

# QUESTIONS FOR

CANDIDATES



2018

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

The Carolina Farm Stewardship Association (CFSA) works directly with policymakers and community leaders across North and South Carolina to educate and collaborate on issues that affect food and farming. Activists across the Carolinas make an impact when they voice the importance of sustainable farming and community food systems to policymakers.

Questions for Candidates equips you with questions you should ask candidates running for elected office to understand their positions on the policies that impact farms and food systems. This guide aims for candidates and their communities to think about food, farming, food security, community gardening, and the environment. The more candidates learn about sustainable farming and food systems now, and their importance, the more likely they'll be to support policies that foster these systems once elected.

Public discourse about these issues is incredibly important to increase awareness and hold our elected officials accountable. 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.*

# HOW TO

BUILD RELATIONSHIPS WITH  
CANDIDATES



# 2018

## Relationships Matter

**The stronger your relationship with a future policymaker, the more likely you are to impact issues that matter to you. Although you're unlikely to agree on every issue, you can still work effectively together and 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 lawmakers,

arrange an in-district meeting. Write a letter, attend a town hall meeting, send an email, or write a letter to the editor of your local paper—take action to let candidates know your stance. It's 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 early and often

Candidates are often very busy. Invite them to every event that you hold, remind them of your invitation about a month before the event, then once more during the week of the event.

### Follow up with a thank you note

Take a moment after a meeting or event with a candidate to send them gratitude. A simple email will do. Thanking a candidate for their time goes a long way toward building a stronger relationship and encouraging future interactions.



### Learn about their interests

Educate yourself on the candidate's interests, as this may help to understand their motivations and

why they take a position around certain issues. Background information about their life, career, and concerns will better inform your engagement efforts. For example, it might help to talk about sustainable agriculture as a way to promote healthy ecosystems with one candidate, another might better understand the benefits on public health, yet someone else may be more interested in sustainable ag's role as an economic driver.

# LOCAL-LEVEL QUESTIONS



## 2018

These can be asked of candidates for county commissioner, city council, mayor, soil & water conservation district, supervisor, or school board

### 1. What would you do to support community gardens and other community-centered food production efforts?

Studies show that community gardens have positive effects on participants' eating habits and attitudes in both urban and rural communities.<sup>1,2</sup> Community gardens also foster connections between neighbors, improve the perception of a neighborhood, and increase property values.<sup>3</sup>

Some municipalities in the Carolinas have made specific commitments to implement policies that support community gardens:

- Allowing community gardens on public land with support from parks and recreation departments and sustainability offices.<sup>4</sup>
- Water departments offering free or reduced-cost water hook-ups and service.<sup>5</sup>
- Letting individuals lease publicly owned land for commercial agricultural enterprises.<sup>6</sup>

### 2. What steps will you take to ensure our community reduces its food waste and meets the 50% reduction goal by 2030?

Up to 40% of the U.S. food supply ends up in landfills as food waste.<sup>7</sup> In 2015, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) announced that they would partner with local governments and other institutions to reduce food waste by 50% by the year 2030.<sup>8</sup>

- The N.C. Department of Environmental Quality provides free information and

technical assistance to the public and private sectors about recycling and food waste reduction.<sup>9</sup>

- S.C. implemented the "Don't Waste Food S.C." campaign, which brings together stakeholders from across the public and private sectors to share knowledge, coordinate resources, and work together to help reduce food waste statewide.<sup>10</sup>

While information and resources are important at the state level, we need local action steps to reduce the amount of food going into the landfill.

### 3. Do you support policies that limit the types of unhealthy foods that can be placed in vending machines on city or county property?

People in our community walk past vending machines every day. Many municipalities around the U.S. are passing policies in an effort to curb obesity and the Carolinas are no exception.

- N.C. was 11.3% in 2016, the 15th highest rate in the U.S.<sup>11</sup>
- S.C. was 14.1% in 2014, costing the state an estimated \$4.1 billion per year in health care costs.<sup>12</sup>
- Diabetes was the 7th leading cause of death in N.C. in 2016.<sup>13</sup>
- Diabetes is the 7th leading cause of death in S.C.<sup>14</sup>

One example of a healthy vending machine policy is regulating beverage machines in areas regularly frequented by children (18 and under) to only include water, unsweetened milk, or beverages with 25 calories or less.

# LOCAL-LEVEL QUESTIONS



## 2018

These questions can be asked of candidates for county commissioner, city council, mayor, soil & water conservation district, supervisor, or school board

#### **4. Do you support the use of tax dollars to invest in facilities that would help farmers and food entrepreneurs expand their businesses?**

In 2009, Cabarrus County, N.C. established a trust fund to support the local food economy through grants and conservation easements. The fund was created using the deferred tax dollars the county collects from properties exiting their Present-Use Value program. By early 2017, the fund had raised over \$1.5 million to support food and farming in their community. Two of the biggest projects from the fund include a grant given to support a new meat processing facility, and funding for the Elma C. Lomax Incubator Farm, a training facility for beginning farmers.<sup>15</sup>

This is an example of a municipal government with an innovative solution to make infrastructure investments that help local farmers be more profitable. Farmers and food producers need convenient places to take their animals and produce for processing.

#### **5. How do you support a comprehensive plan that preserves our agricultural land, fosters our local food economy, and ensures that our community has a healthier future?**

A county's comprehensive plan is an important tool that provides a long-term vision for how communities grow and develop. Site design and locations for private developments, schools, and parks, all impact how easy, safe, and convenient it is to walk or bike. Likewise, the land use policies outlined in comprehensive plans can influence how easily communities access fresh food and how effectively agricultural land is preserved, promoted, and valued.

#### **6. Which, if any, of these ideas would you be willing to explore to make local food resources more accessible to all members of our community?**

- Using city or county resources to offset the cost of having an EBT machine at the farmers market.
- Investing in an advertising campaign showcasing a local farmers market in low income/low access communities.
- Studying whether public transit users would like to see transit routes stop at farmers markets or stands.

Farmers markets and roadside stands create direct access to fresh, local food. Access to affordable, healthy, fresh food is a strong social determinant of community health outcomes like obesity, diabetes, and heart disease.<sup>16</sup> In recent years, communities across the Carolinas have worked to make those markets, roadside stands, and other fresh food options more available to all members of their community through hardline and mobile EBT machines.

#### **7. Food policy councils are community based coalitions that help promote stronger local food systems. If elected will you support the [creation of a/ efforts of our] council to improve our food system?**

In North Carolina, there are currently 35 food councils. In South Carolina, there are currently four of these councils with efforts underway to form two more. Each group is working to build connections and collaboration across stakeholders to improve health, food access, natural resource protection, economic development, and production agriculture for all of their communities' residents.

# STATE-LEVEL

## QUESTIONS

APPLIES TO NC & SC



# 2018

These questions can be asked of candidates for  
State Senate or State House of Representatives in North or South Carolina

### **1. Would you support legislation to require or encourage hiring extension agents that have experience in organic production practices? If so, how?**

Through its national survey, the National Young Farmers Coalition found that some new and beginning farmers opt to start organic vegetable operations, in part due to the comparable low overhead and diversity of market opportunities. At the same time, new farmers in the Carolinas often find that their local extension agents lack expertise in organic production. As a result, some of our state's newest and least financially stable farmers are often on their own when trying to manage disease or pest problems.

### **2. Do you support the use of state tax dollars to supplement federal funding for incentive-based conservation programs? If so, how?**

By volume, sediment runoff is the largest source of water pollution in the Carolinas. Agriculture is a significant source of sediment pollution and the damage it causes is expensive. Sediment pollution reduces storage volume in reservoirs, increases costs for municipal water treatment plants, and kills fish.

Conservation programs administered by the USDA provide financial incentives for farmers to improve their soil management. Yet the demand from farmers for this assistance is greater than available funding. State governments play a vital role in monitoring water quality, educating farmers about best practices, and supplementing federal funding for incentive-based conservation projects.

### **3. Do you support investing in ways to get more local food into schools? If so, how would you like to see this done? If not, why not?**

Several states have passed policies to encourage schools to purchase local food for school cafeterias. Agriculture is the largest economic driver in the Carolinas. Between them, North and South Carolina boast tens of thousands of farms, many of which are barely scraping by. Furthermore, we have a generation of students who don't know where their food comes from, and a large percentage of young people who are overweight or obese.

### **4. Which new or existing state policies or programs do you support that help farmers keep their products cold, distribute them locally, or get more local food into the homes of hungry families?**

Many farmers don't produce enough product to sell into existing, large-scale distribution channels. A huge hurdle to scaling up a small operation is having the refrigerated cooler space and cold-chain distribution channels to get products to market.

# NC-ONLY QUESTIONS



# 2018

These questions can be asked of candidates for  
North Carolina State Senate or State House of Representatives

## **1. Which policies that encourage small and beginning farmers do you back? Which laws that discourage small and beginning farms do you support repealing?**

The average farmer in North Carolina is almost 60 years old. Many young people are interested in farming as a career, but find that farmland is too expensive; that it is difficult to comply with regulations that assume farms are hundreds, if not thousands of acres in size; and that credit is easier to access if you want to borrow \$200,000 than if you want to borrow \$20,000.

Small farms form the backbone of the local food economy, and many farmers want to start small.

## **2. Does government have a role to play in improving access and affordability of healthy food? If so, please describe the specific policies you would support. If not, why not?**

In 2016:

- 31.8% of North Carolina adults self-reported that they considered themselves overweight or obese.
- 30.9% of children (ages 10-17) were considered overweight or obese.
- 80 of North Carolina's counties include addresses that, in rural areas, are more than 10 miles, and, in urban areas, are over one mile from a store selling healthy food.

Data shows that low income families are willing to travel further for less expensive food.

## **3. If elected, how will you balance the interests of farms, communities, and the environment?**

North Carolina has seen extreme tension between confined livestock operations and a number of other constituencies in the state; neighbors of those farms, environmental groups, animal welfare organizations, and outdoor enthusiasts.

In every instance, state-level policymakers have moved swiftly to protect the interests of the farms and the international corporations that contract with the farms.

# SC-ONLY QUESTIONS



# 2018

These questions can be asked of candidates for  
South Carolina State Senate or State House of Representatives

## **1. Should state government take action to support food hub development in South Carolina so that more S.C. farmers, particularly beginning farmers, can expand their businesses? What form should that support take?**

There are many food-producing farmers in South Carolina that focus on direct-to-consumer sales. Some of these farms are interested in expanding into wholesale markets like schools, distributors, and larger grocery stores, but there are a number of challenges to scaling up. Food hubs help overcome some of the challenges. A food hub is a centrally located facility that facilitates the aggregation, storage, processing, distribution, and marketing of locally/regionally-produced food products.

## **2. If elected, how will you support efforts to preserve farmland, and specifically the ongoing work of these initiatives?**

Since 2007, South Carolina has lost 1,326 farms and more than 43,416 acres of farmland. The S.C. Conservation Bank and the new S.C. Farm Link program work to prevent additional loss of farmland. The S.C. Conservation Bank conserved over 19,000 acres of agricultural land throughout the state. Farm Link, a project of the the S.C. Department of Agriculture, keeps land in agriculture by connecting farmers seeking land with those who own farmland.

## **3. Do you support the growth of new and beginning farmer development throughout S.C.? Should the state invest in programs to ensure the next generation of farmers and ranchers can succeed?**

The average S.C. farmer is 59 years old. As its largest economic driver, S.C. puts agriculture at-risk if it doesn't

support the next generation of farmers. Many people entering agriculture have very little on-farm experience. While this state has several new and beginning farmer programs, including Greenville Tech's Sustainable Ag Program, Lowcountry Local First's Growing New Farmers Program, and Clemson Extension's New and Beginning Farmer Program, the bulk of funds for these programs comes from grants and donations.

## **4. Do you support continued state funding for the Healthy Bucks program?**

South Carolina's Healthy Bucks program was created through a 2014 budget proviso. The program allows SNAP recipients to obtain additional fruits and vegetables when they use their SNAP benefits to purchase fresh produce at participating farmers markets. In the first two years of the program's existence, the number of farmers markets accepting SNAP increased from 41 to 54 and the number of farm stands accepting SNAP increased from 32 to 152. SNAP users have better fresh food access and are putting state and federal dollars into local farm businesses.

## **5. Is a plan like this something you would be interested in supporting for rural S.C.? Will you connect with the Office of Rural Health to ask how to support this plan?**

More than one million residents call rural S.C. home. The S.C. Rural Health Action Plan contains five areas of focus, 15 recommendations, and over 50 action steps intended to spur progress. Some of the steps in the plan include fostering local, thriving food economies by working on local food systems activities such as agritourism, commercial kitchens, farmland access, and expanding market opportunities for local, food-producing farmers.

# FEDERAL-LEVEL QUESTIONS



## 2018

These questions can be asked of candidates for  
U.S. Congress (Senate or House of Representatives)

### **1. If you were on the farm bill conference committee, would you support the House or Senate position on organic cost share? Why or why not?**

Since the launch of the USDA's National Organic Program in 2000, each successive farm bill has provided assistance to farmers seeking organic certification in the form of the National Organic Certification Cost Share Program (NOCCSP). The NOCCSP provides reimbursement to farmers for 75% of their annual certification fees, up to a maximum of \$750. This assistance is vital to many small and medium-sized operations—the scale at which new farmers often begin. More than 220 operations in North Carolina received organic cost share support in 2016. Cost share funds allocated to South Carolina in 2016 provided assistance to more than 40 operations.

The House's version of the 2018 Farm Bill eliminates the NOCCSP, while the Senate's version does not.

### **2. If you were on the conference committee tasked with resolving the differences between the two bills, would you support eliminating these programs or support permanent funding during the negotiation process? Why or why not?**

The Farmers Market and Local Food Promotion Program (FMLFPP) and the Value Added Producer Grant Program (VAPG), provide essential support to small businesses.

The FMLFPP has provided competitive grants to businesses, community organizations, and local governments to help establish farmers markets, retail outlets, and aggregation/distribution food hubs—all

vital resources for nearby farmers.

The VAPG helps farmers start or expand value-added, producer-owned businesses, increasing farm income. In May 2018, the USDA Economic Research Service reported that farmers who receive a Value Added Producer Grant create more jobs and were significantly less likely to fail than similarly situation non-recipients.

These programs were eliminated in the House version of the 2018 Farm Bill and were continued and given permanent funding in the Senate version.

### **3. If elected, will you support policy designed to increase the number of agents selling Whole Farm Revenue Protection?**

When natural and economic disasters strike, uninsured and underinsured farmers bear the brunt of the financial loss. South Carolina farmers lost over \$375.5 million in 2015 when disastrous flooding hit much of the state. Many small, diversified farms didn't have crop insurance because there were no policies for sale that met their needs. If the S.C. State House hadn't passed a bailout package to compensate farmers for some flood losses, they would have been left with nothing.

Since then, the USDA launched a crop insurance option for small, diversified farmers called Whole Farm Revenue Protection. Whole Farm has the potential to help small and mid-size diversified specialty crop farmers survive economic downturns and natural disaster. However, most crop insurance agents do not sell Whole Farm policies because it's time consuming to underwrite.



# FEDERAL-LEVEL QUESTIONS



# 2018

These questions can be asked of candidates for  
U.S. Congress (Senate or House of Representatives)

## 4. Is publicly funding agricultural research a priority for you? If so, why? If not, is there any information you would like to be better informed about this area of policy?

Agricultural research has a consistently high return on investment. Public investment in ag research is often cited as a key reason why the U.S. enjoys an abundant food supply. Yet, public investment in agricultural research has been on the decline for decades, in part due to a high level of private investment in only a few areas of agricultural research. Both the House and Senate versions of the 2018 Farm Bill included increased public funding for research.

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Learn more about the work that CFSA is doing to advocate for fair farm and food policies:  
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