

# **“It is Time to Celebrate!”: Supporting Heritage Food Celebration in Central Virginia**

**By Shayna Stern**

## **INTRODUCTION**

What is heritage food? In short, this term refers to distinct place- and person-based foods and culinary practices.<sup>1</sup> However, if we delve deeper into food heritage, we see a variety of themes. We might be talking about a Thanksgiving dish that has been in a family for generations, or we could be referring to a delicacy that we find in only one specific region. This leads us to another question – why does heritage food matter? First, heritage food is important for its economic link to every community. Place-based heritage foods are “well-suited to... markets that value the cultural history, sustainable production, novel nutritional content and unique contributions to biodiversity,”<sup>2</sup> and thus encourage people to spend their money within the local economy. Furthermore, heritage food is unique to specific individuals, communities, and regions. By knowing and appreciating this food heritage, we can better enhance community identity and foster a sense of place. Thus, food heritage is important because it is about who we are as individual people and as a collective; it is about how we survive while retaining a sense of identity.

In recent decades, the manner in which people in the United States consume and interact with food has changed drastically and not necessarily for the best. As our society moves toward a more streamlined and anonymous food industry, celebration of

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<sup>1</sup> University of Virginia Food Heritage Class, May 1, 2012.

<sup>2</sup> Gary P. Nabhan, Patty West, and Rich Pirog, *Linking Arizona’s Sense of Place to a Sense of Taste: Marketing the Heritage Value of Arizona’s Place-Based Foods* (Flagstaff, AZ: Center for Sustainable Environments, 2005), 4.

heritage and place-based food often gets lost in the system of production, processing, retail, and preparation. However, we must continue to place a premium on food celebration on a personal, local, and regional level. Heritage food celebration is one of the many vehicles through which we can ensure that every individual is aware of heritage food and experiences it on a regular basis.

Heritage food celebration is important because it enhances awareness of heritage food, fosters a sense of identity and sense of place, and contributes significantly to the local economy. Gary Nabhan, a celebrated local food writer and scholar, argues that tapping into tourist bases can be a powerful tool for enhancing the economic vitality of heritage foods<sup>3</sup>, especially as cultural tourists tend to be well-educated people with “considerable expendable income,” and thus tend to spend more money in the regions they visit.<sup>4</sup> Thus, tourism is an excellent venue for enhancing food heritage celebration as a tool of economic development. A 2007 tourism study shows that of the 160 million United States residents who travel for leisure, almost half chose their destination based on the food or food activities they would find there.<sup>5</sup> According to the United States Department of Commerce’s analysis of the Tourism and Hospitality Industry, food service makes up the largest portion of the travel industry sales at sixteen percent. Furthermore, recreation and attractions make up eleven percent of the industry’s sales.<sup>6</sup> Based on these statistics, linking recreation and food service into a

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<sup>3</sup> Nabhan, West, and Pirog, *Linking Arizona’s Sense of Place to a Sense of Taste*, 22.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>5</sup> Samantha Gross, “Traveling to eat: Food tourism grows in USA,” *USA Today*, February 20, 2007, accessed April 28, 2012, [http://www.usatoday.com/travel/destinations/2007-02-19-food-tourism\\_x.htm](http://www.usatoday.com/travel/destinations/2007-02-19-food-tourism_x.htm).

<sup>6</sup> SelectUSA, “The Travel, Tourism and Hospitality Industry in the United States,” accessed April 28, 2012, <http://selectusa.commerce.gov/industry-snapshots/travel-tourism-and-hospitality-industry-united-states>.

cumulative heritage food celebration would have profound impacts on a region's economy.

The Thomas Jefferson Planning District Commission (TJPDC) in Central Virginia is faced with this very situation, but many opportunities exist to enhance heritage food celebration. The TJPDC, a regional planning group, governs a five-county region that includes Albemarle County and the City of Charlottesville, Fluvanna County, Greene County, Louisa County, and Nelson County. The TJPDC's mission is to provide "regional vision, collaborative leadership, and professional service to develop effective solutions"<sup>7</sup> by working with local governments and various other groups within each of the five counties and the City of Charlottesville.

There are many opportunities within the Thomas Jefferson Planning District (TJPD) to join heritage food celebration with the region's tourism industry in order to promote economic development and on-going vitality. The TJPDC estimates that in 2000, total traveler spending in Central Virginia was \$2,294,419,000 and total paid in food taxes was approximately \$2.5 million. First-time and repeat visitors overwhelmingly come to the area to see historic sites and cultural landscapes, and heritage visitors tend to "stay twice as many nights and spend two-and-a-half times more money than do other tourists."<sup>8</sup> Thus, we see the economic potential of the food industry and the heritage industry separately. By joining both Central Virginia food tourism and heritage tourism in a single theme of heritage food celebration, the five-county region will experience extensive economic benefits.

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<sup>7</sup> Thomas Jefferson Planning District Commission, "About Us," accessed April 10, 2012, <http://www.tjpd.org/home/index.asp>.

<sup>8</sup> Thomas Jefferson Planning District Commission, "Heritage Tourism," accessed April 29, 2012, [http://www.tjpd.org/workforce/tjV\\_heritageTourism.asp](http://www.tjpd.org/workforce/tjV_heritageTourism.asp).

This paper illustrates the importance of food heritage celebration through two case studies – the Georgia Peach Festival and the Slow Food USA Ark of Taste. I will present each of these cases in detail, focusing on the situations that each responded to, the opportunities that they both created, and the challenges they faced. I will analyze the lessons that each of the case studies provides for heritage food celebration in general, as well as the policy ideas that might be applicable to the TJPD. Ultimately, I will use the case study examples, as well as additional research in effective food policy, to argue that the Thomas Jefferson Planning District and various partners can employ both hard and soft policies to create and enhance food heritage celebration in Central Virginia.

## **ANALYSIS OF CASE STUDIES**

### **Georgia Peach Festival, Inc.: Georgia Peach Festival**

#### **General Information**

The Georgia Peach Festival is a prime example of food celebration. First conducted in 1986 in Fort Valley, Georgia (in Peach County), the festival remains the only state-sanctioned food festival in Georgia and brings in between 7,000 and 10,000 visitors each year. The purpose of the festival is to honor peach growers for their contributions to the state's economy and the United States food industry, promote Peach County, enhance civic pride, and share the county's quality of life to festival visitors. This year, the festival takes place from June 1 – June 9, 2012. The first

weekend's events take place in Byron, Georgia and the second weekend takes place in Fort Valley. Both cities host events throughout the week.<sup>9</sup>

For the first two years of the festival's existence, the Peach County Chamber of Commerce was in charge of the event. However, starting in 1988 and continuing today, a board of volunteers is in charge of executing the event and the government's main involvement is funding. The Georgia Peach Festival receives funding from various government partners, including the Peach County Board of Commissioners, Peach County Tourism Committee, and the local governments for both host cities – the City of Byron Government and the Fort Valley City Government. Local and regional businesses also provide funds, and event receives revenue from annual events that they put on prior to and during the festival. These include arts and crafts vending, 5k races, golf tournaments, and local celebrity dinners. Finally, the festival profits from the sale of festival-franchised merchandise.<sup>10</sup>

The actual festival events are diverse and appropriate for adults and children of all ages. The festival begins with a parade, which offers “bins of peaches” that made Peach County famous.<sup>11</sup> Other activities include water slides, bungee jumping, and craft fairs. The festival also provides entertainment in the form of various music groups (choirs, jazz ensembles, and bands), and ample room for dancing.<sup>12</sup> In addition, various competitions are associated with the Georgia Peach Festival. During the spring prior to each festival, the county hosts the Miss Georgia Peach Pageant. Winners are crowned

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<sup>9</sup> Georgia Peach Festival, Inc., “Georgia Peach Festival,” last modified in 2012, accessed April 10, 2012, <http://www.worldslargestpeachcobbler.com/festival.cfm>.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> PeachCounty.TV, “Georgia Peach Festival,” (video), accessed April 2012, <http://peachcountytv.magnify.net/video/Georgia-Peach-Festival;search%3Atag%3A%20County>.

<sup>12</sup> Georgia Peach Festival, Inc., “Photos,” last modified 2012, accessed April 10, 2012, <http://www.worldslargestpeachcobbler.com/photo.cfm>.

based on age, and each queen gets to serve as an ambassador to the Georgia Peach Festival and participate in the opening parade.<sup>13</sup> During the festival, there is a competition for best peach hat. Finally, the festival claims to present the world's largest peach cobbler, which chefs bake in an eleven by five foot pan and is open for tasting by the festival's hungry visitors.<sup>14</sup>

### **Celebration Benefits**

The Georgia Peach Festival is extremely beneficial on a regional and state level because it both responded to and created opportunities in terms of economic vitality and heritage food celebration. Georgia ranks third in the nation in annual peach production, with 15,000 acres of peach trees and 1.7 million bushels of peaches. More than half of the harvest comes from Peach County alone, which is the host county for the Georgia Peach Festival.<sup>15</sup> Evidently, the peach is a major symbol for the county and the state and integral to the region's food heritage and economy. The Georgia Peach Festival allows the region to celebrate its food heritage and local economy, and spread awareness of the Georgia Peach to residents and visitors alike.

Furthermore, because the festival is currently the only state-sanctioned food festival in Georgia, the festival obviously responded to the need for a sanctioned food festival. The festival also brings in tourism, revenue, and jobs. In 2010, the festival made approximately \$12,372 in revenue; the TJPD might see similar monetary success with a comparable festival or food heritage celebration. Furthermore, because the

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<sup>13</sup> Georgia Peach Festival, Inc., "Miss Georgia Peach Pageant," last modified 2012, accessed April 10, 2012, <http://www.worldslargestpeachcobbler.com/pageant.cfm>.

<sup>14</sup> PeachCounty.TV, "Georgia Peach Festival," (video), accessed April 2012, <http://peachcountytv.magnify.net/video/Georgia-Peach-Festival;search%3Atag%3A%20County>.

<sup>15</sup> Georgia Peach Festival, Inc., "Georgia Peach Festival," last modified in 2012, accessed April 10, 2012, <http://www.worldslargestpeachcobbler.com/festival.cfm>.

Georgia Peach Festival is an incorporated non-profit, they have a income of \$50,526 and assets in the amount of \$23,504.<sup>16</sup> Based on the number of visitors and yearly revenues for the festival, and the fact that the festival continues to endure year after year, a food festival is an extremely viable option for celebrating heritage food.

### **Celebration Challenges**

In addition to creating opportunities for food heritage celebration and economic development, the Georgia Peach Festival also had to respond to various challenges along the way to success. Any festival faces issues of funding and advertising. The Georgia Peach Festival successfully collaborates with various government and business partners to supplement the festivals, and works to create its own revenue sources, through various festival-related activities. The festival also does extensive work with advertising. Printed brochures in Georgia Welcome Centers, Chambers of Commerce, and local businesses advertise the event for four months prior to the festival. The organizing board also places ads on radio, television, billboards, newspapers, and online.<sup>17</sup>

### **Lessons for Our Region**

The Georgia Peach Festivals offers several lessons for heritage food celebration and for the TJPDC. First, instead of simply focusing on the peach, the Georgia Peach Festival includes a variety of auxiliary festival-related activities, such as competitions, arts and crafts, and races. The TJPDC might consider drawing on this idea of auxiliary

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<sup>16</sup> Disclaimer: I was unable to get in contact with anybody from Georgia Peach Festival, Inc. This number is an estimate, but the website does not confirm accuracy or timeliness of information. FAQs.org, "Georgia Peach Festival, Inc. in Fort Valley, Georgia (GA)," accessed April 28, 2012, <http://www.faqs.org/tax-exempt/GA/Georgia-Peach-Festival-Inc.html>.

<sup>17</sup> Georgia Peach Festival, Inc., "Georgia Peach Festival," last modified in 2012, accessed April 10, 2012, <http://www.worldslargestpeachcobbler.com/festival.cfm>.

festival-related activities in a potential food heritage festival. For example, a festival might incorporate arts and crafts. Children could decorate a mini-flower pot in which they could grow a specific type of plant or small crop. Furthermore, many fairs that currently exist within the five-county region already include arts shows. Similarly, a Central Virginia Food Heritage Festival might include a crafts show in which artists from around the region could present their pieces to festival visitors. Other festival-related activities that might be beneficial could be coordinated 5k races in each of the five counties that raise money for heritage food, concerts, and competitions similar to the Best Peach Hat Competition and Miss Georgia Peach Pageant.

The Georgia Peach Festival also offers lessons in terms of location and administration. Rather than simply taking place in one town, the festival spreads across two towns within Peach County. For the TJPDC, each county might host various events related to food heritage. This would allow for individuals throughout the region to participate without having to travel to far-off location. Furthermore, the TJPDC might take note of festival's organization and administration. A volunteer board devotes time to coordinating and executing the festival, and depends on local government financial support. In the TJPDC, the commission might organize a similar volunteer board made up of heritage food producers, who have a vested economic interest in promoting heritage foods and know how to best market these foods, and residents who support heritage or place-based foods. This volunteer board could also work with like-minded organizations, such as the Virginia Food Heritage Project or the Jefferson Area Board for Aging, to coordinate a food festival across the five-county region.



## **Slow Food USA: US Ark of Taste**

### **General Information**

Slow Food USA's US Ark of Taste enhances celebration of food by raising awareness for endangered foods and celebrating those farmers that continue to grow or raise heritage crops and livestock. Founded in 1989, Slow Food USA is a national non-profit organization that hopes to counter the rise of fast food and fast life. Slow Food USA proposes, "[f]ood is a common language and a universal right. Slow Food envisions a world in which all people can eat food that is good for them, good for the planet, and good for those who produce it."<sup>18</sup> The organization conducts various domestic and international programs to aid in the promotion of their missions and values.

The US Ark of Taste is one such domestic program. The Ark of Taste is a catalog of over 200 foods that are in danger of extinction. The catalog is broken down into every category of food, including beverage, meat and poultry, vegetable, grains, and fruits. Alongside each endangered food, the catalog provides information about producers, seed sources, and nursery stock sources so consumers know where they can find the endangered foods and farmers can learn how they can get involved in producing these endangered foods as well. Slow Food USA has stringent criteria for inclusion in the Ark of Taste. Products must be outstanding in terms of taste and as defined in the context of local traditions, at risk biologically or in terms of culinary traditions, sustainable, culturally or historically linked to a specific region, locality,

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<sup>18</sup> Slow Food USA, "About Us," accessed April 2012, [http://www.slowfoodusa.org/index.php/about\\_us/](http://www.slowfoodusa.org/index.php/about_us/).

ethnicity or traditional production practice, and produced in limited quantities by farms or by small-scale processing companies.<sup>19</sup>

Slow Food USA hopes that by promoting Ark products through the catalog, more people will consume these endangered products, which will help to ensure that they remain in production. The organization views the catalog as a tool that “helps farmers, ranchers, fishers, chefs, retail grocers, educators and consumers celebrate our country’s diverse biological, cultural and culinary heritage.”<sup>20</sup> The catalog currently lists 200 rare regional foods and Slow Food USA evaluates new foods for inclusion in the catalog on an ongoing basis. The organization offers various resources in conjunction with the catalog. The Betsy Lydon Ark Award “recognizes an Ark of Taste farmer or food producer whose work reflects the goals of Slow Food USA and who, if better known and celebrated, would benefit from the wider community of food producers.”<sup>21</sup> The Slow Food USA website also includes instructions for creating foods with various Ark foods and a listing of events that serve and support Ark foods.

### **Celebration Benefits**

Primarily, the US Ark of Taste creates an excellent opportunity to celebrate place-based foods that are in danger of extinction. Because a criterion for inclusion is linkage to a certain region, every food included in the catalog is a heritage food. By listing endangered heritage foods in a central location, the information is easily accessible. With this information, both producers and consumers can hopefully

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<sup>19</sup> Slow Food USA, “US Ark of Taste,” accessed April 10, 2012, [http://www.slowfoodusa.org/index.php/programs/details/ark\\_of\\_taste/](http://www.slowfoodusa.org/index.php/programs/details/ark_of_taste/).

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

encourage food heritage celebration and make heritage food an integral part of their daily lives.

In addition to enhancing food celebration, the Ark provides an opportunity for producers to become more visible, thus driving local economic development. By including producer information with each food listing within the catalog, individuals know where they find the endangered foods and the producers hopefully benefit as a result. When heritage food producers sell their place-based endangered foods, they are spurring local economic development and supporting heritage food celebration.

### **Celebration Challenges**

The main challenge that Slow Food USA encountered, and continues to experience, during its formulation of the Ark of Taste deals with criteria for adding foods to the Ark. Without well-defined criteria, it is often difficult to decide whether to add an item to the Ark. Although it does have an existing set of criteria (as stated early), some consider these criteria arbitrary or too high of a standard for inclusion in the Ark of Taste. The Ark of Taste team at Slow Food is currently working to “simplify and standardize a more user-friendly Ark.”<sup>22</sup>

### **Lessons for Our Region**

The US Ark of Taste provides a couple lessons for food heritage celebration and is a useful example for the TJPD. The US Ark of Taste is a resource that provides consolidated information in a central location. This makes information easier to find, which enhances the community’s ability to celebrate heritage food. The TJPD might consider a similar idea. Piedmont Environmental Council, an organization that that

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<sup>22</sup> Emily Walsh (Spokesperson for Slow Food USA), email with author, May 2, 2012.

“promote[s] and protect[s] the Virginia Piedmont’s rural economy, natural resources, history and beauty,”<sup>23</sup> already has a project through its “Buy Fresh, Buy Local” campaign that lists businesses and farms throughout the region that provide local food.<sup>24</sup> TJPDC might work with various organizations, such as the Piedmont Environmental Council and the Virginia Food Heritage Project, to create an addendum to the local food catalog. This addendum would include much of the same information that the US Ark of Taste provides. The Virginia Food Heritage Catalog would list heritage foods based in Central Virginia and the five-county region and would provide information for producers and consumers who would like to find these foods. Furthermore, by adding to a resource that already exists, TJPDC and its partners can use the local food movement’s momentum to gain support for heritage food.

The five-county region could also expand upon the US Ark of Taste example to create even more opportunities for food heritage celebration in Central Virginia. In addition to providing information as to where to find heritage foods, the catalog could also include information as to where to obtain assistance in growing and preparing heritage food. TJPDC might also consider collaborating with local governments to create tax break or other financial incentive to purchase items listed in the catalog. Furthermore, TJPDC could work with various food-based non-profits and institutions, such as the Local Food Hub and universities, to develop a mini-grant program. Farmers who want to being growing crops or raising livestock listed in the catalog can apply for a mini-grant to aid in their endeavor. Similarly, institutions such as schools or nursing

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<sup>23</sup> Piedmont Environmental Council, “About Us,” accessed April 28, 2012, <http://www.pecva.org/index.php/about>.

<sup>24</sup> Piedmont Environmental Council, “Charlottesville Area,” 2010, accessed April 2012, <http://www.buylocalvirginia.org/index.cfm/0,5,296,html>.

homes who want to design menus around items listed in the catalog could also apply for grants.

## **POLICY PROPOSALS**

Based on my analysis of the Georgia Peach Festival, US Ark of Taste, and other policies and methods that localities have used to promote place-based and heritage foods, I recommend that the Thomas Jefferson Planning District Commission work with various organizations and institutions around the five-county region to implement both hard and soft policies that will enhance food heritage celebration. Hard policies are policies written into legal codes and are tools to achieve a certain vision or goal. Hard policies can include items such as zoning or financial taxing programs. On the other hand, soft policies are programs based on a specific goal, but not necessarily written into the law. These policies could include programs such as farmers markets or community gardens. Localities usually fund soft policy programs in part, while non-profit organizations or local governments take the lead in administering the program.<sup>25</sup>

### **Add a Heritage Food Element to Existing Festivals**

First, the TJPDC should consider working with the planning boards for various food festivals around the region to add a food heritage element to the existing festival. By working within festivals that already exist, the region will employ fewer resources and can gauge residents' interests in heritage food while working on longer term projects. For example, because wine is integral in Central Virginia's heritage, there are numerous wine festivals throughout the year. Organizers for the Annual Virginia WineFest, which

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<sup>25</sup> Tanya Denckla Cobb, "Developing a Range of Planning Tools Options for Food Heritage Planning For Our Five-County Region," March 8, 2012.

takes place in May, or the Discover Virginia Wine and Food Festival, which takes place in April, might be able to include an element of food heritage in their events.

Other festivals that might benefit from a food heritage element would be Persimmon Festival in Nelson County and the Virginia Festival of History in Charlottesville. The Persimmon Festival takes place in October and highlights the persimmon fruit with activities such as fresh fruit tasting.<sup>26</sup> The festival's organizers might consider adding a food heritage element that demonstrates the persimmon's history and celebrates the fruit as part of Central Virginia's food heritage. The Virginia Festival of History takes place in Charlottesville at the beginning of June, and celebrates Virginia rich history.<sup>27</sup> A heritage food element would fit perfectly within the festival's framework and could include demonstrations of historic culinary practices from the state and region or tastings of historic foods based in the area.

### **Partner with Food Producers and Food-Related Organizations**

In planning a new heritage food festival, the TJPDC might consider collaborating with food producers or one or more charities or organizations that focus on local or place-based foods. Producers of local heritage food would be key members of a festival's organization board because they have a vested economic interest in preserving heritage food. For example, for a cider festival, cider producers would be valuable members of a volunteer organizing board because they know best how to market cider and what events and activities would best highlight the value of cider products for the region.

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<sup>26</sup> "Edible Landscaping's Persimmon Festival," accessed April 2012, [www.virginia.org/Listings/Events/EdibleLandscapingsPersimmonFestival/](http://www.virginia.org/Listings/Events/EdibleLandscapingsPersimmonFestival/).

<sup>27</sup> "Virginia Festival of History," accessed April 2012, <http://www.visitcharlottesville.org/includes/events/index.cfm?action=displayDetail&eventid=2316>.

Food-related organizations that would be helpful for collaboration might include the Piedmont Environmental Council, Jefferson Area Board for Aging, the Local Food Hub, and the Virginia Food Heritage Project. By collaborating with established organizations, the TJPDC will have a wealth of resources at its disposal, including volunteers and food literature. Furthermore, by working with established organizations that deal with food or food heritage, the TJPDC will be better able to raise awareness for the festival's message.

Whether the TJPDC works with existing festivals to add a food heritage component or create a new heritage food festival, the region will surely benefit economically. While the Georgia Peach Festival brings in up to 10,000 visitors per year and has approximately \$80,000 in revenue, assets, and income, other heritage food festivals make similar economic impacts. The Unicoi County Apple Festival in Tennessee has 110,000 visitors annually<sup>28</sup>, and the California Strawberry Festival has raised over \$3.5 million since it began in 1984.<sup>29</sup> Thus, depending on a food festival's size and visibility, the TJPDC could bring in up to 100,000 visitors from within and outside the region, and raise a sizeable amount of money with an annual festival.

#### **Add to the Piedmont Environmental Council's "Buy Fresh, Buy Local" Catalogue**

Based on the Slow Food USA Ark of Taste and the "Buy Fresh, Buy Local" listing of local foods that Piedmont Environmental Council (PEC) has already sponsored, the TJPDC should consider working in conjunction with PEC to create an addendum to this listing that focuses on regional heritage food. This listing would describe Central

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<sup>28</sup> Unicoi County Chamber of Commerce, "35<sup>th</sup> Annual Unicoi County Apple Festival," accessed May 2012, <http://www.unicoicounty.org/apple-festival>.

<sup>29</sup> California Strawberry Festival, "FAQ," accessed May 2012, <http://strawberry-fest.org/festival-fun-2/faq/#whobenefits>.

Virginia heritage foods and provide information as to where consumers can find these foods. Criteria for inclusion in this catalogue would be similar to the criteria for inclusion in the Ark of Taste. Food items must be sustainable, linked to the TJPDC historically or culturally, and benefit the economy for all five counties within the region.

### **Waive Permit Fees for Food Heritage Events**

In order to enable the five-county region to conduct food heritage festivals, the TJPDC should consider collaborating with local governments to waive permit fees for events that fit the criteria of a “food heritage festival.” This criteria might include that the festival must spur local economic development, focus on a food or culinary practice that is specific to the Central Virginia region, and must be easily accessible to residents in all five counties. Other financial incentives that would enhance the region’s ability to celebrate heritage foods would be tax waivers for foods that the region considers heritage, and small incentive grants that would be available to farmers who wish to grow and support heritage food and institutions that want to begin using heritage foods.

### **Add Heritage Food Component to Comprehensive Plans**

Finally, the TJPDC should consider encouraging local governments to include heritage food and heritage food celebrations in their comprehensive plans. Furthermore, in their capacity as a regional planning board, the TJPDC often works with various localities, especially in rural areas, to develop comprehensive plans.<sup>30</sup> This collaboration is a prime opportunity for the TJPDC to encourage inclusion of food heritage celebration. A heritage food celebration section within a comprehensive plan might include a heritage food overlay zone or certain financial exemptions for groups

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<sup>30</sup> Thomas Jefferson Planning District Commission, “Community Planning,” accessed April 2012, <http://www.tjpdcc.org/community/index.asp>.



organizing heritage food-related events. By including food heritage festivals in comprehensive plans, local governments can support local food heritage and ensure that future generations do the same.

## **CONCLUSION**

Cultural tourism is one of the most promising areas of growth in our current economy<sup>31</sup>, which means that Virginia's heritage is a powerful economic resource. Furthermore, cultural tourists tend to be well-educated people with "considerable expendable income," and thus tend to spend more money in the regions they visit.<sup>32</sup> Thus, if the TJPD were to enhance its cultural heritage through food-based tourism, the economic benefits would be considerable. Based on analysis of various case studies, the Thomas Jefferson Planning District could bring in over 100,000 visitors from within in the region and outside of the region, and add a sizeable amount to food revenue and general tourist revenue by enhancing food heritage celebration through festivals and local government policies that incentivize heritage food events.

Food heritage celebration is an extremely important aspect of food heritage and the manner in which we as individuals and communities experience food in general. By celebrating our food heritage, we celebrate our identity and enhance our awareness of where we live and who we are. The Central Virginia region is rich in heritage and culture, and the place-based food in the five-county region exemplifies this idea. The Thomas Jefferson Planning District Commission should collaborate with various individuals and organizations throughout their region in order to ensure that celebration

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<sup>31</sup> Nabhan, West, and Pirog, *Linking Arizona's Sense of Place to a Sense of Taste*, 21.

<sup>32</sup> Nabhan, West, and Pirog, *Linking Arizona's Sense of Place to a Sense of Taste*, 22.

of food heritage becomes an integral part of how we experience our food and our history and contribute to the Thomas Jefferson Planning District's economic well-being.

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