

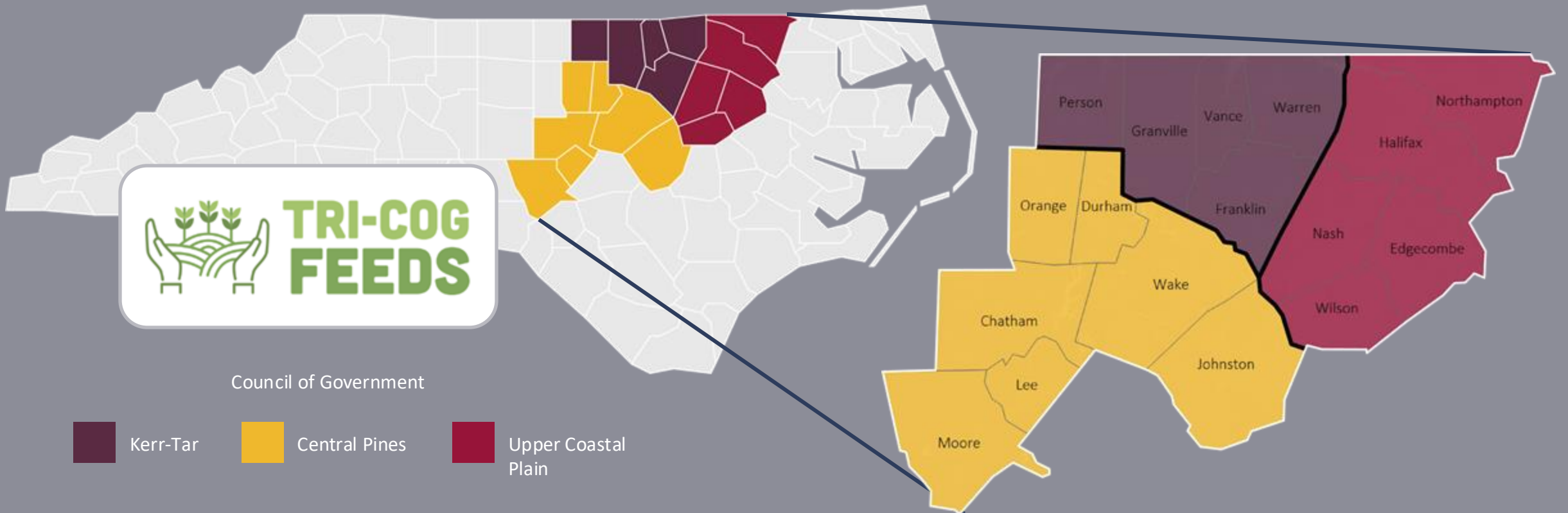


Tri-COG Food Ecosystem Economic Development Strategy (FEEDS): The Case for COGs & Local Government Investment in Food Systems Infrastructure



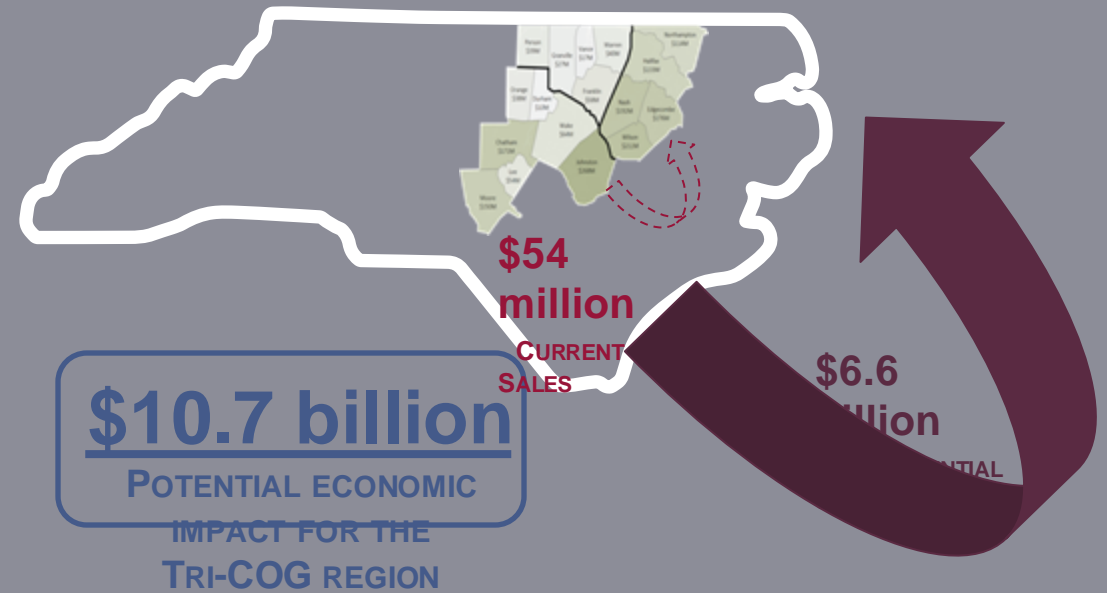
Tri-COG FEEDS Goals:

- Identify the infrastructure needed to shorten food supply chains,
- Drive economic development,
- Enhance resilient practices,
- Foster equity, and
- Increase rural-urban connectivity in the region



The Demand: \$6.6 billion Potential in Local Food Spending

- \$10.2 billion spending on all food products in 2021 in the Tri-COG Region
- Less than 1%, at \$54 million, was direct-to-consumer sales
- \$6.6 billion local food spending potential, assuming 65% of total food spending could be satisfied with food products grown in the Tri-COG region
- Reaching the \$6.6 billion local food spending potential would require substantial public and private investments in regional food systems infrastructure.



*Note: The Census defines direct-to-consumer and intermediated sales as “sales of edible agricultural products that are both produced and sold by the operation directly to consumers (farmers markets, on farm stores or farm stand, roadside stands or stores, u-pick, CSA, online marketplaces, etc.) or retail markets, institutions, or food hubs for local or regionally branding. Retail and institutional establishments include supermarkets, supercenters, restaurants, caterers, independently owned grocery stores, food cooperatives, K-12 schools, colleges or universities, hospitals, workplace cafeterias, prisons, foodbanks, etc.”⁴

The Conventional Food System is Largely Inequitable

Production

- Farmers of color make up < 5% of principal producers and < 3% of operations by acreage.
- There are historic, multigenerational structural barriers to ownership for farmers of color.

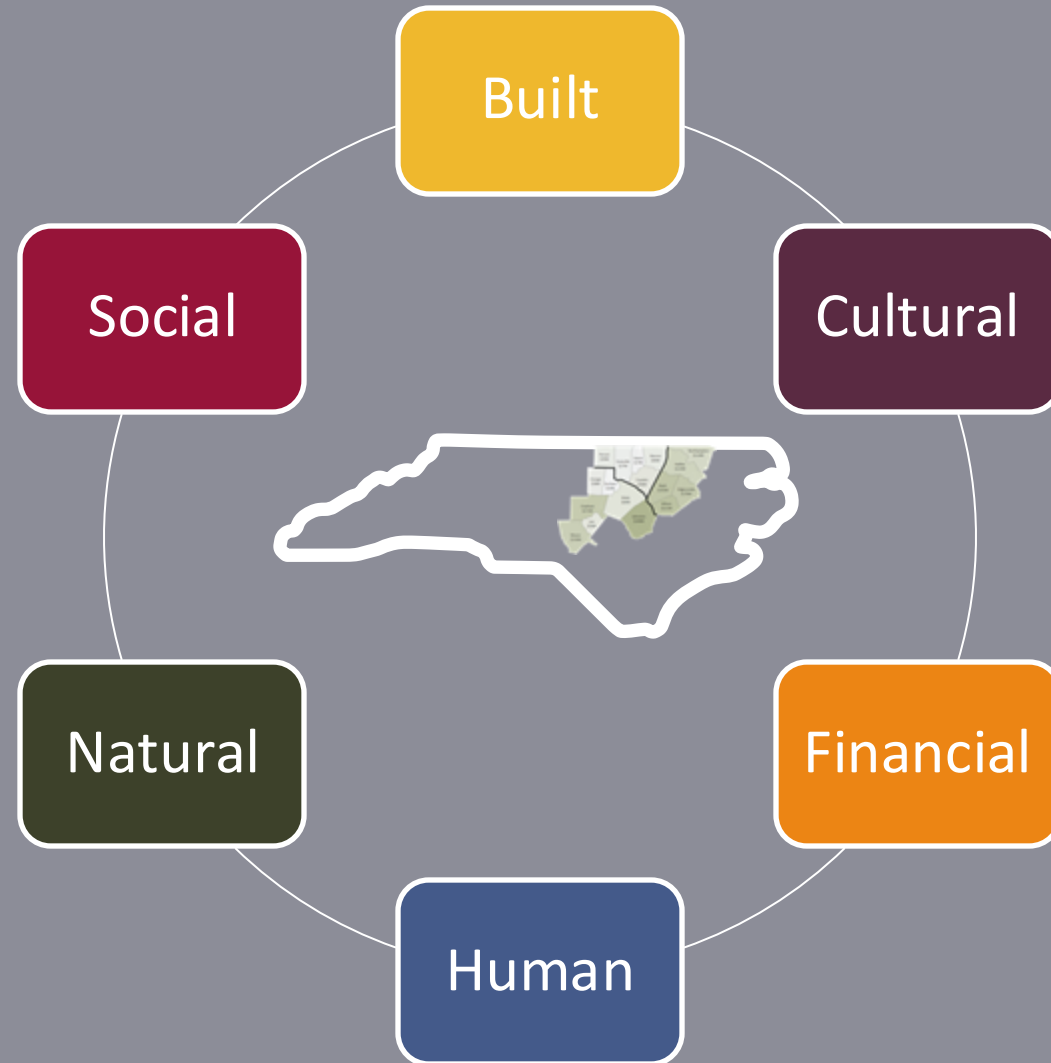
Intermediary

- NC has lower representation of People of Color in business ownership roles than the United States overall, including in the food manufacturing and restaurants sectors.²²

Consumption

- Investment in North Carolina food businesses in areas where there is currently underinvestment can also improve food access outcomes.

Building Community Capital to support: Food Systems-Driven Economic Development



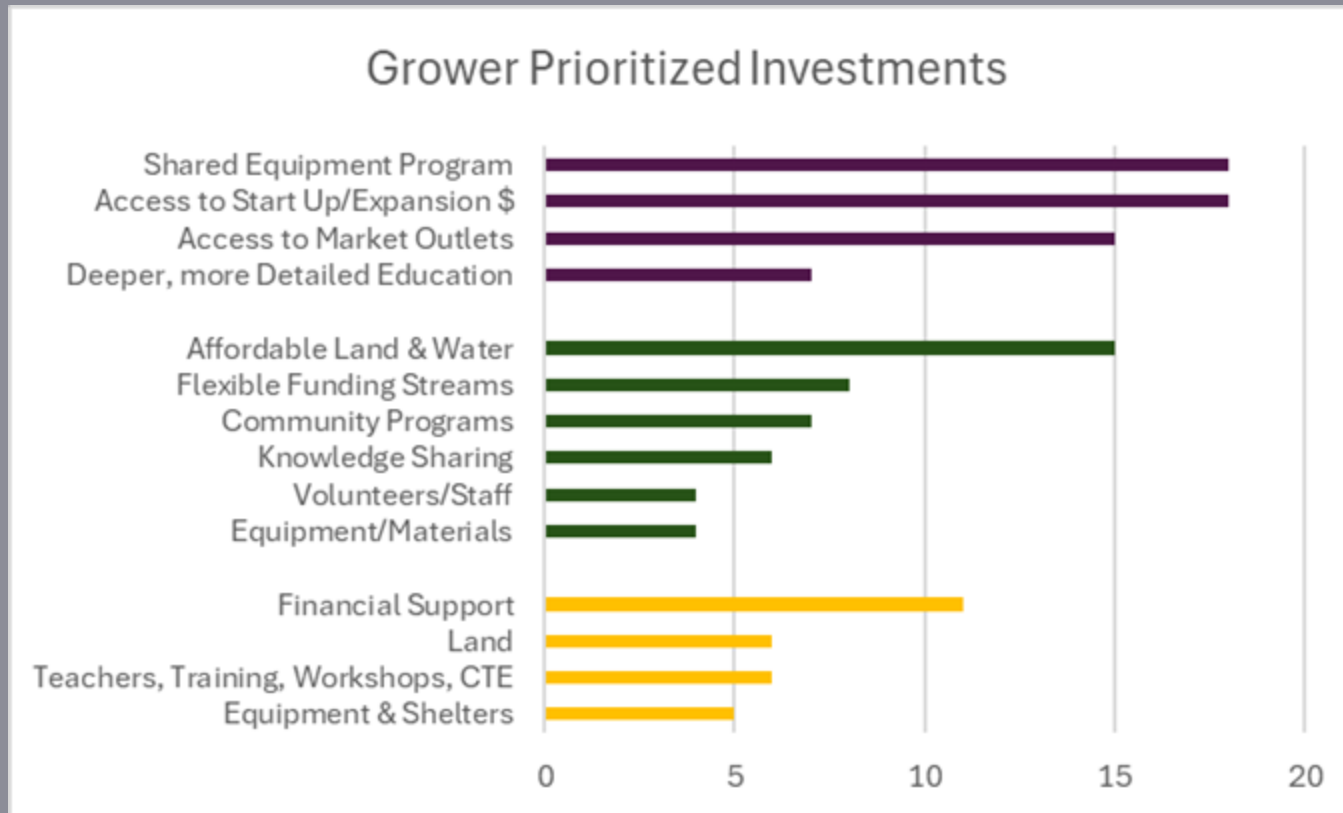


Different types of capital and infrastructure are needed to support a thriving regional food system.

1. **Built Capital:** (Buildings, Equipment, Storage) Plentiful in conventional supply chains, not necessarily in regional. Need to be intentional on utilizing the built capital we already have and coordinate.
2. **Natural Capital:** (Farmland, Clean Water, Soil Health) Preserving environmentally suitable farmland important and increasing access to it.
3. **Financial Capital:** (Cash, Loans, Credit) Allows business owners the freedom to make decisions that align with their goals and values, need to be creative.
4. **Human Capital:** (People, Knowledge, Expertise) Critical knowledge transfer intergenerationally, between practitioners and educational institutions
5. **Social/Cultural Capital:** (Trust, Tradition, Relationships) Encourages communication and coordination, a gateway to other types of capital

Grower Engagement:

- **Goal: Highlight needed infrastructure**, using the community capital framework, to facilitate equitable food value chains and provide economic data to support infrastructural needs.
- **Growers are aware of the demand and opportunity in the region, however, need the infrastructural support to take advantage of it.**

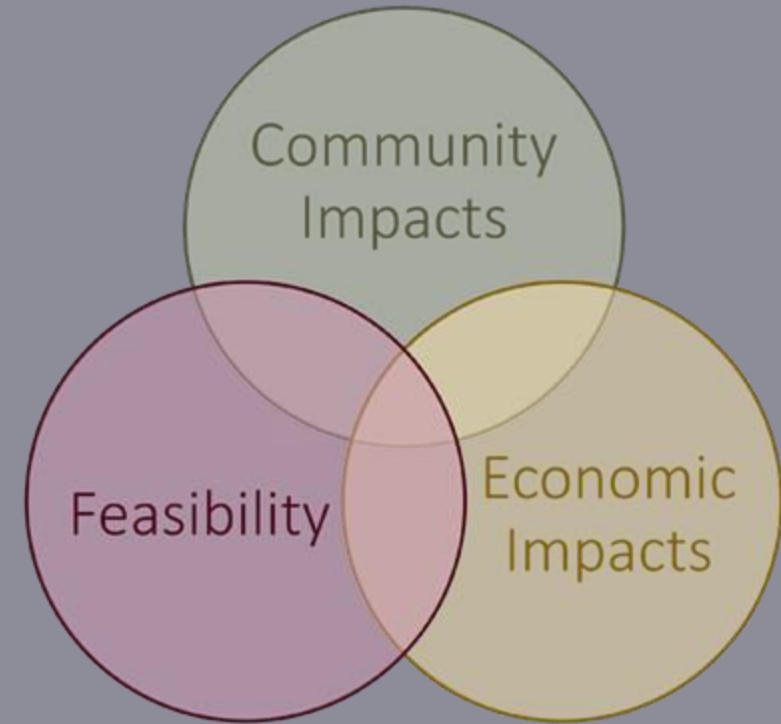


“Public policy” is an important tool local governments can use to transform food systems

Effective policies...⁴⁵

- Are informed by input from the community and other affected stakeholders.
- Balance progress and feasibility.
- Set affected entities up for success.
- Promote equity and ensure no group or community is unduly burdened.
- Are evidence-based and reflect current best practices.
- **It is important to consider who benefits from economic development policies.** Understanding the current state of ownership and decision-making power along the dimensions of race and ethnicity are a helpful starting point for improving equity outcomes.

Considerations for Selecting Policies



“The degree to which [alternative food networks] become potentially transformatory will partly depend upon the continued adjustments and actions of the dominant regulatory structures.”

Local Government Survey & Focus Group Results

- Local government representatives surveyed in the Tri-COG region believe strengthening food systems is important but are either unaware of ways to support or have limited capacity to support.
- Built, natural, human, and social were the four types of capital they felt local government was in the best place to support.
- Agreed local government's capacity to provide traditional financial capital was constrained, although acknowledged that need for financial capital usually arises before the resources arrive.
- There was a tension between feeling that local government could provide support in the areas listed above and challenges tied to a lack of social capital and equity: community distrust of government, communication, cooperation, and lack of community input into projects.

How Tri-COG region's grower-recommended investments align with local government capacity:

- Financial capital is a high-priority for grower-recommended investments, and yet local government officials feel constrained in their capacity to build that type of community capital.
- Financial capital can be a bottleneck for accessing other types of capital (e.g., natural, built, human), so it is important for local governments to find ways to support the development of financial capital in Tri-COG.

Alignment Between Recommended Investments and Local Government Capacity

Rural Growers: Recommended Investments

- Financial
- Built
- Social
- Cultural
- Human

Urban Growers: Recommended Investments

- Natural
- Financial
- Human

Youth Growers: Recommended Investments

- Financial
- Natural
- Human
- Built

Local Government Officials: Government Capacity

- **Built**
- **Natural**
- **Human**
- **Social**

It is important to consider who benefits from economic development policies

The question of “who benefits” from food systems-driven economic development is addressed by Clark et al.¹¹ They posed several questions that may be helpful for local governments to consider as they try to improve equitable outcomes in the Tri-COG food system:

- “Whose values are embedded in business relationships?”
- Whose values are excluded?
- What is a “fair” distribution of price premiums?
- How are trade-offs in the sector negotiated?
- What assets are most critical in the development of this sector and at what points are they most impactful? ”¹¹

Understanding the current state of ownership and decision-making power along the dimensions of race and ethnicity are a helpful starting point for improving equity outcomes. We must know where we are starting to understand when progress has been made.

Equitable

Equitable participation and asset ownership along the dimensions of race, ethnicity, geography, and position in the value chain (e.g., grower, aggregator, purchaser).



COGs and local governments can use the following strategies to build food systems community capital



Social Capital: Lead with social capital. Serve as a convener: build relationships FIRST to leverage other capital types more effectively. Reach out to community members, particularly those who have had less of a public voice in the past, to meet them where they are and involve them in decision-making processes. Tailor communication strategies to specific groups.



Cultural Capital: Acknowledge that inequity exists in the food system and commit to adopting policies that move toward equity and investing in groups that historically have been underinvested in. Collectively examine how your community's values show up in decisions about food systems.



Human Capital: Explore opportunities for joint funding of staffing positions. Dedicated staff who work on these issues across county boundaries are key. Ensure workforce development strategies support agriculture and food entrepreneurship endeavors. Connect well-matched organizations and individuals in this space.

COGs and local governments can use the following strategies to build food systems community capital (Continued)



Built Capital: Advocate for public financing of built infrastructure for food systems just as you would for roads and broadband. They are an important part of your government's economic development strategy. Identify and support organizations already working to build infrastructure in your area. Focus on unlocking the full potential of existing and new built by ensuring they have the other types of capital they need.



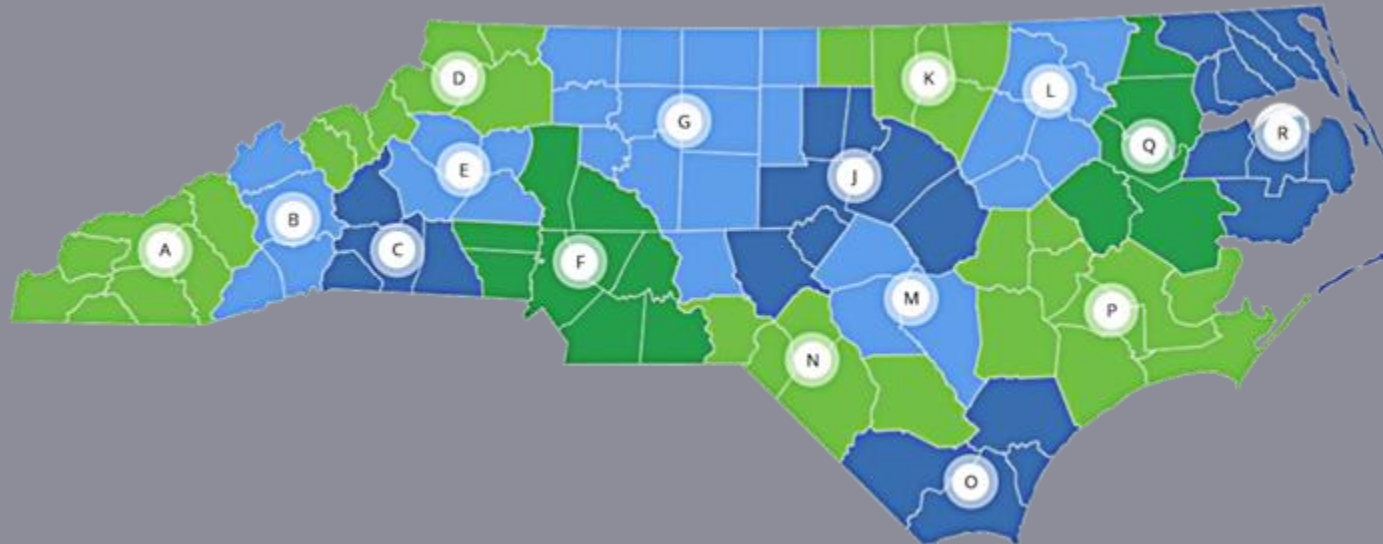
Natural Capital: Integrate protection of farmland and water sources into your economic development strategy and land use plan.



Financial Capital: Familiarize yourself with creative financing mechanisms and connect organizations and individuals to appropriate options for their goals. Advocate for policies that enable easier direction of public funds, such as institutional procurement and emergency food dollars, toward regional and equitable food value chains in ways that put community-based organizations in control of decision-making.

Potential Role of Councils of Governments in the Regional Food System

- Consist of staff and departments who specialize in a multitude of areas that influence the food system, are consistent entities that can provide continuity to the work, supported by Local governments that would like to see COGs support food system efforts and can work with other regions when beneficial.
- Have consistent contact with state and federal agencies to deliver programs - can drive investment from the EDA and other federal funding opportunities to the Tri-COG region and local organizations.
- Facilitate relationships between local community organizations and funders and can partner on grants with local governments and community organizations if further capacity is needed.
- Can tie Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) to food system objectives. The CEDS guides work throughout the year and gives capacity to work in partnership towards named strategies.



THANK YOU!

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