



QUESTIONS for CANDIDATES

A Voter's Guide to Questions on Farm and Food Policy in the Carolinas

The Carolina Farm Stewardship Association (CFSA) works directly with policymakers and community leaders across the Carolinas to educate and collaborate on issues that affect food and farming. CFSA knows that food and farming activists across the Carolinas make an impact when they are able to impress upon policy-makers the importance of sustainable farming and community food systems. This guide provides questions you should ask candidates for elected office to understand their positions on the policies that impact farms and food systems. Questions for Candidates aims to get candidates and their communities thinking about farming, food security, community gardening, fracking, and food. Some candidates will become elected officials; the more the candidates learn about sustainable farming and food systems now, the more likely that they will support policies that foster these systems once elected.

Public discourse about these issues is incredibly important to both increase awareness and to hold our elected officials accountable. Please use this guide to discuss food system issues at public debates, forums and town hall meetings.

The Carolina Farm Stewardship Association (CFSA) is a farmer-driven, membership-based 501(c)(3) non-profit organization that helps people in the Carolinas grow and eat local, organic foods by advocating for fair farm and food policies, building the systems family farms need to thrive, and educating communities about local, organic agriculture.

Founded in 1979, we are the oldest and largest sustainable agriculture organization in the Southeast. For over three decades, we have successfully united farmers, consumers and businesses to build a just, healthy food and farming system that is good for consumers, good for farmers and farmworkers, and good for the land.



Tips For Building Relationships With Candidates

Relationships matter. The better or stronger your relationship with a future policy-maker, the more likely you are to impact how that person thinks about the issues that matter to you. Keep in mind that you can work effectively with someone, regardless of the personal opinions either of you may hold. Although you are unlikely to agree on every issue, you can still build a positive relationship in the long run.

Get to know them and their staff: The best way to get to know your candidates on a personal basis is to spend time with them. For incumbent state or federal lawmakers, arrange an in-district meeting when they are home. You can also write a letter, attend a town hall meeting, send an email, write a letter to the editor of your local paper: take action to let candidates know how you stand on issues. It is also important to get to know their campaign staff, especially at the state and federal level; staff opinions inform the policy positions of candidates.

Invite them often and early: Candidates are often very busy. Be sure to invite them to every event that you hold and remind them of your invitation about a month before the event and again the week of the event.

Follow up with a thank you note: Following up with a thank you note after a meeting or an event sets the stage for future interactions. A simple email message will usually do the job. Thanking a candidate for his or her time will go a long way towards building a stronger relationship and encouraging future discussions.

Learn about their interests: Educate yourself about the interests of a candidate; this will help you to better understand why she may choose a certain position. Knowing background information about the candidate's life and concerns will better inform your engagement efforts and help you to understand her motivations around certain issues. For example, it might help to talk about sustainable agriculture as a way to promote healthy ecosystems with one official, while another might better understand the benefits local agriculture can have on public health, while still another will be interested in sustainable ag's role as an economic driver.

UNDERSTANDING BARRIERS AND BENEFITS

Barriers prevent or discourage a change in behavior and perceived benefits motivate change. When trying to change policy or advocate for a project or new program, it is helpful to think about how candidates understand the barriers and benefits to change. Reducing barriers and/or increasing benefits makes a more persuasive argument. By mapping out the benefits and barriers before meeting with an elected official, you can more easily identify opportunities to decrease barriers or increase benefits. For example, it might help to talk about sustainable agriculture as a way to promote a healthy environment with one official, while another might better understand the benefits local agriculture can have on public health or sustainable ag's role as an economic driver.

Questions for LOCAL Candidates

These questions may best be asked of candidates running for offices like County Commissioner, City Council, Mayor, Soil and Water Conservation District Supervisor, and School Board

1. In a study of Oklahoma farmers' markets, researchers found that direct sales of \$3.3 million generated a total economic impact of \$6 million. A total of 113 jobs were associated, directly or indirectly, with the markets (The Economic Impacts of Direct Produce Marketing, 2008). In addition to their positive impact on local economies, farmers' markets are also a great vehicle for putting more locally grown food on the plates of local community members. What would you do to help establish or expand access to farmers' markets in our community?
2. School and community gardens serve as a center of social activity, a site to learn leadership and social skills, and a place to connect with food and nature. Research shows that people involved with community gardens eat more fruits and vegetables than their non-gardening counterparts, and that school gardens provide students with feelings of self-efficacy, enthusiasm for food and nature, and excitement about learning. Given these positive outcomes, what actions would you take to foster the development of community and school gardens?
3. In the U.S., 30 to 40% of the food supply ends up as food waste. In 2015, USDA and EPA announced that they would partner with local governments and other institutions to reduce food waste by 50% by the year 2030. What policies would you support to ensure that our community reduces its food waste?
4. Many municipalities are adopting policies and passing laws to ensure that the food available on city property—cafeterias and vending machines in government office buildings, day care centers, schools, parks,

- and other venues—is healthful. Some communities provide incentives and opportunities for community gardens or even farms on city owned property. What would you do to encourage healthy eating in our community? What would you do encourage the production of fresh food on city property?
5. Numerous studies indicate that fruits and vegetables produced and consumed locally create more economic activity in a specific area than comparable imported food. Local food may also be more healthy; recently a team of scientists in the U.K. found that organic crops had 18 to 69 percent more antioxidants than conventional crops (British Journal of Nutrition, 2014). How will you encourage our community to access the tremendous benefits of consuming locally grown, organic food?
 6. Demand for locally produced food far exceeds the supply; nationally, direct sales by farmers to consumers were 8% higher in 2012 than in 2007 (USDA Census of Agriculture, 2012). What policies would you like to adopt to support the increase of local food production, processing, and retailing to address the growing consumer demand for local food?
 7. City and county comprehensive plans provide long-term vision for how a community should grow and develop. What would you do to ensure that our community's comprehensive plan preserves the county's agricultural land, and fosters our local food economy?

Questions for STATE Candidates

These questions may be asked of candidates for State Senate or State House of Representatives in SC and NC

1. The organic sector continues to grow at a rapid rate. Recently, the U.S. Department of Agriculture's National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) released the results of the 2015 Certified Organic Survey, which show that 12,818 certified organic farms in the US sold a total of \$6.2 billion in organic products in 2015, up 13 percent from \$5.5 billion in 2014. In 2009, the South Carolina Department of Agriculture introduced the '50 by 20' goal with the idea of raising the economic impact of South Carolina agribusiness to \$50 billion by the year 2020. In 2015, the North Carolina Department of Agriculture announced the goal of boosting the state's agriculture industry to \$100 billion in revenue by the year 2020. The organic sector is an area of agricultural production where we can see rapid expansion and economic growth, even as prices for many commodity crops are tanking. What policies do you ensure that our state reaps its share of the rapidly increasing organic sector?

2. There are thousands of small-scale farms across the Carolinas. Many state level policies have been set to support the growth of larger-scale farms who are working to access wholesale, international markets. The needs and challenges faced by small-scale producers are different than those faced large-scale producers. What policies would you support to support the efforts of small-scale farms in the state?

3. Federal nutrition programs such as WIC, SNAP, school lunch and breakfast programs, and the Summer Food Service Program are important food security resources in communities across the Carolinas. If some of the food used in these programs is sourced

from local farms, the programs have a positive economic impact on local retailers and food producers. If elected, what will you do to ensure that these programs purchase from Carolina farmers?

4. Critics of today's industrial agriculture point out that most food production is too dependent on pesticides and that it damages the environment. High-tech agriculture's go-to response is that this kind of petroleum and chemically based system is the only way to efficiently produce enough food to feed the world. However, inefficient food distribution is actually one of the largest barriers to feeding our growing population; food waste is a huge factor that contributes to the inefficiency of our food system. 40% of the food produced in the United States is wasted as a result of production, storage, packaging losses, and retail and consumer waste (Natural Resources Defense Council, 2012). This food typically goes straight from field to landfills without ever getting to a consumer. Local, intermediate cold chains are part of the solution to decreasing this food waste. Local and regional cold handling and storage systems would be an investment in our communities to prevent such large amounts of perishable food losses. These systems would help small and beginning farmers to more efficiently bring their products to market; creating economic growth and reducing food waste. What policies or programs would you support at the state level that would rebuild our local and regional cold supply chains?

NORTH CAROLINA Specific Questions

1. North Carolina's tax code hurts small farmers. Small farmers pay more in property taxes and sales tax than larger farms. For example, NC property tax law allows certain, larger farms and forestland to be taxed at its present use rather than its market value. Small farms pay sales tax for farm equipment and supplies larger farms don't pay. Small farms form the backbone of the local food economy, and young farmers often cannot afford to get started on a large scale; what policies do you support to encourage small and beginning farmers?

2. North Carolina voters recently voted to support a bond that will, in part, finance a Plant Sciences Initiative at NC State University. After over a decade of reductions in state and federal funding for agriculture research, this new initiative is welcome news. What will you do to ensure that the research done at NC State with taxpayer dollars benefits both conventional and organic farmers?

3. In 2012, 29.6 percent of North Carolina adults self-reported that they considered themselves overweight or obese. Nationally, 17.1 percent of children between the ages of 2 and 19 were considered overweight or obese (Center for Disease Control, 2012). A food desert is a low-income area with limited access to affordable, healthy food options. North Carolina has at least 349 food deserts across 80 counties. Living closer to healthy food retail outlets is associated with better eating habits and decreased risk for obesity and diet-related diseases. Some other states and communities around the nation have taken action to offer healthier food in food desert communities by

stocking healthy food in convenience stores or providing economic incentives to grocery stores to locate in low-income communities. This past year, the NC General Assembly passed the Healthy Food Small Retailer/Corner Store Act. This act created a fund to utilize existing retail outlet infrastructure across the state to facilitate access and increased consumption of fresh, local, nutrient-dense foods. The bill called for a \$1 million appropriation for the NC Department of Commerce to implement and manage the program, however only \$250,000 was put towards the initiative. What results will you be looking for from this small investment of state dollars to consider funding the effort in the future?

4. In 2015, there was much controversy over the "Property Protection Act," better known as "Ag Gag." The bill became law over the governor's veto. This harmful law is seen by many as a wholesale assault on many fundamental values shared by people across the state of North Carolina. Countless responsible businesses, including farms, will suffer by association with those that perpetuate animal abuse, violate workers' rights, endanger consumer health, or engage in other illegal or unethical activities. The law is also an affront to the freedom of journalists, employees and the public at large to share critical information that brings to justice those who break the law by abusing vulnerable members of our community. What will you do to bring transparency and consumer confidence back to our state's food system?

SOUTH CAROLINA Specific Questions

1. A report called Making Small Farms Big Business was published in 2013. It includes a number of policy recommendations that the state can take to increase the local food economy, including the development of regional food hubs and community food councils. What policies do you support to foster the expansion of South Carolina's local food economy?

2. In 2014, South Carolina legalized industrial hemp production. However, despite legalization, hemp is nearly impossible for farmers to grow because there is no agency responsible for issuing licenses that the law requires. North Carolina passed a similar hemp bill in 2016 and is already moving towards implementation of a pilot hemp production program. Do you support legislation directing a state agency to create a licensing program to enable industrial hemp production?

3. In order to feed South Carolinians into the future, we must ensure that farmland is protected for future generations. Development pressure makes it difficult for farmers to keep their land in farming, and so, without protections, more prime farmland will be lost. Would you support expanded agricultural easements (a contract that dedicates land to agricultural uses. A landowner who enters into an agricultural easement agrees to use the land predominantly for agricultural purposes, and forfeits the right to develop the land for other purposes)? What other policies would you support to preserve farmland?

4. In 2012, 31.6 percent of South Carolina adults self-reported that they considered themselves overweight or obese. Nationally, 17.1 percent of children between the ages of 2 and 19 were considered overweight or obese (Center for Disease Control, 2012). A food desert is a low-income area with limited access to affordable, healthy food options. South Carolina has at least 21 food deserts in 14 counties (USDA ERS, 2011). Living closer to healthy food retail outlets is associated with better eating habits and decreased risk for obesity and diet-related diseases. Some other states and communities around the nation have taken action to offer healthier food in food desert communities by stocking healthy food in convenience stores or providing economic incentives to grocery stores to locate in low-income communities. In 2015, South Carolina lawmakers included an appropriation in the state budget for a Healthy Food Financing Initiative (HFFI). These funds will help local farmers and food businesses by providing them access to affordable loans to establish, renovate, or expand. Priority is given to projects that expand access to healthy, local food in communities where access to this food is limited or totally unavailable. If elected, how will you work to increase healthy food access in communities that don't have access now? How will you improve access to credit and capital for farm and food businesses looking to expand?

Questions for FEDERAL Candidates

These questions may be asked of candidates to the US Congress whether they are running for a seat in the Senate or one in the House of Representatives

1. The Congressional Budget Office has estimated that the Food and Drug Administration will need an additional \$580 million in funding over a five-year period to effectively implement the Food Safety Modernization Act. Even if the FDA receives an estimated \$109.5 million in the president's proposed budget, the agency's funding for FSMA would still only reach about half of that estimate. Farmers and food processors need to be prepared for implementing the necessary changes on their farms and facilities in order to fully comply with these new federal laws. What will you do to ensure that there is sufficient funding for implementation of FSMA and for training of farmers and food producers on these new laws?

2. Climate change poses a real threat to local farms – not just from the projected changes in temperature and moisture, but in increased variability, which means more intense storms and droughts. What policies will you support to address climate change – mitigation or adaptation – to protect the nation's food supply?

3. Sustainable Agriculture Research Education (SARE) was created in 1988 by the U.S. Congress in response to the growing need for research on sustainable agriculture and organic farming. Since its creation, SARE has funded the development of important research information on cover crops, rotational grazing, diversification, and a large variety of other sustainable agriculture topics. However, many worthy projects have

gone unfunded; in fact, only 6 percent of SARE Research & Education grant applications could be funded in 2013 due to severe funding constraints. SARE is authorized in the 2012 Farm Bill to receive up to \$60 million a year, but it has never received more than \$22.7 million in annual appropriations. A substantial increase in funding would help worthy sustainable agriculture research projects get going and would support the rapidly growing organic sector. Do you support the use of taxpayer dollars to fund agriculture research that will benefit sustainable farms?

4. Farm to school efforts increase the connection that communities have with fresh, healthy food and local food producers by changing school food purchasing and education practices. Farm to school implementation differs by location but typically includes local food procurement, hands-on learning related to agriculture, food, health or nutrition, and school gardens. These programs empower children and their families to make informed food choices while strengthening the local economy and contributing to vibrant communities. The Child Nutrition Reauthorization act is currently stalled in the Senate, but both Senate and House versions contain significant increased supports for the USDA Farm to School Grant Program. This program provides important grant funding to schools wanting to expand their farm to School footprint. What are your thoughts on federal support towards increasing the amount of local food sold in public school cafeterias?

Questions for FEDERAL Candidates

5. 2017 will be a year where conversations will begin about policies and programs to be included in the 2018 Farm Bill. Traditionally, the bulk of programs and subsidies included in farm bills strongly support conventional agriculture and conventional commodities. Sustainable agriculture advocates will be working hard in the next two years to ensure more policies and programs to support the growth of supports for sustainable agriculture and organic crop production. Are you willing to meet with sustainable farmers and food advocates to discuss ways that the 2018 Farm Bill can better support those producers and their markets?

carolina farm 
stewardship association

To learn more about the work that the Carolina Farm Stewardship Association is doing to advocate for fair farm and food policies, visit us at

www.carolinafarmstewards.org,
call us at 919-542-2402, or email us at
takeaction@carolinafarmstewards.org.

To stay up-to-date on the latest food and farm policy news.

Subscribe to our Action Alerts at
<http://bit.ly/axnalerts>.



*A special thank you to our partner,
the Center for Environmental Farming
Systems, for their contributions to this
document.*