

QUESTIONS FOR CANDIDATES



2020

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 can ask candidates for elected office. Farm and food policy should be a part of every candidate's platform, and these questions will make sure they think about these issues if they aren't already. And if they have already given farm and food policy some thought, this guide will help you understand their positions. This guide is meant to support candidates in thinking about food, farming, food security, community gardening, and the environment. The more candidates learn about the importance of sustainable farming and food systems now, 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.

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, CFSA is the oldest and largest sustainable agriculture organization in the Southeast. For four decades, CFSA has successfully united farmers, consumers, and businesses to build a just, healthy food and farming system that is good for consumers, farmers, farm workers, and the land.

HOW TO

BUILD RELATIONSHIPS WITH
CANDIDATES



2020

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. Sign candidates and elected officials up for your organization's email list, newsletter, and/or action alerts. Make sure your elected official is signed up to receive information in whatever format you use to update people about your work. It's also important to get to know their campaign staff, especially at the state and federal levels; 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, while **another** may better understand the benefits on public health or sustainable ag's role as an economic driver.

LOCAL-LEVEL QUESTIONS



2020

Questions for candidates in elections for soil & water conservation district supervisor positions, school board seats, city council and county commissioner positions.

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.^{1,2} Community gardens also foster connections between neighbors, improve the perception of a neighborhood, and increase property values.³

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

- **The City of Asheville, NC's** Community Gardens and Urban Agricultural Leases Programs creates a way for the city to lease publicly owned land for community and commercial agricultural enterprises.⁴
- **The City of Greensboro, NC** funds a Community Garden Coordinator position through the Parks and Recreation Department that is specifically tasked with supporting community gardening efforts on city-owned land.⁵
- **The Town of Cary, NC** supports an organic-certified learning farm, Good Hope Farm, on town-owned land through an eight-year lease to the Piedmont Conservation Council and partnerships with The Conservation Fund, North Carolina Community Development Initiative, and Conservation Trust for North Carolina. The Town also supports the project with a general manager to handle all infrastructure interactions with the Town.⁶

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

Here are some examples of municipal governments investing in infrastructure that helps local farmers be more profitable. Farmers and food producers need convenient places to take their animals and produce for processing.

- The PeeDee Agriporium in Marion, SC was founded using local, state, and federal dollars. This public/private partnership features a food hub with a mission to market, sell, aggregate, and deliver products from the farms in the region.⁷
- The High Country Food Hub is supported with free space from Watauga County, NC within their Cooperative Extension building, and was supported by the Town of Boone with grant funding to pay for cold storage upgrades within the facility. The food hub's goal is to provide local farmers with marketing and sales support.⁸

3. Why are our health departments advising against the consumption of foods that cause negative outcomes, like sugary snacks and beverages, while our local governments are making money by selling those same products on public property?

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.

Here are some facts to consider:

- NC's medically obese rate was 11.3% in 2016, the

LOCAL-LEVEL QUESTIONS



2020

Questions for candidates in elections for soil & water conservation district supervisor positions, school board seats, city council and county commissioner positions.

- 15th highest rate in the U.S.⁹
- SC's medically obese rate was 14.1% in 2014, costing the state an estimated \$4.1 billion per year in health care costs.¹⁰
- Diabetes was the 7th leading cause of death in NC in 2016.¹¹
- Diabetes is the 7th leading cause of death in SC.¹²

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.

4. Up to 40% of our nation's food ends up in landfills.¹³ In response, South Carolina has implemented the "Don't Waste Food SC" 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 and increase food recovery statewide.¹⁴

SC Question: How are you working with or plan on working locally with this program to reduce food waste and increase food recovery?

NC Question: In North Carolina, there seems to be varying knowledge and implementation of food recovery regulations at both the enforcement and community levels. This leads to safe, edible food being sent to the landfill that could be recovered for human consumption. Would a cohesive conversation around food waste like SC has developed support our own local food waste recovery or diversion efforts?

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. What are you willing to explore to make local food more accessible to all community members?

Farmers markets and roadside stands create direct access to fresh food from local farmers. Access to affordable, healthy, fresh food is a strong social determinant of community health outcomes like obesity, diabetes, and heart disease.¹⁵ In recent years, communities across the Carolinas have worked to make markets, roadside stands, and other fresh food options more available to all community members through hardline and mobile EBT machines, and innovative transportation opportunities. Examples include:

- **The Town of Boone** committed resources to support Blue Ridge Women in Agriculture's 'Double Up Bucks' for EBT users at farmers markets and retail locations in Watauga County.¹⁶

LOCAL-LEVEL QUESTIONS



2020

Questions for candidates in elections for soil & water conservation district supervisor positions, school board seats, city council and county commissioner positions.

- **Healthy Alamance** has invested public dollars in supporting the development of a farmers market in a food-insecure neighborhood and supporting producers from that neighborhood to become vendors at that market. A marketing campaign showcased the neighborhood's own local vendors at the new market.
 - **Columbia, SC and Charlotte, NC** are exploring and piloting public-private partnerships with ride-sharing and grocery delivery services to provide transportation to farmers markets, roadside stands, and other retail locations.
- 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 local 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' citizens.



STATE-LEVEL QUESTIONS APPLIES TO NC & SC



2020

Questions for candidates in elections for
state legislature, governors, and other state-level positions

1. Do you support more of our schools buying food grown and produced in our state? If so, how would you like to see this done? If not, why not?

Many states have passed policies that 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 who could supply our schools with produce and protein. However, farmers in the Carolinas need support in accessing these institutional markets. Farm-to-school programs keep funds in our local Carolina economies, support local farms, and provide kids with fresh, locally grown and produced food.

2. Do you support the use of state tax dollars for incentive-based environmental conservation programs for farmers? If so, do you support designating any of those funds to help farmers pay to implement practices that sequester carbon or reduce on-farm carbon emissions?

Farmers are on the front lines of climate change. Their crops and livestock react to changes in temperature, precipitation, as well as pest and disease pressure. Farmers react to these changes and actively work to mitigate them—for their own farms and for the wider community. Conservation programs administered by the USDA and state departments of agriculture can provide financial incentives for farmers to improve their soil management practices. Demand from farmers for this assistance is greater than available funding. State governments play a vital role in monitoring soil quality, educating farmers about best practices, and supplementing federal funding for incentive-based

conservation projects that may not boost an individual farmer's bottom line, but improve the life of the community.

3. Do you support policies like increasing access to small-dollar loans for farmers, or tax incentives encouraging big distributors to work with smaller growers?

Many farmers don't grow enough to sell into existing, large-scale distribution channels. A huge hurdle to scaling up a small operation is having a way to keep produce cold after harvest. Cooling produce increases its shelf life, making it easier to get quality products to market. Whether a walk in cooler on an individual farm, an aggregation center with cold storage that takes produce from many farms, or encouraging big distribution companies to pick up produce from small growers in refrigerated trucks, there are many ways to help farmers get more local food to their communities. These types of infrastructure can play an important role in supporting local farmers' needs, but major gaps in the local supply chain persist.

4. Do you support the continued expansion of the hemp industry?

In its second year growing hemp, SC farmers are projecting a 1,200% increase in total acres growing hemp. In 2018, the SC Department of Agriculture has issued 113 permits, which represents a 565% increase from the first year of the pilot program. But many market analysts are warning that CBD and hemp markets may not be the original gold rush that the industry promised. This new and growing industry represents a dynamic and changing opportunity for farmers across the Carolinas.

NC-ONLY QUESTIONS



2020

Questions for candidates in elections for state legislature, governors, and other state-level positions

1. Do you support changing state law to allow small and beginning farmers to receive the same sales and property tax benefits as larger, more established farms?

The average farmer in North Carolina is almost 60 years old. Agriculture, the largest economic sector in the state, is at risk if we don't do more to encourage young, beginning farmers. Many young people are interested in farming as a career but find that state tax laws discourage beginning farmers by forcing them to pay sales tax on business purchases—taxes that established farms don't pay. North Carolina also acts to disincentivize the smart business strategy of starting small and expanding with increased demand and expertise by making farms cultivating under ten acres pay more property taxes than larger farms.

2. Will you support efforts to ensure equal investment in pastured livestock operations and industrial-scale livestock facilities? What are you willing to do to support such efforts?

In 2019, the General Assembly sent a budget to the governor that included \$900,000 in new funding earmarked for industrial swine operations. No new funds were appropriated to benefit pasture-based livestock farms.

3. Do you support investment by NC into a grant and loan program to stimulate the development and revitalization of new and existing community-supported venues selling healthy and affordable foods?

Healthy food financing programs support and promote healthy food retail in under-resourced communities. These programs are created with public funds and leveraged with additional public and private capital. Communities also benefit from the job creation and additional economic and community benefits these venues bring.

Successful models for this type of public investment exists across the country and are often referred to as Healthy Food Financing Initiatives (HFFI). These public-private partnerships provide one-time grants and loans for the development or renovation of healthy food retail and other projects, as well as revitalize distressed communities by supporting local business development and creating triple-bottom-line benefits with meaningful impacts on community health, job opportunities, and economic stimulus.

4a. Will you commit to supporting policies and programs that offer farmers incentives to use practices that increase resilience to extreme weather on their farms? Do you support policies and programs that offer farmers incentives to use practices that reduce the amount of carbon their farm puts into the atmosphere, or that remove carbon from the atmosphere and store it in the farms' soil?

Extreme weather caused by increasing amounts of carbon in the atmosphere makes it harder for farmers to do their jobs. More frequent flooding, stronger hurricanes, longer periods of drought, and temperature swings all harm farmers' ability to feed their communities and to make a living. There are management strategies that increase farmers' ability to withstand extreme weather, and there are ways that farmers can reduce the amount of carbon in the atmosphere.

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

NC has seen heightened tension between confined livestock operations and many other constituencies in the state, including neighbors of those farms, environmental groups, animal welfare organizations, and outdoor enthusiasts. In almost 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



2020

Questions for candidates in elections for state legislature, governors, and other state-level positions

1. Do you support the growth of new and beginning farmer development throughout South Carolina? Should the state invest in programs to ensure the next generation of farmers and ranchers can succeed?

The average South Carolina farmer is 59 years old. SC puts its largest economic driver 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. Supporting new farmers with sustaining a livable wage is a vital part of ensuring food security for South Carolina.

2. What role should state government play in eliminating food deserts?

According to the US Department of Agriculture, there are approximately 250,000 South Carolinians living in 21 food deserts across 14 counties. In rural, low-income areas, many residents have no choice but to travel 10 or more miles to reach the nearest supermarket. The SC Food Access Task Force estimates that residents of South Carolina food deserts are forced to spend around \$311 million annually on groceries outside their respective communities, creating a major drag on local economies.

3. How should state government take action to support food hub development in South Carolina so that more SC farmers can access wholesale markets?

There are many food-producing farmers in South Caro-

lina that focus on direct-to-consumer sales. While some of these farms are interested in expanding into wholesale markets like schools, distributors, and larger grocery stores, 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.

4. If elected, how will you support efforts to preserve farmland?

Since 2007, South Carolina has lost 1,326 farms and more than 43,416 acres of farmland. The SC Conservation Bank and the new SC Farm Link program work to prevent additional loss of farmland. The SC Conservation Bank conserved almost 20,000 acres of agricultural land throughout the state and is the only state agency offering farmers monetary incentives for conservation easements to protect against urbanization. Farm Link, a project of the SC Department of Agriculture, keeps land in agriculture by connecting farmers seeking land with those who own farmland.

5. Do you support a legislative push to make the Healthy Bucks program permanent?

Healthy Bucks was created through a temporary budget provision in 2014. 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 program's first two years, 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.

FEDERAL-LEVEL QUESTIONS



2020

Questions for candidates in elections for president and US Congress (Senate or House of Representatives)

1. The Farm to School Grant Program connects children with healthy foods from local farms. Over 80 percent of applications for funds under this program are denied due to insufficient funds. Do you support increasing mandatory funding for Farm to School from \$5 million to \$15 million?

The Farm to School Act of 2019 seeks to make small changes to the existing USDA Farm to School grant program and increase funding. Farm-to-school activities have been proven to help students build healthy eating habits and support family farmers by expanding market opportunities. The USDA Farm to School Grant Program provides funds on a competitive basis to schools, farmers, nonprofits, and local, state, and tribal government entities. Funds help schools procure local foods for school meals and support farm-to-school activities like farm field trips, hands-on science classes and new food taste tests. Since 2013, the program has received more than 1,900 applications requesting over \$141 million in support. With only \$5 million in mandatory funding available annually, the Farm to School Grant Program has been forced to turn away roughly 80% of qualified applications.

2. Will you support efforts to direct USDA to conduct farmer-selected research focused on improving farm and community resilience to climate change and other weather disruptions?

Climate change presents a severe and immediate threat to agriculture and to rural communities across the country. We also believe that farmers and ranchers can, and must, be part of mitigation and adaptation solutions. Farmers and ranchers are uniquely positioned to lead the charge on climate change mitigation and adapta-

tion – many producers are already implementing practices and utilizing programs that help them to increase their sustainability and resilience to a changing climate.

3. Will you support efforts to authorize funding to help beginning farmers get started? Will you support policy changes to make it possible for new farmers to benefit from USDA programs such as from crop insurance and funding to implement conservation practices.

Seventy-percent of farmland in the US is due to change hands in the next 20 years, and the average farmer in the Carolinas is nearly 60 years old. Farmland is already being purchased by hedge funds and international land speculators, all which will have an impact on our nation's food supply and the fabric of our rural communities.

4. Do you support annual appropriations to fund the Value Added Producer Grant and other programs that help farmers succeed?

Annual congressional appropriations fund multiple programs that help farmers succeed, such as the Value Added Producer Grant. The VAPG supports farmers with grant money to create food processing enterprises to make value-added products like cheese and jam. USDA research shows that farmers who receive grant funds are more likely to hire workers at a living wage and stay in business than similarly situated farmers who do not receive grant funds. The VAPG is a proven way to keep farmers in business and to create jobs in rural areas.

5. Is publicly funding agricultural research a priority for you? If so, why? If not, is there any information

FEDERAL-LEVEL QUESTIONS



2020

Questions for candidates in elections for US president and Congress (Senate or House of Representatives)

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.

Sources

1. Barnidge et al.: Association between community garden participation and fruit and vegetable consumption in rural Missouri. *International Journal of Behavioral Nutrition and Physical Activity* 2013 10:128. Retrieved from: <https://ijbnpa.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/1479-5868-10-128>.
2. Litt, J and Hale, J: The Influence of Social Involvement, Neighborhood Aesthetics, and Community Garden Participation on Fruit and Vegetable Consumption. *American Journal of Public Health* Aug, 2011. Retrieved from: <https://ajph.aphapublications.org/doi/full/10.2105/AJPH.2010.300111>.
3. Been, V. & Voicu, I.: The Effect of Community Gardens on Neighboring Property Values. *New York University Law and Economics Working Papers*. Retrieved from: <https://nccommunitygardens.ces.ncsu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/researchBeenVoicuEffectof-CG-of-Property-Value.pdf?fd=wd=no>.
4. City of Asheville. Urban Agriculture Leases. Retrieved from: <https://www.ashevilenc.gov/departments/sustainability/sustainability-initiatives/food-policy-action-plan/>.
5. City of Greensboro, Community Gardens. Retrieved from: <https://www.greensboro-nc.gov/departments/parks-recreation/parks-gardens/gardens/community-gardens>.

6. Town of Cary. Good Hope Farm. Retrieved from: <https://www.townofcary.org/recreation-enjoyment/parks-greenways-environment/community-gardens-urban-agriculture/good-hope-farm>.

7. Pee Dee Food Hub. Retrieved from: <http://www.peedeefoodhub.com/>

8. High Country Food Hub. Retrieved from: <https://www.highcountryfoodhub.org/>.

9. Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. (2018). *The State of Obesity: North Carolina*. Retrieved from <https://stateofobesity.org/states/nc/>.

10. American Diabetes Association (2018). Retrieved from <http://main.diabetes.org/dorg/PDFs/Advocacy/burden-of-diabetes/south-carolina.pdf>.

11. Center for Disease Control. (2018). Retrieved from: <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/pressroom/states/northcarolina/northcarolina.htm>.

12. SC Department of Health and Environmental Health. (2018) SC Diabetes Fact Sheet. Retrieved from: <http://www.scdhec.gov/Library/ML-025328.pdf>.

13. National Resource Defense Council. (2018). Retrieved from: <https://www.nrdc.org/issues/food-waste>.

14. SC Department of Health and Environmental Control. Don't Waste Food SC. Retrieved from: <https://www.scdhec.gov/environment/recycling-waste-reduction/dont-waste-food-sc>.



Learn more about the work that CFSA is doing to advocate for fair farm and food policies:
carolinafarmstewards.org | 919-542-2402 | info@carolinafarmstewards.org

Stay up-to-date on the latest food and farm policy news: bit.ly/axnalerts.