

North Dakota Statewide Local Foods Action Plan

North Central Regional Food Business Center

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Assembled by



North Dakota Rural Electric Cooperatives
Foundation



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This North Dakota local foods action plan is a product of the USDA's Regional Food Business Center (RFBC) initiative, developed by the North Dakota partners located within the North Central RFBC, which is a tri-state region that encompasses North Dakota, South Dakota, and Minnesota.

The plan contains key objectives, strategies, and tasks intended to strengthen and increase the resiliency of our state's local foods system.

"Local foods" are the foods we grow, produce or process right here in our own communities, and sold directly to the end user. Local foods have long been identified with high quality, nutrition, and freshness. To borrow the National Good Food Network's definition of "good food," local foods are food products and practices that are healthy for the body, green for the planet, fair for producers and workers, and affordable for all.

Local foods systems are comprised of many elements, including production, harvesting, storing, transporting, processing, packaging, marketing, and retailing of the food. Effective system operation requires a coordinated effort of the farmer, suppliers, buyers, and government. Equally important to an effective local foods initiative is a marketing and promotional campaign where the community understands the importance of the value of the foods produced, both economically and nutritionally.

Some of the advantages of a successful local food system are:

- Reduced food costs
- Increased number of producers
- Increased income/profitability for family farms
- Increased employment
- New wealth generated
- Strengthened local economy

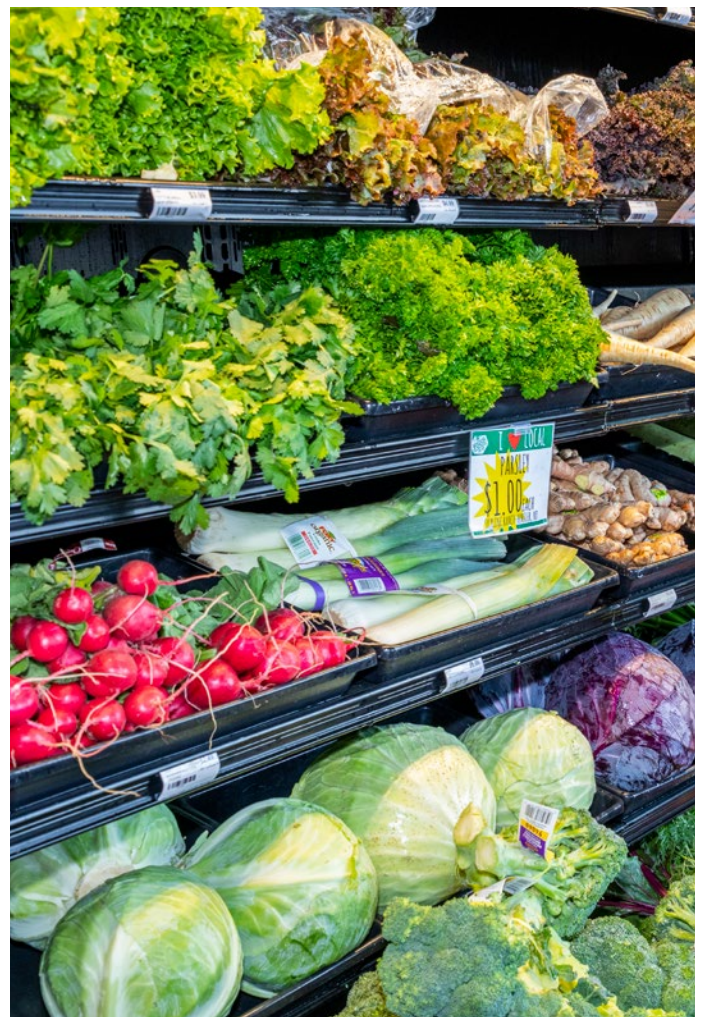
A primary challenge associated with these efforts has been, and continues to be, effective coordination and collaboration of resources and stakeholders. This list of stakeholders includes producers, technical assistance providers, resource providers, and consumers.

Collaboration among stakeholders is crucial for the success of local food initiatives. This North Dakota Statewide Local Foods Action Plan is intended to encourage partnerships between government agencies, agricultural organizations, nonprofits, and community groups to leverage resources, share best practices, and foster innovation in local food production and distribution.

Recognizing the economic, environmental, and health benefits of supporting local food production and consumption, this action plan outlines three key opportunities and strategies to enhance the vitality of North Dakota's agricultural sector while fostering community resilience and wellness.

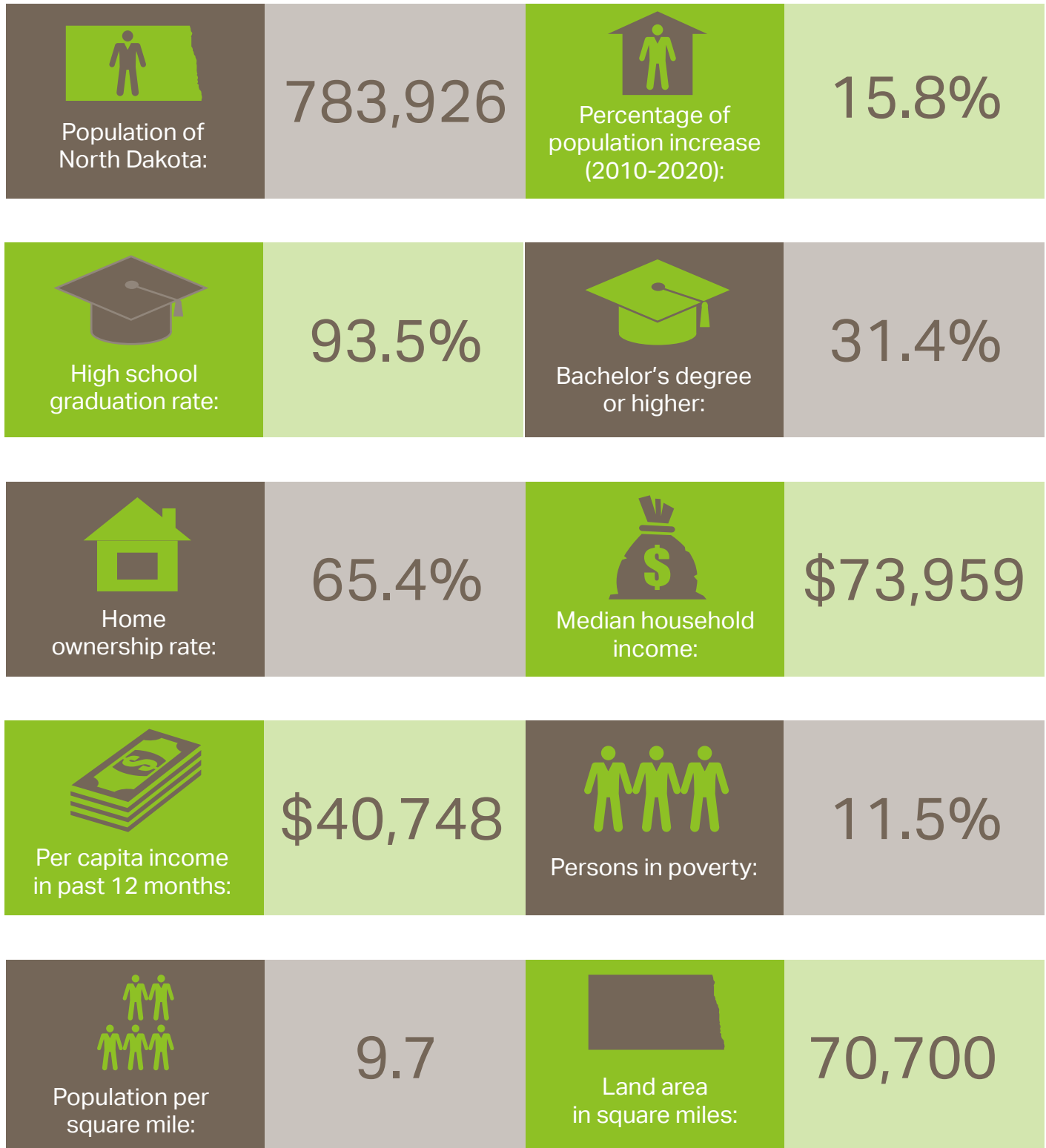
Key Plan Objectives:

- 1. Increase public awareness and support for local food systems:** Educating consumers about the benefits of local foods and empowering them to make informed choices is essential.
- 2. Support growth of businesses and market expansion within the food supply chain:** Efforts will be focused on improving market access for local farmers and producers by facilitating partnerships with retailers, institutions, and food service providers.
- 3. Educate and advocate:** Producers and technical assistance providers must be provided access to educational opportunities that enhance current practices and help develop new capacities and abilities. There must also be efforts to develop unified messaging to help stakeholders advocate for the continuation of policies, laws, regulations, etc. that favor the growth and enhanced resilience of local foods systems.



NORTH DAKOTA DEMOGRAPHICS

As of July 2023, North Dakota's population was 783,926, which shows an increase of 0.62% from the 2020 Census. Here is a capsule of some demographics that might be good to keep in mind as a local foods system plan is developed.

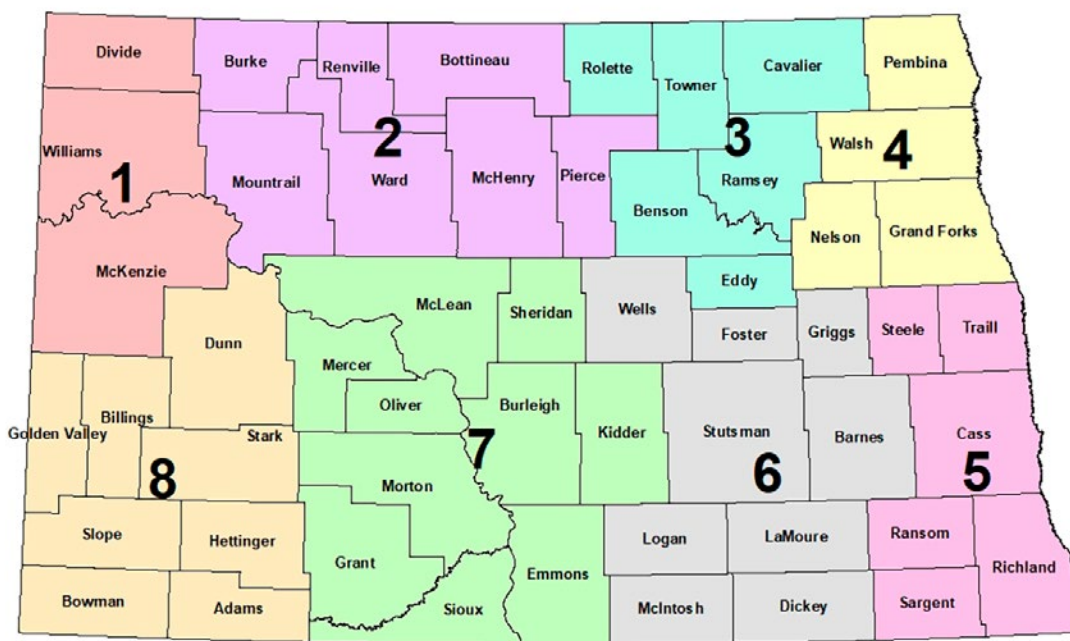


PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT PROCESS

A system's output is only as good as its inputs. This statewide plan is an aggregation of months of public engagement efforts conducted by North Dakota's Regional Councils and other technical assistance providers.

The robust public engagement efforts included public listening sessions, which were attended by stakeholders through the local foods value chain, as well as a statewide survey of local foods producers that garnered 61 complete responses.

REGIONAL COUNCILS



- Region 1** – Tri-County Regional Development Council, Williston, ND
- Region 2** – Souris Basin Planning Council, Minot, ND
- Region 3** – North Central Planning Council, Devils Lake, ND
- Region 4** – Red River Regional Council, Grafton, ND
- Region 5** – Lake Agassiz Development Group, Fargo, ND
- Region 6** – South Central Dakota Regional Council, Jamestown, ND
- Region 7** – Lewis and Clark Development Group, Mandan, ND
- Region 8** – Roosevelt Custer Regional Council, Bowman, ND

KEY OPPORTUNITIES

From the regional action plans and producer survey results, there were three top opportunities identified as the focus of the North Dakota partners of the North Central Regional Food Business Center partners going forward:

1. Increase public awareness and support for local food systems
2. Support growth of businesses and market expansion within the food supply chain
3. Educate and advocate

Within each area are identified tasks, collaborators, timelines for such tasks and how progress will be measured.

OPPORTUNITY #1

Increase public awareness and support for local food systems



STRATEGY

Create and maintain public-facing web presence for sharing services and successes

Tasks		Project Lead / Resource Provider	Timeline (calendar year)	Evaluation Metrics
1.1	Develop individual state pages on NC-RFBC website	Region Five Development Commission	Q3 2024	Page engagement data
1.2	Share successes on North Dakota's page on the NC-RFBC website (one story per TA provider per year)	Coordinator North Dakota RFBC partners	Q3 2024-2028	Page engagement data
1.3	Create North Dakota-specific Resources page that lists NC-RFBC partner programs (w/ links) Organize list of resources based on applicant's need – Education, Funding, etc.— with subheads (e.g., season extension, business planning, etc.)	Coordinator ND RFBC partners, USDA, Dept. of Ag, NDSU Ext., FARRMS, FSMA	Q4 2024	Page engagement data
1.4	Create general project assistance inquiry form that after submission would be disseminated to RFBC partner group; post form to Resource page	Coordinator	Q3 2024	Form usage data
1.5	Create archive of RFBC media articles and videos on ND NC-RFBC page (Coordinator places quarterly requests to ND RFBC partners for submissions)	Coordinator ND RFBC partners	Q3 2024 – creation (ongoing maintenance)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ND RFBC partner submissions • Archive engagement data
1.6	Share successes on social media (#NC-RFBC)	RFBC Partners, Evaluator	Q3 2024 – begin (ongoing sharing)	Post engagement metrics

STRATEGY

Inform media of successes



Tasks		Project Lead / Resource Provider	Timeline	Evaluation Metrics
1.7	Provide talking points/press release template to RFBC partners (post on SharePoint, refresh as needed)	Region 5 Development Commission	Q2 2024	SharePoint resource engagement data
1.8	Generate and distribute press releases	RFBC partners	Q2 2024 (ongoing as needed)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of press releases published • Publication of press releases by media outlets

STRATEGY

Enhance consumer education



Tasks		Project Lead / Resource Provider	Timeline	Evaluation Metrics
1.9	Share economic impact study data showing benefits of purchasing local foods (e.g., generate stories with food buyers showing community impact) (reference Task #3.12)	RFBC partners	Q2 2026	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Online engagement data • Usage amount of data during advocacy efforts
1.10	Educate RFBC partners on existing resources and promote existing local food content for regions to use in school districts	RFBC TA providers, Coordinator ND Dept. of Public Instruction, ND Dept. of Ag (Farm to School)	Q1 2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of trainings • Number of training participants
1.11	Support existing programs that educate K-12 students on the importance of local foods (nutrition, economic impact, environmental impact) and career opportunities; identify gaps in curriculum; seek funding to support education/ events	Advisory TA Provider, Coordinator, TA Providers Mobile Meats Lab, FFA, 4-H, ND Dept of Health, NDSU Ext. (curriculum resources), ND Ag Dept. (Ag in the Classroom – local foods component), Living Ag, Farm to School), ND Dept. of Public Instruction, commodity groups (K-12 outreach)	Q2 2024-2028	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of educational programs that include local foods components • Educational gaps filled • Funding secured

OPPORTUNITY #2

Support growth of businesses and market expansion within the food supply chain



STRATEGY

Provide direct technical assistance

Tasks		Project Lead / Resource Provider	Timeline	Evaluation Metrics
2.1	Increase access to business planning resources and capital for emerging and expanding local food businesses via technical assistance (e.g., write grant and loan apps, business planning, financial forecasting)	TA providers, Evaluator Small Business Development Center, North Dakota Farm Management	Q2 2024-2028	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Food and farm business/producer consultations and applications each year • Enterprises created and expanded • Jobs created and retained • Grant dollars secured, financing secured, and dollars leveraged • New or improved infrastructure developed • Completed environmental reviews completed • Acres in production, protected, or restored
2.2	Refer producers and food businesses in need to resource providers	TA providers	Q2 2024-2028	Number of referrals each year

STRATEGY

Explore potential development of mutually owned and operated food hubs, shared processing space and farm/food incubators (activity initiated by RFBC partners)



Tasks		Project Lead / Resource Provider	Timeline	Evaluation Metrics
2.3	Provide business development guidance: Identify stakeholders, conduct exploratory meetings, gauge/generate stakeholder support, raise funds, conduct feasibility study	TA providers	Q2 2024-2028	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of meetings held • Funds raised • Number of studies completed • Number of jobs created and retained • Number of enterprises created and expanded • Amount of new or improved infrastructure developed • Environmental reviews completed • Acres in production, protected, or restored

STRATEGY

Provide community assistance to assess feasibility of, and to form, farmers markets and community gardens



Tasks		Project Lead / Resource Provider	Timeline	Evaluation Metrics
2.4	Guide community through feasibility assessment using existing resources	TA providers NDFMGA, NDSU Ext.	Q2 2024-2028	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of assessments completed • Number of new farmers markets created

STRATEGY

Provide centralized resources



Tasks		Project Lead / Resource Provider	Timeline	Evaluation Metrics
2.5	Conduct baseline surveys to determine production volume (producers) and market size (institutions, businesses, schools)	Advisory TA provider, TA providers	Q3 2024-2025	Survey completions
2.6	Compile resources for TA providers: best practices, templates, links, contacts, video tutorials – regularly test links to ensure they're active	Coordinator TA providers, Evaluator, Advisory TA provider	Q2 2024-2028	Page engagement metrics
2.7	Create and maintain slate of requirements for smaller spoke facilities, including state and federal regulations, equipment needs, etc. (link to state and federal pages)	TA providers (w/ support of Advisory TA provider, Coordinator, Evaluator) Dept. of Ag., Dept. of Health, USDA, Local Health Districts	Q3 2024	Page engagement metrics
2.8	Investigate access to and acquire statewide consumer consumption pattern data (where food is purchased, amount of produce consumed, etc.)	TA providers ND University System, ND Dept. of Commerce, ND Women's Business Center	Q2 2024-2025	N/A

STRATEGY

Create tools to enhance producer marketing



Tasks		Project Lead / Resource Provider	Timeline	Evaluation Metrics
2.9	For producers: Create email list of food producers, stakeholders, and resource providers, and serve as liaison between producers and interested local foods buyers	TA providers Dept. of Ag, FARRMS	Q2 2024-2028	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of new markets generated • Number of producers benefitted

STRATEGY

Increase statewide capacity of TA providers with specialized expertise in food supply chain



Tasks		Project Lead / Resource Provider	Timeline	Evaluation Metrics
2.10	Write grant applications to support TA capacity growth; explore staff-sharing possibilities between TA providers	TA providers	Q2 2024-2028	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Funding secured to grow capacity Successful staff-sharing between TA providers

OPPORTUNITY #3

Educate and Advocate



STRATEGY

Conduct producer education

Tasks		Project Lead / Resource Provider	Timeline	Evaluation Metrics
3.1	Create central calendar of existing trainings; enlist speakers and execute as needed	Advisory TA provider FARRMS, NDSU Ext.	Q2 2024-2028	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Page/calendar engagement metrics Number of trainings Number of session participants
3.2	Conduct education on market access (Farm to School, farmers markets/direct sales, groceries, etc.) (one training per year)	Advisory TA provider ND Dept. of Ag, NDSU Ext., FARRMS, NDFMGA, Dept. of Public Instruction, NDLFDA	Q4 2024-2028	Number of producers entering new market
3.3	Conduct education on production practices to lengthen growing seasons; train on climate-smart strategies, adaptations, and practices (one training per year)	Advisory TA provider NDSU Extension, Dakota College at Bottineau, FARRMS, NDFMGA	Q4 2024-2028	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of producers implementing new production methods Amount of new or improved infrastructure developed
3.4	Provide business startup and operation training; food safety standards and regulations training (one training per year)	Advisory TA provider FARRMS, Small Business Development Center, NDSU Extension, producers, ND Farm Management Education Association, ND Dept. of Health	Q4 2024-2028	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of new business startups Number of producers adopting new operating standards Amount of new or improved infrastructure developed

STRATEGY

Conduct producer education (*continued*)



Tasks		Project Lead / Resource Provider	Timeline	Evaluation Metrics
3.5	Educate on value-added processing – business development, marketing (to include going to scale and emerging markets) (one training per year)	Advisory TA provider Dept. of Ag., NDSU Extension, producers, FARRMS, Local Health Districts, ND Women's Business Center	Q4 2024-2028	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of attendees • Number of producers increasing engagement in value chain activities • Amount of new or improved infrastructure developed

STRATEGY

Conduct TA provider education



Tasks		Project Lead / Resource Provider	Timeline	Evaluation Metrics
3.6	Create annual calendar of topics, enlist speakers, and execute; audience can be expanded to include RFBC partner boards and stakeholders (peer-to-peer learning and networking—to include food hub cross-learning)	Coordinator	Q2 2024-2028	Number of trainings and participants
3.7	Advocacy education (one training per year)	TA providers	Q2 2024-2028	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of organizations and networks engaged and implementing new ideas • Number of policies and programs supporting value chain strategies

STRATEGY

Collect information, develop unified messaging among partners and advocates; involve external stakeholders as appropriate



Tasks		Project Lead / Resource Provider	Timeline	Evaluation Metrics
3.8	Advocate for favorable zoning and land use regulations (city/county/state/federal)	TA providers Producers	Q2 2024-2028	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of organizations and networks engaged • Number of policies and programs supporting value chain strategies • Instances of collaboration on advocacy messaging

Tasks		Project Lead / Resource Provider	Timeline	Evaluation Metrics
3.9	Advocate for favorable regulations for selling local produce to institutions	TA providers Dept. of Ag, Producers, Local Health Districts, NDSU Ext.	Q2 2024-2028	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of organizations and networks engaged • Number of policies and programs supporting value chain strategies • Instances of collaboration on advocacy messaging
3.10	Encourage continuation or development of local foods assistance programs (USDA Local Food Purchase Assistance Program, ID opportunities for collective RFBC advocacy)	Coordinator (w/ support of TA providers) Dept. of Ag (LFPA grant), Great Plains Food Bank	Q2 2024-2028	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of organizations and networks engaged • Number of policies and programs supporting value chain strategies • Instances of collaboration on advocacy messaging
3.11	Develop talking points to assist partners with engaging local units of government	TA providers	Q2 2024-2028	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of organizations and networks engaged and using talking points • Number of policies and programs supporting value chain strategies
3.12	Conduct economic impact study examining benefits of purchasing local foods – write grant to fund, steering committee to oversee	TA providers	Q1 2025-Q1 2026	N/A
3.13	Identify unmet training needs of farm workers, inform higher education entities of unmet needs (meat cutting, food handling/safety training,) (biennial producer/local food processing business roundtables)	TA providers Dept. of Ag (free produce safety and GAP training, Good Agricultural Manuals), FARRMS, NDSU Ext.	Q2 2024-2028	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Needs communicated to higher ed. entities • Number of roundtables held • Roundtable attendance and engagement

STRATEGY

Networking and collaboration

Tasks		Project Lead / Resource Provider	Timeline	Evaluation Metrics
3.14	Host networking opportunities via summits, workshops, or webinars (Farm to School-connect schools and producers; rural grocers to restaurants; government) (one event per year)	RFBC planning committee – one person from each partnering staff	Q2 2024-2028	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of participants • Number of new participants • Event attendee survey results

MEASURING SUCCESS

As with the quality of system inputs, regular assessment and accountability are also critical to any effective, successful action plan.

The North Dakota RFBC partners will review this plan regularly to ensure it continues serving its intended purpose, and that task outcomes are being evaluated, measured, and recorded. Thus, this plan will serve as a living document and be updated as needed, beyond the five-year span of the USDA's RFBC initiative.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This North Dakota Statewide Local Foods Action Plan represents a collective effort to build a more resilient, equitable, and vibrant food system that benefits farmers, consumers, and communities alike. By implementing the strategies outlined in this plan, North Dakota can harness the full potential of its agricultural resources while promoting economic development, environmental stewardship, and public health across the state.

In accordance with the USDA's RFBC initiative, this plan is written to satisfy a five-year window. It is our hope, however, that it serves as a comprehensive strategy that promotes the development, accessibility, and sustainability of local food systems across the state for many years to come.

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