## Farm Demographics

Of the respondents, 71 % are farmers (42 out of 59), while the remaining 29% (17 respondents) work directly with farmers through an NFFC member group.

Farm size varied greatly between those questioned. The numbers below are organized based on whether the response was given in acreage (for produce or commodity crops) or herd size (for cattle, dairy, pork, poultry, seafood, or lamb).

Acreage	Number of Farms		Herd Size	Number of Farms	Type	Number of Farms*
<50	9		0 - 29	0	Commodities	6
50 - 100	5		30 - 49	3	Produce	17
100 - 400	12		50 - 99	4	Dairy	13
400 - 700	5		100 - 199	0	Beef	12
700 - 1000	0		200 - 499	1	Poultry	3
> 1000	3		500 +	0	Pork	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>34</b>		<b>Total</b>	<b>8</b>	Forestry	1
					Seafood	1
					Lamb	2
					<b>Total</b>	<b>58</b>

*\*Some farms produced/raised more than one type of crop/animal*

Eighteen of the farmers surveyed grow using conventional methods and 24 grow using sustainable methods (15 of which are certified organic, 4 are uncertified but practice organic methods, and 5 practice other methods such as grass-fed or no-till).

Most of the farmers surveyed sell their products within 150 miles, either directly to consumers, to a processor or to a distributor. About half of the respondents quoted transportation as a regular challenge they must face. The cost of fuel, distance to travel, time away from the farm, and capital were the most quoted challenges related to transportation. Below is a chart showing the breakdown of responses for the distance traveled to market question:

Miles to Market	Number
0-25	15
26-75	14
76-150	4
151-300	4
300+	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>42</b>

The last question in this section asked farmers if they worked with their County Extension offices and if they were helpful. Fifteen per cent of the respondents said they worked with their local extension office often, 27.5% sometimes worked with the office, and 55% said they do not work with County Extension. Some reasons given for not working with them were that the offices were "too chemical focused," "too nose," and that the officers were "mindless idiots."

## Section 1: Local Food Economies

The first main section of the survey focused on local food economies. A number of trends arose out of this section, particularly the barriers that farmers must address when entering a local market.

About half of the respondents said that their county, state, or other jurisdiction has pending or passed legislation to improve local food economies and access, such as a local food policy council or geographic preference for institutional procurement. Of NFFC's member groups, 18 have some sort of local food campaign, such as Family Farm Defenders' project, Family Farmer Fair Trade Cheese through Cedar Grove, California's Buy Fresh Buy Local, or more informal campaigns to support local food economies.

Almost every respondent (57 out of 59) confirmed that farmers and producers in their area are interested in selling locally. The two who said "no" noted a lack of farmers in their community to support any type of local food system. These numbers make it clear that local food marketing is an important issue to NFFC's farmers and member groups and highlight the important role the Local Food Committee can play for the larger organization.

When asked what issue NFFC's Local Food Committee should focus on, a range of answers were provided. The most popular response was, "To better educate the public on the benefits of buying local food, particularly in terms of local economic development and supporting local farmers." Many members would also like to see NFFC focus on local, state, and federal policies that make it easier for farmers to enter local markets. Other popular responses included: helping with market building and promotion, farm to school and other farm to institution programs, and helping to create local farmer-seller cooperatives. Members also expressed an interest in a network or database of local food efforts from across the county so communities do not have to "reinvent the wheel" and can learn from other successes and challenges. Challenging the National Animal Identification System (NAIS), hosting regional conferences, working to legalize raw milk, improving access to local food for low-income communities, and including seafood in local food discussions were also mentioned as topics of focus.

The question receiving the most responses of the entire survey was on barriers to local food marketing. Question 5 of this section asked, "What barriers must you address to develop a local food economy? (Examples: Regulations, tax issues, zoning rules, food safety, or other problems related to land, credit or labor.)" Answers were varied, and often numerous answers were given by each respondent, so the total number of responses is higher than the number of total interviews conducted. By far, the most common response to this question was the lack of slaughterhouses and processing plants, particularly for small-scale operations. Without legal and safe ways to slaughter their animals or create value-added products through processing locally, many farmers are unable to sell directly to consumers. Related to this point are local, state, and federal food safety regulations that often prevent small-scale and unprocessed products directly to consumers (such as raw milk). Food safety laws that should be

targeted to confined animal feeding operations (CAFOs) and large-scale processing plants are actually hindering the family farmers' ability to sell directly to their neighbors and community members. Similar problems arise when farmers try selling directly to schools or other institutions that must follow certain safety requirements and levels of liability insurance from growers.

An absence or lack of local markets was the next most common response. Many farmers interviewed would like to sell locally but their local food economy is either non-existent or poorly developed. Some farmers also mentioned difficulties entering into existing markets as another barrier. Even if the demand exists, often there is no local distribution infrastructure established (such as processing plants, physical markets, storage, adequate transportation, etc).

To many farmers, the consumer mindset prevents local markets from growing. Consumers often do not know where their food comes from and are unaware of the economic, environmental, health, and social damages caused by the globalized food system. At the same time, some farmers believe it is their own mindset holding back local food economies. Many do not view the risk of leaving their current market to sell locally as a wise economic choice. It is also feared that if everyone starts selling locally at the same time the market would be flooded and no one would get a decent price for their products and labor. To many, the local market is still viewed as a "niche" market rather than an alternative market that can support a community of growers and consumers.

The costs associated with selling locally were quoted as major barriers, including transportation costs and logistics. The closest markets are often more than an hour away for many producers, using extra money for fuel while also losing time away from the farm. Trucks for moving produce to market are expensive and many farmers lack the capital to move the amount and type of product necessary for selling locally.

Another obstruction to local market development is the lack of healthy and culturally appropriate food available to minority, income and tribal populations. Many low-income communities, particularly communities of color, are considered "food deserts" since they do not have access to food stores other than convenience stores let alone healthy food. If we do not include all communities in the local food equation, we are ignoring the justice and equality that must be part of the response to the current unjust food system. This should extend to the rights of farmworkers and migrant populations as well, since without a labor base that is treated fairly we cannot have enough supply of locally produced food that benefits everyone in the community.

A number of other issues were noted as local food marketing barriers. Access to land and credit is an issue facing many farmers today and has become even tighter recently (see Section 2: Credit and Discrimination). An extension of this problem is a lack of new and beginning farmers entering the occupation. It should go without saying that with no young people becoming farmers we cannot build sustainable local food systems (see Section 3: Mentoring Programs). Agribusiness was another barrier mentioned, as its product floods the current market due to the distribution of government support via subsidies and

policies promoted by USDA and County Extension Offices. NAIS (national animal identification system) exemplifies a government policy that is biased against family farmers in support of industrial CAFO operations. A lack of seller co-ops is another barrier that prevents smaller farmers from entering the market and purchasing capital collectively. Finally, the lack of an agreed upon definition for the term “local” is a point of confusion and often leads to unintended outcomes. An example of which are Lays potato chips being advertised as “local” since they are being sold in the same region the potato was grown but are raised and processed under the industrial system. The same happens with “local” chicken from a nearby CAFO. This is not what most local food advocates mean when discussing local food systems. An agreed upon definition must be reached before farmers and consumers are on the same page and working together for the same local food system.

The chart below shows the responses, organized by category and frequency of response. Again, each respondent was able to list numerous barriers - hence the large number of responses.

<b>Barriers</b>	<b>Number of Responses</b>
Lack of Slaughter & processing plants	14
Not Enough Local Markets	12
Consumer Mindset	11
Food Safety Regulations	8
Transportation cost & logistics	8
No Guarantee of Economic Return	7
Lack of Local Distribution Infrastructure	7
Farmer Mindset	5
Capital & Labor Costs	5
Agribusiness (crowds out market, subsidies)	4
Raw Milk Laws	4
Liability w/ Institutions	4
Minorities, Low-income, Tribal Left Out of Local Markets	4
Risks of Transitioning to Local Markets	4
Lack of Pubic Awareness	3
Time Investment for Marketing	3
Local as Niche, not as Alternative	2
What is "local?"	2
Access to Credit/Land	2
Value-Added Processing Laws	2
Trade Policy	1
Gov Promotes Industrial	1
Not Enough Young Farmers	1
Low Demand	1
Lack of Seller Co-Ops	1
Zoning Rules	1
NAIS	1
Short Growing Seasons	1
Concerns of Flooding Market	1



Overall, it seems that members believe that NFFC has an important role to play in the local food movement. As one respondent said, NFFC should “focus on the role of *farms* in local food economies, not just consumers, which is often done” with many local food programs such as farm to school. By bringing the voice of farmers to the forefront of these discussions, NFFC can help better link consumers with producers.

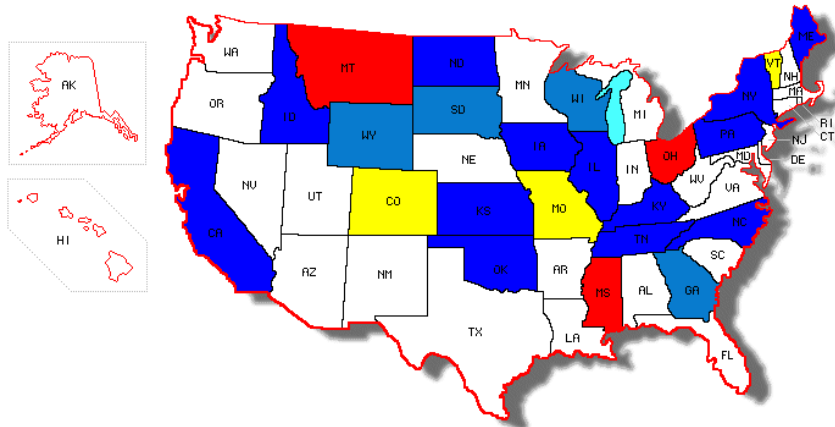
## Section 2: Credit and Discrimination

Section 2 of the survey looked at access to credit and discrimination as issues faced by NFFC farmers. This section also asked questions over unequal opportunities for socially disadvantaged farmers, and perceptions of fairness in the Farm Bill.

When asked if farm credit is accessible in their region, responses were mostly split and trends arose within states. About 35% of respondents said that credit is accessible, 25% said credit has become tighter recently, 15% said credit was not accessible to farmers and 25% were unsure. Below is a state-by-state breakdown to illustrate where NFFC farmers have access to credit or not based on average responses from the survey:

Access to Farm Credit\*

- - Yes
- - Tightening
- - No
- - Don't Know



NOTES:

\*Based on average responses

These numbers, though, paint a more optimistic picture than the survey respondents actually provided in the interviews. Even though credit is accessible in Illinois, one respondent said, you must already have relatively high assets to be approved for a line of credit. In California credit is available in certain farm communities but there are not many loans available in general for small farmers. A few Wisconsin dairy farmers mentioned that credit is accessible to larger operations and commodity producers but it is almost non-existent for small farmers. This last sentiment was shared with most small farmers throughout the

country who felt they were discriminated against by the banks and FSA based on the size and type of operations they manage. Sustainable fishers and value-added producers also mentioned limited access to credit.

Over 55% of respondents said that either they or their neighbors have been victims of discrimination or bias when trying to access credit or other assistance. One farmer of color said “hell yeah” when asked if he had been the victim of discrimination and another said “of course.” Women were also more likely to be victims of discrimination, with one female respondent stating that her husband was required to sign her bank papers and was then asked to sign a form saying there was no discrimination involved (which is more than likely illegal). Native American, Hmong, Amish, and LGBT farmers were also mentioned as populations facing discrimination when applying for credit and often face discrimination from fellow farmers, as well.

When asked if they were aware of unequal opportunities for minority or socially disadvantaged farmers in their community 36% said ‘yes’ with 64% responding ‘no’. This seemed to relate more to the demographics of NFFC member farming communities rather than a lack of problems, since many respondents said there were no farmers of color in their community. Sixty-six per cent of respondents said that they were aware of the initiatives to support diversity and equity in the current farm bill, but more than half the respondents were uncertain how to make the farm bill less biased or discriminatory.

Based on the responses, most NFFC farmers and member groups were either victims of discrimination themselves, knew of others in their community who were victims of discrimination, or lacked access to credit due to insufficient assets or the size and type of their operation.

Access to credit, particularly in terms of discrimination, is a serious and pervasive issue for NFFC farmers and member groups. NFFC currently has a credit campaign and has worked closely with offices in the House of Representatives, the Senate, the Department of Agriculture, and the Treasury Department. Even with some victories, much work needs to be done to open access to credit for all farmers throughout the country.

### **Section 3: Mentoring Programs**

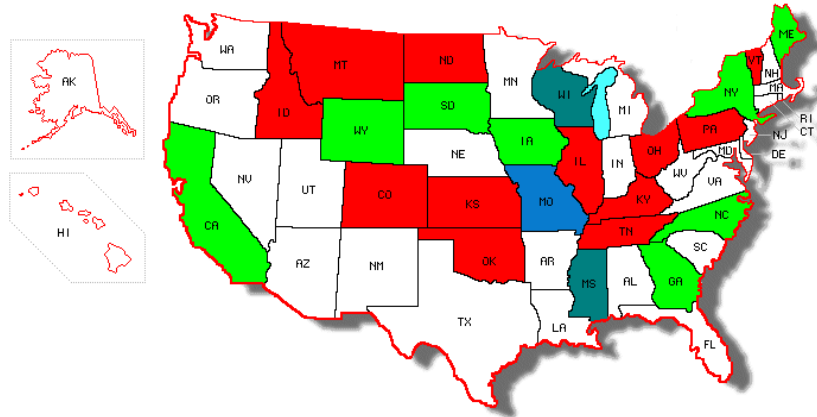
With less than 2% of the American population currently farming, no sustainable local food system can exist without bringing in more people to the profession and lifestyle. Mentoring programs for new and beginning farmers are one way groups throughout the country are using to bring new people to the land.

Currently, eight NFFC groups currently have a mentoring program or have access to such programs. The main function of Farms not Arms, for example, is to help veterans gain farming skills and access to land and credit. Two groups have a more informal mentoring program that connects people either entering farming or current farmers needing advice from fellow local farmers. The Missouri Rural Crisis Center is currently in the process of creating a mentoring program.

Below is a state-by-state breakdown of groups that either have their own program or access to another mentoring program for new and beginning farmers, based on average responses.

Access to a Mentoring Program

- - Yes
- - Informal
- - In Progress
- - No



When asked if there are farmers in their region who would be willing to take part in a mentoring program, 73% said 'yes.' One respondent mentioned the need for mentoring programs for immigrants who farmed in their home country and need help getting started in the U.S. Of those that said there would be no interest in their region, a number of reasons were given. One respondent said, "Small farms don't have the logistics to run a mentoring program," and another response was that there "...was not enough young people entering farming" to make a mentoring program successful. An important point raised by a few respondents was that any mentoring program "needs to be accessible to low-income communities." One respondent said that he/she does not support the idea of mentoring programs. "We don't need more farmers, we need more successful farmers," the respondent said. "Beginning farmer programs are not worth the effort since we are throwing people into a failing system. We need to make systemic changes and people will enter the market themselves."

The last question in the survey asked if member groups had farmers, fishers, or producers who would like to transition from conventional practices to practices such as organic, grass-fed, or sustainable practices. Sixty-four per cent of respondents said there were farmers who are either in the process or are considering a transition to more sustainable methods of farming. Many farmers said they are not seeking USDA organic certification because it is expensive, time-consuming, bureaucratic, and being co-opted by industrial operations. Others said they will not transition because there is no market for organic products in their area and that the economic risks of transitioning are too high.

## Conclusion

The National Family Farm Coalition and its Local Food Committee has an important role to play in the emerging local food movement. All too often, the concerns of consumers are placed center-stage without giving much thought to the actual producers of the good food everyone desires.

By focusing on increased access to local food markets, credit, discrimination, and mentoring programs NFFC can fill an important niche in the local food movement and help raise awareness of the challenges facing farmers across the country to the general public. Access to local slaughtering and processing facilities is one major issue that many farmers believe is holding back local food system from throughout the country. Illogical food safety regulations play a large role in this problem. For example, with the recent allowance of regional preference for school meal procurement through the last Farm Bill, schools can request Georgia-only peaches, but they cannot purchase washed and sliced peaches from a local farmer since it is deemed "unsafe." By increasing the number of processing plants and easing redefining food safety regulations that are biased against small growers, farmers can significantly increase their ability to enter local food economies.

The Local Food Committee should strongly consider working closely with the Credit committee on policies both local and national to increase access to credit. Increased credit can allow more farmers to purchase the necessary capital to begin selling locally to new markets and can help beginning and new farmers enter the profession to increase the supply of local food. Related to this last point is access to mentoring programs. Such programs, whether formal or informal, can be an important way to help a new generation enter farming and local food economies.

In many regions throughout the country, demand for local food far outstrips current levels of supply. By helping farmers to overcome the logistical and perceived barriers of local food marketing, NFFC can help farmers enter emerging local markets that provide local food to consumers while creating a new source of income for producers. Local food systems have to become the norm, not a niche. NFFC and its member groups have the knowledge, skills, and experience to represent the needs of producers across the country and to help these producers sell locally within their community to help consumer and farmer alike.

## **Appendix: Local Food Survey**

### **Introduction**

Farm Demographics:

- What is the size of your farm?
- What do you grow/raise on your farm?
- Do you grow using conventional or organic methods?
- How far away is your farm from where you market?
- Is transportation an issue when trying to market your products?
- Do you work with your County Extension office? If so, how helpful (or not) are they?

### **Section 1: LOCAL FOOD ECONOMIES**

Question 1: Does your state, county or other jurisdiction have pending or passed legislation to improve local food economies/access? (Examples: Local procurement or food policy council initiatives)?

Question 2: Does your member organization have a local food campaign?

Question 3: Does your community/state have a local food policy council?

Question 4: Would you or other producers like to raise/process and/or sell locally?

Question 5: What barriers must you address to develop a local food economy? (Examples: Regulations, tax issues, zoning rules, food safety, or other problems related to land, credit or labor.)

Question 6: What would you like to see the NFFC Local Food Committee take on to advance local food production and access? (Ex: Federal Legislation? A national conference?)

### **Section 2: CREDIT & DISCRIMINATION**

Question 1: Is Bank Credit accessible to farmers in your region? If yes, how accessible is it? If no, what barriers exist?

Question 2: Have you, your members or neighbors experienced discrimination or bias when trying to access credit or other assistance?

Question 3: Are you aware of unequal opportunities for minority or socially disadvantaged farmers in your community?

Question 4: Are you aware of the initiatives to support diversity & equity in the current farm bill? How could the next Farm Bill be made fairer in terms of discrimination or bias?

Question 5: Do you think that the new Farm bill will address issues of discrimination or bias? If so, how?

### **Section 3: MENTORING PROGRAMS**

Question 1: Does your member group have access to a mentoring program for new/beginning/socially disadvantaged farmers/fishers/producers?

Question 2: Does your member group have farmers/fishers/producers who would like to transition from conventional practices to unconventional (organic, grass-fed or sustainable) practices?

Question 3: Does your member group have farmers/fishers/producers who are willing to take part in a mentoring program??