

2022  
**QUESTIONS**  
FOR CANDIDATES



## A VOTER'S GUIDE TO QUESTIONS ON FARM & FOOD POLICY IN THE CAROLINAS

The Carolina Farm Stewardship Association (CFSA) works with policymakers and communities across the Carolinas to educate people on sustainable, local, and organic food and farming issues. CFSA also works with advocates across the Carolinas to prepare them to make an impact when they talk about the importance of sustainable farming and community food systems to policymakers.

The 2022 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, no matter the level of public office, and these questions will ensure they consider these issues.** And if they have, this guide will help you understand their positions.

We developed this guide to give candidates enough information to support them in thinking about and engaging with 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 critical to increase awareness and prepare to hold our elected officials accountable. We encourage you to use this guide to discuss food system issues at public debates, forums, and town hall meetings.

### **ABOUT CFSA**

*CFSA is a farmer-driven, membership-based 501(c)(3) non-profit organization that helps people in North and South Carolina grow and enjoy local, organic food.*

*Founded in 1979, CFSA is the oldest and largest sustainable agriculture organization in the Southeast.*

*For 43 years, CFSA has successfully united farmers, consumers, and businesses to build a just, healthy, food and farming future. How? We advocate for fair farm and food policies. We build systems that family farms need to thrive. We educate communities about local, organic, agriculture.*

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# RELATIONSHIP

BUILDING WITH CANDIDATES



## TIPS FOR BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS WITH CANDIDATES

Relationships matter. The stronger your relationship with a current or future policymaker, the more likely you will 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.

### Introduce Yourself to Them & Their Staff

The best way to get to know your candidates personally 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 organizational email list, newsletter, and 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 essential to know their staff, especially at the state and federal levels; staff opinions inform candidates' policy positions.

### Invite Them Often & Early

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

### Learn About Their Interests

Educate yourself on the candidate's interests, as this may help you understand their motivations and why they take a position around specific 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 tool to promote healthy ecosystems with one candidate. Another might better understand the benefits of public health, and someone else may be more interested in sustainable agriculture's role as an economic driver.

### Follow-up with a Thank-You Note

Take a moment after a meeting or event with a candidate to express gratitude.

A simple email will do. Thanking candidates for their time goes a long way toward building stronger relationships and encouraging future interactions.

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# LOCAL-LEVEL

## CANDIDATE QUESTIONS



### CANDIDATES RUNNING FOR SOIL & WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT SUPERVISOR, SCHOOL BOARD, CITY COUNCIL, OR COUNTY COMMISSIONER POSITIONS

#### 1. What are you willing to do to make local food accessible to all community members?

Farmers markets, roadside stands, and food hubs create direct access to fresh food from local farmers. Access to affordable and healthy food is a significant factor in community health outcomes like obesity, diabetes, and heart disease. In recent years, communities across the Carolinas have worked to make markets and roadside stands more available to all community members through increased EBT machines.

Here are some examples where communities in the Carolinas have found success:

- The City of Charlotte and Mecklenburg County committed resources to support the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Food Policy Council in running a 'Double Up Bucks' for EBT users at 16 farmers market locations.
- The Foothills Food Hub partnered with McDowell Transit to deliver fresh foods to homebound rural residents.
- In South Carolina, the Healthy Bucks program operates as a reliable and sustainable resource at farmers markets in 28 counties to incentivize the purchase of healthy, local fruits and vegetables.

**2. USDA estimates that up to 40% of our nation's food ends up in landfills. In response, South Carolina implemented the "Don't Waste Food SC" campaign, which brings together stakeholders from across the public and private sectors to**

**coordinate resources, and work together to help reduce food waste and increase food recovery statewide.**

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

**NC Question:** In NC, there seems to be varying knowledge, resources, and implementation of food waste initiatives across the state. This leads to additional food entering landfills that could be recovered for human consumption, fed to animals, or composted. Would a cohesive conversation around food waste like SC has developed support our local food waste recovery or diversion efforts, and if so, how would you foster those conversations?

#### 3. 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 essential tool that provides a long-term vision for the community's growth and development. 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.

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# LOCAL-LEVEL

## CANDIDATE QUESTIONS



### CANDIDATES RUNNING FOR SOIL & WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT SUPERVISOR, SCHOOL BOARD, CITY COUNCIL, OR COUNTY COMMISSIONER POSITIONS

**4. The Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds program, a part of the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA), delivered \$2.6 billion to counties and municipalities in North Carolina and \$435 million to small towns and rural counties in South Carolina to support recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. How should we allocate our ARPA local funds to improve our community's food system resiliency?**

Municipalities and counties can use these funds to support public health expenditures and address the negative economic impacts caused by the public health emergency. Phoenix, Arizona, invested \$9.7 million of its ARPA allocation to strengthen its local food system and provide emergency food assistance through the Phoenix Resilience Food System Initiative.

The programs implemented include:

- Feed Phoenix Program – Local First Arizona Foundation (\$2,700,000)
- Funds to Feed Program – LISC Phoenix (\$1,950,000)
- Funds for Food Banks and Food Pantries (\$1,300,000)
- Worker Cooperative; Sustainable Food System Business Incubator (\$200,000)
- Agri-food Technology Innovation Grants (\$500,000)
- Backyard Food Production Pilot Project (\$500,000)
- Farmland Preservation (\$1,000,000)
- Resilient & Sustainable Agriculture Projects (\$200,000)
- City of Phoenix Urban Agriculture Fellowship (\$50,000)
- Council District Food Action Plans, Projects or Initiatives (\$400,000)

**5. Food policy councils are community-based coalitions that help promote more robust local food systems. If elected, will you support our council (or the development of a food council) to improve our local food system?"**

In North Carolina, 36 food councils are serving 60 counties. In South Carolina, there are nine councils. New groups are forming every year across the Carolinas. These groups build connections and collaboration across stakeholders to improve health, food access, natural resource protection, economic development, and production agriculture for all community residents.

#### WANT TO GET MORE INVOLVED IN LOCAL FOOD & FARMING ISSUES?

**Consider joining or starting a local food council.**

Food councils are community-based coalitions that work toward creating resilient local food systems. They identify and strengthen connections between food, health, natural resource protection, economic development, and agriculture.

Food councils solve broad food system issues and give communities more control over the food they produce and consume.

Don't miss: [5 Reasons You Should Get Involved with Your Local Food Council](#)

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# STATE-LEVEL CANDIDATE QUESTIONS NC & SC



## CANDIDATES RUNNING FOR NC OR SC STATE LEGISLATURE, GOVERNOR, OR OTHER STATE-LEVEL POSITIONS

### 1. Do you support tax incentives encouraging big distributors to work with small farms? If so, how?

Many farmers don't grow enough to sell into existing, large-scale distribution channels. A massive hurdle to scaling up a small operation is keeping 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 farms in their refrigerated trucks, there are many ways to help farmers get more local food to their communities. These types of infrastructure can play an essential role in supporting local farmers' needs, but significant gaps in the local supply chain persist.

### 2. Do you support more of our schools buying and selling locally grown and raised foods? If so, how would you like to see this done? If not, why?

Many states have passed policies encouraging and supporting schools to purchase local food for school cafeterias. Agriculture is the most significant economic driver in the Carolinas. North and South Carolina boast tens of thousands of farms that could supply 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 economies, support local farms, and provide kids with fresh, locally grown and raised food.

### 3. Do you support state-funded programs that purchase food from small and mid-size farms at a fair price to address hunger?

At the start of the COVID pandemic, CFSA launched FarmsSHARE in North Carolina to support communities facing a never-before-seen hunger crisis while paying small and mid-size farmers a fair price for their products. The program was catalyzed with a \$1.6 million corporate and foundation investment, and the capacity was doubled with a \$2 million allocation in the 2021 North Carolina state budget. Those investments roughly translate to 85,000 boxes of fresh, nutritious, locally grown, and raised food delivered to families in need across the state. Programs like FarmsSHARE that feed individuals and families facing food insecurity through local supply chains can strongly bolster our regional economies and should be nurtured and supported with state resources.

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# STATE-LEVEL CANDIDATE QUESTIONS NC



## CANDIDATES RUNNING FOR NC STATE LEGISLATURE, GOVERNOR, OR 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 farms over 10 acres in size?**

The average farmer in NC is 58 years old. Agriculture, the most significant economic sector in the state, is at risk if we don't do more to encourage young and beginning farmers.

Many young people are interested in farming but find that NC tax laws discourage beginning farmers by forcing them to pay sales tax on business purchases—taxes established farms don't pay. NC also disincentivizes small farms by making farms with less than 10 acres pay more property tax than larger farms.

### **2. Do you support creating and funding a Healthy Soils Program in the North Carolina Division of Soil and Water Conservation within the North Carolina Department of Agriculture & Consumer Services (NCDA)?**

Soil health is one of the most significant challenges facing American farming and nutrition. Water pollution running off from agricultural operations is also one of the most considerable challenges facing our coastal ecosystems. The North Carolina General Assembly passed the Coastal Habitat Protection Plan last year and has made recommendations that the state must implement to increase soil management practices to combat water pollution.

Creating a Healthy Soils Program at NCDA would reduce the input of agricultural pollution into the state's watercourses and improve the health of the state's agricultural soils. Funding and services through the program would support farmers in administering practices such as conservation tillage, water control structures, riparian buffers, mulching, cover cropping, inter-cropping, the establishment of no-till, and so much more.

### **3. Do you support the creation of a fund to support the subsidization of food safety certification costs for fruit and vegetable farmers?**

Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) is a food safety certification that many institutional and wholesale buyers require. Getting GAP certified involves a lot of additional paperwork and tracking for farmers, and they must pay annually for certification audits, which can be pricey. These additional burdens are barriers for fruit and vegetable farms looking to expand beyond direct-to-consumer sales.

NCDA runs a cost-share program to assist specialty crop farmers with the cost of a GAP audit. Congress funds this program for all 50 states through the federal farm bill, but the federal allocations are not enough to meet the annual demand from North Carolina farms. An investment in a state fund to support the existing cost-share program would help more North Carolina fruit and vegetable farmers access GAP certification and thus new markets.

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# STATE-LEVEL CANDIDATE QUESTIONS NC



## CANDIDATES RUNNING FOR NC STATE LEGISLATURE, GOVERNOR, OR OTHER STATE-LEVEL POSITIONS

### **4. Although not passed by the House or signed into law, a medical marijuana bill was passed by the NC Senate this year. Do you support legalization of medical marijuana?**

This year, the NC Senate passed Senate Bill 711 to legalize medical marijuana. However, it was quickly killed after the state House backed Senate Bill 448, a competing bill permitting cannabis products to be sold in the state only if approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA). SB 448 was signed into law by Governor Cooper.

This essentially forces the state to wait until federal legalization of marijuana before North Carolina can launch an industry, given that the FDA has approved only one cannabis product. The medical marijuana market is expected to grow by 18% annually. The market was valued at over \$11 billion in 2021 and is projected to reach over \$51 billion by 2028. Under current NC law, this entire market is a missed opportunity for NC growers.

### **WANT TO UP YOUR ADVOCACY GAME?**

Want to enhance your ability to advocate for causes that are important to you and your neck of the Carolinas?

Consider applying to CFSA's Membership Advocacy Program!

The free training program is an opportunity for those interested in upping their advocacy game by studying with the CFSA Policy Team. Participants will grow their advocacy skills and network with fellow food and farming advocates across North and South Carolina.

Those selected for the program will have the opportunity to build community with other food system advocates across North and South Carolina and learn more about:

- Meeting with lawmakers & agency officials
- Grassroots advocacy activities & techniques
- Networking & coalition building
- Effectively telling your story
- Educating your community
- The legislative & administrative process at all levels of government
- & more!

Learn more about CFSA's [Membership Advocacy Program!](#)

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# STATE-LEVEL CANDIDATE QUESTIONS SC



## CANDIDATES RUNNING FOR SC STATE LEGISLATURE, GOVERNOR, OR OTHER STATE-LEVEL POSITIONS

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

Many food-producing farmers in South Carolina focus on direct-to-consumer sales.

While some of these farmers are interested in expanding into wholesale markets like schools, distributors, and larger grocery stores, scaling has several challenges. 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 and regionally grown and raised food products.

### 2. How will you support efforts to preserve farmland from development encroachment if elected?

Since 2007, South Carolina has lost 1,326 farms and more than 43,416 acres of farmland.

The South Carolina Conservation Bank and the new South Carolina Farm Link program work to prevent additional loss of farmland. The 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 South Carolina Department of Agriculture project, keeps land in agriculture by connecting farmers seeking land with those who own farmland.

### 3. What role should the state government play in eliminating food deserts?

According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, approximately 250,000 South Carolinians live in 21 food deserts across 14 counties. In rural, low-income areas, many residents have no choice but to travel 10 miles or more to reach the nearest supermarket.

The South Carolina Food Access Task Force estimates that residents of food deserts in South Carolina are forced to spend around \$311 million annually on groceries outside their respective communities, creating a significant drag on local economies.

### 4. Would you support a legislative push to make the Healthy Bucks program permanent?

SC's Healthy Bucks program was created through a temporary budget provision in 2014. The program allows Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (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 Healthy Bucks' existence, the number of farmers markets accepting SNAP increased from 41 to 54, and the number of farm stands taking SNAP increased from 32 to 152. SNAP recipients have better access to fresh food and put state and federal dollars into local farm businesses. During COVID-19, the program skyrocketed. A permanent funding source is needed.

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# STATE-LEVEL CANDIDATE QUESTIONS

SC



## CANDIDATES RUNNING FOR SC STATE LEGISLATURE, GOVERNOR, OR OTHER STATE-LEVEL POSITIONS

### 5. How do you support new and beginning farmer development throughout South Carolina? Should the state invest in programs to ensure the next generation of farmers and ranchers succeed, and what would those programs entail?

The average South Carolina farmer is 59 years old. South Carolina puts its most significant economic driver at risk if it doesn't support the next generation of farmers. Many people entering agriculture have minimal 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 vital for ensuring food security for South Carolina.

### WANT TO STAY UP-TO-DATE ON IMPORTANT AG POLICY ISSUES?

Want to know when to take action (and what to say) on timely policy issues?

The CFSA Policy Team can help! They're always on the lookout for legislation that affects local and organic small and mid-sized farms.

When there is a pressing policy issue, you can sign up to receive an email from them explaining the issue and how to take action.

Anyone can sign up to receive alerts on:

- South Carolina issues
- North Carolina issues
- Federal issues

[Sign up for CFSA Action Alerts](#) today!

2022

# FEDERAL-LEVEL

## CANDIDATE QUESTIONS



### CANDIDATES RUNNING FOR U.S. CONGRESS OR PRESIDENT.

#### 1. Will you support the Strengthening Local Processing Act?

Meat processors of all sizes and capacities continue to struggle with workforce shortages, outdated infrastructure, and underfunding. These challenges lead to bottlenecks that cost farmers significant time and money.

The Strengthening Local Processing Act is a bipartisan, comprehensive bill that addresses acute livestock supply chain issues and supports small meat and poultry processing plants; the bill includes support for small plants' compliance with hazard analysis plans, includes increased cost-share as well as a new grant program to expand small plants.

#### 2. Are you willing to support the continued expansion of the LAMP program?

The Local Agriculture Market Program (LAMP) was created in the 2018 Farm Bill and streamlines two existing local food system programs: the Farmers Market and Local Food Promotion Program and the Value-Added Producers Grant Program.

These programs provide critical and ongoing funding to help local and regional food systems, including supporting farmers markets, local and regional food businesses, supply chains, etc. Funding for LAMP ensures that local food systems are resilient and strong enough to weather future supply chain disruptions.

#### 3 Will you support the Agricultural Resiliency Act?

Climate change presents a severe and immediate threat to agriculture and rural communities. 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 adaptation—many are already implementing practices and programs that help them increase their sustainability and resilience to a changing climate.

The Agricultural Resiliency Act will refocus federal conservation, research, renewable energy, and rural economic development programs on climate resilience and empower farmers and ranchers eager to drive climate change solutions on the ground.

#### 4. How do you propose marketing farming as a viable profession for young people?

The average age of a farmer in the United States is 60 years old. There are already several programs to support new and beginning farmers, but there are often social and cultural stigmas around embracing farming as a way of life.

Rather than consolidating agriculture into a handful of commercial operations, we must find a way to recruit new farmers to start their local operations to bolster local food economies.

2022

# FEDERAL-LEVEL

## CANDIDATE QUESTIONS



### CANDIDATES RUNNING FOR U.S. CONGRESS OR PRESIDENT.

**5. USDA has a history of discrimination against African Americans, Native Americans, and other BIPOC farmers who were pushed off their land, which has been documented in several sizeable class-action lawsuits. How can the USDA begin to address racial equity issues within the department and its programs?**

A 15-member independent Equity Commission has been charged with evaluating USDA programs and services and will recommend how barriers to accessing them can be reduced. Using this information, USDA will make needed changes so that their programs, services, and decisions reflect the values of equity and inclusion. This work aims to ensure that everyone has fair access to resources while beginning to close the racial wealth gap and addressing long-standing inequities in agriculture.

#### CAN'T STAY ON TOP OF ALL THE NEWS?

It can be hard to stay up-to-date on all things food and farm policy.

Each month, the CFSA Policy Team puts together a free newsletter on policy matters and advocacy opportunities across both states and federal government.

It also includes a short list of curated reads. Each has a brief summary in case you don't have time to dive in.

[Sign up to receive this newsletter](#), *The Buzz*, in your inbox once a month.

#### MAKE A DONATION

We developed this guide to give candidates enough information to support their thinking about and engagement with issues affecting food, farming, food security, community gardening, and the environment.

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Help CFSA continue this work by [donating today!](#)