

The Missing Link

Distribution in Charlottesville's Local Food System

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INTRODUCTION

This project began as a hunt for a way to improve and strengthen the local food system within the Charlottesville area. As a result, through conversations with producers, distributors, and consumers in surrounding area it has become clear that the missing link in creating a secure community food system is the adequate structure for distributing local food in an efficient and financially feasible way. While local food is being distributed through Community Support Agriculture (CSA's) these programs are strained with demand and meanwhile plenty of other producers are currently producing more food than they are able to sell. A consumer market does exist for these products, the problem lies in getting the product to marketplace in order to sell it. Thus, the problem lies within the economy of the middle, where both processing and distribution make up the missing link to ensuring a connected and unified local food system.

Supporting local food has major benefits for the local economy, the health of local residents and the long-term food security of a community. If Charlottesville wishes to reap these benefits, it will need to give concerted support to facilitate the distribution of local food, on a local scale, at the local level. If the area government listens attentively to the wishes of current producers, distributors, and consumers, it become quite clear what must be done.

Before going into what could change about the local food distribution system, a clear conception should be formed as to how the current system functions.

CURRENT DISTRIBUTION SYSTEM IN THE AREA

The current food distribution system in Charlottesville consists of several locally owned companies, such as Standard Produce and Cavalier Produce, as well as non-locally owned companies such as Sysco .

Sysco distributes to Aramark, which processes and distributes food throughout UVa, as well as to a number of other retailers including larger groceries such as Giant, Kroger and Harris Teeter, and smaller locally owned shops like Integral Yoga, Rebecca's and C-Ville Market.

Although the current infrastructure predominately distributes non-local food, an infrastructure for distributing local food does exist. Nevertheless, several significant challenges, identified through interviews with local distributors and farmers, serve as barriers that impede the ability of local farmers to sell their produce through this local distribution network.

Many smaller, locally owned distributors and retailers are already making an effort to carry some local food, C-Ville Market, and its companion distributor Cavalier Produce, for example, have made a concerted effort to distribute local food, and have met with a good deal of success. Aramark has also instituted a local food pilot program at UVa, and wishes to increase its use of local food on grounds.

Still, the major difficulty in increasing the current distribution of local food through Charlottesville's existing networks lies in connecting individual farms with distributors efficiently. The fact that Cavalier Produce, Standard Produce, and Aramark operate on an economy of mass scale, they don't consider it economically feasible to try and retrieve or receive produce from disparate, distantly located farms. Thus, even with the desire to distribute more local food, doing so would require a more efficient way of moving that food into the local distribution networks.

Some of the other major difficulties inherent to distributing local food are insurance, seasonality and cost.

Aramark has an official policy that the company cannot work with any producer who possesses less than \$5 million in liability insurance, to cover any possible health risks. Unfortunately This kind of insurance policy is almost impossible for most of the small farmers around Charlottesville to acquire. Though Aramark has stated they might be willing to help producers get this kind of insurance through special aid grants the fact remains that the requirements for large insurance policies creates a significant barrier for the distribution of local food through large retailers or distributors. Even so, one way to get past such a barrier may be larger companies such as Aramark to develop relationships with smaller distributors like Cavalier Produce who doesn't have such a lofty insurance requirement. Thus, the smaller distributor could purchase local food in mass and then the larger distributor could purchase it from the smaller distributor who would possess their own insurance policy comparable to that of a large company.

Another difficulty in the consistent distribution of local food is its seasonality. The seasonality of food is something with which most people have become profoundly disconnected. Most people have become used to being able to eat any food they want at any time of the year. This luxury depends very strongly on access to world markets, not local food. Area distributors such as Aramark agrees that this expectation of year-round access makes distributing large amounts of local food difficult. Though Charlottesville, has relatively mild winters is still not a place where extensive year-round growing currently occurs. As a result, winter distribution of local foods drops significantly. Accommodating the dramatic shifts in availability of local produce, as well as the relatively short amount of time during the summer when there is an abundance of local food, makes distribution of large amounts of local food by local distributors daunting. Still, a possible solution could be the exploitation of more greenhouse growing throughout the area.

In summary, distribution of large amounts of local food faces serious barriers. However, if supporting local food is priority, there are a number of things that could be done by the local government to facilitate the distribution process of local food.

THE ECONOMICS OF THE CURRENT SYSTEM

However, even with these barriers, economically it is make so much sense for communities to begin considering local food systems. Nationally, Annual Consumer Spending is monitored by a number of government and nongovernmental agencies and the research has deducted that Americans spend 10% or more of their income on food. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics Consumer Expenditure Survey for 2005, the 400 thousand people who live in the Thomas Jefferson Planning District alone spend 2 and one-quarter billion dollars annually on food. If half of those 400 thousand people spent half of their weekly food budget for half of the year on locally grown food, that would translate to nearly 300 Million dollars maintained within the local economy.

When something is purchased from a large company, some of the money stays local to pay salaries and rents, but the majority of the money goes to the hometown of the corporation to pay for the office staff and executives there. Right now, to get an apple grown in Crozet from the orchard to someone living in Crozet the apple has to travel to a distribution center in Marylander Georgia and then come back, having leaked money out the entire way.

But when you buy something from local businesses, a little bit of the money “leaks” out in taxes and other small costs, but much of the money stays local and is able to continue circulating again and again. Local merchants eat at local restaurants, visit local doctors, ride local buses, and pay local accountants. Conventional estimates are that the same dollar can be spent anywhere from 3 to 7 times in a local community. So that 300 Million dollars being spent on local food is circulating 3 -7 times through the local economy. That means anywhere from 900 Million to 2.1 billion dollars could be being spent in our region.

WHAT WOULD A STRONG LOCAL FOOD SYSTEM LOOK LIKE?

It would consist of an abundance of producers producing a variety of different kinds of local food that are easily accessible through diverse distribution networks to all consumers in the area who have interest in local food. In this system, consumers would be educated as to the seasonality of local food, and would support processing techniques to make local food available throughout the year. Small farmers would experience minimal regulations that would allow for them to process and sell their food on their own, directly to consumers. The local government would support, through incentives or more directly, a number of a more centralized distribution networks in place to facilitate easy access to local food.

CURRENT INTEREST IN LOCAL FOOD

Such a system can not succeed unless producers, consumers, and distributors together are involved and committed to participating in and supporting their local foodshed. In the Charlottesville area, we have a wide variety of producers and consumers wanting to support a local food system. For example, we currently have four Community Support Agriculture (CSA) programs, which have been forced to institute waiting lists due to an excess of demand. However, many producers have trouble getting all their food distributed out to consumers leaving some producers with an excess of local food. On the other hand, many consumers don't have access to enough food and as a result are naïve as to its benefits and the reasons for eating local. Thus, in order to establish a local food system that can be prosperous for all parties involved the distribution sector must be evaluated and remodeled in order to efficiently and effectively connect producers and consumers and make local food available, accessible, and financially feasible to everyone within the community whenever seasonably possible.

WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE TO MAKE LOCAL DISTRIBUTION WORK

To improve the distribution of local food in Charlottesville, there are two main approaches that can be taken. The first requires facilitating a more centralized distribution process, which would need to be actively supported by the City. The second lies in encouraging the direct sale of food from farmers to consumers. Both should be present in a healthy distribution system, because each supports different aspects of local food distribution. Centralized distribution supports efficiency, minimizing the ecological footprint associated with food distribution, and inundating the local food market with local food, while direct sale supports healthy, trust based farmer-consumer relationships, a connection to and knowledge of the land where food is grown, and minimized government interference.

To address the issue through a centralization process, energy could be directed toward creating a local food center that would provide a location at which a great deal of local food could be housed and processed, encouraging more distribution of local food through the already established distribution networks, and/or using technologies to coordinate the distribution of local food through existing or newly created channels. Encouraging the direct sale approach would consist of bringing local food to the attention of the community and encouraging individuals to seek local food out on their own. It might include community supported local food education, a website with local food resources, creating more farmers market opportunities, supporting CSA startup, etc. Lightening regulations upon the production, processing and distribution of local food from small farms by creating a tiered regulation system would also increase the potential for direct distribution to occur, as it would allow for more numerous kinds of food to be distributed by the farmer, including the kinds of food that would not be accessible via larger farms and in big stores. This approach does not involve middlemen, but simply supports local farmers distributing their own product directly to consumers.

The answer lies not in picking one of these approaches, but in integrating many aspects of both into the local distribution process as fully as possible. Charlottesville area residents, including both producers and consumers, should have access to a multifaceted selection of distribution options. Just as an ecosystem's health depends on and is gauged by the biodiversity of its species, so we can view the success of an area's local food distribution system based on the community's access to diverse distribution options.

SPECIFIC IDEAS

A number of specific ideas were suggested by various local producers, consumers, and distributors to facilitate the creation of a robust, diversified local food distribution system. They are compiled and described as follows, interlaced with case studies. Though these are those ideas that originated in discussions with the community, it should be clear that this is not an exhaustive list, nor does it supply all the answers. The implementation of any suggested solution would certainly benefit local food distribution, but thought and study should be put toward foreseeing any consequences not noted here. The best model would include a comprehensive distribution system. The more comprehensive the model, the stronger it will be in the face of unexpected challenges.

The ideas to be presented are: a local food warehouse, a community kitchen, trucks that pick up food from local producers, trucks that deliver local food to consumers, an inventory tracking system that eliminates the need for a physical distribution center, supporting startup of more CSAs, farmers markets, and metropolitan buyers clubs, creating tiered regulations for small farms, covering liability and costs, and using the internet to facilitate distribution and organized growing of diverse crops.

A Centralized Local Food Warehouse

One of the most prevalent ideas suggested was a local food warehouse. A local food warehouse would operate as a central location where local food could come together for efficient distribution at wholesale prices and quantities. Kate Collier from Feast! recommended this kind of warehouse as a solution to inefficient local food distribution in Charlottesville. Such a warehouse would ideally reside someplace relatively close to the City center and serve as a location where food producers of all kinds could drop off their local produce, possibly including meats, dairy, flowers etc. Food drop off could occur every day, a few times a week, or at whatever interval seemed to work best.

If large amounts of local food were to come together in one location, it would become feasible for local distributors to begin distributing more local food, as they would not need to deal directly with receiving food from many different sources. Additionally, larger distributors would be able to distribute local food for the first time, finally having access to an adequate quantity of local food for their scale in one place. Aramark, the distributor that supplies UVA, said in a personal interview that they would even be willing to send their own truck to pick up local food if enough could be sourced from a single location.

Such a warehouse could function in a multitude of ways. It could be a city run operation, or the local government could create economic incentives for private businesses to institute such a space. It might be run such that farmers sold their goods to the warehouse, which would sell the goods back to the community for a slightly higher price. Another means of operation would consist in farmers dropping off their food to be sold by the warehouse for a fee, with any unsold food remaining the farmer's responsibility. If the warehouse were government operated, instead of charging fees or raising food prices, the City could choose to cover the warehouse' overhead as a direct investment in the local food system and community. Ultimately, however the warehouse operated, it would benefit farmers by saving them a great deal of time.

If a local food warehouse of this nature existed, it could be utilized by local distributors, local chefs, and local consumers. It would also make an ideal central point for local food to be distributed to local schools and government offices. Such a warehouse would make complying with any future Virginia Farm to School bills simpler.

A number of cases of this kind of warehouse exist around the world, the most notable being the Rungis International Market in Paris. Though Rungis does sell food from around the world, it also features local food from around Paris. Local chefs go every morning to create their menus based on the local, in season food available. They then buy that food from the market at wholesale prices.

Another good example of a food warehouse is the Fulton Fish Market in New York City, which sells a variety of different produce in addition to fish fresh from the pier. Distributors, restaurateurs and consumers alike visit the market to buy various foods as fresh as possible for low prices in a central location.

While these markets may not focus solely on local food, a Charlottesville food warehouse could. It would provide a year round location for local food to be sold. Even though local produce production drops off significantly in the winter, local meat, eggs, greenhouse produce and winter vegetables could still be sold, as well as any food that was canned or otherwise processed during the growing season for winter sale.

Almost every producer and retailer spoken to thinks that a local food warehouse would be extremely successful and beneficial to the local food market. Some examples, though not all, follow: Aramark says that such a location would facilitate their buying local food because it would mean local food in the quantities they require for sale at a single location. Karen Waters of the Quality Community Council thinks that such a warehouse would be a great idea. She says it could potentially be a useful resource for the Urban Farm she is working to create in the Friendship Court area, though she could not say for sure until residents themselves decided what to do with the food they produced. Bill McCaskill, a local producer, agrees that such a location would be very beneficial and would aid him in selling the food he produces. He thinks most local producers would be interested in a warehouse like this, as it would provide an easy, legitimate place to sell their goods locally. He especially likes that the food sold to a

local food warehouse could easily be funneled into a farm to school program. Susie McRae, with Integral Yoga, also agrees that the local food warehouse is a good idea.

Karen Waters suggested that the local food warehouse could be located in the soon to be vacated City buildings warehoused on Harris Street. These buildings could be converted after being acquired, ideally as a gift, from the City. Harris Street is an optimum location. It resides relatively near to the center of town, but is not in an area where congestion would present a problem. It is also close to a number of lower income communities, which would benefit from the access to good, nutritious, local food.

This idea has already received interest from and is being worked on by the E.A.T. Local group as a part of their community food center project.

The local food warehouse concept came forth as a widely supported community solution for increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of our local food distribution system. It should be strongly considered as a viable option for improving local food distribution.

Community Kitchen

Kate Collier recommended a community kitchen be implemented in conjunction with the local food warehouse to serve the local food community and distribution process. The kitchen would ideally be attached to the local food warehouse. This would prove to be an enormous benefit to producers, the warehouse, and the community, as any unsold goods could be processed and canned, or turned into value added products for later sale. Producers could also choose to drop off a certain portion of their good for sale at the warehouse and then process the rest in the same trip. The community kitchen would serve as a place where community members could process food from their own gardens.

A community kitchen would facilitate the effective distribution of local food by providing the space for food to be processed and saved for later distribution. This would help ensure that bumper crops of local food not go to waste. Any food produced above the market demand could be processed and sold as a value added product, or processed and saved for winter sale when local food would no longer be abundant.

A community kitchen would help address the difficulties of local food seasonality, as extra crops grown during the summer could be processed and sold during the winter. Since seasonality is one of the biggest problems that make eating local food difficult in this area, finding effective ways to process and preserve local food within the community would greatly support making large scale local food consumption feasible. Aramark, a large distributor strongly interested in procuring more local food, says that seasonality is one of its biggest impediments, especially since it does the majority of its buying during winter, when students are on grounds. Local schools, who will be seeking access to more local food in the future (as a result of any forthcoming Virginia Farm to School Legislation) will also appreciate being able to buy locally processed local food.

A community kitchen would help address the lack of effective local distribution and processing systems in Charlottesville.

Kate Collier of Feast!, as well as various producers have been in favor of this idea, believing it to be a move in the right direction toward creating more local economies of the middle, minimizing food waste, and increasing the ways in which local food can be sold. Ms. Collier pointed out that much of food that goes through distributors cannot be sold due to blemishes. However, this food is still good to eat. As it turns out, according to Ms. Collier, distributors normally throw out about 25% of the food they move. A community kitchen might help mitigate this waste.

Catherine Tatman and Bill McCaskill, two local producers, think that a community kitchen would be an effective tool for supporting local food and local food distribution. Apparently, the lack of processing centers in and around Charlottesville cause quite a problem for creating a strong local food distribution system, as much of the local food that requires processing must be shipped elsewhere to be processed before coming back to Charlottesville for sale.

The E.A.T. Local group in Charlottesville is currently working on plans for a community food center, which would include a community kitchen and embody some of the ideas of a local food warehouse. Supporting these ideas should involve supporting E.A.T. Local, as they have already done much of the work and will continue to do so. Creating a community food center with their help would be a great boon for local food and local food distribution in the area.

A community kitchen should be considered as a valuable asset to the local food distribution process

Trucks to Pick Up Food from Farms

This concept would utilize trucks (perhaps supported by the local government) to collect produce from farms and bring it back to local distributors or a local food warehouse. The trucks could operate on a daily, multi-weekly, or weekly basis for an annualized fee to farmers. This would save local distributors the time and effort of coordinating with each farm individually, making it feasible for them distribute more local food, and would save farmers the time of hauling their crops into town. This method would require planning between farmers and distributors to ensure that pick ups between multiple farms could occur on the same day and result in one or two drop offs with distributors. Though this concept would not allow restaurants or consumers to have direct contact with local farms, it would greatly increase the ease and efficiency of local food flow.

Kate Collier suggested this idea, saying that she knows a number of local producers who have mentioned they would enjoy such a service.

The City should consider creating incentives for a business of this kind. Otherwise, it could help coordinate farmers to create a farmers co-op that could organize a service like this. Either way, local farmers would benefit from this model of local food distribution.

Local Food Delivered to Your Door

This concept consists of trucks that deliver fresh, local food to the consumer's door as another method for efficiently and conveniently distributing local foods. This service has already proven extremely successful in the case of S.P.U.D. (Small Potatoes Urban Delivery), an online grocery service that supplies the Seattle and Vancouver areas. S.P.U.D. provides customers the opportunity to order local and organic groceries and produce online and then have them delivered to their door for free. Business is kept affordable due to the fact that they pre-order all products, keep inventory low, pay less than \$9.00 a square foot for warehouse space compared with \$30.00 a square foot for most grocery stores, and arrange delivery routes efficiently.

S.P.U.D. makes their service work using the internet, where consumers can select and buy what they want online, which will then be delivered to their door.

Tim Beatley, a Charlottesville resident and professor of Sustainability at UVA, recommended this idea. It has received support from numerous other consumers.

Charlottesville would welcome a company like S.P.U.D., as residents would appreciate the convenience. The City could therefore create tax incentives to encourage the startup of this kind of business.

Inventory Tracking System

An inventory tracking system would combine both of the above systems and would be coordinated online, eliminating the need for a physical distribution center. In this system, trucks would collect food orders made online by consumers from farms and then deliver them directly. Farms could join such a network to benefit from a consistent direct customer base without the responsibility of delivering their goods personally. This system would help relieve the existing demand on CSA's as well as provide those who had not yet considered joining such a program a way to easily, economically, and conveniently purchase local products. Deliveries and pickups could be made in accordance to zones so as to reduce overall food miles traveled. Such a service would reduce the ecological footprint and carbon emissions of local food distribution as one truck would deliver food instead of 50 consumer cars driving to the store and back.

An amazing case study for this type of system is the Oklahoma Food Coop, which uses free software they wrote to connect farmers with consumers. The Coop works entirely online, efficiently distributing Oklahoma food across the state. Each month, producers post what they have available on the website. Consumer members then have two weeks to place orders. Then, on the third Thursday of each month, the farmers bring

their goods to Oklahoma City where coop volunteer crews sort the customer's orders. Once organized, these orders are then delivered to seventeen pickup sites across the state where the purchasers retrieve them. The coop is, and always has been completely self-financed. Operating expense are thus covered by both a \$50 fee paid by members when they join as well as a 5% charge to both producers and consumers for selling and buying through the coop.

This model for distribution has received support from numerous consumers. As an amalgamation of two other ideas which have received community support, this idea has strong backing.

An inventory tracking system offers a new and unique model for local food distribution that will most likely become increasingly popular in the future because it operates on coordinated efficiency rather than physical infrastructure. As it could be the distribution model of the future, the City should investigate how such a model could be implemented.

CSAs

Community Supported Agriculture is a distribution method in which individuals or families pay a farm an upfront fee at the beginning of the growing season to receive a box of produce each week in return until the season ends. Everyone interviewed thought CSAs were a powerful way to bring local food into the community. As local CSAs already have long waiting lists, the City could create tax incentives to encourage the startup of new CSAs, which could then begin providing for this demand.

Farmers Markets

Everyone we talked to agreed that Charlottesville needs more farmers markets.

The Charlottesville City Market is an extremely popular event. There is more than ample demand for selling space during the peak season, even though farmers must pay to participate. Furthermore, consumers flock to buy local produce whenever the market is running. The fact that the City has decided to implement an additional market on Wednesdays is a smart step towards advancing direct local food distribution.

Still, a number of farmers, including Bill McCaskill and Christine Solem of Satyrfield Goat Farm have said that the City needs still more farmers markets. Mr. McCaskill thinks that for every market the City made space for, there would be plenty of both producer and consumer interest- more than enough to make it worthwhile. In addition, he says the current downtown location of the market proves problematic in its space constraints. As a result, Mr. McCaskill thinks that the difficulty associated with trying to drive to and set up a stand downtown deters many potential sellers. In addition, since there is so little parking downtown, many buyers from outside Charlottesville struggle to attend. He suggests that the City should provide markets in large open

spaces, spaces where it is easy to get a truck in and out and which provide ample parking for consumers.

A number of farmers referred to the problem of the market charging them to sell their food. They said that the City should be willing to shoulder the costs of putting on the City market for the positive benefits it produces in the community and for local food distribution. Bill McCaskill put it in poignant terms, saying that though he has no interest in accepting government subsidies, he would not complain about the City covering the unnecessary costs placed on his food at the market.

It may be wise for the City to consider covering these costs, as the Tuesday market to go up at Whole Foods will purportedly charge farmers nothing. This extra market will be a welcome added venue for selling food.

Kate Collier of Feast! agrees that more farmers markets are a good idea. So does Catherine Tatman. Ms. Tatman suggests, though, that only producers from the local foodshed should be allowed (being within 50 miles by her definition) to sell at the markets. The biggest problem, says Tatman, is that there simply are not enough venues for local producers to sell their goods without unfair competition.

The city should continue to make more farmers markets available. These should be placed in different areas of town, to serve different segments of the population. Having multiple markets a week would also be useful to farmers who might experience the need to harvest and sell an entire crop within a short span of time. With the opportunity to vend at 3 or 4 markets a week, selling the surplus food would be made much easier. Multiple markets would also provide consistent and varied access to local food throughout the growing season.

Metropolitan Buyers Clubs

Joel Salatin recommended metropolitan buyers clubs as a way to distribute local food. These clubs are something he has worked with recently, where a community or neighborhood in a town or city buys large quantities of food together via a website. Due to the large orders that come from multiple families buying together, it becomes economically feasible for the farm to send a truck to deliver the food.

This method for distribution has been supported by every producer asked about it.

The city could create incentives for facilitating the creation of a website made to connect producers and consumers in the form of metropolitan buyers clubs. This kind of idea could be combined with distribution trucks that could pick up food on their normal route and deliver it to a set location in the City connected with a buyers club.

Deregulation/ Tiered Regulation

A tiered regulation system supports direct sale distribution of local food. Christine Solem and John Coles of Satyrfield Dairy Goat Farm suggested it as another way in which the City could encourage local distribution. Such a system would allow for small farmers to process and sell their own food according to their own methods. She mentioned that regulations placed on farmers markets, such as requiring all the producers selling any sort of processed food to have their kitchen inspected, has put many farmers markets out of business in the past. In addition, current regulations, such as pasteurization laws on milk, cheese, and cider have cut off the distribution of these items, and as a result adversely affected the amount of local distribution possible. According to Susie McRae, raw apple cider used to have an enormous market through Integral Yoga until it was no longer legal to sell.

Christine Solem says that the best assurance of safe food is in knowing your producer face to face. If that small producer is no longer allowed to sell their food due to tough regulations, consumers do not have the option to do this. Instead, they are forced to trust regulating agencies who generally work with huge businesses which have ample opportunity for oversight. As the consumer will not have the opportunity to meet either the agency or the large scale farmer in person, they cannot base their trust for food safety on a relationship or hold the grower personally accountable.

If Charlottesville were to create a tiered regulation system, the large producers would remain closely monitored, from whom most of the danger of contaminated food originates, according to Ms. Solem. Smaller farmers, who operate solely on a local scale, would be freed to produce, process, and distribute their food on their own, with minimal to no interference. This would vastly open up the opportunities for local food distribution in the Charlottesville area. Of course, if worries arose around issues of food safety, a tiered regulation system would be flexible enough to be tailored to fit the changing needs of the community and its farmers.

Bill McCaskill supported deregulation as well.

Liability and Cost Coverage

Liability is one of the major barriers creating to a successful local food system. The inability of small farms to acquire adequate insurance policies relegates them from selling to large distributors. To deal with this problem, the local government could extend its own blanket insurance to cover local farmers of a certain size and/or income. While this would cost for the local government, it would greatly increase the potential demand for local food via large distribution networks, thus increasing local production and enhancing the local economy. In the end, the government would be greatly supporting local food, with minimal interference to the farmer.

In general, local government should look for ways to cover unnecessary costs to the farmer, such as liability insurance, farmers market fees, etc. and thus support local food and its distribution by covering costs that frequently place unnecessary burdens on an already economically challenging field.

Internet

When it comes to facilitating local food distribution, the internet provides an incredible resource for the future. With minimal effort, groups of people can be connected instantaneously, and coordinating distribution through those groups becomes simple.

An approach a variety of localities have taken to strengthen local food systems has been the establishment of online farmers markets. These websites act as the liaison between consumers and producers. At the most basic level, such sites will provide information about the local farmers market itself by providing a database that includes which farms participate in that farmers market, what they provide when, as well as contact information for each farm. Another version allows consumers to use the website to place orders for the week. Those orders are then given to specific farms and on market day the consumer is able to arrive and pick up a ready made box containing their purchases. This approach allows farmers to better know what demand to expect while also shortening shopping time for consumers, which may increase their likelihood of attending the farmers market. The most elaborate of these systems essentially brings all aspects of the market to the Internet. On these sites people can not only order the products they want from the market but also have them delivered on market day. All the variations of this online system tend to produce an increased interest in buying local because they simplify the process and make the concept more accessible to many people through the use of Internet.

Another way the internet could increase local food distribution would be through coordinating farmers to grow varied and diverse crops so as to ensure that no one crop was produced in overabundance, and above market demand. Susie McRae, of Integral Yoga, stated that during the summer they often cannot buy the food farmers want to sell them, because everyone else wants to sell the same thing. If there were a service available to local farmers that helped them gauge what the demand for particular crops would be in a given year, as well as what crops could use more production, this would help make certain that as much locally grown food as possible could be sold. This kind of system could also be used to help orient growing power toward producing certain crops specifically for processing and storing them with the intention of winter distribution.

CONCLUSION

This proposal is meant to be a catalogue of a few of the myriad options available for creating a robust local distribution system in the Charlottesville area. It is by no means exhaustive. These ideas have come forth from the community, and therefore should be taken quite seriously. The community knows what it needs.

New precedents and case studies for successful community food systems arise every day. It is clear that communities all across the United States and world are making

the shift toward local food. Charlottesville should take heed of this, and begin making itself a model community by channeling energy and resources toward building a healthy local food system, including diversifying its means for distributing local food. In doing so, Charlottesville will be ensuring its future food security, community health and economic wellbeing.

In seeking to establish a strong, sustainable local food system, no one particular method for distribution should be considered the golden key. Instead, a diversity of options should be made available to both producers and consumers.

It is recommended that the local government adopt these stances and policies toward local food distribution:

- 1) Local Government should take responsibility for spearheading the effort to diversify the local food distribution system. This could be done by supporting:
 - a. The direct implementation of programs and creation of jobs to facilitate diversified local food distribution,
 - b. Making it easier for farmers to sell directly to consumers, and
 - c. Encouraging the local private sector to invest in local food by providing incentives for businesses and non-profits to get involved.
- 2) Local Government should create a Local Food Task Force to further study local food issues, including how to best diversify the local food distribution system.
- 3) Local Government should seek to educate the public as to the current and potential future options for obtaining local food.

Whatever Charlottesville decides to do, inaction is not a viable option. Considering the abundance of opportunity for supporting local food distribution, along with the clear reasons why doing so would benefit the community, it is up to us to come together as a community, take action, and make a concerted effort toward supporting our budding local food system.