

*Regional Food Business Centers*

# Action Plan

North Dakota Region 7 and 8

2023-2028

## Introduction

The regional action plan for southwest and south-central North Dakota covers a varied and large geographic area. It includes 7,841 farms of over 7 million acres of production land and roughly 4,000 farms that work with 882,672 inventoried livestock. The majority of these acres are used for large production of small grains. Agriculture is the backbone of the economy throughout many of the counties, however, production for local sale and consumption is a small portion of the ag work being done. The Bismarck/Mandan area is seeing benefits of having a regional foods coordinator in place to assist with farm to school efforts and farmer's market. Many other locations in the region are working to build awareness, accessibility and sustainability of producers and consumers for the local food system.

## Assessment Engagement

Public and industry engagement were facilitated through a comprehensive approach that encompassed a series of both in-person and virtual meetings, complemented by a producer survey. In-person sessions were conducted in both Region 7 and Region 8, specifically held in Dickinson, ND, on November 28, and Mandan, ND, on November 30, respectively. These meetings were open to the public, allowing broad participation from diverse stakeholders and residents interested in contributing to the conversation.

The primary objective of these hour-and-a-half-long meetings was to discern the prevailing dynamics within each region of focus. Attendees included representatives from various sectors, such as producers, NDSU extension, Dickinson SBDC, Billings County Commission (Region 8), Department of Ag, local farm-to-school procurement, school food department staff, and regional local foods programs (Region 7). The discussions aimed to identify gaps in the food value chain, assess successful initiatives, and uncover challenges encountered within the local food sector.

In Region 8, which spans Adams, Billings, Bowman, Dunn, Golden Valley, Hettinger, Slope, and Stark counties, key themes emerged, highlighting a strong interest among participants in supplying local foods to regional schools and enhancing awareness of locally available food options.

In Region 7, covering Burleigh, Emmons, Grant, Kidder, McLean, Mercer, Morton, Oliver, Sheridan, and Sioux counties, discussions centered around strategies to expand producer businesses, enabling increased integration of locally sourced food into school systems. Additionally, there was a focus on sustaining and expanding farm-to-school programs in the future.

To augment our understanding, a survey was conducted in collaboration with FARRMS, targeting all producers identified through FARRMS research. Developed in conjunction with the North Dakota Association of Rural Electric Cooperative Rural Development Coordinator, the survey aimed to span three weeks, gathering valuable insights to identify challenges and opportunities for growth within the local foods sector.

Attendance Count: 26

## Value Chain Mapping

There is potential for extensive value to be added to the local food systems. There are strong traditions around production and sharing of produce. Approaching it in a more systematic way and ensuring access is available to a diverse population of producers as well as on the consumer side will grow the local food systems and value chain. Barriers and new opportunities have also been identified. These are not fully inclusive and do not represent each individual circumstance but are a general overview of themes that arose through community input meetings.

Current	Potential

Agricultural Production	Education/Awareness	Processing, Transport, and Industry	Retail & Food Provisioning	Food Consumption	Food System Outcomes
Small Producers	Resource Development	Personal Transportation	Farmers Markets	Personal	Economic livelihood at each level
Mid-size Producers	Producer Education	Processing – Cottage Law	Vendor Shows	Friends	Food & Nutrition Security
Infrastructure	Consumer Education	Commercial Processing	Roadside Stands	Family	Sustainable growth, action, and mindset
Staff	Locally focused effort with manpower	Agritourism	Bismarck Public Schools	Outside Consumer	
		Inspections/Regulations	Rural Groceries		
			Institutions		
			Year-Round		

## Partners

- Farmers/Ranchers/Producers
- North Dakota Department of Ag
- FARRMS
- Schools
- North Dakota Association of Rural Electric Cooperatives
- Regional Councils
- Lenders
- Small Business Development Center
- NDSU Extension
- Farmer's Markets
- North Dakota Farmers Market and Growers Association
- North Dakota Local Food Development Alliance
- USDA
- Region 5 Development Commission
- North Dakota Women's Business Center
- Farmers Union

## Resource Development

<b>Strategy #1: Develop Newsletter</b>		
<b>Evaluation Metric:</b> Quarterly distribution of newsletter		
Action	Collaborators	Timeline
<b>1.1</b> Research and compile a list of available local food resources.	<b>Lead:</b> RCRC <b>Support:</b> Local food organizations and programs	Quarter 1, 2024
<b>1.2</b> Regularly update and maintain with new and updated information.	<b>Lead:</b> RCRC	Quarterly/Ongoing
<b>1.3</b> Make resource information available on RCRC website.	<b>Lead:</b> RCRC	Quarterly/Ongoing
<b>Strategy #2: Understanding and Leveraging Local Food System Resources</b>		
<b>Evaluation Metric:</b> Connect with ten contacts per quarter		
<b>2.1</b> Foster collaboration with other organizations to ensure a unified approach	<b>Lead:</b> RCRC <b>Support:</b> Department of Ag, local food organizations and programs	Ongoing
<b>2.2</b> Hold meetings with producers to enhance their understanding of available resources.	<b>Lead:</b> RCRC <b>Support:</b> Producers and small local foods businesses	Ongoing
<b>2.3</b> Identify key leading partners that are active throughout the region	<b>Lead:</b> RCRC <b>Support:</b> Local food organizations, producers, and other stakeholders	Ongoing
<b>Strategy #3: Intermediary Relending Program for small local foods businesses and producers</b>		
<b>Evaluation Metric:</b> Two additional funding pools created		
<b>3.1</b> Establish through Roosevelt Custer to serve region 8.	<b>Lead:</b> RCRC <b>Support:</b> USDA Rural Development, lenders	Request fund in 2025 Available for lending 2026
<b>3.2</b> Establish through Lewis and Clark Development to serve region 7.	<b>Lead:</b> Lewis and Clark Development Group <b>Support:</b> RCRC, USDA Rural Development, lenders	Request fund in 2025 Available for lending 2026
<b>3.3</b> Promote and market funding with partners throughout the region.	<b>Lead:</b> RCRC <b>Support:</b> Lenders, local development organizations	Ongoing after funding pools available for lending

## Technical Assistance

### Strategy #1: Promote Farm-to-School Program

**Evaluation Metric:** Develop packet, contact with minimum of 20 School Districts and other institutions, knowledge and access to forms necessary to pursue distribution to institutions

Action	Collaborators	Timeline
1.1 Establish and maintain direct contact with local schools to provide tailored assistance and support.	<b>Lead:</b> RCRC <b>Support:</b> School districts, Farm-to-School program	Research quarter 4 of 2024 Connect with schools' quarter 1 and 2 of 2025 Work with connecting producers 2026
1.2 Develop Farm-to-School Program best practices packet.	<b>Lead:</b> RCRC <b>Support:</b> Farm-to-School program	Release in 2027
1.3 Assistance to producers in navigating rules, regulations, and policies in distributing food to institutions.	<b>Lead:</b> RCRC <b>Support:</b> Farm-to-School program, producers, Department of Ag, and other local food programs	Research and learning 2024 Offering service 2025

### Strategy #2: Growth plan/business plan/financial access

**Evaluation Metric:** Create Business Plan Template, List of Financial Resources available to producers/processors, Business Plan Template with special attention to scalability, fourteen minimum Applications for funding submitted

2.1 Create a growth plan template tailored to local farmers and producers.	<b>Lead:</b> RCRC <b>Support:</b> Small Business Development Center	2024
2.2 Offer business planning resources	<b>Lead:</b> RCRC	Ongoing
2.3 Assist with application process for available funding options	<b>Lead:</b> RCRC	Ongoing

### Strategy #3: Video Tutorials

**Evaluation Metric:** Create or share three to five video tutorials pertinent to Region 7 & 8's needs that will be located on an accessible website

3.1 Establish areas of assistance needed.	<b>Lead:</b> RCRC <b>Support:</b> Producers and stakeholders	2025
3.2 Produce tutorials	<b>Lead:</b> RCRC	2027
3.3 Promote and market	<b>Lead:</b> RCRC	Ongoing after implementation

## Regional Sustainability

### Strategy #1: Local Foods Coordinator

**Evaluation Metric:** Feasibility Study

Action	Collaborators	Timeline
1.1 Explore feasibility of position.	<b>Lead:</b> RCRC <b>Support:</b> Local Foods Coordinator Bismarck, school districts	2026
1.2 Determine sustainability and support.	<b>Lead:</b> RCRC <b>Support:</b> School districts, local government organizations	2027

### Strategy #2: Support Farmer's Markets in communities that don't currently have one

**Evaluation Metric:** Feasibility Study

2.1 Determine feasibility.	<b>Lead:</b> RCRC <b>Support:</b> Producers and stakeholders, local farmer's market organizations	2025
2.2 Engage community members active and interested in local food systems or other organizations.	<b>Lead:</b> RCRC <b>Support:</b> Communities, producers, and stakeholders	2025
2.3 Work through the start-up and sustainability of an on-going Farmers Market with the local interested group.	<b>Lead:</b> RCRC <b>Support:</b> communities	2026

### Strategy #3: Stakeholder Engagement

**Evaluation Metric:** Number of active participants in programs and giving feedback

3.1 Identify and establish relationships with key stakeholders throughout the region.	<b>Lead:</b> RCRC <b>Support:</b> Producers, stakeholders, local food programs	Ongoing
3.2 Yearly Action plan evaluation.	<b>Lead:</b> RCRC	Annually
3.3 Establish a monitoring system to track progress of action plan and initiatives derived from the action plan.	<b>Lead:</b> RCRC	Quarter 1, 2024