



## **Local motivations, regional implications: scaling from local to regional food systems in northeastern North Carolina**

**Gabriel Cumming, PhD** | Working Landscapes

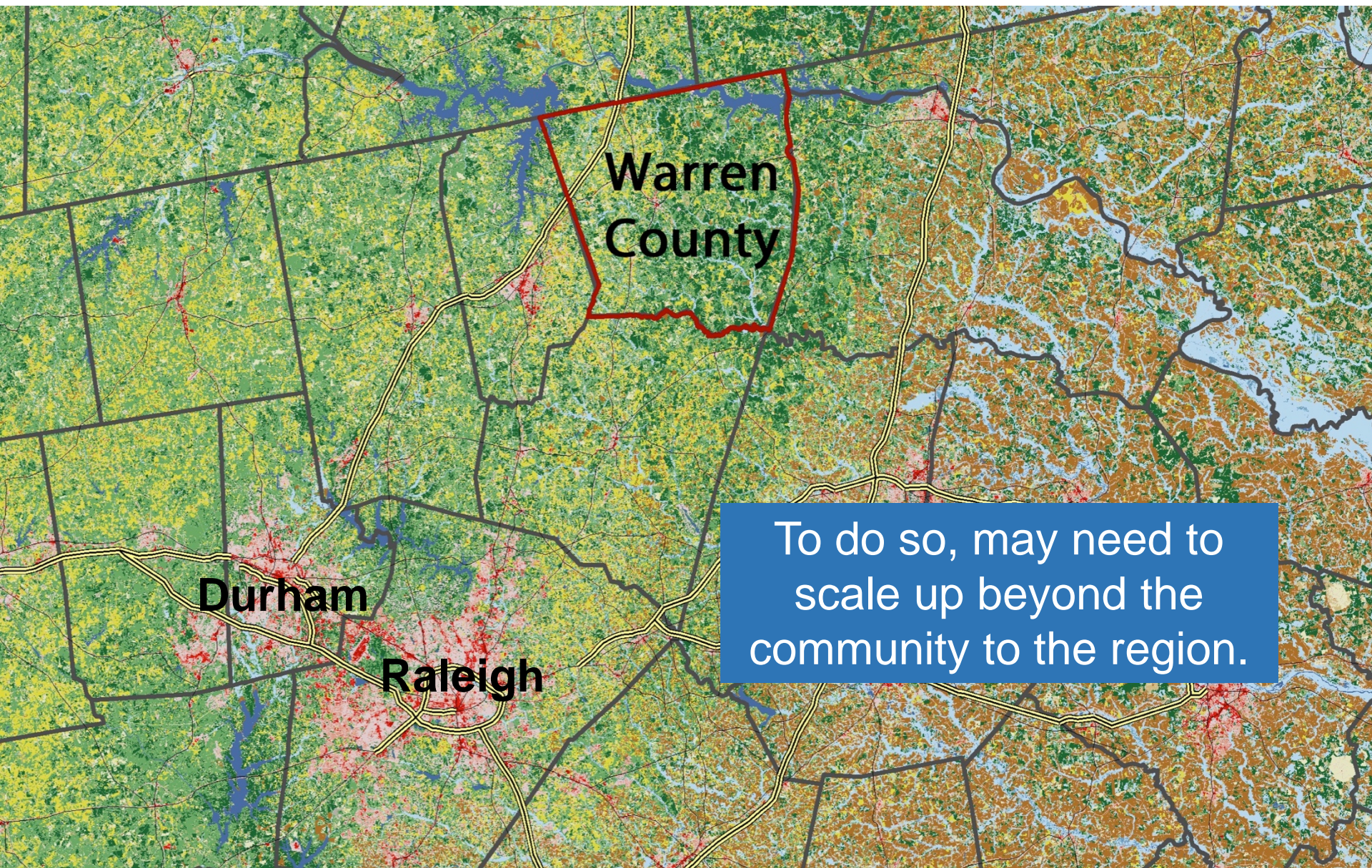
**Carla Norwood, PhD** | Working Landscapes

**Sophie Kelmenson** | University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill



“How can I help my home community?”





**Warren  
County**

**Durham**

**Raleigh**

To do so, may need to  
scale up beyond the  
community to the region.



# Scaling up presents challenges and opportunities

- Business development
- Discourse/messaging
- Implications for developing resilient regional systems





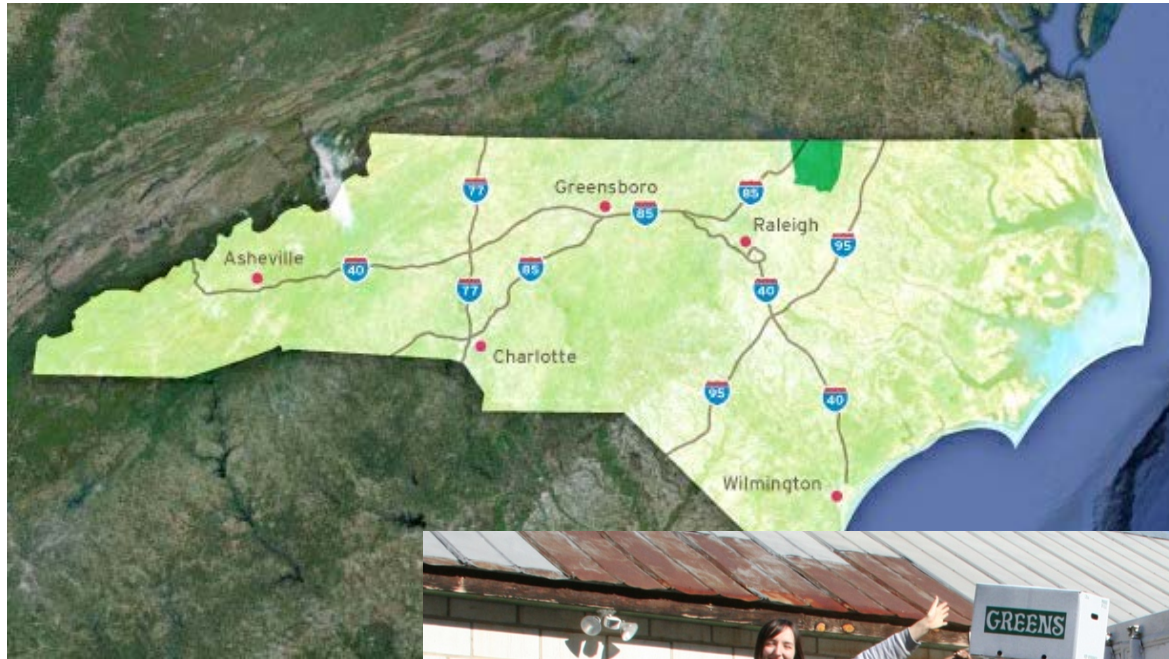
# Research methodologies

- Case study: operations of Working Landscapes, 2011-present
- Two Community Voice Method stakeholder engagement projects
  - County scale: *Growing Local/Buying Local*, 2010-11
  - Regional scale: *Growing Opportunities*, 2017-18

Cumming, G. and D. Holland. 2013. *Growing Local/Buying Local: Challenging pessimism and social division through narratives of possibility. Progressive Planning.*

Cumming, G. and C. Norwood. 2012. *The Community Voice Method: Using participatory research and filmmaking to foster dialog about changing landscapes. Landscape and Urban Planning.*





## Case study: Working Landscapes





# Our place-based motivations





# Engaging local stakeholders, 2010-11





# Goals identified by local stakeholders in 2011



# Working Landscapes' programs today

## 1. Assist small farmers



## 2. Build farm-to-fork infrastructure



## 3. Consumer education



## 4. Engage youth



## 2. Build farm-to-fork infrastructure





# Produce processing facility development



# The Chopped Produce Initiative: our value-added produce value chain





# Chopped Produce Initiative so far

- Growth in volume of produce processed:
  - 3000 lbs. in 2013
  - 40,000 lbs. in 2017
- Served school districts in 18 counties
- Have learned what works and doesn't work; positioned for growth



High school students harvesting collards for CPI from school farm, Halifax County

# Next steps for Chopped Produce Initiative

- To achieve long-term viability:  
600,000 lbs./yr.
- Renovate facility
- Add washed, fresh-cut produce



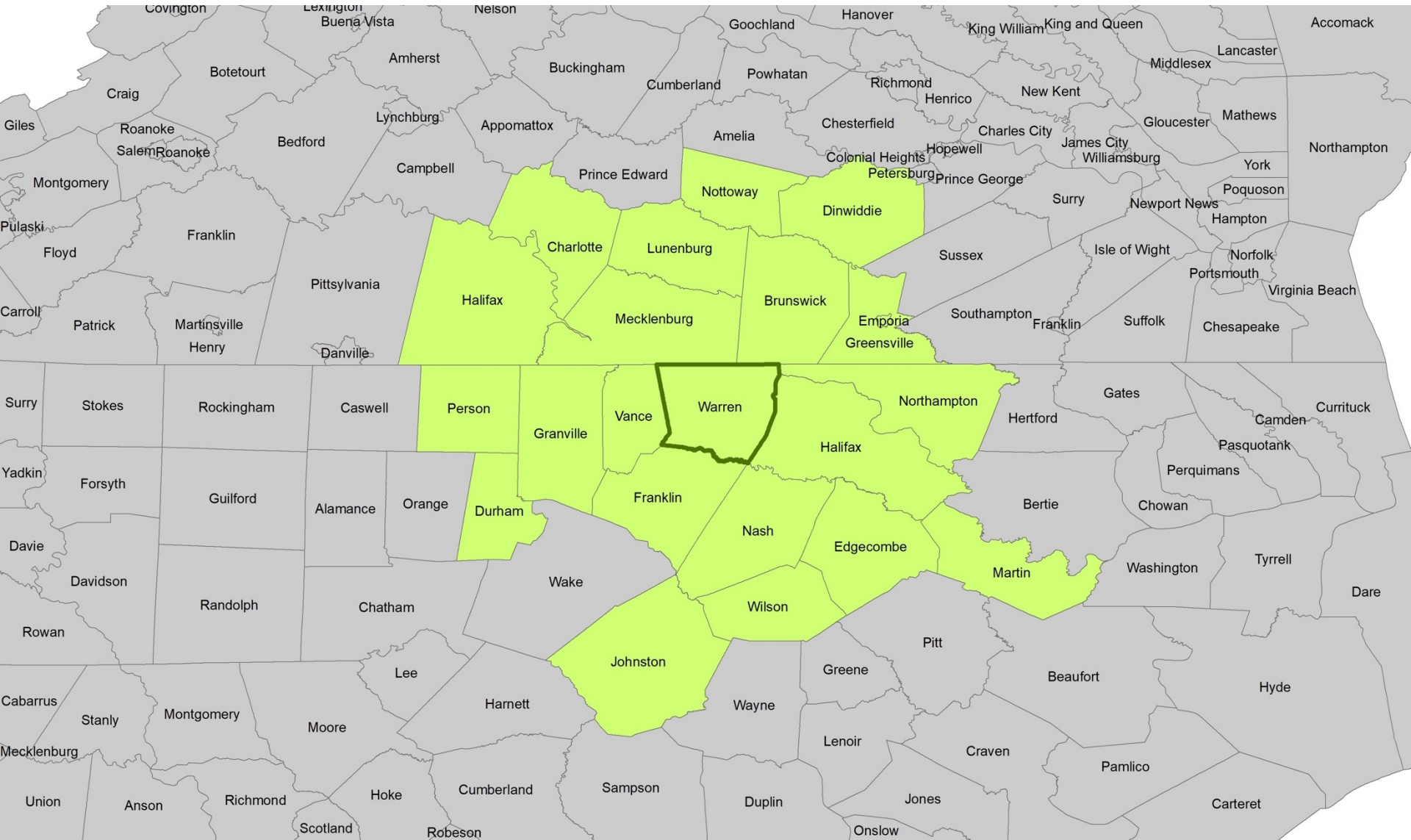


# Scaling up: business development challenges and opportunities



# Scenario 1: school districts order one product per week

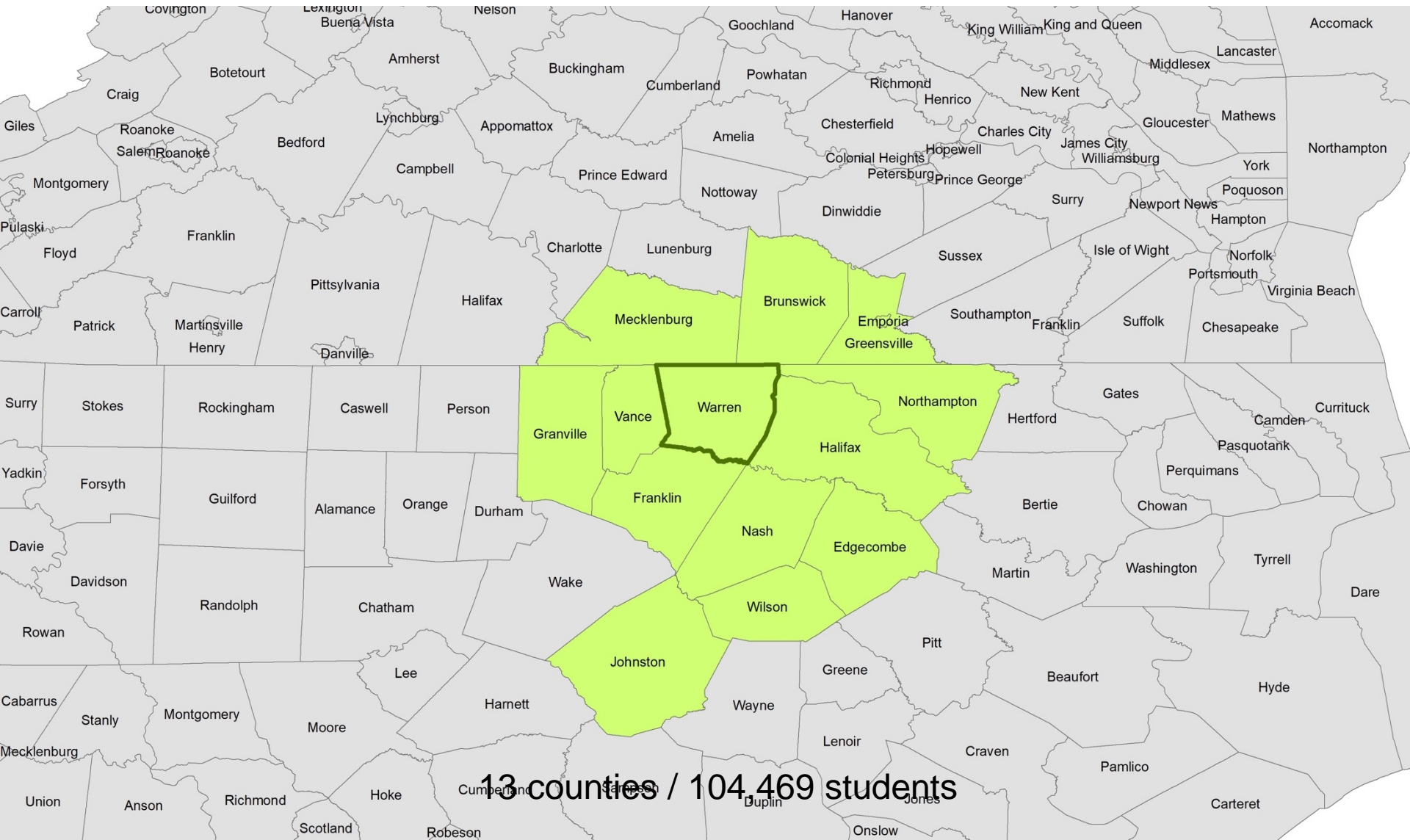
Market needed: 23 counties / 159,051 students





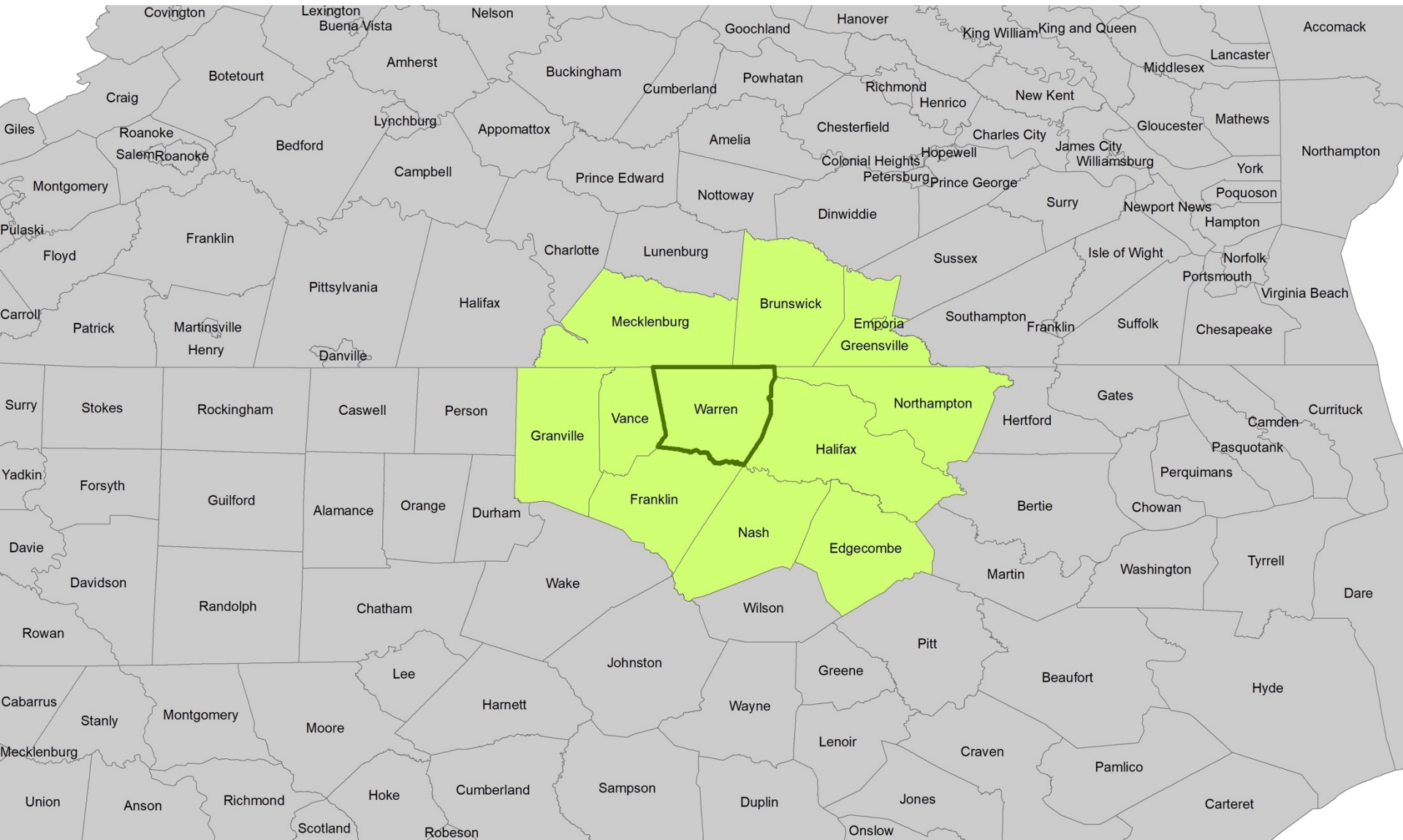
# Scenario 2: school districts order two products per week

Market needed: 13 counties / 104,469 students



# Scenario 3: school districts order three products per week

Market needed: 11 counties / 57,666 students





# As place-based ventures scale up, enter into interaction with other ventures



Excerpt of *What Can Be*, a production of Vittles Films, the Center for Environmental Farming Systems, and NC Cooperative Extension, with funding support from Southern SARE (USDA NIFA). <http://www.vittles.us/what-can-be-film/>

# As place-based ventures scale up, enter into interaction with other ventures



Excerpt of *What Can Be*, a production of Vittles Films, the Center for Environmental Farming Systems, and NC Cooperative Extension, with funding support from Southern SARE (USDA NIFA). <http://www.vittles.us/what-can-be-film/>



# Scaling up: discursive challenges and opportunities



Community dinner, Warren County

Local conversations and regional conversations are different



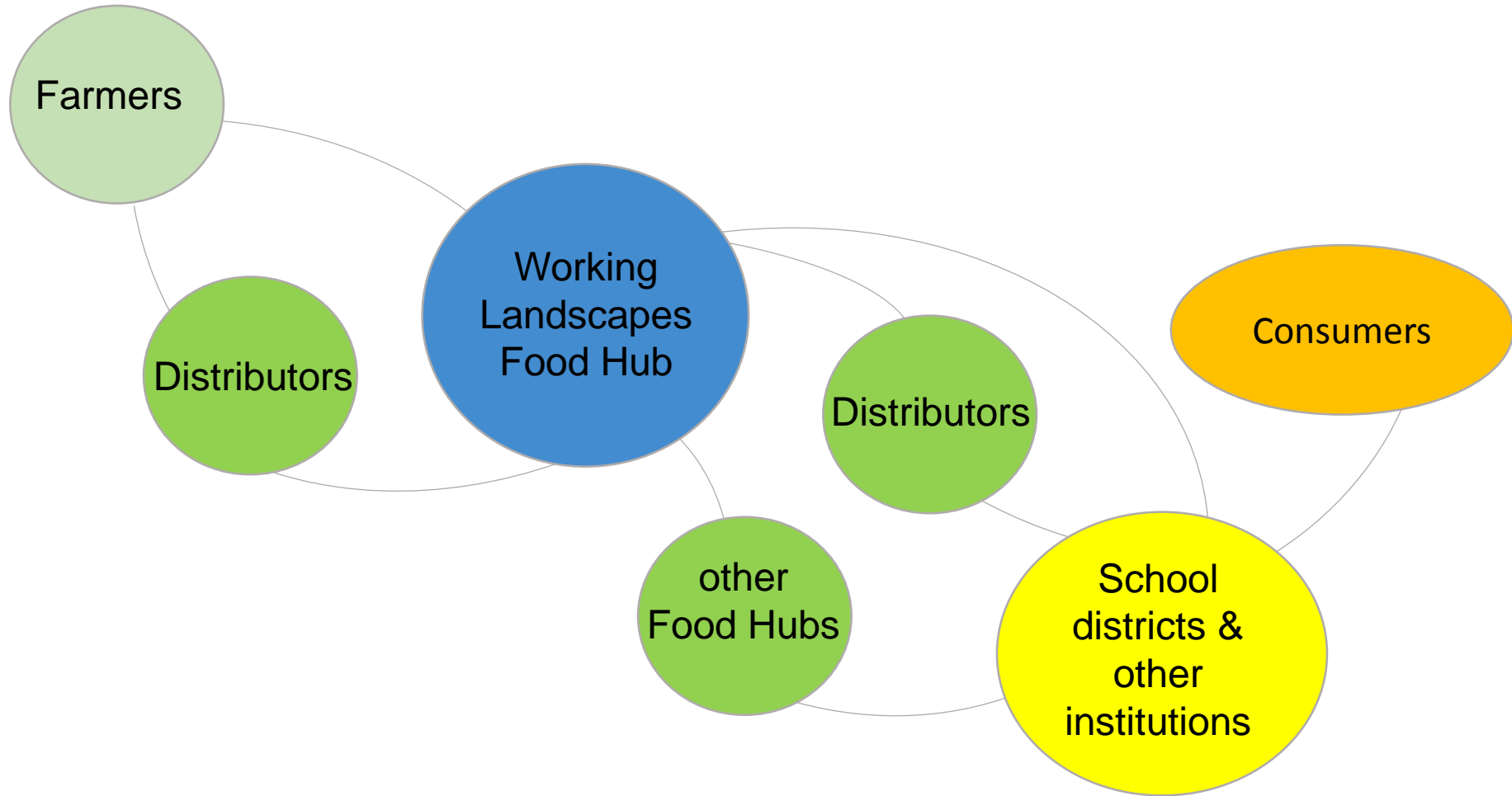


The food system: the local perspective





# The food system: the regional perspective



# Place-based food system leaders across northeastern NC are also taking part in the regional conversation



← Restaurateur

Food hub director →



← Grassroots nonprofit

University administrator →



← School nutrition director

Farmer →





# Beyond these leaders, though, support for regional value chains is not yet widespread

- Impacts of regional food initiatives distributed, so less impact in local community
- To stakeholders in home community, can feel like a betrayal of place-based mandate



# Challenge: increasing visibility of and support for regional value chains





# Challenge: increasing visibility of and support for regional value chains



# Conclusion: regional food system narratives can honor and extend place-based motivations

- Triple-bottom line imperatives
- Connection food's origins; traceability
- Supporting small, family farms
- Product quality, e.g. freshness
- Expanding food access
- Economic impact; job creation





... while also making discursive contributions that are distinctly regional

- Establishing a sense of identity at a regional scale
- Communicate the importance of scale in the development of food system initiatives
- Reveal multi-step value chains in their entirety (these have been intentionally obscured by global food industry)
- Bridge rural-urban divides



# Need to align resources and stakeholders with regional narratives

- Government agencies (local, state, federal): need regional planning
- Food system intermediaries: coordination, not competition
- Public institutions: anchor system with procurement commitments
- Marketing/education
- Funding: aligned with planning
- Research, data collection



Cafeteria manager receiving diced sweet potatoes



# Research to move regional food systems ahead

- Research not just to improve academic understandings of food systems, but to help to **establish shared understandings among the stakeholders in the systems.**
- This is the goal of our Community Voice Method work
- If deployed in this way, research can be vital in aligning interests and advancing regional food system development.





**WorkingLandscapesNC.org**

*This project is supported by the National Institute of Food and Agriculture, U.S. Department of Agriculture, under award number 2016-33800-25598.*



United States  
Department of  
Agriculture

National Institute  
of Food and  
Agriculture



From “local” to “regional:”  
what does that mean?

