



FEASIBILITY STUDY

North Alabama Farm Food Collaborative



2000-B Vernon Avenue
Huntsville, AL 35805

p. 256-539-2256
f. 256-539-1437

kstrickland@fbfna.org
www.foodbanknorthal.org

CONTENTS

Introduction	4
Background	4
SECTION ONE – COLLABORATIVE SUPPORT	8
1.1 Purpose	8
1.2 Values & Principles	8
1.3 History	10
1.4 Determination of Need	11
1.5 Model Development	12
SECTION TWO – TRIAL PERIOD	15
2.1 Membership	15
2.2 Addressing Challenges to Market Entry	16
2.3 Organizational Milestones	19
2.4 Sales & Analysis of Impact	20
2.5 Major Findings	29
SECTION THREE – BUSINESS PLAN	31
3.1 Organizational Structure	32
3.2 Organizational Capacity	33
3.3 Description of Management	34
3.4 Membership Services	36
3.4.1 Supporting Grower Capacity	36
3.4.2 Education & Cause Marketing.....	37
3.4.3 Leverage Support.....	38
3.5 Food Safety and Regulations	38
3.6 Revenue Model	39
3.7 Basic Assumptions	40
3.8 Market Segment Analysis	41
3.9 Sales Projections	44
3.10 Funding Plan	45
3.12 Risk Analysis	48

3.12.1 PEST	49
3.12.2 SWOT	52
3.12.3 Porter’s Five Forces	55
3.13 Competition	57
3.14 Educational & Cause Marketing Plan.....	59
RECOMMENDATIONS.....	62
GLOSSARY	63
WORKS CITED	65
APPENDIX – Pro Forma	67

INTRODUCTION

“The heart of social entrepreneurship is a willingness to try out ideas that are helpful to others. Social entrepreneurs are action researchers: they learn primarily through experimentation, not just by relying on theory.”

-FROM SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP: WHAT EVERYONE NEEDS TO KNOW
(BORNSTEIN & DAVIS, 2010, P. 82)

The North Alabama Farm Food Collaborative (referred to hereafter as “the Farm Food Collaborative” or “the Collaborative”) is an action research project incubated by the Food Bank of North Alabama to address regional health and wealth disparities through social entrepreneurship. The Farm Food Collaborative spurs economic development and creates mainstream access to healthy food choices by helping family farmers sell locally grown fruits and vegetables to local schools, hospitals, workplace cafeterias, and grocery stores.

During its initial 57-week trial period, the Farm Food Collaborative facilitated \$163,117 dollars of local food sales among nine family farmers and 17 local buyers. It also supported the launch of five new neighborhood farmers markets championed by local residents and churches. Initial success indicates the Farm Food Collaborative has the potential to play a significant role in developing a healthy community food system in north Alabama where the local economy is strong, family farms thrive, and residents lead, healthy, active lives.

This report details the Collaborative’s successes and challenges faced during the trial period, and presents a business plan for its launch as a self-sustaining social enterprise.

BACKGROUND

Before and immediately after the 2008 economic crisis, the leaders of the Food Bank of North Alabama (Food Bank) reached a crossroads. The Food Bank, a 501(c) (3) nonprofit charity, was charged with feeding residents at risk of hunger in eleven counties of northern Alabama through a network of over 200 partner feeding programs including food pantries, children’s programs and shelters. Despite operating for over two decades, the Food Bank found more and more people unable to afford to eat. From 2006 to 2010, the Food Bank went from feeding an estimated 86,000 to over 100,000 residents a year – more than

the populations of key cities in the region like Decatur or Florence (Food Bank of North Alabama, 2010) (Hiatt & Hartz, 2006).

In strategic planning sessions, Food Bank leaders asked themselves: How many more of our neighbors can we feed? Are there proactive actions we can take so families can afford to buy the food they need and no longer rely upon charity? If we do not shoulder the risk of testing solutions to hunger and poverty in northern Alabama, who else will?

The questions intensified when a truckload of peas arrived at the Food Bank. The Food Bank's Director of Food Handling, Ed Rains, had ordered a truckload of canned peas to help meet the demand for food supplies. As a good steward of charitable dollars, Ed purchased the truckload at the very best price available. When the load arrived at the Food Bank's warehouse, he examined one of the labels and realized the peas had been grown, processed and shipped **from China** – over 11,000 miles away.

This can of peas was a wake-up call for the Food Bank's leaders, who soon realized food imports were commonplace nationwide. In fact, at the time, nearly 2/3 of all fruits and vegetables consumed in the United States were grown outside the country (Johnson, 2014). This trend meant that a fraction of the millions of pounds of food the Food Bank distributed each year was grown, raised or produced locally – a reversal from how the Food Bank first began in the 1980's. In the early years, the Food Bank received truckloads of donated produce from local farmers over the course of a growing season. Then in the 1990's the effects of the national “get big or get out” farm policy took hold (Philpott, 2008). Many farmers who used to donate to the Food Bank responded by selling off their land, quitting vegetable production or filing for bankruptcy. In fact, Ed Rains, who was a 4th generation farmer before joining the Food Bank's staff, lost a farm that had been in his family for over 100 years during this period. The peas from China begged yet another question for Food Bank leaders: What was the cost of this inexpensive food in terms of livelihoods in rural Alabama?

At the end of the strategic planning process, Food Bank leaders committed a sizable investment of staff time and resources to pursue proactive strategies that go beyond charity to end hunger. In 2009, the Food Bank launched a new division called *Community Food Security* that focuses on economic development within our local food system to address the root cause of hunger: poverty.

In this capacity, the Food Bank acts as a convener, facilitator and incubator of collaborative initiatives, cooperative enterprises and social entrepreneurship within northern Alabama’s local food economy. Projects include local food policy council development, a revolving loan fund dedicated to local farmers and food-based businesses and the incubation of a “local food hub” called the North Alabama Farm Food Collaborative.

Underpinning each of these local food initiatives is the definition of a healthy community food system. In a healthy system, each of the roles that comprises the food system (producers, processors, distributors, retailers, consumers, food recovery/waste recyclers and suppliers) form a “collaborative network” and work together to advance “the environmental, economic and social health” of a region (University of California-Davis, 2014). This system is not a linear supply chain – it is a dynamic, complex web of mutually beneficial relationships (Meter, 2011). For example, a local brewery may take its spent grain (often considered waste) and donate it to a locally owned restaurant. The restaurant, in turn, bakes homemade bread from the grain and provides it to its patrons without charge. In a healthy community food system, these crisscrossing relationships add value. They are cooperative, interdependent, and adaptable in nature. These are the type of relationships the Food Bank and partners work to foster within our local food economy.



North Alabama Farm Food Collaborative Cash Flow Statement						
	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Year 6	Year 7
	10/13-9/14	10/14-9/15	10/15-9/16	10/16-9/17	10/17-9/18	10/18-9/19
Starting Cash	\$8,270	\$22,265	\$48,665	\$40,871	\$39,101	\$31,657
Sources						
Gross Local Food Facilitated Sales	\$220,208	\$385,364	\$578,046	\$867,069	\$1,040,483	\$1,196,555
Delivery Fees	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Grants Committed	\$82,231	\$67,624	\$21,799	\$0	\$0	\$0
Grants Pending	\$5,092	\$26,884	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Fundraising/Future Grants	\$0	\$0	\$30,000	\$30,000	\$0	\$0
Food Bank In-kind Support	\$63,342	\$73,178	\$75,042	\$77,012	\$78,919	\$80,950
Total	\$370,873	\$553,050	\$704,886	\$974,081	\$1,119,401	\$1,277,505
Uses						
Cost of Food/Products Sold	\$206,995	\$358,388	\$531,802	\$789,033	\$936,434	\$1,076,899
Employee Compensation	\$99,167	\$104,378	\$119,050	\$122,233	\$125,511	\$128,887
Operation Costs	\$13,515	\$12,291	\$12,291	\$12,508	\$12,508	\$12,679
Membership Costs: Marketing	\$11,823	\$18,115	\$15,700	\$15,000	\$15,000	\$15,000
Membership Costs: Insurance	\$0	\$9,000	\$9,000	\$9,450	\$9,450	\$9,450
Other Membership Costs	\$18,627	\$6,850	\$8,000	\$8,000	\$8,000	\$8,000
Depreciable Assets Purchased	\$0	\$1,500	\$0	\$1,500	\$0	\$1,500
Administrative Costs	\$6,751	\$16,128	\$16,836	\$18,128	\$19,943	\$20,772
Total Uses	\$356,879	\$526,650	\$712,680	\$975,851	\$1,126,845	\$1,273,187
Net Change in Cash	\$13,995	\$26,400	-\$7,794	-\$1,770	-\$7,444	\$4,318
Ending Cash Position	\$22,265	\$48,665	\$40,871	\$39,101	\$31,657	\$35,975

3.12 RISK ANALYSIS

Farm Food Collaborative members used three established models of risk analysis to consider and evaluate the project's potential and risk from multiple perspectives:

- (1) PEST (Political, Economic, Socio-cultural, Technological);
- (2) SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats); and,
- (3) Porter's Five Forces (Supplier Power, Buyer Power, Threat of New Entry, Threat of Substitution, Competitive Rivalry).

The chart below summarizes the analysis. Detailed descriptions of each risk assessment follow.

MODEL	FOCUS	SUMMARY
PEST	Macro-Economic Factors: Political, Economic, Socio-cultural, and Technological	Based on a PEST risk analysis model, the Collaborative rates its risk as low.
SWOT	Internal & External Strengths & Weaknesses	Based on a SWOT risk analysis model, new market opportunities abound. Although the Collaborative faces a few significant weaknesses and threats, its strengths—namely, the strong commitment of its partners and specific contingencies in its business plan—mitigate many of the potential risks to success.
Porter’s Five Forces	Five Competitive Forces including Buyer & Supplier Power	Based on an analysis of the economic forces at work in the local agricultural sector, the Collaborative rates its chance of success as moderately high.

Overall, the Farm Food Collaborative business potential is very promising: The macro-economic factors (PEST) are low, market opportunities are strong, and the strengths of the Collaborative outweigh its central weaknesses (SWOT). The Farm Food Collaborative’s probability for success is moderately high based on economic forces analysis (Porter’s Five Forces).

3.12.1 PEST

Aside from a company’s internal resources and industry factors, there are several other macro-economic factors that can have a profound impact on the performance of a company. In particular situations, such as new ventures or product launch ideas, these factors need to be carefully analyzed in order to determine their impact on the organization’s potential success. One of the most commonly used analytical tools for assessing external macro-economic factors is a PEST analysis which examines: Political, economic, socio-cultural and technological risk.

Political Risk: Several recent political factors have made fertile ground for the Farm Food Collaborative’s local food initiative. A federal local food campaign (“Know your

farmer, know your food”) has created nationwide awareness of the benefits of eating fresh, locally grown food. New food safety regulations (such as the Food Safety Modernization Act) allow the Farm Food Collaborative to be uniquely positioned to help growers implement on-farm food safety programs and gain a competitive edge in the marketplace. The recent passage of a new Farm Bill in Congress stands to strengthen the position of Alabama farmers’ ability to cultivate and market local food. For these reasons, current political risk is moderate to low.

Economic Risk: In the last decade, the local food movement has proven economically profitable in the communities where it has taken root. Communities such as Hardwick, Vermont and Athens, Ohio that have encouraged this movement have found, to their great benefit, that robust local food markets help create a more stable economic environment, thereby attracting new residents and new businesses—each contributing to the financial health of the region.

This profitability has created a buzz that is spreading nationwide and has arrived in northern Alabama. The Farm Food Collaborative seeks to take advantage of that buzz by positioning itself as a leader in the local food economy. Other economic factors make the Collaborative’s entrance into this new market timely:

1. Drastic climate changes are impacting the economic landscape of agriculture. Widespread drought and its resultant irrigation problems in central California—an agricultural juggernaut—may severely compromise its agricultural production. With a major competitor like California hamstrung, there is tremendous opportunity for a state like Alabama, with its agricultural lands and water resources, to capitalize on meeting the demand.

2. Water shortages in other states and increased transportation fuel costs continue to have a dramatic effect on food inflation. Food is becoming more and more expensive to produce and transport. It stands to reason that the fewer miles food needs to travel, the less it costs to transport it, the more affordable it becomes to consumers. People will be looking to local food not just for its health benefits, but for its economy.

Some economic risk remains a cause for concern. Growers have long been at a disadvantage in the open market; buyers often hold the power in price negotiations. Furthermore, consolidation of buyers into larger and larger conglomerates means that

farmers face a growing monopsony—being forced to negotiate with only one buyer who can disproportionately dictate market prices. Despite this traditional disadvantage, the Collaborative sees great economic potential for a new business model like a local food hub to work profitably by focusing on local market opportunities and local food. Therefore, we rate current economic risk of our enterprise as moderate.

Socio-cultural Risk: As mentioned above in the consideration of economic factors, the local food movement is gaining profitable traction in our region. The movement's popularity has created positive shifts in attitude about local food. More and more, people regard local food as fresher, healthier, and of better quality than food that has been transported thousands of miles to market. They are showing more curiosity about where their food comes from and who grows it. They place great value on food that they see has been grown with care and attention to quality. This perception of value is a large part of the potential for profit that has spurred the Farm Food Collaborative into action. For all these reasons, we rate the socio-cultural risk of our enterprise as low.

Technological Risk: Digital technologies continue to develop at a breakneck pace. Digital technologies developed for agriculture and agricultural market trading are no exception to this trend. Invest in a new technology and you run the risk of dealing with its obsolescence in a few years. There is no escaping this reality. Growers and buyers watch these developments with caution, waiting to see which new technologies gain a level of permanence before investing in them. Farm Food Collaborative members share this caution. Both buyers and growers in the Collaborative rejected an investment in an on-line platform, noting that the technology is only as reliable as the data inputted and accessibility to users. Buyers and farmers prefer direct communication with the Collaborative's Local Food Coordinator for sales, marketing and service coordination—thus reducing reliance on online, digital marketplaces. Members do, however, appreciate the advantages of new technologies, such as hoop houses or aeroponics (the process of growing plants in an air or mist environment without the use of soil), which have potential to extend the growing season. Therefore, we rate technological risk to our initiative as low.

3.12.2 SWOT

A SWOT analysis identifies the positives and negatives inside and outside the organization to inform both strategic planning and decision-making.

Strengths

Grant support: The Collaborative has already secured 73% of needed grant support for its startup development phase.

Infrastructure: The Collaborative has partners such as the Food Bank, which has storage and transportation capability to aid the Collaborative's operations.

Community support: The Collaborative currently enjoys diverse financial, political, and public support from state, corporate, religious, civic, and academic institutions. Some of these include the Boeing Company, Redstone Federal Credit Union, Chairman of the Madison County Commission, The Alabama State Commissioner of Agriculture and Industry, ALFA Insurance Corporation, Top of Alabama Regional Council of Governments, Alabama Department of Education and Alabama Cooperative Extension.

Strong, long-established relationships with a group of highly-committed, local growers and buyers: It has been our experience that, once established, these relationships are self-sustaining—and infectious. New growers and buyers see the benefits of collaborative relationships and desire to be a part of them.

Market experience: With the help of the above relationships, the Food Bank has tested the framework of the Collaborative with a year-long trial program. The resulting lessons have placed us in a better position to understand and anticipate the challenges unique to this dynamic, new food hub enterprise.

Member services: The Collaborative has several services to offer to members, including GAP training assistance, invoicing services, marketing support, resource referrals, and a lending equipment library.

Perception as a state leader: The Food Bank, as our incubating agency, is viewed as a state and regional leader in local food research, analysis, and policy consulting.

Internal Leadership: Members of the Collaborative include experienced leaders from multiple sectors who are committed to making the Farm Food Collaborative a profitable reality for north Alabama growers and buyers.

Weaknesses

Food Hubs are a new concept: Food hubs like the Farm Food Collaborative offer a new, non-conventional paradigm of a value chain that operate on mutual collaboration among growers and buyers. They stress the formation and cementing of one-on-one relationships built on trust and cooperation instead of cutthroat competition. Such relationships require time and patience to develop. Add the pressures of a competitive market, regulation, and the shifting (and often inverse) schedules of farmers and buyers to the inherent complexities of relationship-building, and the implementation of a supply chain based on collaboration becomes difficult.

Grower and buyer readiness for a new market paradigm is currently low: There are currently few growers and buyers consistently participating in the Farm Food Collaborative. Relationship building takes patience, trust, and time. Success will be judged over the long term.

Barriers to market entry: Regulatory and infrastructure barriers to entry in this new market are numerous and frequently changing. For example, an increasing number of buyers are requiring GAP certification, creating a barrier to entry for most growers in the state. If we can build the capacity of our members to meet the standard, however, then the Collaborative establishes a competitive edge for our grower members.

Long-term funding: Grants typically are limited to a year—enough to get a project off the ground, but not necessarily enough to sustain it in the absence of profitability. The Collaborative has garnered 73% of required funding, but more is needed to incubate the kind of relationship-building between growers and buyers that will make this social enterprise a self-sustaining success.

Opportunities

Food hubs are a new niche: As this type of venture is a relatively new market paradigm in the state of Alabama, opportunities are rife for carving out a large market share, establishing a standard of practice, and creating marketing that has not been seen before.

Capitalizing on buzz: The local food movement has gained profitable traction in other parts of the country and consumer interest in local food is growing in north Alabama. However, growers and buyers have not, to this point, marketed local food well. This

provides a unique opportunity for a well-prepared organization, such as the Farm Food Collaborative, to create new demand.

Regulatory assistance: The Collaborative is one of the few organizations that currently offer training and assistance to growers who seek GAP certification.

The power of local food: Examples in other parts of the country have shown that a local food initiative can have a positive effect on the well-being of a region. The economy stabilizes and improves when residents patronize local growers. Local food aids in sustainable growing and distribution patterns, as growers and distributors seek to meet the demands of local patrons. Lastly, local food is fresh food; it has higher concentrations of nutrients, making it healthier for consumers.

Profitability: This new paradigm has the potential to provide farmers and their employees a living wage.

Local strengths: North Alabama is able to offer local food choices that include a large supply of less-perishable products such as sweet potatoes and apples that have longer shelf-lives. The Collaborative can grow particular varieties of local foods according to member buyers' needs.

Threats

Crop failure: Crop failure is a persistent threat. North Alabama's hot and humid climate, while good for crop growth, is also friendly to competitive plants (weeds); pests, and disease.

Limited growing season: Although north Alabama enjoys a longer growing season than many parts of the country, it experiences weather extremes and proliferation of pests and disease that can hamper crop growth.

Market volatility: The hyper-competitive nature of conventional supply chains can create instability that threatens industry sustainability. For example, a buyer who files for bankruptcy can ruin a grower who has planted a crop based on preexisting agreement with that buyer. On the other side of the competitive spectrum, a powerful, successful buyer can consolidate and control market prices, whittling away the profit margins of growers.

Time delays: Growing season limitations and market fluctuations (such as those referenced above) require a rapid response and distribution that many growers cannot reasonably provide.

Lack of infrastructure: Limitations in storage and transportation infrastructure can make it especially difficult for smaller, local growers to get product to market in a timely manner.

Regulatory compliance: Insurance and safety certification requirements can shut growers out of profitable relationships with public schools, grocery chains, and a growing number of distributors.

3.12.3 PORTER'S FIVE FORCES

Named after Michael E. Porter, this model identifies and analyzes five competitive forces including supplier and buyer power that shape every industry. Porter's model can be applied to any segment of the economy to search for profitability and attractiveness.

Supplier Power: The Collaborative currently rates the power of local suppliers (growers) as low. In traditional wholesale markets, buyers have great influence over prices. Buyers are free to shop for the lowest prices, making it easy to substitute the product of one grower for another. Growers lack this flexibility. They are bound to the soil and are constrained by the perishability of their products. This dynamic invariably leads to lower profitability for growers and higher profitability for buyers.

However, using a traditional understanding of a conventional supply chain to assess supplier power in a local food market is problematic. It fails to account for a new variable: the value and potential profitability of the term "local." The local food movement has created awareness of the environmental and health benefits of food grown in close geographical proximity to a community. Consumers are beginning to understand this concept and are seeking to spend a larger share of their money on local food. This trend presents a unique opportunity for suppliers (and buyers) of local foods and places each in a position to profit from this emerging market. Specifically:

1. There are a limited number of growers of local product. Having a finite supply of producers of products in high demand increases the bargaining power—and the profitability—of the supplier.

2. As consumers believe more and more in the benefits of local food, they will be more likely to demand local foods to the exclusion of food produced far away. .

3. Because “local” is a self-limiting term, buyers are not as free to substitute a locally farmed product with one produced hundreds or thousands of miles away, placing local suppliers at a significant advantage.

When an analysis of the growing value of local food is factored into its assessment, the Collaborative projects the power of suppliers will strengthen.

Buyer Power: In the Collaborative’s assessment, buyer power will remain strong in a local food market. As distributors continue to consolidate, their ability to negotiate with suppliers and transport their product to market will still be a tremendous factor to their advantage. Other types of buyers, such as grocery chains and public schools, are large and fixed in number, giving them considerable negotiating power. Restaurants, despite their small volume and high risk of attrition, are numerous and also present a large bloc of buying power.

Threat of Substitution: In the Collaborative’s assessment, the threat of substitutes in a local food market is low. There are a finite number of producers of reliable, quality local food. These suppliers enjoy a high level of buyer and customer loyalty, reducing the threat of substitution.

Threat of New Entry: Due to the regulatory nature of food production and distribution, barriers to entry in the market are numerous and intimidating. Therefore, the likelihood of a surge in the emergence of new food hubs like the Farm Food Collaborative is very low. Furthermore, because of the Food Bank’s long operating history within the food system, and its food safety competencies, the Collaborative has significant developmental advantage over other Tennessee Valley food hubs that may be contemplate entry into the market.

Competitive Rivalry: Traditionally, competitive rivalry in food markets is high. There is a history of suppliers and buyers undercutting each other to gain competitive advantage in the market. In these bidding wars, quality of product may suffer as a result, so that while the end-consumer may enjoy low prices, the overall value may be far less than what that consumer thinks she is getting.

But again, however, it is important to understand that food hubs like the Farm Food Collaborative represent the *antithesis* of traditional food distribution; they offer a new market paradigm that is based on collaboration and cooperation between supplier and buyer.

Cooperative competition

- **The Deep South Food Alliance** in Marengo county seeks to link the combined efforts of numerous, limited resource, historically disadvantaged farmers with a unified planting cultivation and crop harvest plan. They primarily sell collard greens into the Birmingham area. The Deep South alliance has purchased sweet potatoes from the Collaborative when their supplier's inventory was depleted. The two groups have shared booth space at Food Shows as well. Potential for competition - moderate.
- **Good Food for Good People** works with farmers within 150 miles of Nashville. They offer mobile markets, provide start-up services for farmers markets, and a buyers club with support an on-line ordering buyer's club. They also act as a food hub with daily deliveries to restaurants and other wholesale buyers. They have created a catchy brand and appear to have organized with the Amish farmers, a collective of reliable producers, in Lawrence County, Tennessee, a county that abuts Lauderdale County, Alabama. They are a limited liability corporation. They present a (small) potential threat of competition to wholesale distributors, whereas we propose to act as a collaborator with distributors. Potential for competition – low.

Several of these organizations have established web presences and well-organized delivery networks. Manna Market has a visually pleasing and interactive website. Good Food for Good People has a catchy brand and a strong marketing presence. We would do well to study and emulate both. What sets us apart from them is our diverse scope: we propose to work in collaboration with wholesale distributors; Manna Market and Good Food for Good People have chosen to focus on smaller, more direct grower-to-restaurant and grower-to-consumer markets.

At this time, these emerging food hubs are not direct competition for the Farm Food Collaborative. The Farm Food Collaborative will stay attuned to food hub development in north Alabama and will seek collaborative opportunities as they arise.

3.14 EDUCATIONAL & CAUSE MARKETING PLAN

The North Alabama Farm Food Collaborative faces two significant marketing challenges. First, farmers are anonymous, interchangeable, and unknown in the current

supply chain. One reason for this is that the majority of fruits and vegetables consumed in the U.S. come from an international market in which price, not informed consumer demand, dictates where crops are shipped and sold. For the end-consumer, the provenance of farm products is largely unknown, other than a general label stating the country of origin. Second, price continues to be the single most important factor in consumer choice. In this equation, value is determined less by the inherent quality of the food or its production and more by the raw financial impact on the consumer.

The goal for the Collaborative's marketing campaign is to create end-consumer demand for locally grown food and increase local farmers' share of the state's total produce market. The volumes of food needed to meet an increase in local demand for Alabama's produce currently exist, but, with the current supply chain system, the products are usually diverted to other areas of the country. The Collaborative's educational marketing campaign seeks to create knowledgeable consumers who desire local food above that from other regions or countries. Informed consumer demand will provide the financial incentive for wholesale buyers to keep north Alabama produce in north Alabama at competitive and affordable prices, creating significant impacts on the local economy and the health of north Alabama residents.

Such a campaign will make the Collaborative among the first in Alabama to market these producers to the end-consumer in wholesale markets across the state. No one in Alabama has marketed the individual Alabama farmer and his or her family on a personalized basis to the end-consumer. There are success stories where this approach has been implemented, such as Ball Foods, Kansas City, MO, and Ingles Grocery chain, based in Asheville, NC.

The main tenets of the marketing campaign are identity, innovation, communication, and collaboration. The Collaborative proposes to tap into regional and cultural pride as the main resource for encouraging regional residents to demand the fruit of their own soil. There are few subjects more intimate to individuals as food, which allows the Collaborative to reach out to consumers on visceral, emotional levels—not just hearts and minds, but hearts, minds, and stomachs. Local food is good health; local food is family; local food is home. Intimate connections will help consumers realize that they are collaborative partners in bringing food from farm to plate.

By touching on themes of humor, history, family, work, regional identity and pride, aesthetic beauty, and emotional sentiment, the Collaborative will craft a series of narratives (augmented with a rich combination of images, artwork, and music) that feature farmers, their families, and their land. We seek to brand not just local food, but individual farms in an effort to make farmers visible leaders—even personalities—in the minds of north Alabama residents. The marketing campaign will build consumer awareness and knowledge through a multi-pronged saturation campaign.