

Catawba Sustainability Center offers economic benefit to Roanoke County food system, Virginia Tech study says

ROANOKE, Va., March XX, 2015 – With its strong research, education, and environmental conservation programs, Virginia Tech's Catawba Sustainability Center is well-suited to bolster local and regional food systems. That's the finding of a new Virginia Tech study.

"Agriculture is by far Virginia's largest industry with an economic impact of \$52 billion annually, providing over 300,000 jobs in the commonwealth," said Josh Nease, manager of the Catawba Sustainability Center. "One of our primary goals is to support the local food system and strengthen the local economy. Knowing what the needs are and how we can help is an important first step in realizing this goal."

The study identified three areas where the 377-acre property could help farmers and leaders strengthen the regional food system:

- **Incubation and acceleration** – providing education and demonstrations for agricultural entrepreneurs seeking to develop and manage farms
- **Interconnectivity and capacity-building** – employing Virginia Tech and [Virginia Cooperative Extension](#) resources to champion local foods and connect growers and advocates with consumers
- **Innovation and experimentation** – providing land for training and experimenting with programs, models, and initiatives to promote sustainable agriculture

"The recommendations in this report reflect innovative strategies for advancing agribusiness and sustainable agriculture in a rural area of Roanoke County," said Jill Loope, director of the Roanoke County Department of Economic Development.

Roanoke County commissioned the [Virginia Tech Office of Economic Development](#), part of [Outreach and International Affairs](#), to conduct the study, which analyzed food system characteristics, conducted focus groups, and administered stakeholder surveys. The Virginia Tech team also examined food production, processing, access, distribution, retail, marketing, and consumption. As part of a regional approach, several counties and independent cities were included in the study.

Highlighting the growing number of small farms that contribute to the popularity of local food in the region, the report identifies how Roanoke County, Virginia Tech, the Catawba Sustainability Center, and Virginia Cooperative Extension could champion a community-supported agricultural initiative.

Funding for the study came from the [Governor's Agriculture and Forestry Industries Development Fund](#).

Situated in the headwaters of the Chesapeake Bay watershed, the Catawba Sustainability Center has belonged to Virginia Tech since 1988.

[Click](#) to read the report, *Linking the Catawba Sustainability Center to the Local Food System*. [Read more](#) about the Catawba Sustainability Center and its economic benefit to local food system in *Virginia Tech News*.