

Keep Berkshires Farming Sub-regional Action Plan Central Berkshire Region

A product of the *Sustainable Berkshires*,
Long-Range Plan for Berkshire County and the Glynwood Keep Farming
program



Sustainable Berkshires is a project of the
Berkshire Regional Planning Commission.



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Keep Berkshires Farming: Central Berkshire Region Action Plan

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Glynwood's Keep Farming® program served as the basis for the Keep Berkshires Farming planning process and a good portion of Glynwood's staff time over the three-year effort was contributed as in-kind support. Glynwood provided overall guidance throughout, facilitated and presented at team meetings and community events and will remain in touch with community volunteers to support implementation moving forward.



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Introduction

Keep Berkshires Farming is a community-driven initiative aimed at supporting and strengthening local agriculture to build a strong and healthy regional food system. This planning process involves engaging a diverse set of stakeholders in gathering and analyzing data about the current state of agriculture in order to better understand existing production conditions, demand dynamics for local agricultural products or commodities, and related barriers or challenges. The data is then used to inform decision-making and prioritize specific strategies the community may undertake to support a vibrant agricultural economy.

This action plan contains key findings from this data gathering process and the resulting strategies for the towns in the central KBF group: Hancock, Lanesborough, Pittsfield, Dalton, Hinsdale, Peru, Windsor, Richmond, West Stockbridge, Stockbridge, Lee, Lenox, Washington, Becket, Otis, Tyringham, Monterey, Sandisfield and New Marlborough are in the Central region.



Agriculture has a deep history in the Berkshires and is still prominent in the local landscape and culture. In this picture, cows graze pasture on Leahey Farm in Lee. Source: Caroline Alexander's Berkshire Food Journal.

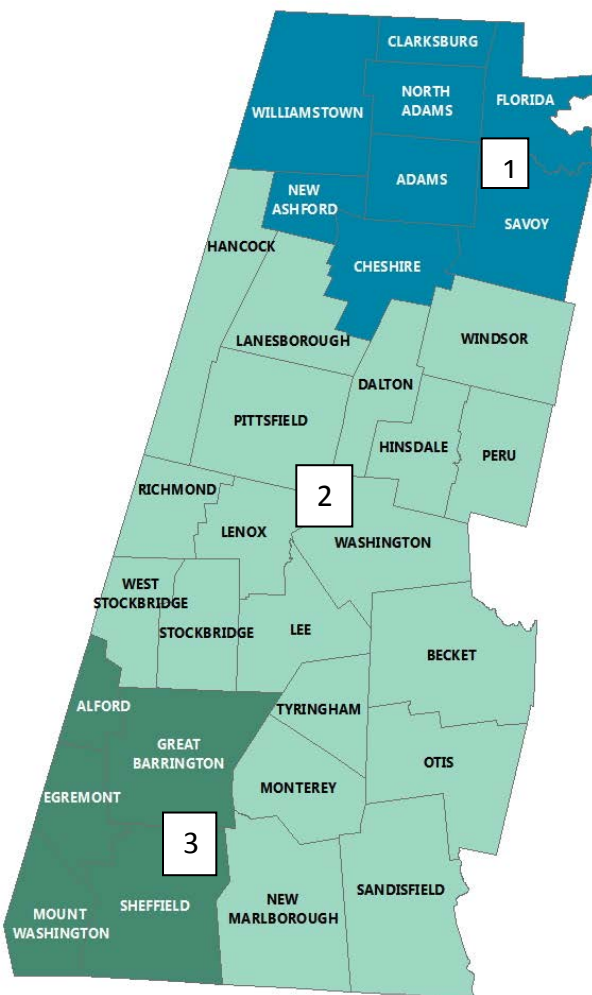
BACKGROUND

The countywide Keep Berkshires Farming initiative began with a phone call. The Great Barrington Agricultural Commission contacted Glynwood to learn about their community-based Keep Farming program as the town sought ways to better support their local food and farming. It was quickly recognized, however, that farm fields don't start and stop at municipal boundaries and that, while markets for farm products may be concentrated in some towns like

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Great Barrington, the farms that supply these markets are located in nearby towns. Development of a new regional plan for the Berkshires, Sustainable Berkshires, was just getting underway by the Berkshire Regional Planning Commission (BRPC). The new plan sets long-range regional goals and strategies in a comprehensive list of topics, including land use, economy, natural resources, social conditions, housing, and infrastructure. One objective of the plan was to better understand local food and agriculture in the Berkshires and how we can best support agricultural profitability and enhanced access to local, healthy food now and in the future.

Since agriculture had already been identified as an important topic for the regional plan, the decision was made to coordinate efforts. In order to include this work in the Sustainable Berkshires plan, the Keep Farming initiative was expanded countywide and Keep Berkshires Farming was born. BRPC and Glynwood worked with communities in three sub regions, as shown on the following map:



Community Working Groups

The 32 communities of Berkshire County were divided into three working groups.

1. North
2. Central
3. South

The towns of Hancock, Lanesborough, Pittsfield, Dalton, Hinsdale, Peru, Windsor, Richmond, West Stockbridge, Stockbridge, Lee, Lenox, Washington, Becket, Otis, Tyngham, Monterey, Sandisfield and New Marlborough are in the Central region.

THE KEEP BERKSHIRES FARMING PROCESS

Keep Berkshires Farming is based on the Keep Farming® process developed by Glynwood, adapted into a regional approach for the Berkshires. The county was divided up into three regions, each with a team of representatives from towns within the region.

The process consists of three phases:

- Phase I – Mobilize Your Community for Success
- Phase II – Data and Analysis
- Phase III – Strategies for a Healthy Food System

The Keep Farming methodology is different than other planning processes in the following key ways:

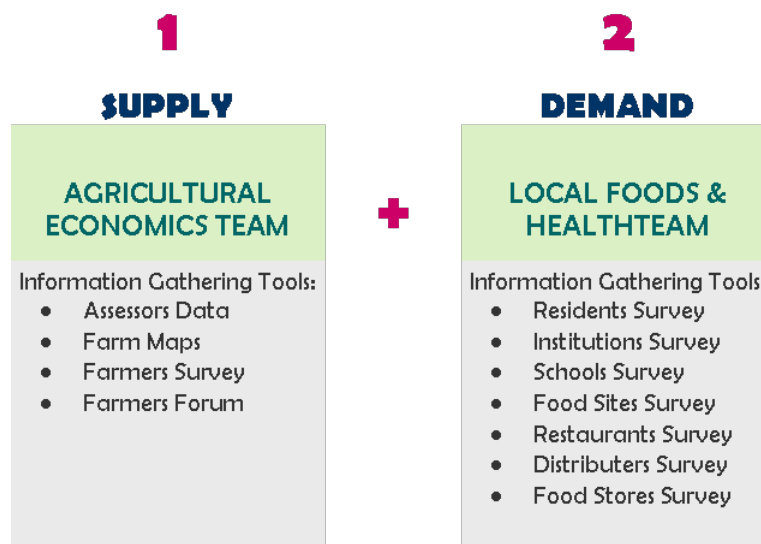
- ✓ Provides local data to the community that is not otherwise readily available
- ✓ Involves diverse stakeholders throughout the process, including farmers
- ✓ Supports the agricultural economy by connecting producers to local markets
- ✓ Communities develop their own strategies to support farms in their area by choosing tools and actions most appropriate to their situation
- ✓ Community-based process creates relationships and dialogue that result in implementation

OUR PROCESS

The Keep Berkshires Farming process is based in two main components:

Gathering Original Data

Original data was gathered using a variety of survey, map, and interview tools in order to enhance knowledge of local food production and distribution with the aim of improving market connections. This was achieved through the hard work and dedication of community volunteers working in two teams to gather existing and original data on supply and demand dynamics within the local food system.



Building Community Capital

Building community capital – the connections, relationships, and common understanding among those who use and consume local food is a key attribute of the process. This was achieved through the design of the process itself. At the most basic level, the fact that the work was largely completed by community volunteers means that there was already teamwork and collaboration inherent to the process. Volunteers came to the process with a wide range of interests and backgrounds from farmers to chefs, health professionals to land trusts. Volunteers helped spread the word, tailored the process and events in ways that would resonate with others in their communities, and presented at the community events.



Open meetings were held throughout each of the three phases of the planning process – from initial information meetings to gather volunteers and spread the word about the initiative to the final community forum designed to share the draft action plan and strategies.

Volunteer Motivation

At the outset of the project, community conversations focused on the reasons volunteers wanted to contribute their time to the project. Some common motivations, which also help illustrate the range of people involved in the process, included:

- Old and new farmers wanting to ensure conversations on the subject represented their interests in an accurate way.
- Old and new farmers who believe in their products and know some of the regulatory, market, and infrastructure challenges facing small farmers.
- Desire to see local agriculture better represented in economic development discussions
- Commitment to community health and a belief in slow foods and whole foods.
- Businesses that know the market potential of local food and want to see more food available.
- A belief that local food is an essential component of long-term local resiliency in the context of climate change and transitioning energy landscape.
- An understanding that both hunger and poor nutrition are health challenges in our communities.
- A love of the rural landscape and desire to see farms remain a prominent feature of that landscape.
- A love of all that is local in the Berkshires, including its yummy food!

Current State of Agriculture in Central Berkshire

The following sections highlight some of the key findings from the agricultural economics (supply) and local foods and health (demand) teams.

The Central Berkshire region's farms are in concentrated areas, including Lee, Windsor, Dalton, Pittsfield and Lanesborough. West Stockbridge and Stockbridge have fewer, but larger farms. Twelve percent of agricultural land in Central Berkshire is permanently protected in the Massachusetts' Agriculture Preservation Restriction (APR) program.

SUPPLY: CURRENT AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION

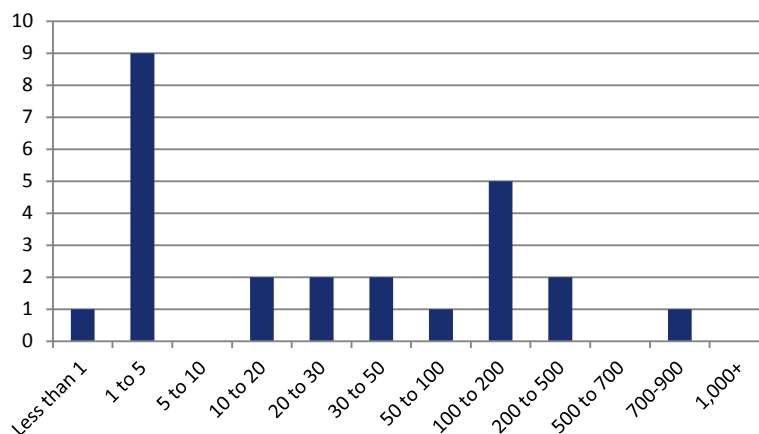
The Agricultural Economics team conducted surveys of farmers to gather local data on what farmers are producing on their land, how much of their land is actively used, and future business development areas farmers would like to explore. The twenty seven farmers represented in the survey effort provide important insight into the existing conditions, challenges and opportunities of planning for and maintaining a vibrant food system in both the Central region as well as the larger Berkshire region as a whole.

Table 1: Profile of Farmers Responding to the Survey

Average # of years farming	36.9
Average # of years farm in family	51.2
Average # acres owned	95.6
Average # acres farmed	108.4

Source: Keep Berkshires Farming Forums (2012)

Figure 1: Farm Size (acres) by Number of Farms



Source: Keep Berkshires Farming Farmer Survey (2012)

Central region farms range in size: from less than an acre to 800 acres. In the group of farmers who participated in the Keep Berkshires Farming survey, nine reported farming between one and five acres, while the second largest group indicated farming between 100 and 200 acres.

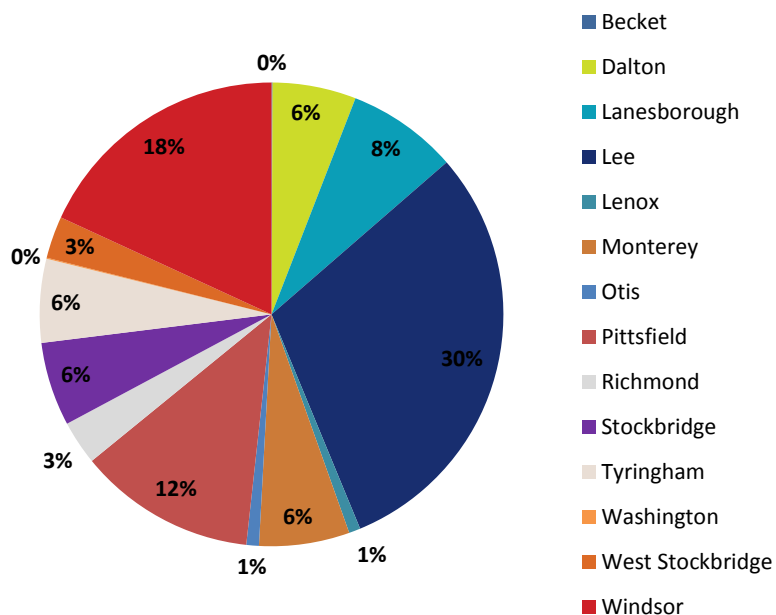
In addition to the surveys, farm maps were created for each of the nineteen towns in collaboration with the Berkshire Regional Planning Commission, area farmers, and tax assessors.

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These maps provide more insight into the total number of farms in any given community, the size of those farms, protection status, and tax incentive program participation.

Agricultural Land and Farms

Figure 2: Location of Central Berkshire Agricultural Lands



Source: Keep Berkshires Farming Forums (2012)

Table 2: Land and Farms by Community

	Acres in Agriculture	Farms
Hancock*	--	3
Lanesborough	1206.1	9
Pittsfield	1932.8	24
Dalton	910	7
Becket	11.3	1
Hinsdale	--	0
Peru*	--	0
Windsor	2832.2	9
Richmond	479.8	3
West Stockbridge	458.5	5
Stockbridge	913.4	1
Lee	4707.2	32
Lenox	125.4	2
Washington	10.9	1
Otis	136.5	1
Tyringham	910.3	6
Monterey	984.7	5
Sandisfield*	--	3
New Marlborough*	--	3
Total	15,619.1	115

Source: Mass GIS, tax assessor parcel records (2012)

The starred communities did not provide farm maps.

Through Keep Berkshires Farming, 115 farms in the central region were identified. The average farm size in the region is 108.4 acres, lower than the entire county average of 127 acres. The town of Lee has the greatest number of acres in agriculture, with 4,707.2 acres, while Washington has the least, with 10.9 acres. The Town of Lee also has the greatest number of farms, with thirty two, and in the planning process, it became evident that the Agricultural Commission in Lee is very active, and had even worked with the Town to exempt farm

equipment from property taxes, which farmers recognized as a positive impact to their farming efforts. No farms were identified in Peru or Hinsdale, although it is suspected that there are some forestry operations in these communities.

LAND IN PRODUCTION

The nineteen towns in the Central region KBF group together represent 15,619 acres of land in agricultural use as classified by assessor. Of this land, 12% is permanently protected through the state's Agricultural Preservation Restriction (APR) program. This program specifically targets prime agricultural soils; 4.5% of lands with prime agricultural soils are currently protected from future development through this program. Dalton is the most active of the 19 towns participating in the APR program with 54% of its agricultural acres protected in APR. The town of Tyringham has the highest percentage of prime agricultural soils permanently protected, with 14.6% of prime agricultural soils in APR. Lee, Windsor and Pittsfield have the highest number of acres in agriculture.

Table 3: Profile of Agricultural Land by Community

	Parcel Acres in Agriculture	Prime Agricultural Soils in Existing Farmed properties	Non-Prime Soils currently farmed	Farm Acres in APR	Farm acres in Chapter 61/61A	Percent Agriculture Acres in APR	Total Percent Prime Ag in APR
Becket	11.3	--	11.3	--	--	--	--
Dalton	910.0	319.4	590.6	491.3	549.6	54.0%	14.2%
Hancock	--	--	--	--	--	--	6.1%
Hinsdale	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
Lanesborough	1,206.1	165.4	1,040.7	339.0	851.0	28.1%	4.5%
Lee	4,707.2	1,717.1	2,990.1	214.8	13,195.5	4.6%	3.0%
Lenox	125.4	14.9	110.5	--	--	--	--
Monterey	984.7	63.3	921.5	244.6	131.3	24.8%	9.7%
New Marlborough	--	--	--	--	--	--	5.5%
Otis	136.5	--	136.5	--	11.2	--	--
Peru	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
Pittsfield	1,932.8	495.2	1,437.6	135.9	1,210.1	7.0%	2.5%
Richmond	479.8	113.8	366.0	--	768.8	--	--
Sandisfield	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
Stockbridge	913.4	90.5	822.9	--	--	--	--
Tyringham	910.3	129.6	780.7	480.7	315.1	52.8%	14.6%
Washington	10.9	0.8	10.1	--	--	--	--
West Stockbridge	458.5	28.3	430.1	--	381.6	--	--
Windsor	2,832.2	2.8	2,829.4	3.7	1,130.1	0.1%	0.2%
Total	15,619.1	3,141.2	12,477.9	1,910.1	18,544.4	12.2%	4.5%

Source: Mass GIS, tax assessor parcel records, 2012

The starred communities did not have information provided.

Prime Agricultural Soils

Of the 15,619 acres of parcel acres in agricultural use in the Central region, 3,141 acres are prime agricultural soils. More acres are farmed that are non-prime soils: 12,477.9 acres. Lee has the highest number of acres of prime agricultural soils: 1,717 acres. Windsor and Washington have the fewest, with 2.8 and .8 acres respectively. Tyringham has the greatest percentage of prime agricultural soils protected in the APR program, followed by Dalton. Lee has a relatively small percentage of prime agricultural acres protected, more similar to Pittsfield and Lanesborough.

Figure 3: Number of Acres of Prime Agricultural Soils

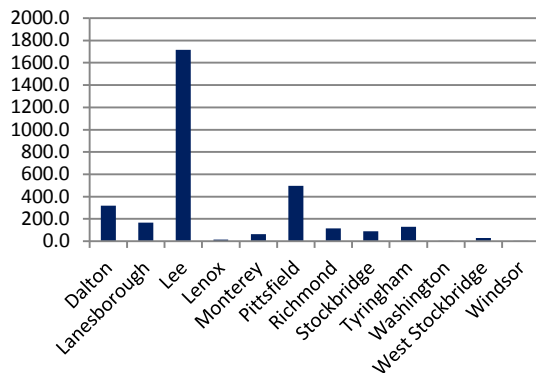
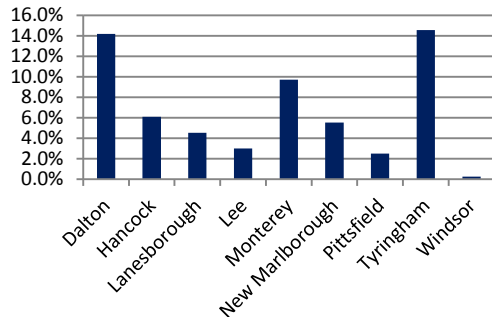


Figure 4: Percent of Prime Agricultural Soils in APR Program



Source: Mass GIS, tax assessor parcel records, Berkshire Regional Planning Commission, 2012

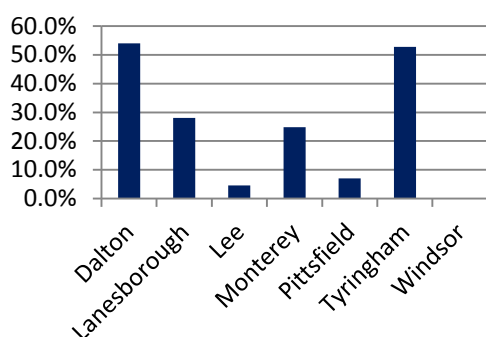
There are prime agricultural soils not being farmed in all the communities, indicating untapped potential for scaling up agricultural activity and production in the central region. In total, there are 18,892 acres of prime agricultural soils not being used in farming. Pittsfield has the largest number of prime agricultural acres not being farmed: 3,357 acres. Peru has the lowest number, which matches its topography. The table below provides the figure for each of the Central region communities.

Table 4: Prime Agricultural Land Not in Agricultural Use

Town	Acres
Becket	340.61
Dalton	484.33
Hancock	673.67
Hinsdale	664.87
Lanesborough	1,192.93
Lee	726.83
Lenox	2,438.19
Monterey	525.80
New Marlborough	1,986.43
Otis	406.37
Peru	68.82
Pittsfield	3,357.34
Richmond	1,548.32
Sandisfield	450.44
Stockbridge	2,365.40
Tyringham	421.10
Washington	145.35
West Stockbridge	793.17
Windsor	302.20
Total	18,892.20

Agricultural Preservation Restriction

Of the 15,619 acres in agricultural use, only 1,910.1 acres are in Agricultural Preservation Restriction (APR). Tyringham, Dalton and Lanesborough have the most acres of farmland permanently protected, together representing 69% of the permanently protected farmland in the Central region. Mapping at farmer workshops indicated 115 farms in the nineteen Central region communities. Of these, twenty-seven participated in a farmer survey, providing current information unavailable from standardized sources such as the Agricultural Census or the Massachusetts Department of Agriculture. Of these twenty-nine, nine farms had at least some land in APR.

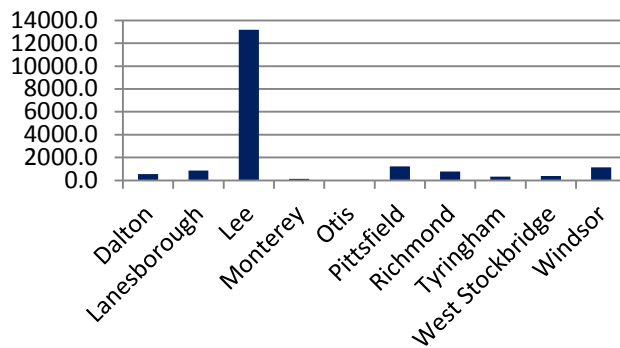
Figure 5: Percent Agricultural Acres in the APR Program

Source: Mass GIS, tax assessor parcel records,
Berkshire Regional Planning Commission 2012

Chapter 61/61A

Lee has the greatest number of acres conserved under Chapter 61/61A, in the Central region, 13,195.5 acres. Otis has the fewest: 11.2 acres. In total, there are 18,544.4 acres of land protected through Chapter 61/61A in the Central region. Work to promote the enrollment of farm land in this program can help farmers, as properties are taxed for the value of the timber or agricultural products rather than the development value of the land. Property tax reductions are provided in exchange for a property lien. The data indicates that this, much like APR, is an under-utilized tool in the Central region.

Figure 6: Number of Acres in Chapter 61/61A

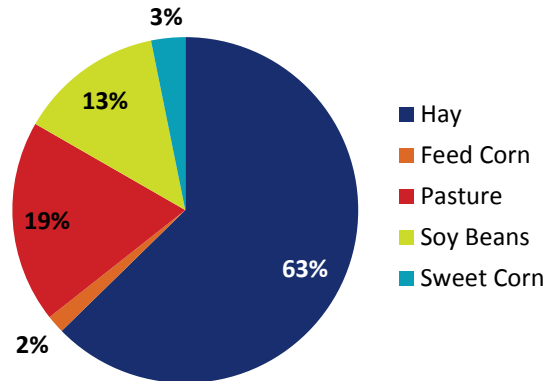


Agricultural Products

The predominant picture of agricultural production in terms of total land devoted to specific crops is that the Central region focuses on raising crops to feed animals: Hay (927+ acres), pasture (280 acres), soy beans (200 acres) and corn (72 acres). However, none of the farmers surveyed provided acreage for other land uses such as vegetables or fruit.

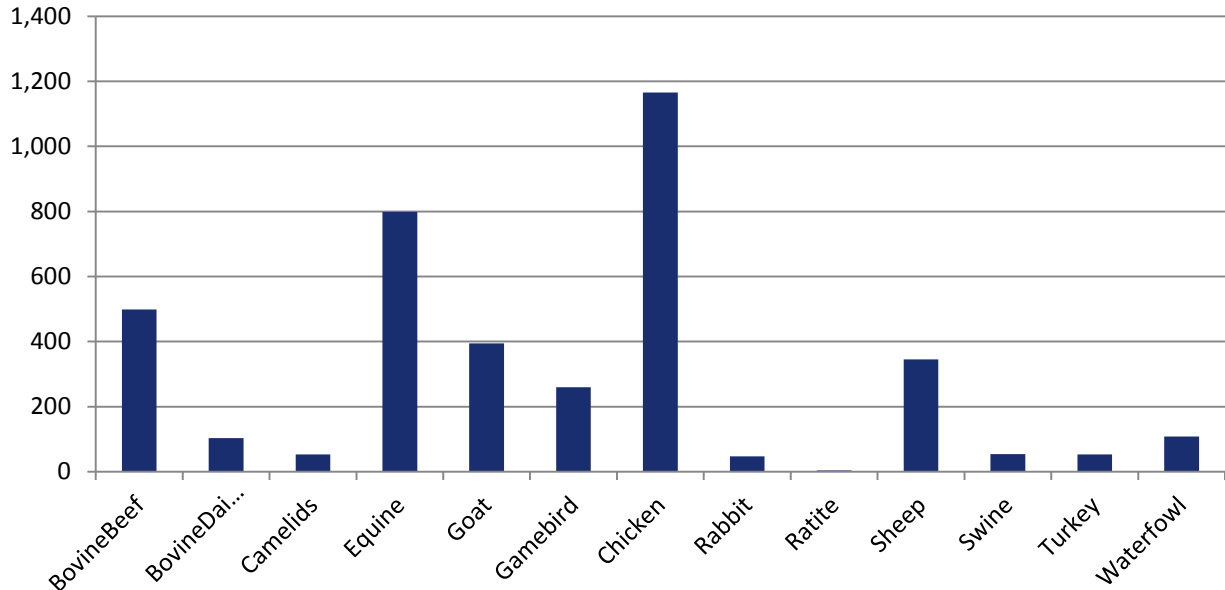
In total, responding farmers are responsible for the cultivation of 2,697 acres of land.

Figure 7: Land Cover by Crop (in Acres)



Source: Keep Berkshires Farming

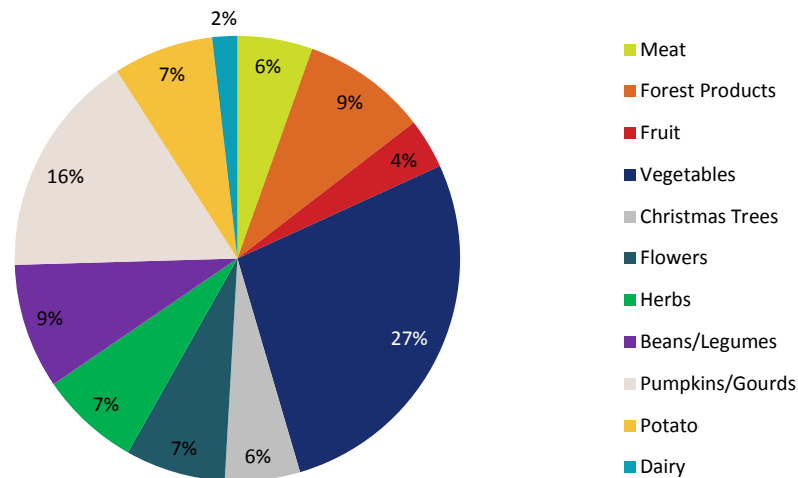
Figure 8: Livestock Count in Central Berkshire Towns



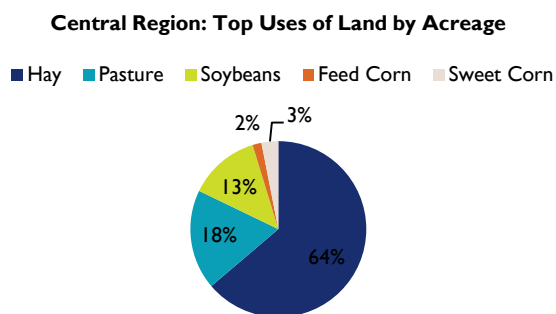
Source: Massachusetts Department of Agriculture, 2011

According to data provided by the Massachusetts Department of Agriculture, chickens make up the largest proportion of total livestock in the Central region, followed by horses, beef cattle, sheep and dairy cattle.

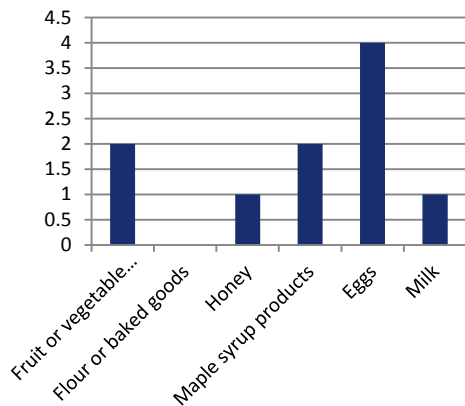
Figure 9: Crop by Number of Producers



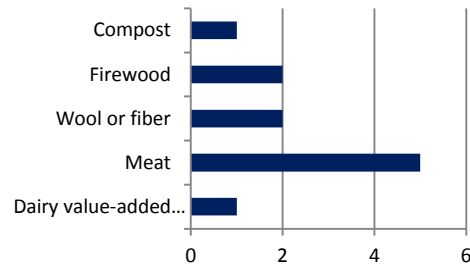
Source: Keep Berkshires Farming Farmer Survey (2012)



Additional farm uses were reported by the number of producers. More than a quarter of the farmers surveyed grow a variety of vegetables, pumpkins/gourds and beans/legumes. The most common processed or value added products reported by farmers were eggs, fruit or vegetables and maple syrup products. The most common value added product in the Central region was reported to be meat, corresponding to the fairly high count of beef cattle in the region. The high number of egg producers also corresponds with the high number of chickens in the central region.

Figure 10: Processed Products by No. of Producers

Source: Keep Berkshires Farming Survey (2012)

Figure 11: Value Added Products by No. of Producers

Agricultural Product Challenges

Moving product from farm to market is hindered by the limited availability of processing facilities, and the limited marketing or distribution of products. A dearth of processing facilities is apparent: there are no commercial scale meat processing facilities immediately within the region, nor near the Central region. Processing facilities used by regional farmers include slaughter facilities in Canaan, Eagle Bridge and Hoosick Falls, New York; Athol and Groton, Massachusetts, Westminster Station, Vermont; and Bristol Beef in Connecticut. Nearby value added processing facilities with commercial kitchens include a processing center in Greenfield, Massachusetts and Kingston New York. Through the Keep Berkshires Farming process, however, farmers became aware of a nascent, smaller commercial kitchen opportunity in Lee, which will enhance current and future access. Farmers have anecdotally described waiting lists at slaughter facilities, and noted the substantial travel cost to get to these facilities.

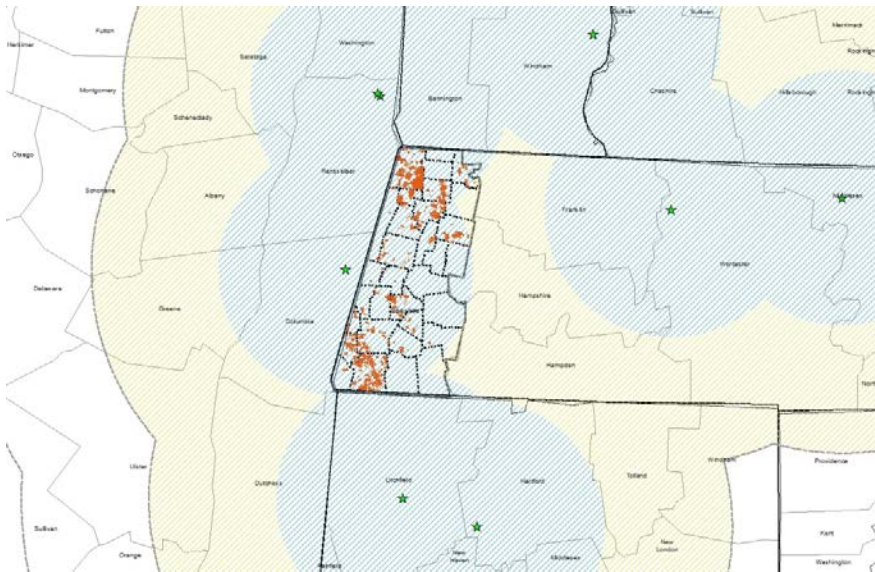
Table 5: Slaughter and Commercial Processing Facilities Serving Central Berkshire Farms

Facility	Address
Hilltown Pork	Canaan NY
Adams Farm	Athol MA
Eagle Bridge Custom Meat & Smokehouse	Eagle Bridge NY
Westminster Meats	Westminster Station VT
Western Massachusetts Food Processing Center	Greenfield MA
Farm to Table Co-Packers	Kingston NY
Bristol Beef	Litchfield County, CT

Source: BRPC, 2013

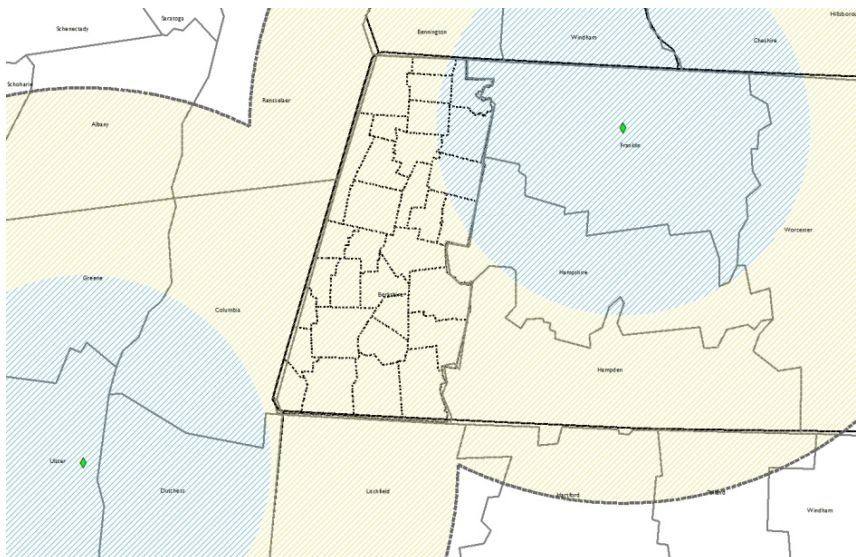
While a number of USDA certified commercial slaughter facilities outside of the region are options, a mapping exercise indicates that communities in the Central Berkshire region are in fact served within a 25-radius of existing slaughter facilities. The central region is within twenty-five miles of the Canaan, New York facility.

Figure 12: Slaughter and Meat Processing Facilities



There are some local options for the slaughter and butchering of livestock. The issues with these local options is that they are not commercial USDA facilities, so the sale of the final product is limited to the farmer or consumers who bought part of or the whole live animal. For a farmer to be able to sell processed meat or poultry via wholesale or at a retail store, it must have been slaughtered at a commercial USDA facility. Identifying existing custom options in the central region, and identifying which custom operations have interest in scaling up will be one part of further identifying opportunity in the Berkshire region for a local slaughter and processing facility. One custom butcher in the North KBF region has expressed interest in scaling up, and a facility in the North KBF region could serve the Central region as well.

Figure 13: Commercial Kitchens for Value Added Processing



Source: Keep Berkshires Farming

The Central region is also underserved by existing commercial value added processing facilities, as is most of Berkshire County. Opportunity to change this is strong in the Central region, with a processing kitchen opening up in Lee. Potential also exists in Dalton and Great Barrington.

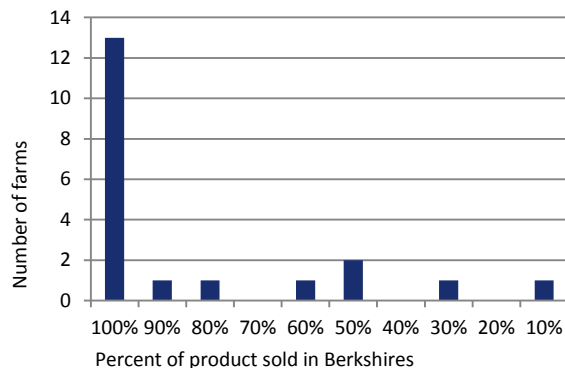
Having a nearby and convenient facility for processing farm goods is important in helping farmers profit, and important in making local foods available throughout the year for a number of consumer groups. If farmers have to take time, and spend substantial money on fuel to get to a processing facility, it impacts their profit margin. Residents have expressed desire for local produce all through the year, not just during the growing season, and larger institutions have identified storage and seasonality as barriers to using more local food. School is not in session in the summer, but if a farmer or institution could freeze and store produce, local food could be used in schools in the fall, winter and spring.

Another component of the food and agriculture system is food waste, and the Central region has two state permitted food materials processors. One is in Lee, and the other is in Dalton. Both of these facilities are permitted to receive up to fifteen tons of waste per day. The location and capacity of composting facilities is important consider in face of upcoming Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection's commercial food waste ban.

Farm Business Practices

Fourteen farmers identified farming as their full-time job, while twelve identified as part-time. More land is farmed than owned, pointing to lease or rental arrangements between farmers and land owners. Farmers in the Central Berkshire region rely on a number of market outlets, and over half (54%) of surveyed farmers sell at least some of their product in the Berkshires, while more than a quarter (38%) sell 100% of their product in the Berkshire region.

Figure 14: Product Destination



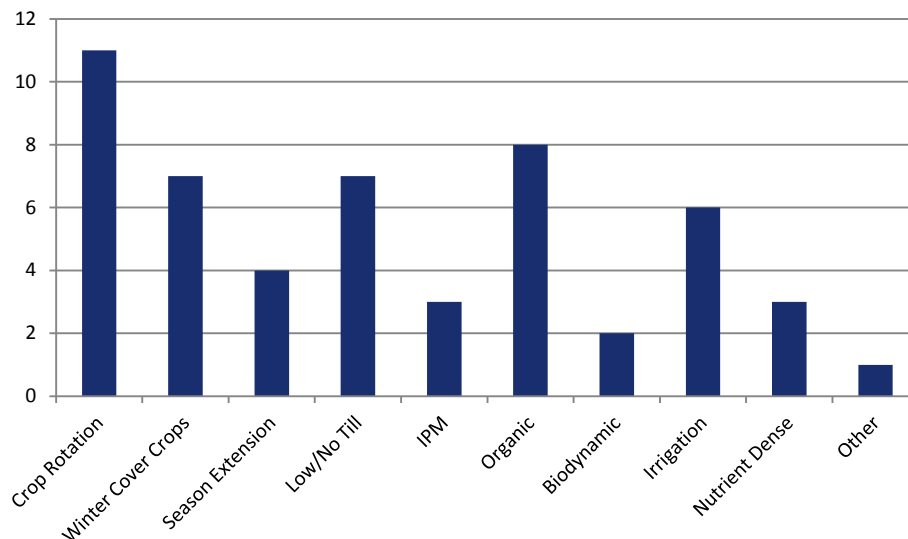
Source: Keep Berkshires Farming Farmer Survey

Of those indicating they sell less or none of their product in the Berkshire region, eight indicated they would like to sell more locally. They indicated that the following would enhance their ability to sell more product locally:

- ✓ monetary support for expansion of production,
- ✓ enhanced collaboration between stores, restaurants and institutions and small farmers,
- ✓ greater awareness of local availability,
- ✓ labor,
- ✓ better understanding of compost,
- ✓ winter markets,
- ✓ advertising, and
- ✓ cold storage.

Farmers surveyed use a variety of farm techniques. Eleven farmers indicating they practice crop rotation, eight practice organic farming, seven reported using winter cover crops and low-or no-till practice, six use irrigation and four indicated use of some type of season extension.

Figure 15: Farming Techniques Employed



Source: Keep Berkshires Farming Farmer Survey

SUPPLIES AND SERVICES

Not only do Berkshire farmers help contribute to the local economy by providing local goods and services for sale and consumption, but they contribute through purchasing goods and services. In 2011, interviewed farmers spent a total of \$1,095,950 on farm supplies, with 21% (\$233,800) of those expenditures taking place in Berkshire County. The most notable barriers to the purchase of local supplies or services included:

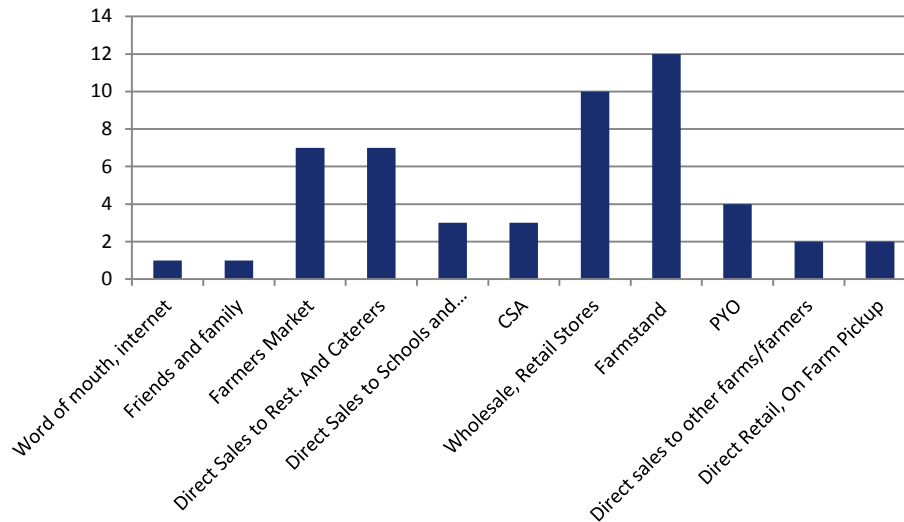
1. Relative cost of local goods and services compared to what was available elsewhere
2. Distance to and from existing tractor repair service/lack of local tractor repair
3. Lack of supplies available locally

Sales and Distribution Methods

In survey responses, farmers indicated the following as their sales/distribution methods: (ranked in descending order):

1. Farm stand/store
2. Wholesale, retail stores
3. Direct sales to restaurants and caterers
4. Farmers Market

Figure 16: Methods of Sales and Distribution



Source: Keep Berkshires Farming Farmer Survey

Few of the farmers reported selling their product to schools or institutions, and the largest market outlet was indicated to be farm stands. It is interesting that third largest market outlet is direct sales to restaurants and caterers. Central farmers already sell much of their product through wholesale or retail stores, which corresponds with the resident survey responses indicating retail stores as a popular place to purchase local food.

Table 6: Farmers and Farm Labor

Average # of years farming	36.9
Average # of years farm in family	51.2
Average # acres owned	95.6
Average # acres farmed	108.4

The average farm tenure in the Central region is nearly thirty seven years, and the average number of years that a farm has been in a family is fifty-one years.

The twenty-seven farmers cultivate 2,697 acres. Of these, 2,572 acres are owned, indicating that farmers in Central region benefit from lease arrangements to augment holdings and production. Farmers in the Central region are not strictly fulltime farmers—fourteen described themselves as full time farmers, twelve described themselves as part time farmers.

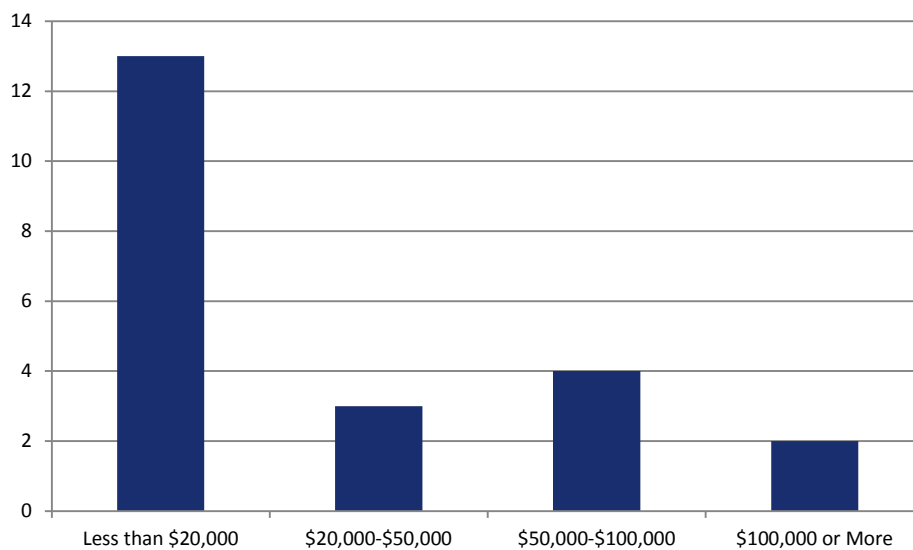
Central Berkshire Region Action Plan

Characteristics of the farm workforce support the identification of full time help and part-time, seasonal help. The majority of family member workers are in the 40 year old to 60 year old range; the average farmer age is 51. Population trends in the county as a whole (aging and declining in number) suggest that the ease of finding and securing both full-time and part-time farm help may not ameliorate.

FARM SALES

Most of the farms in the Central region indicated farm sales off \$20,000 or less. This corresponds to the high number of smaller farms of 1 to 5 acres.

Figure 17: 2011 Farm Sales by No. of Farms



Source: Keep Berkshires Farming

OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

Farmers in the Central Berkshire region were asked to identify what they viewed as opportunities and challenges of the local food system. Increased local interest in local food and awareness of the importance of buying local and agriculture were noted as having positive impacts on farms, while access to labor and access to tillable land were identified as important needs to address to continue farming. Collaborative processing infrastructure for slaughter, co-packing and processing was the most popular strategy to keep farming in the central region viable.

Opportunities

What has had a positive impact on your farm? (top 5)

1. The buy local movement and increased interest in food safety and freshness
2. Increased interest in local products
3. Increased awareness of farming
4. State or federal farm programs
5. Community

What would make it easier to continue farming?

1. Access to labor
2. Greater access to affordable farmland
3. Greater participation in the Farm Bureau
4. More young farmers

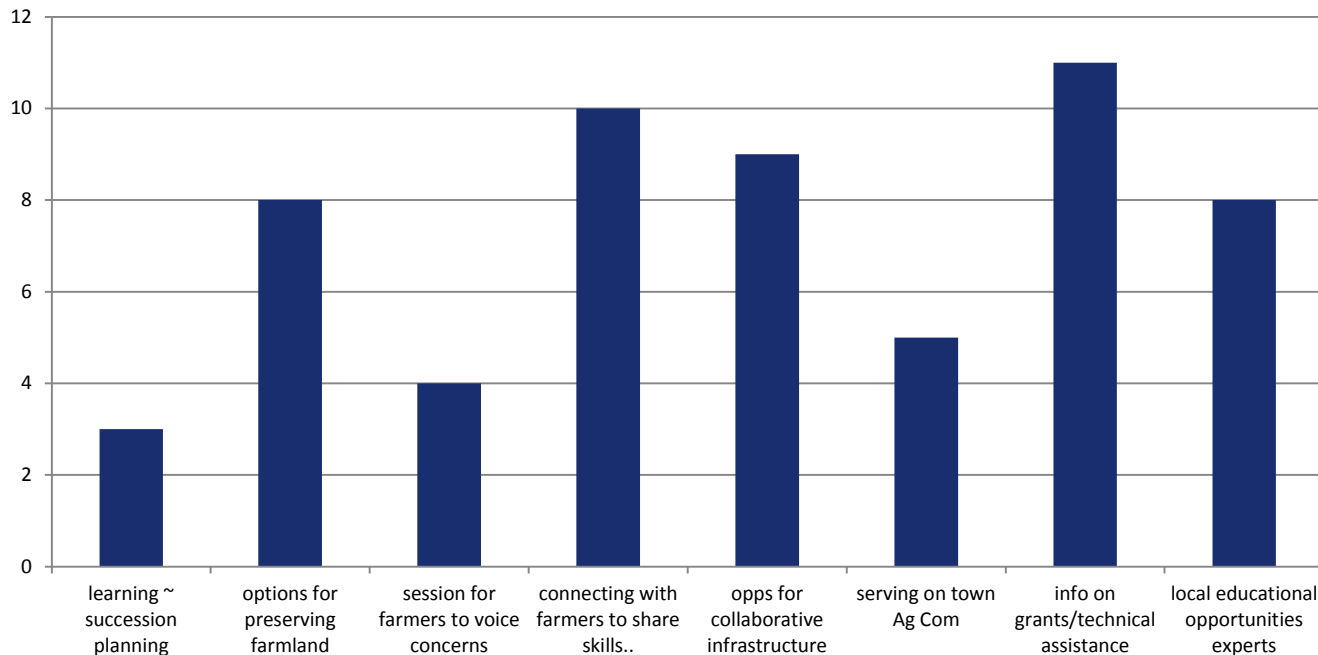
What strategies would you recommend to keep farming viable?

1. On-farm solar energy
2. Greater access to farm-to-institution arrangements
3. Land matching database
4. Tax credit for seasonal use of land
5. Farm co-op
6. Tool share
7. Shared storage
8. More land in APR
9. More farm visits for students, residents and political representation
10. Continued promotion of locally grown farm products

Which opportunities or assistance would be of greatest interest to you?

1. Information on grants and technical assistance
2. Connecting with other farmers to share skills
3. Opportunities for collaborative infrastructure

Figure 18: Opportunities or Forms of Assistance of Greatest Interest



Source: Keep Berkshires Farming Farmer Survey

Central Berkshire Region Action Plan

Challenges

Land Access and Management

1. Availability and cost of farmland
2. Soil quality

High Costs of Doing Business

1. Availability and cost of labor
2. Availability of technical assistance
3. Cost of fuel
4. Manure availability
5. Property taxes
6. Availability/cost of fertilizers/pesticides

Ability to Create and Sell Products

1. Product storage
2. Marketing/distribution of products
3. Availability of processing facilities
4. Availability of winter markets

Survey results depict four dairy producers in the Central region. The difficult nature of the dairy market was noted to be a challenge or barrier to farming success in survey results.

Local Food Use and Access

The Local Foods and Health Team conducted a number of surveys to understand the degree to which local food is purchased and consumed locally, whether at home or in a business setting, as well as in-demand products that are not currently available at all or in at volumes or prices to meet demand. This helps identify potential market growth opportunities for local farms.

LOCAL DEMAND – CURRENT

Institutions

Twenty-one institutions in the entire Berkshire region were surveyed through Keep Berkshires Farming; six of these are located in the Central region. Farmer surveys indicate that some product is sold to local schools and institutions, a finding supported by surveys of institutions.

The institutions in the central region include Berkshire Community College, two school districts and two private health/wellness facilities, Canyon Ranch and Kripalu. The educational institutions surveyed differ from the private organizations in three important ways. First, the elementary and high schools are subject to federal nutrition standards, which shape the type of meals they serve in cafeterias. Second, they serve a higher daily volume than private institutions. . Third, they face different budget realities and constraints than private health/wellness retreats.

Central region institutions indicated feeding between 150 and 800 people a day, and between 350 and 1,020 meals a day. The annual budget ranges from \$110,000 to \$1,500,000, with the average meal cost ranging from between \$2.56 to \$28.00/person/day. The percentage of food served that is sourced locally ranges between 5% and 30%.

These institutions reported using eleven local producers and two larger distributors. Most indicate that they would prefer working with fewer distributors, but will work with as many as it takes to provide the best product to customers within their budget. Current relationships with farmers or growers were self-created or resulted from events such as farmers' markets or Berkshire Grown networking activities.

Factors considered when purchasing food, and barriers to purchasing more local food differed between types of institutions. Educational institutions considered freshness, quality and ease of ordering/delivery to be the top three considerations, while they found availability/seasonality, budgetary constraints, and the timing/frequency of deliveries to be the greatest barriers. Educational institutions identified a local food hub to be the most promising strategy in terms of expanding local food access.

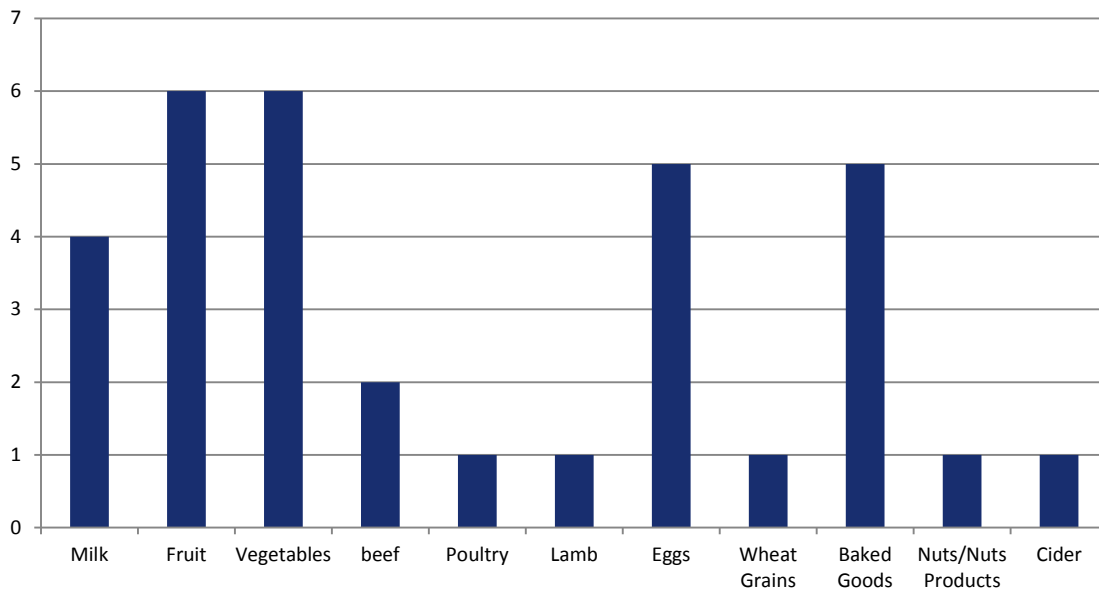
The private institutions were most concerned about the quality, method of production and freshness of food products. Less constrained by budget, they cited the biggest barriers to be seasonality, availability and timing/frequency of deliveries. Private health/wellness institutions expressed interest in a regional food hub, a website or list-serve to facilitate communication between food buyers and food producers, as well as potential frameworks for contract growing. They also identified building relationship with growers at local farmers' markets or networking opportunities for growers and buyers hosted by Berkshire Grown. Because these institutions

work to prepare healthful yet unique menus for their clientele, they expressed interest in availability calendars so that they could plan their menus around local, seasonal produce far in advance.

Restaurants

Nine restaurants in the Central region were surveyed. All of the restaurants surveyed serve some percentage of local food. The percentage ranged from 10% to 60%, but most restaurants served 10% local food. The local food most commonly served in the restaurants surveyed include fruit, vegetables, eggs, baked goods and milk. The restaurant with 60% of its food identified as local food indicated that they were ‘maxed out’ in terms of what they could prepare or use—the only restaurant to say they would not be interested in using additional local food.

Figure 19: Local Products Purchased/Served by Local Restaurants



Source: Keep Berkshires Farming Restaurant Survey

Farmers in the central region noted restaurants to be the third most common market outlet for their products. There are many restaurants in the Central region, spanning a range of size, cuisine, etc. Volunteers were able to successfully interview nine restaurants within the Central region. Contacting and interviewing all of the restaurants in the central region proved a challenging endeavor, but pivotal volunteers persisted.

Although the actual number of restaurants surveyed was small in terms of percent total, it is fairly representative in terms of size, budget, cuisine and location—from the city center restaurant to the rural café; from the exotic to American pub-fare.

The findings are also consistent with those in the North and South regions. While not all restaurants/stores provide local products, a large majority expressed interest in purchasing local food directly from regional farms. Restaurants sourcing local food were split in how they developed relationships with local producers—some indicated approaching the producers; others indicated the producers approached them.

Generally, local chef/owner/managers voiced support for local food and agriculture, and an interest in serving more of it in meals their restaurant/store. Challenges to doing so include:

- ✓ Seasonality—many menu staples are not locally available for much of the year due to climate and season length.
- ✓ Convenience and Reliability—it is difficult to get local products delivered to their restaurant/store, whereas existing, conventional distributors deliver on a reliable and convenient schedule.
- ✓ Price—the local option is often more expensive than the conventional option and may not be part of their distribution contract.
- ✓ Quality and Freshness—there is concern that local options may not be as fresh or as high quality as conventional options, especially in off-seasons

Central region restaurant or store food buyers currently source product from a range of suppliers, including small or independent farms, like the Berry Patch, McEnroe, Highlawn, Equinox; large, regional food distributors, such as Sysco, US Foods, and Ginsbergs; or grocery stores, such as Guido's, Stop and Shop, Price Chopper and the Big Y. Crescent Creamery was frequently noted as a supplier of eggs and dairy products.

The supplying farms are not just within Berkshire County, but also include Connecticut, the Hudson Valley, and southern Vermont.

The chef/managers/owners noted customer demand for local foods, with emphasis on specific items, such as:

- ✓ Meat (including grass-fed)
- ✓ Seasonal produce all year round
- ✓ Wheat and grain products
- ✓ Potatoes

Central region restaurant chefs expressed interest in all strategies identified as means to expanding local food in restaurants, including a regional food hub, assistance in identifying local growers, and a centralized source with listings of availability.

Residents

CONSUMER BEHAVIOR

Eighty one residents from the central region communities were surveyed through Keep Berkshires Farming. Most respondents estimated spending between \$50 and \$150 on weekly grocery expenses.

The most important reasons for choosing where to purchase local food were:

- ✓ The quality/flavor of food
- ✓ Healthy food options
- ✓ Good selection
- ✓ Convenient location
- ✓ Affordable prices

Although not provided as an option in the final version of the survey, convenient hours was written in as a reason. Factors considered not important in choosing where to shop were:

- ✓ Accepts form of payment the shopper wishes to use
- ✓ One stop shopping
- ✓ Comfort with store layout

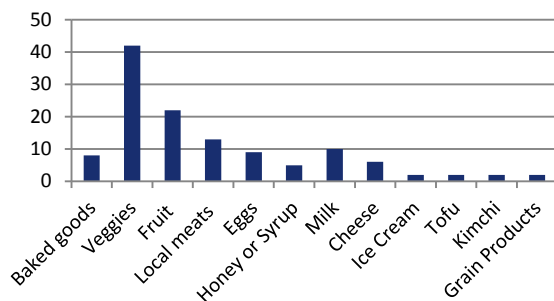
WHAT ARE CONSUMERS PURCHASING?

Roughly a quarter percent of respondents indicated that they purchased local food at farm stands or farm stands. The most common local food outlets accessed 'very frequently' were:

- ✓ Supermarkets
- ✓ Farmers markets
- ✓ Garden (your own, family, friend)
- ✓ Food co-ops

The majority (64.7%) of respondents shop at large supermarkets such as Big Y or Stop & Shop four or more times a month. Twenty seven percent (27%) of respondents shop at smaller, locally owned markets like Guido's four or more times a month. Thirty five percent (35%) of respondents shop at Farmers Markets two or three times a month, though a common remark reflected the seasonal availability of this option. In the 'I don't shop here' category, more than half of the respondents (61.9%) listed convenience stores, while 51.7% listed large retail or wholesale stores such as Walmart.

Figure 20: Local Favorites



Source: Keep Berkshires Farming Resident Survey

Vegetables are the most commonly purchased local food in the Central region. This makes sense, since vegetables were noted to be produced by the most number of farmers in the Central region. This also makes sense given the complications of bringing local meat to market in a commercial retail setting.

The most important reasons why respondents choose to purchase local food:

- ✓ Supports local farms and farmers
- ✓ It is fresher
- ✓ It is good for the environment
- ✓ It is healthier
- ✓ I know how and where it was grown

Of residents who indicated that they do purchase local food, the reasons indicated to be least important in their decision:

- ✓ Less expensive
- ✓ Organically grown
- ✓ My family likes it

When asked why they may not purchase local food, residents most frequently cited difficulty in getting to places that sell it and cost as very important obstacles. Shopping habits change seasonally, and due to availability. Eighty-four percent of residents stated that their shopping habits changed seasonally due to the availability of local produce at markets like Guidos and the Berkshire Co-op in Great Barrington, the availability of farmers markets, farm stands, CSAs and home gardens.

HOW DO THEY FEEL ABOUT LOCAL AGRICULTURE AND AVAILABLE PRODUCT?

Residents generally support local agriculture, with the two largest proportions of respondents purchasing locally produced food between 41% and 80% of total food purchased. Seasonality was noted as a principle barrier to buying more local food annually.

- Consumers in the region are satisfied with the quality of local food available, and are also able to access local food products somewhat easily.
- More are willing to expend additional funds on locally produced food and projects.
- A majority of residents also indicated that they would purchase more local food if it was more obvious where to find it, both in terms of labeling, but also in terms of identified markets and locations.
- The preparation or processing of fresh produce was not noted to be a barrier to the purchase and consumption of local fruits and vegetables.
- A large majority of respondents indicated feeling disconnected to the farmers producing local food. This could be addressed with additional networking opportunities. In Vermont, some communities have initiated a 'Farmer Correspondence' program, in which local farmers become pen pals with local classrooms. The Berkshire Co-op already offers farm tours; farmers markets and CSAs are other opportunities to connect consumers with farmers.
- Most respondents purchase local food at the Berkshire Food Co-op, with farmers markets or farm stands and super markets following.

LOCAL DEMAND – POTENTIAL

Institutions

All six institutions located in the Central region expressed interest in purchasing more local food, and most institutions in the rest of the Berkshire region expressed similar interest. The market demand is there, but challenges of cost, seasonal availability, and volume exist. Institutions expressed interest in direct contracts with local farmers, a local food hub, some type of media so as to always be aware of what is available locally, and assistance in identifying local options as tools to expand their use of local farm products.

There are more than six institutions in the Central region, and it is likely that those places not interviewed could also be interested in expanding their use of local farm products, and could provide local farmers with expanded and predictable market opportunity.

Restaurants

All of the nine restaurants in the Central region indicated that they would like to purchase and serve more local food. Local products that restaurants would like to see more of include: meat, cheese, eggs, dried herbs, frozen/canned veggies, ketchup, vegetables, confections, jams, cured meats and fish. Meat is the most commonly the most frequently cited product.

Considerations were noted that could serve as challenges or barriers to restaurants purchasing more local food. These included:

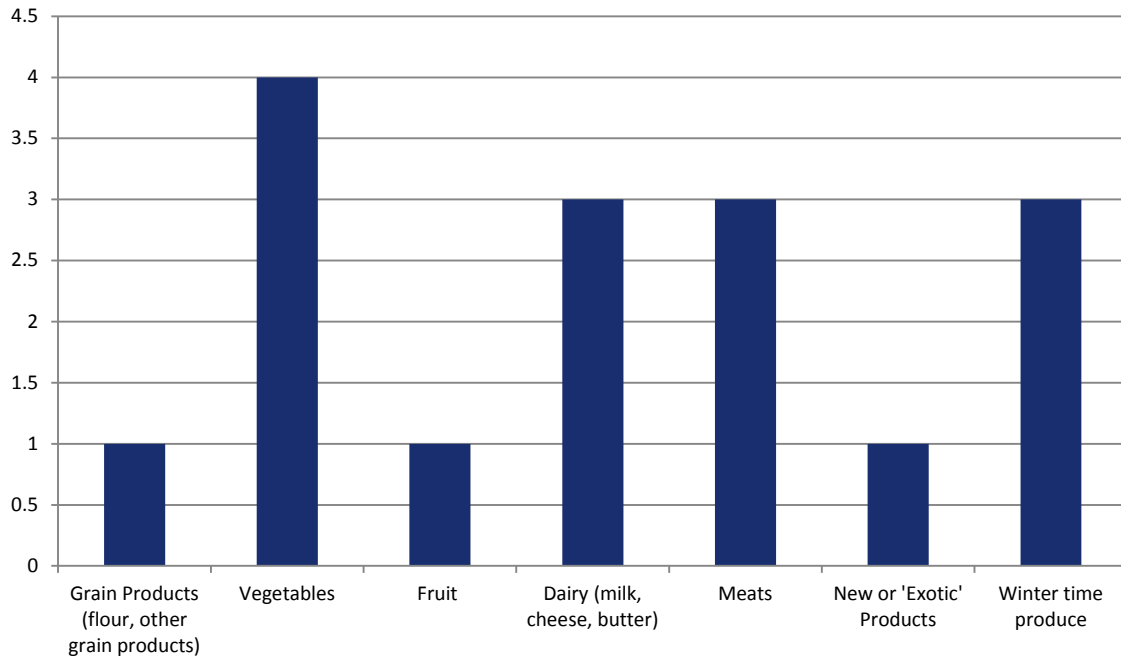
- Consistent quality of products to meet demand
- Consistent quantity of products to meet demand
- Cost of product compared to commercial options
- Delivery service
- Ability to conform to legal packaging regulations
- USDA approved items

Residents

Ninety seven percent of respondents indicated that they would purchase more local food if they could. Thirty-eight people indicated that their shopping habits vary with the season—attending farmers markets, visiting farmers markets, growing their own food, participating in a CSA, in the summer months, and that local produce is really the most readily available and best to eat in the summer and fall. Fifty residents indicated that they go to area farmers markets. While most residents indicated living in Lee and Richmond, the majority of those who attend area farmers markets indicated the market they most frequently attend is the Great Barrington, followed by the Lenox farmers market.

In sum: residents in the Central region enjoy purchasing local food, and would purchase more if it was more available at their current preferred outlets. They would also purchase local produce if it was available year round.

The strongest purchase demand was for vegetables, followed by meats, dairy and winter time produce (all ranked equally). When meat was indicated, residents noted interest in affordable meat options for chicken and beef, with specific attention paid to grass fed beef.

Figure 21: Potential Demand for Current Products

Source: Keep Berkshires Farming Resident Survey

Food Access and Security

DEMAND

Identifying Vulnerability: Families, children and the elderly

This section describes challenges to food access and security. In the Central region, the largest sub-group of population living in poverty is that of children below the age of 18. This indicates a need to improve food security and access to fresh, local foods for school-aged children.

Reduced cost or free lunches help during the school day and school year, but leaves gaps over weekends and vacations.

Children under the age of five and seniors make up more than a quarter percent of the total population living in poverty. This composition varies from community to community, and the differences need to be highlighted.

Pittsfield, the population center for the entire Berkshire region and the Central region, has more children living in poverty, as does Dalton, Becket, Hancock, Lee and Otis. Other communities in the central region have more seniors living in poverty, most notably Lenox, Stockbridge, Richmond, and Lanesborough. Compared to the other two regions, Central region exhibits higher levels of childhood hunger. This is not surprising since these towns and Pittsfield in particular have a greater percentage of the regions' youth. In contrast, the other two regions show more hunger concerns in the senior population.

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As fuel and food costs increase, (and more of the Berkshire region population ages into and beyond retirement), seniors' food security and access could become a greater issue. Younger families and children could also be further challenged by cost of living increases, making the need for access to fresh, local food opportunities greater than it is currently. Older residents with transportation or mobility challenges may also struggle to access fresh, healthy, local foods.

In terms of local best practices, Berkshire Grown hosts "Share the Bounty, a donation program that purchases local products from local producers, and these products serve pantries and other meal assistance programs. The ten-year old program, largely funded by the Berkshire Taconic Community Foundation, provides support for 14 farm-organization partnerships. These include farms and food assistance organizations throughout the Berkshire region.

Supply: Emergency Food Sites

Keep Berkshire Farming volunteers surveyed four emergency food sites in the Central region, though there are many more sites in the Central region and Pittsfield. While these sites like to use local products, their selection is largely dictated by affordability and donations. WIC offers the greatest flexibility, in that enrollees may use WIC at Farmers' Markets. Some of the larger providers of emergency food assistance are bound by cost and wholesale contracts to out of area suppliers—including the Berkshire Hills Regional School District. In terms of service availability, survey responses leave the weekends as periods of time with no service offered. It would appear that Sunday and Saturday lack opportunity to access food for residents seeking a food pantry or meal site service. Only one of the service providers indicated being open 24/7. This could pose a challenge for people working during scheduled hours, or for people relying on public transportation or friends/family to get them to the food pantry or meal site. Currently, Wednesdays have the most coverage in terms of service provision.

If a majority of residents living in poverty are school-aged children, the dearth of meal sites or services on weekends poses an issue for families seeking ways to meet hunger needs during the weekend when their children are unable to get food from their school meal services.

Approximately 703 clients are served weekly through these meal sites. Fifty percent of the sites have an application process or eligibility criteria to participate in the program or service being provided; 50% do not. One organization reported receiving 90% of its donations in the form of private donations, the other largest percentage came from government funding. With these resources, three out of five respondents indicated that they are able to meet demand. Two indicated that current resources do not enable them to meet demand. All organizations base their decisions on what food is available from their sources. Menu planning ranges from a day in advance to an entire month in advance.

In terms of local food, two organizations stated that it factors it into menu as it is available and as the season allows. Two organizations indicated that local food does not heavily factor into menu planning. Menus are planned based on both nutritional guidelines and what food is available. Two of the four respondents indicated that they are able to meet nutritional guidelines using available food. One indicated that they are unable to meet nutritional guidelines. Of the two who said they can meet nutritional guidelines, one said 'most of the time', implying that there are times they cannot meet nutritional guidelines with the food they have available. Five organizations indicated use of fresh produce at the meal site.

When asked what percentage of food served is locally grown April-October, response ranged from 10% to 80%.

Meal sites are challenged to offer more local food because of:

1. Affordability
2. Access (transportation)
3. Availability
4. Volunteers

Two of the organizations donate waste to a local pig farm. Two organizations compost. One organization indicated having no way to dispose of produce that cannot be served as food.

Table 7: Emergency Food Sites Surveyed in Central Berkshire Region

Site	Clients Served	Schedule	Food Source
South Congregational Church	275-300 weekly	Daily, except Saturday and Sunday	Food bank, local donations, purchase by food team
The Christian Center	1-23 daily	Daily, except Saturday and Sunday	Food bank, local donations, purchase by food team
FUMC Pittsfield	120 weekly	Daily, except Saturday and Sunday	Food bank, local donations, purchase by food team
St. Joseph Food Pantry	125-300 weekly	Daily, except Saturday and Sunday	Food bank, local donations, purchase by food team, other
Women Infants and Children (WIC) Nutrition Program	1804	--	--

Source: Keep Berkshires Farming Survey

Vision/Mission Statement

OUR VISION:

Central Berkshire County has a resilient local food system that includes a full spectrum of economically viable farms offering a diverse range of products. The community supports its farmers both as neighbors and as businesses, purchasing their food for consumption at home, school, or out to eat. Successful farm businesses are part of the region's sustainable economy, keeping more money in the economy from local spending. Regional investment in value-added infrastructure has also enabled farmers to increase production and profits. Farmers continue to care for the productivity and health of the land and community by employing best practices for soil, water, habitat, and biodiversity. Eating local, healthy foods is promoted through education, networking opportunities, and economic development activities. It is also made possible for those of limited income or mobility to access more healthy food options at affordable prices to foster a hunger-free community.



Chickens graze at Leahey Farm in Lee. Source: Caroline Alexander's Berkshire Food Journal.

Goals and Strategies

Food System Economy and Infrastructure

GOAL1: SUPPORT LOCAL EFFORTS TO EXPAND YEAR-ROUND ACCESS TO LOCAL FOODS

Strategy A: Support enhanced value-added processing capabilities for meat, dairy, vegetable, and fiber products from the region.

Action Steps:

- Promote availability of Western MA Food Processing Center in Greenfield
- Countywide meat processing committee – producers and others, quantify demand and determine potential sites to help explore funding sources; potential for farmer cooperative
- Food waste mapping – identify existing resources in the county for composting; preparation for new state policy for commercial food waste
- Connect farmers with resources to assist them with winter extension (MDAR grants for greenhouse production, cold storage, etc.) in order to meet demand for year-round locally produced food
- Promote potential new infrastructure soon to be available at the Great Barrington Fairgrounds including cold storage, flash freezing, root cellar, and year-round farmers market! Potential collaborative opportunities for aggregation and sales, such as multi-farm CSA model, winters farmers market, etc.

Strategy B: Improve capacity of local farms to access new markets through aggregation and distribution.

Action Steps:

- Work with regional partners such as Berkshire Grown to identify feasibility of a food hub
- Participate in feasibility study efforts, site identification and financing efforts for a regional food hub
- Collaborate within the region to further the Berkshire brand

Strategy C: Work with regional school districts to transition to a local food system first model.

Action Steps:

- Work with Massachusetts Farm to School
- Participate in regional efforts to form a working group of dining service managers (see Sustainable Berkshires Goal FA7, Policy FA7.I, Strategies A-C).
- Work with local superintendents, principals, school committees, teachers and dining services to link food, farms and gardening to curricula.
- Pursue networking events hosted by Berkshire Grown to match institutional buyers with farmers and producers.

Strategy D: Increase Access to Current Commercial Kitchens for Processing Opportunities

Action Steps:

- Identify local, potential sites for processing opportunities, including old church or school facilities
- Work with existing commercial kitchen opportunities to broadcast their availability and capacity

See also regional strategies on food processing/food hub.

Land Access & Availability

GOAL 2: KEEP CURRENT CENTRAL BERKSHIRE FARMLAND IN PRODUCTION

Strategy A: Ensure current farmers have succession plans in place for their farms.

Action Steps:

- Promote state APR Program and Chapter 61A as land protection options to make farmland more affordable – workshops should target municipal officials as audience participants, such as Planning Boards, Assessors offices, Select Boards, as well as farmers
- Connect land trusts with newer and established farmers to make connections and increase awareness of farmland access opportunities and land protection
- Encourage and provide leasing models for state and town owned property to be leased to area farmers
- Develop innovative financing models for land acquisition and farmer housing (Greater Berkshire Ag Fund/Carrot Project, Common Capital, local banks)
- Land access system – develop one pager to identify process & resources for providing connections and assistance to landowners and land seekers

Strategy B: Increase awareness of land protection options.

- Work with local and regional land trusts to identify options and identify local opportunities
- Work with local agricultural commissions and conservation commissions to educate residents and farmers on tools such as APR, Chapter 61/61A
- Work with the regional farm land access and transition network (See Sustainable Berkshires Goal FA1, Policy FA1.1)
- Train tax preparers, assessors' offices, lawyers and accountants on tax and estate planning.

GOAL 3: HELP CONNECT INTERESTED FARMERS TO LAND TO START OR EXPAND A FARM

Strategy A: Facilitate access to land for new or expanding farmers.

Action Steps:

- See Goal 2

Strategy B: Work with partners to think creatively about agricultural utility of non-“prime-ag” soils.

Action Steps:

- Work with local, regional and state partners to identify and broadcast technical training opportunities (See Sustainable Berkshires Food and Agriculture element for list of potential partners or providers, including Massachusetts NOFA and MDAR.)

Farmer Business Networking and Support

GOAL4: STRENGTHEN AND CONNECT THE FARM COMMUNITY

Strategy A: Connect new and experienced farmers for mentoring and support.

Action Steps:

- Hold regular potluck farmer dinners for networking, sharing food, skills and knowledge among farmers
- Hold workshops/trainings for farmers during winter months
- Encourage towns without Ag Commission to form one to support area farmers
- Eliminate excise tax on agricultural machinery (municipal level; Ag Coms)
- Promote Right to Farm bylaws, explain to potential home buyers & new homeowners (municipal level; Ag Coms)
- Create brochures that highlight area farms that encourage the public to visit, such as those with pick-your-owns, farmstands, and Agritourism activities (Ag Coms and/or visitors bureau, chambers of commerce)

GOAL5: ADAPT LOCAL FARMING TO ENSURE RESILIENCE TO NATURAL HAZARDS

Strategy A: Bring in expert knowledge and practices to support the evolution of farming to adapt to changing circumstances.

Action Steps:

- Work with local, regional and state partners such as Massachusetts NOFA, USDA, and MDAR to identify potential shocks or stressors along with solutions.

Food Access & Security

GOAL6: ELIMINATE HUNGER IN CENTRAL BERKSHIRE REGION

Strategy A: Working within existing systems to improve the volume of local food contributed directly to meal sites and food pantries to help address hunger in our communities.

Action Steps:

- Connect with existing Tri-Town's Be Well Berkshires Mass in Motion funded initiative to promote restaurants that are serving local food and implement other food access and health related strategies

Strategy B: Improve nutrition awareness and behaviors

Action Steps:

- Work with local and regional health and wellness entities to offer evidence-based programming that can build nutrition and food preparation skills within families.
- Work with local youth groups, schools, community centers and other non-profits Increase practice of backyard gardening through education and campaign-style promotion as both a healthy hobby with nutrition-supporting results.

Food Producer/Buyer Connections

GOAL7: GROW AND FOSTER CONNECTIONS BETWEEN GROWERS AND FOOD BUYERS

- Web based database connecting farmers and buyers with available products – price, quantity
- Collaborative CSA model – farmers work together to get produce to consumers at regional locations (@ GB Fairgrounds, Lee farm stand)
- Promote MA Farm to School guides targeted to institutional buyers and farmers wanting to sell to institutions to facilitate institutional buying
- Develop relationship between institutions and restaurants and producers to enable supply and demand connections (framework for contract growing, networking events to introduce/build relationships)
- Explore increased use of existing local food distributors (i.e. Black River Produce) to get more local product into institutions and stores
- Develop delivery and aggregation systems to utilize existing trucking capacity and delivery routes (Berkshire Coop, MA Farm to School, FoodEx model)

Education and Awareness of Value of Agriculture

GOALS: MAKE ALL BERKSHIRE RESIDENTS AND VISITORS AWARE OF AGRICULTURE'S VALUE TO PLACE AND IDENTITY

Strategy A: Develop a marketing campaign to communicate to public the value of agriculture in the region & keeping land in farming – repetition to enforce & opportunity for connections

Action Steps:

- Create and maintain a Facebook page, and consider other social media tools such as Twitter or a blog to maintain presence and contact with supporters
- Maintain website page with Keep Berkshires Farming findings, reports
- Promote articles about Keep Berkshires Farming in Berkshire Magazine, Edible Berkshires
- Connect with the Berkshire Visitors Bureau, and Chamber of Commerce to connect with farms in tourism efforts and promotion of region

Strategy B: Enhance Agricultural Curriculum in area schools, connections to area farmers (field trips, classroom visits) and related Agricultural organizations (MA Farm to School, 4H STEM efforts; Fertile Ground school gardening model)

Action Steps:

- Work with local school leadership to identify opportunities to enhance agricultural curriculum
- Work with programs and people already bringing agricultural curriculum into schools in North Adams, Vermont and eastern Massachusetts. Examples include: Vermont FEED (Food Education Every Day), Vermont Farm to Schools, Jenn Munoz in North Adams, and the Food Project in Lincoln, Massachusetts.

Strategy C: Bring back Agricultural Fair to be held regularly at the Great Barrington Fairgrounds

Action Steps:

- Work with the Great Barrington Fair Ground and other local or regional partners to coordinate efforts to bring back the Agricultural Fair.

Implementation

Implementation has been an ongoing focus of Keep Berkshires Farming, and has been championed by Berkshire Grown.