



Moving the NC Local Food System Toward Sustainability: A Comprehensive Graduate Course in Local Food Systems for Cooperative Extension Agents, Specialists, and Other Educators



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OBJECTIVE

To increase the capacity of Extension educators to work with and educate growers, processors, distributors, buyers, and community members in the development of high performing local food systems (LFS).

Extension educators:

1) can knowledgeably explain the benefits and challenges of localized food systems to a variety of audiences, including farmers.

2) can identify the structure and components of food systems and lead or facilitate a collaborative process of aligning these with agricultural and general community strengths for local food system expansion.

AUDIENCE



13 NC Extension Agents / other educators



RATIONALE AND SIGNIFICANCE

- Rising interest in local food systems
- Gaps in training in local food / local food systems and related research identified through needs assessment

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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PROJECT SUMMARY

- Designed, implemented, and evaluated a 3-credit hour graduate course, *Local Food Systems for Cooperative Extension Agents* delivered through NC State University and NC Agricultural & Technical State University.
- Input from >40 LFS stakeholders from NC, VA, & SC.
- Use of interdisciplinary and systems approaches.



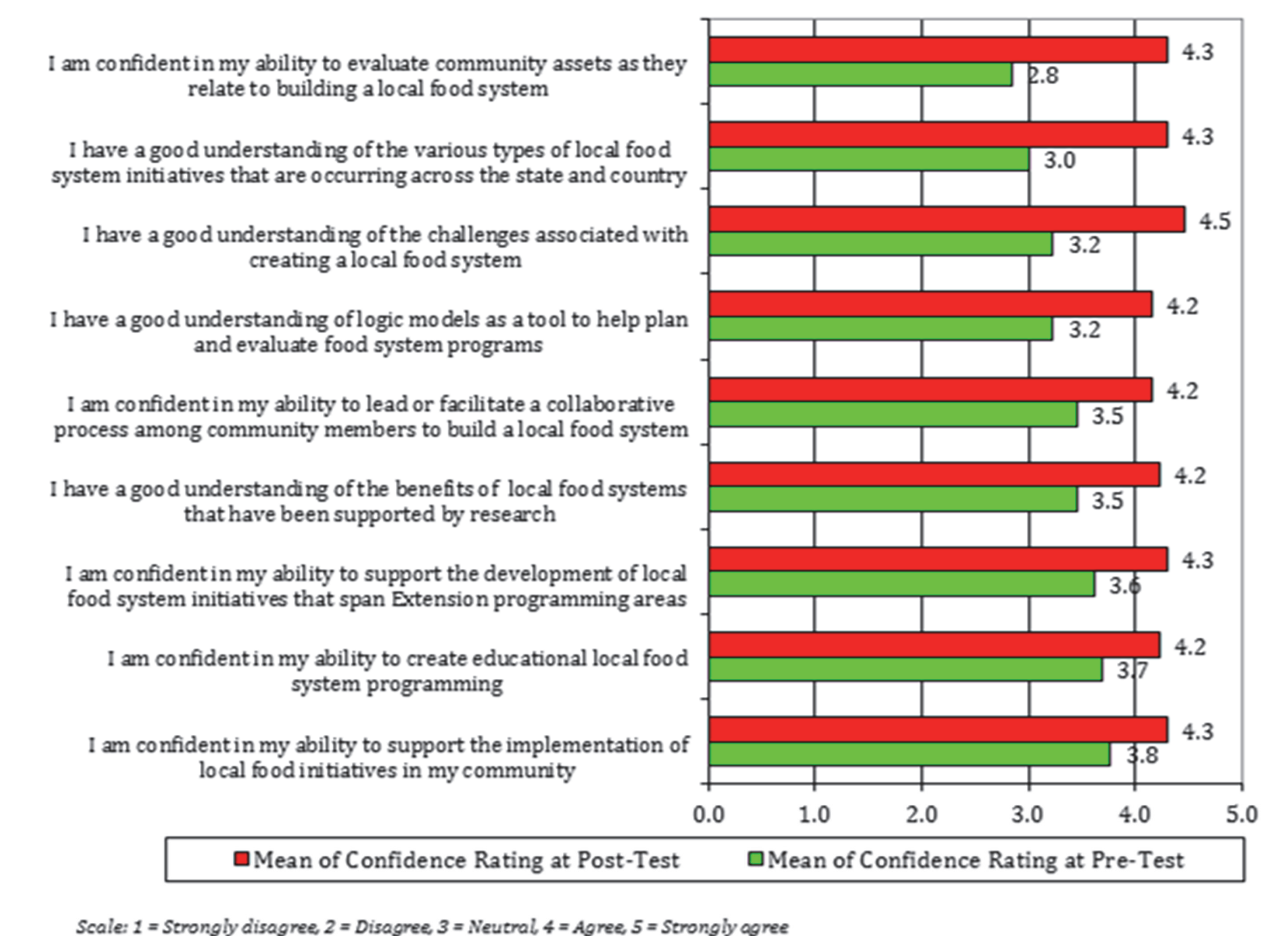
- 6 NC meeting locations; 6 two-day, face-to-face sessions.
- Session themes:
 - Introducing Local: Where We Have Been & Where We Are Going
 - The Bottom Line: Economic Opportunities & Challenges of LFS
 - Value Chain: Farm to Fork (in two parts)
 - Food as a Common Denominator: Bringing Everyone to the Table
 - Understanding & Influencing Regulatory Policy & Frameworks / Local Leaders: Framing Local Policy
- Course syllabus and all recorded course materials are available at go.ncsu.edu/localfoodlectures.

OUTPUTS, OUTCOMES AND IMPACTS

- Graduate course participants reported **improvements in knowledge** in all content areas; overall increase of **27%** (Fig. 1).
- Qualitative data reinforced achievement of learning outcomes:
 - Education of community on LFS:** "It [the course] has helped me to educate community members about the sectors of the food system and how we all play a part and what we can do to better the food system."
 - Use of course resources in LF work:** "It [the course] [gave] me more resources across the state to call on and more practical examples."
 - Recommendation of LF training for other agents:** "I think every agent in the state who's at all planning to be around with the organization in the [future] ... they need to go through local foods training and be really up on that, because I think that's where the future lies."

OUTPUTS, OUTCOMES AND IMPACTS

Figure 1: Comparison of participants' perception of local food system knowledge and confidence before and after the course



Report on course published in 2017:

Bloom, J.D., Lelekacs, J.M., Dunning, R., Piner, A., and Brinkmeyer, E. (2017). Local Food Systems Course for Extension Educators in North Carolina: Summary of an Innovative Program. *Journal of Extension*. 55(4) Article 4IAW2. Available at: joe.org/joe/2017august/iw2.php

"This is a really valuable course... it's valuable for our agents to have the resources and the knowledge to be able to help foster these local food systems and really keep them alive and keep them sustained."
— Graduate course participant

SUSTAINABILITY PLAN

The curriculum has been transitioned into an online professional development training program, *Overview of Local Food Systems* (piloted in 2016/17 with 12 LFS Extension professionals) for a broader audience of service providers with launch in 2018: www.localfoodsystems.org.

"This course was extremely helpful in preparing me... to educate the community on how to develop a high performing local foods system."
— Online training pilot participant