

**Food Heritage Retail:
Story, Sustainability, and Sustenance**



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Food heritage is an anchor: linking people to deeply personal pasts around ways of cooking and eating. Engaging with food heritage represents a move towards thinking critically about what kinds of food are eaten and how they are prepared. Comparing the ways in which people used to eat with the practices of today allows for an examination of how food systems have changed in the United States.

The industrial system of food currently employed in the United States efficiently turns out high quantities of food. During the period of 1940 to 1960, a time known as the Green Revolution, modern advances in irrigation techniques, genetic selection methods, and the availability of fertilizers and pesticides generated dramatic increases in yield (Pew 3). However, it can be argued that a certain level of quality has been lost to this system. Foods high in fat and sugar plague grocery stores. Items considered to be food contain unreadable ingredients. Today, iceberg lettuce, frozen potatoes, fried potatoes, potato chips, and canned tomatoes account for close to half of total vegetable consumption in the United States (Anderson 3). Food production was not always this way. By exploring food heritage it will be possible to regain the health and wealth benefits of the food that is eaten each day.

The case for supporting the sale of local food has been made on the basis of data and studies demonstrating the economic benefits derived from stimulating demand for local food. A 2012 report completed by the National Association for the Specialty Food Trade found that “three-quarters of retailers say that local is the most influential product claim today and two-thirds report the claim will grow

the most in the next three years” (“Industry Statistics”). In order to understand how the sale of heritage food can improve central Virginia’s agricultural economy, it is important to understand the current impact of local food sales

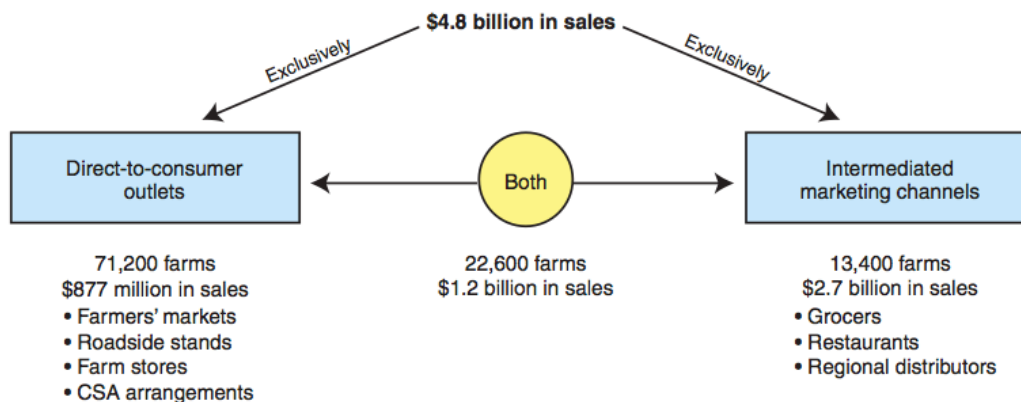
Ken Meter, a food system analyst, has done extensive work on understanding how supporting local agriculture can benefit the entire food system of an area, helping to build strong communities. Meter’s thesis is that strong local food economies can build “health, wealth, connection, and capacity.” According to analyses done for the Commonwealth of Virginia, Meter found “If Virginia consumers bought 15% of their food directly from local farms, farms would earn \$2.2 billion of new income ” (Meter “Economic Leakage”). Another study by Benson and Bendfeldt completed for the Virginia Cooperative Extension, found that if every home in Virginia allocated \$10 of its weekly food budget for local food products, \$1.65 billion could be gained by Virginia’s economy (Virginia Farm To Table 3).

Currently, heritage foods are an untapped economic resource. Heritage food can bolster the already strong profits made by local food sales. Through the retail of heritage foods, it will be possible to harness a greater share of the economic, social, and health benefits already being realized by the sale of local foods.

Two retail options that will be discussed include direct-to-consumer marketing and intermediated (indirect) marketing. As defined by the Economic Research Service (ERS) of the United States Department of Agriculture, direct-to-consumer retail includes farmers markets, roadside stands, farm stores, and

CSAs (community-supported agriculture) (Low and Vogel 4). Intermediated retail occurs when a farmer sells to grocery stores and restaurants (Low and Vogel 4). As reflected in the diagram below, in 2008, combined sales of local food from direct-to-consumer retailer and intermediated retailers generated \$4.8 billion dollars (Low and Vogel 3).

Figure 2
Farmers' local food marketing, 2008



CSA=Community-supported agriculture.
Source: USDA, Economic Research Service calculations based on 2008 Agricultural Resource Management Survey, conducted by USDA, National Agricultural Statistics Service and Economic Research Service.

Heritage foods can become an important product for Central Virginia's food market. Through a three-step approach of identification, certification, and marketing it would be possible to create demand for heritage foods. Treating the Thomas Jefferson Planning District Commission as an entity with the potential to influence other groups and to acquire and allocate funding, the following policy ideas are presented as possible ways to encourage the sale of heritage foods.

Step One: Identification of Heritage Foods

Before heritage foods can be sold they must be identified. Initially, this identification process could be achieved by forging partnerships with groups

already involved in cataloging the heritage foods such as The Virginia Food Heritage Project and the Thomas Jefferson Center for Historic Plants. It would also be important to establish a set of criteria by which to define and identify heritage foods, followed by creation of a comprehensive guide to Central Virginia Heritage Food, in order to encourage awareness by producers, sellers and buyers.

Step Two: Establish a Certification Program

In partnership with the Piedmont Environmental Council, a certification program could be created and put in place to label and brand heritage foods, making them recognized, sought after products by consumers. Because heritage foods are intended to be sold premium prices, a certification system would also assure that the products are held to high standards. This will help producers build trust with consumers. The certification, and consequent branding of Central Virginia Heritage Foods will also be a way to educate both consumer and retailers about what heritage foods are available and why they make worthwhile purchases.

Step Three: Sponsorship of Heritage Food Marketing Campaign

Advertising and promoting heritage food requires investment in a wide-reaching innovative marketing campaign. The last piece of this strategy to bolster the sales of heritage foods is a regionally sponsored heritage food marketing campaign. With proper funding, a regionally sponsored marketing campaign *can* change consumer-buying habits. By making the sale of heritage foods possible,

regional farmers will be supported helping keep more food dollars in the five county region.

Creating Demand By Creating a Brand

Regional marketing campaigns can make a difference in improving the sales of specific products. A concrete example of a state sponsored marketing campaign that created significant economic gain is the Jersey Fresh Program. In 1984, the New Jersey State Department of Agriculture established and funded the Jersey Fresh Program (Govindasamy et al “State Promotion” 85).

Through a multipronged marketing strategy, the Jersey Fresh Program was able to reach a wide audience of consumers. In the program’s early years, television and radio ads were used along with billboards, in-store promotions, and statewide events to encourage the sale of produce grown in New Jersey (Govindasamy et al “State Promotion” 86). Radio advertisement was specifically designed to reach targeted consumer audiences: some ads were produced in Spanish. In order to expand the consumer base, television commercials were aimed at consumers in New York, Philadelphia, and Boston. Eventually commercials were aired in other New England states, spreading the message of Jersey Fresh produce throughout the Northeast. Billboards were important in getting consumers to pay attention to direct retailers. In grocery stores, the Jersey Fresh Program was able to connect consumers to Jersey Fresh products with the help of point of sale promotional materials (Govindasamy et al “Consumer Awareness” 11). Store employees were encouraged to wear Jersey

Fresh logo buttons, putting a face to the brand. Recipe cards were available giving consumers ideas for how to put their Jersey Fresh products to best use.

The Jersey Fresh marketing campaign has promoted different catchy themes over the years, appealing to customers in different ways to promote the sale of Jersey Fresh products and by tying the program to the success of national nutrition campaigns. In 1987, the slogan “Demand the Freshest” was used as a way to target consumers and connect the Jersey Fresh logo to the idea of freshness. Funding from the program was used to promote this theme on some point of purchase materials. By the end of the year, it was calculated that sales of local retail stores rose by 24% and consumer awareness rose by 23% (Govindasamy et al “State Promotion” 88). This success of this theme led to an even more focused slogan, “Farm Fresh to You Each Morning” (Brown 260). By underscoring the freshness and availability of healthful, local produce available in New Jersey (and even beyond). The Jersey Fresh program has begun to strengthen the relationship consumers have with the food they buy, promoting the availability of New Jersey made products and harnessing the buying power of consumers with state pride.

The program recognized the benefits of making Jersey Fresh logos and promotional material available to both direct-to-customer retailers and intermediated retailers. For example, establishments from farm stands to big national grocery stores received “point of purchase materials” such as “price cards, stickers, banners, and commodity recipe brochures” (Govindasamy et al

“State Promotion” 86). Special events have also been supported by the Jersey Fresh program such as festivals and fairs like “Vineland’s Jersey Fresh Festival.”

In 1991, the “5-A-Day For Better Health” (or more simply “5 A Day”) program was established by the National Cancer Institute of the National Institutes of Health, using both public and private funds (National Institutes of Health 19). . Private funding was made possible by the Produce for Better Health Foundation, representing the fruit and vegetable industry (National Institutes of Health 11). Public funding was secured from the United States Department of Health and Human Services. The program sought to inform consumers about the importance of eating five servings of fruits and vegetables each day. The Jersey Fresh Program implemented the “5-A-Day” campaign, aimed specifically at getting consumers to increase their consumption of fruits and vegetables by buying produce grown in New Jersey (Govindasamy et al “State Promotion” 88). Coupling the Jersey Fresh Program with the “5-A-Day” campaign is a good example of how the effect of state or regional funding can be maximized.

Premium pricing demands superior product quality. To ensure the quality of the produce promoted by the program was a reality, a quality grading system was established to set Jersey Fresh produce apart from the other produce being sold by various retailers. The system was introduced during the 1986-1987 growing season (Govindasamy et al “State Promotion” 88). The New Jersey State Department of Agriculture explained that this voluntary program “enhances regional and national marketability of more than 80 New Jersey commodities and assures consumers and wholesale buyers that the products meet or exceed US

No. 1 standards” (“Jersey Fresh Quality Grading Program”). Through the program, inspections take place to ensure the quality of products featuring the Jersey Fresh logo. Selling a product that does not meet or exceed US number 1 standards subjects the packer to penalties up to and including revocation of the license to use the Jersey Fresh logo (Govindasamy et al “State Promotion” 88).

Since the establishment of the Jersey Fresh Program in 1984, extensive data has been collected on the returns to the New Jersey economy. In 2000, the Jersey Fresh Program received \$1.16 million in funding (Govindasamy 19). It has been estimated that for each dollar spent on the program through the year 2000, the revenues of New Jersey fruit and vegetable growers were raised by \$31.54 (Ibid). This amounts to a total increase in fruit and vegetable revenues of \$36.6 million. This increase in sales also had “ripple effects in other industries” amounting to \$22.95 for each dollar spent on the program, thereby creating revenues of \$26.6 million in supporting industries (Ibid). Total economic impact derived from the Jersey Fresh Program is calculated at \$63.2 million (Ibid).

Properly created, managed, and funded programs for marketing food products can generate appreciable increases in revenue. The creation of a fair and effective identification, certification, and marketing system for heritage foods will be an arduous task but it has clear potential for return to the local economies of Central Virginia.

The Politics of Defining Heritage

There are clear challenges surrounding the definition and certification of heritage foods. A recent interview with Joe Henderson of the Chapel Hill Farm in Berryville, Virginia, illuminated some of these challenges.

Mr. Henderson is currently working to save one of America's rarest heritage breed of cows, the Randall Lineback. In the 1600's colonists bred the cow from a mix of European breeds. As an "all purpose breed," the Randall Lineback was bred not only to produce milk and meat but also to provide physical labor (Henderson and Sponenberg). This breed of cow was of utmost importance to the colonists as it was considered an "ideal breed for subsistence farming in America from New England through the Mid-Atlantic region" ("The Health Conscious Gourmet").

The Chapel Hill farm raises and sells the Randall Lineback with deep respect for the animal. The Chapel Hill Randall Linebacks range free and eat grass rather than grain. This aspect of their diet combined with their "all purpose" genetics give the meat a very low fat content. The cows are not given antibiotics or growth hormones. The farm only sells the animal as a whole animal.

When a chef chooses to feature the Randall Lineback on his menu he faces what some might consider a number of challenges. Because the animal is sold in its entirety, rather than in cuts, a chef must have the resources, kitchen space, and skills to butcher the animal. But for others who have tasted the meat of the Randall Lineback, these challenges are warranted.

When discussing how the branding of heritage foods in Virginia could affect the Randall Lineback, Mr. Henderson explained some factors of the current branding regime that exist for the industrial production of cattle for meat. “When it comes to cows, the brand name is Angus:” the characteristics of high marbling and high fat associated with the Angus brand have become synonymous with what consumers consider a “good” cut of meat.

In further discussion he explained, “we have swung way over to the industrial system and the education system followed it.” If chefs are not taught how to butcher animals, it is left up to the industrial system of meat production to decide what cuts are available on the market. Furthermore, chefs are not being taught how to cook various parts of the animal. Additionally, fat meat is easier to cook because it is less delicate than meat that comes from the Randall.

In describing how to define the cuts of meat from the Randall, Mr. Henderson said, “Is it veal or is it beef? I will tell you that it is neither. You are using 19th century terms to define a product that was raised before these terms were created.” In fact, the USDA meat certification system is run according the amount of fat in the cut of meat. With more fat, a prime rating is given. But as Mr. Henderson sees it, “More fat is not a good thing.”

A marketing campaign for heritage breeds of animals is must focus on consumer education. For example, a heritage breed of turkey will taste different than the large white turkey Americans are used to. A heritage turkey provides the consumer with less meat and it will be more difficult to chew. “When marketing, you have to overcome some fallacies that the industrial model has put out there,

for example, that you don't have to chew your meat" (Henderson). Because of its very low fat content, the Randall needs to be cooked very slowly. A redefinition of what it means to cook beef when cooking with Randall needs to happen through consumer education.

In branding the Randall Lineback, the Chapel Hill farm takes a personalized approach to promotion of the product. By interacting with chefs personally, Mr. Joe Henderson and his partners are able to explain why their meet is a cut above the rest. Three aspects concerning the Randall can help drive its sale: its history, its quality, and ease of delivery. The Chapel Hill Farm focuses on the fact that the Randall Lineback is the "only remaining colonial breed on the Atlantic coast" and that it "served George Washington and saved America in 1776" (Duncan). The superior quality and taste is another aspect that is unique to the Randall, it is marketed to chefs as having a "unique, habit forming taste." Finally, the Chapel Hill Farm provides a delivery system.

Another major issue in selling the Randall is finding an efficient way to distribute the product. Distribution is key in enabling the sale of the Randall Lineback. An element of marketing heritage foods is the need to capture the market of "good for you food raised in a sustainable way." When considering how well a marketing campaign could work Mr. Henderson suggested, "The idea of state branding heritage breeds is okay, but you have to come to grips with the other piece: how will it be sold and distributed. We haven't got a good way of distributing heritage food." Currently, high-end restaurants in the District of Columbia sell the meat. Because the market for the Randall is high-end

restaurants, there are a number of distribution and transportation issues that are brought up when selling to restaurants in Philadelphia and New York.

Mr. Henderson raised some very important questions regarding the politics around the concept of heritage. As he pointed out, there must be consideration of nature versus nurture. In regard to the Randall Lineback, and other heritage breeds, the meat contains certain characteristics that come from the genetics of the breed and some that come from the husbandry practices utilized to raise the animal. The term heritage has been used as a breed definition. By branding heritage foods “you are adding on a husbandry aspect” to that definition and “when you go to the marketplace, you are selling both things” (Henderson).

Heritage Food as Fuel for Central Virginia’s Economy

With careful planning and appropriate funding, it will be possible to make heritage foods a vital part of Central Virginia’s economy. By defining what foods can be considered heritage, ensuring that these products are of quality, and marketing them to targeted audiences, selling heritage food can become a reality. While there are clear challenges, heritage food cannot be overlooked. There is power in heritage food. An identification, certification and marketing campaign can enable producers and consumers of Central Virginia in taking advantage of the history, quality, and economic power embedded within heritage foods.

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