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The Significance of Local and Regional Food Systems for Community Resilience: If Not Now, Then When?

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With our busy schedules, and under normal conditions, we often take working farms and landscapes for granted and do not notice the beauty of our surroundings, the cultural fabric of society, or consider the foundational economic and community impact of farm and food businesses. It is sometimes forgotten how interconnected we are as we go to work or move about our daily activities. Presently, the significance of local and regional food systems to community resilience cannot be overstated.

During this unsettling time of social distancing and working to contain the coronavirus (COVID-19), we may have a brief moment to reflect on and appreciate how a strong agricultural base and diverse food value chain is something important to be protected, appreciated, and planned for at the local, regional, and national level as our communities change in response to the current situation.

The food and farm system that makes food available and accessible is an important component of community economic development, social well-being, responsiveness, resilience, and democracy. The food and farming systems are often overlooked as a connector and undervalued as a means and strategy for building health, wealth, connection and capacity where food is grown and needed (Meter, 2011). Since everyone needs to eat each day to thrive, the food system affects and touches everyone on a daily basis. Currently, it is hard to overlook the importance of durable, diverse local and regional food value chains and supplies. Even in this time of social distancing, farmers, market gardeners, food and beverage artisans, restaurateurs, and food service workers are sources of social courage, trust, and solidarity.

Local and regional food systems allow the everyday person to know the farmer; strengthen and connect to locally owned businesses and farms that provide essential nourishment and resilience; preserve local and regional identity; and benefit the long-term social, economic, and environmental health and viability of communities. Such an approach seeks to benefit and empower us from the ground up. The development precept is that if local towns, cities, and

counties are vibrant and strong socially, economically, and environmentally, the impact and benefits will be mutually noticeable and substantial at the regional and state levels.

The present and future work entails being civic-minded and being vested in the well-being of everyone in the community since we are so inextricably connected whether we realize the connection or not. At this time of uncertainty, we need to work together in courage, trust, and solidarity to provide mutual aid and encouragement. Everyone needs to dig in for equitable change that is cultivated and nurtured by our most vulnerable farmers, food service workers, and community members to transform our current system here and now into a more resilient, self-reliant food system, and economy that serves everyone.

References

Meter, K. (2011). Finding food in Southern Virginia. PowerPoint presentation to The Harvest Foundation and Virginia Cooperative Extension as a part of a food system assessment of the Martinsville-Henry County, Virginia Region. Martinsville, VA. January 13 – 15, 2011.

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