

2025 Annual Report



Letter from the Chair

Dear Friends in the Food System:

The South Carolina Food Systems Network (SCFSN) made big strides as an organization in 2025. In our first year operating as an independent nonprofit, we engaged our members around pressing food system issues, and we built governance and administration structures for the organization. I am so proud of the people in our Network who continue to invest their time and energy in sharing information and building the connections necessary to improve our local food system.

1) We grew SCFSN membership.

We grew from 492 members to 588 members, a 20% increase. Our members are individuals and organizations committed to building a better food system in South Carolina. Remember, membership is open to all and it's FREE!

2) We brought important food systems issues to the forefront.

We held 3 member meetings and issued 3 member newsletters on the most pressing topics affecting South Carolina's food system, including disruptions to federal funding.

3) We built a more sustainable organization.

We created administrative and governance systems for effective organizational management, and secured \$50,000 in grant funding to continue powering our mission into 2026 and beyond.

Thanks so much to everyone who pushed our mission forward in 2025. We hope you will join us in the year ahead to build a thriving local food system in this precious place, this piece of ground we call home, our South Carolina.



Weatherly Thomas
Board Chair
South Carolina Food Systems Network



Who We Are

Mission

The mission of the SC Food Systems Network (SCFSN) is to build a **thriving local food system** in South Carolina through connecting people, sharing information, and promoting effective policy.

Membership

SCFSN's **427 individual members + 161 organizational members** represent all aspects of the food system, including farmers, distributors, retailers, health care providers, academics, extension agents, nonprofits, and interested community members.



PRODUCE

Board of Directors

Weatherly Thomas - Chair

Clemson Cooperative Extension

Jim Johnson - Vice Chair

SC Small Business Development Center

Rebecca McKinney - Treasurer

Bon Secours - St. Francis
Health System

Ben Boyles - Secretary

Clemson Cooperative Extension

Margaret Burn

Lowcountry Food Bank

Paola Gutierrez

SC Office of Rural Health

Matt Kneece

Carolina Farm Stewardship Association

Anthony Mirisciotta

Freshlist

Kyle Player

SC Department of Agriculture

Ivan Segura

SC Commission for Community
Advancement & Engagement

Amy Weaver

SC Institute of Medicine & Public Health

2025 Activities

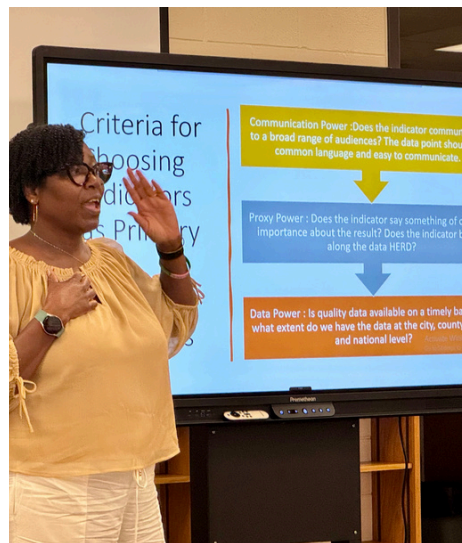
An Independent Organization

After 20 years under the umbrella of various state and university institutions, 2025 was the first year SCFSN operated as an independent organization. SCFSN is now a chartered nonprofit corporation in the state of South Carolina, and a 501(c)3 tax-exempt charity. In 2025, we built governance and administrative structures to support our mission, including:

- A 12-member Board of Directors, representing various aspects of SC's food system
- Accounting, communications, and government reporting
- Short-term and long-term plans to advance the SCFSN mission
- A contracted Project Manager to help execute plans



Member Engagement



Our activities are oriented towards the needs and interests of our members. In 2025, we held quarterly, virtual member meetings and sent quarterly newsletters, addressing important topics in SC's food system.

2025 Member Engagement Snapshot

- 3 virtual member meetings, averaging 60 attendees per meeting
- 2 member newsletters, averaging 197 readers per newsletter



Strategic Plan

SCFSN RECENTLY COMPLETED A 2-YEAR STRATEGIC PLAN TO GUIDE ITS ACTIVITIES OVER THE NEXT TWO YEARS, FOCUSED ON ADVANCING A THRIVING LOCAL FOOD SYSTEM IN THE STATE OF SOUTH CAROLINA.

Goals and Initiatives



GOAL 1: ADVANCE A THRIVING LOCAL FOOD SYSTEM IN SC

- 1) Create a SCFSN statement of principles for a thriving local food system
- 2) Conduct a South Carolina local food needs assessment
- 3) Host a South Carolina “Local Food Day” at the SC State House
- 4) Host 8 regional “mini meet ups” between farmers and chefs

1) Grow and engage SCFSN membership through member meetings and newsletters

2) Publish annual reports, including policy recommendations

GOAL 2: DEVELOP A MORE ROBUST SCFSN ORGANIZATION



What is a Thriving Local Food System?

Our first strategic initiative is to define a thriving local food system. We began the process at our 2025 Winter Member Meeting. Based on member input, we will know we have a thriving local food system in South Carolina when:

Cultural food traditions are celebrated and valued



Local food is continuously available, affordable, and accessible

People know where their food comes from and understand its worth



Small farms producing directly edible foodstuffs are economically viable

2025 Issues: Local Food Purchase Assistance (LFPA) Canceled

LFPA was a federal grant program authorized by the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 to maintain and improve food supply chain resiliency through the purchase of locally produced foods. The SC Department of Agriculture (SCDA) and the Catawba Nation were awarded over \$11 million through the program from 2022-2025. The program was widely celebrated in South Carolina for creating a reliable sales channel for local farmers, and access to healthy, local food for food insecure communities.

Early in 2025, federal funding for LFPA was abruptly canceled.

According to our members who participated in LFPA, the program provided many benefits, including:

A “built-in market” for local growers

“There was zero food left in the field.”

LFPA offered a built-in market with multiple options for producers, so less food went unharvested. Growers gained confidence they could sell their product when it was ready.

An educational opportunity for local growers

“It was a runway for grower education.”

LFPA allowed growers to access new markets. New funding allowed aggregators and distributors to educate new-to-wholesale growers on how to harvest and pack competitive products for the wholesale market.

Connection between community members and farmers

“LFPA was wonderful for us to be able to show our community what local food looks like, what the farmers look like, and where to go to find that local food.”

The resources from LFPA increased the ability of community members to connect directly with local growers.





Effects of Funding Cuts

The elimination of LFPA funding means:

Food is more likely to waste in the field

“Without [LFPA], we are still moving, but it’s tough. You can grow it but it could be sitting out in the field. Because sometimes, it’s not worth picking it because of the labor costs and material costs.”

Rural economies lose much-needed support

“These programs were creating jobs in the local community, and some farmers, including myself, are in low-income areas.”

Next Steps

Some next steps we can take to build off the success of LFPA in South Carolina are:

Keep fostering relationships between growers and distributors

“Don’t let the relationships we have built between growers and aggregators, go away.”

We must continue strengthening connections between producers and distributors, which were established with the help of federal funds. Even if the market for local produce is smaller or the price is lower without funding support, maintaining these connections is vital. This way, when other funding opportunities arise, we will be able to capitalize on them.

Advocate for funding at the state and federal levels

“We can run both programs at the same time.”

We can advocate for a reinvestment in local food funding at the federal level, while also advocating at the state government level in South Carolina. There is a precedent for state funding in North Carolina, which provided \$8 million over two years for local food, called the “FarmSHARE Program”, which South Carolina could use as a model.

Work with other, existing programs to support local food

“One of the things I’m doing is working more closely with FoodShare.”

FoodShare is working in every county to distribute produce and uses funding from the state’s Healthy Bucks program to subsidize the customer’s purchase of fresh produce. This is an example of an avenue for local food purchase and distribution.

Small-scale growers need to be supported

“We are trying to do everything we can to make sure that if there is a plan for LFPA to continue, that it supports small-scale agriculture, which is what we all want to see here.”

If funding for local food purchasing is going to be revived, our network needs to communicate the benefits of funding for small-scale agriculture, not just larger growers.

2025 Issues: SNAP Funding Cuts

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), formerly known as food stamps, is the largest federal food program, with approximately \$100 billion allocated in the federal budget each year. In South Carolina, over 550,000 people receive SNAP benefits, or about 10% of the population. In 2024, SNAP accounted for \$1.3 billion in retail sales through 5,195 retailers across the state.

The new federal budget cuts funding for SNAP by an estimated \$186 billion over the next 10 years. It achieves this through broadened work requirements for SNAP recipients, and an increase in the share of costs the state government is required to pay.

SNAP Program Benefits

Food for low-income families

It is difficult to understate the amount of food SNAP provides in South Carolina. The total amount of SNAP benefits used in South Carolina is about \$1.3 billion per year. Another way to express this volume is in comparison to a food bank. Research has shown that for every 1 meal provided by a food bank, 9 meals are provided by SNAP benefits. Last year, Lowcountry Food Bank distributed over 42 million pounds of food. If you apply the ratio above, SNAP benefits provided an estimated 378 million pounds of food last year, in the Lowcountry alone.

Choices for food insecure families

SNAP helps families meet their own specific needs through shopping at a grocery store. When SNAP is not available, families are often forced to find food at a food pantry. If a family has specific dietary needs or cultural preferences, then the food pantry may not meet their needs.

Support for rural economies

Studies have shown that every \$1.00 of SNAP benefits creates over \$1.70 in economic impact. This is especially valuable for rural grocery stores, which depend heavily on the use of SNAP benefits to stay open, provide food access to their communities, and employ people.

Foundations for healthy food incentives

Through programs such as Healthy Bucks in South Carolina, SNAP recipients can purchase \$3 of fresh fruits and vegetables for \$1 of SNAP benefits, from approved vendors.



EFFECTS OF FUNDING CUTS

THE END OF SNAP-ED

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program - Education (SNAP-Ed) is a federally funded program that promotes healthy food choices and physical activity through nutrition education and community initiatives for people who receive or are eligible for SNAP benefits.

The recent federal budget reconciliation eliminated all future funding for SNAP-Ed.

1) South Carolina families will lose benefits

The exact effect on families in South Carolina is still unknown. A study by the Urban Institute estimated around 300,000 families in South Carolina could lose some or all of their SNAP benefits, with the average family losing about \$103 per month. A study by the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities estimated closer to 100,000 families in the state would be affected.

2) The state budget will need to find additional funds to support SNAP

The state budget will need to provide more funds to support administrative costs of SNAP, and to increase quality control. The SC Department of Social Services has requested \$34 million in additional funds to cover the increased costs in the coming fiscal year.

3) Rural retailers, and economies, will suffer

Reductions in SNAP funding, combined with other restrictions, such as a recent executive order from the Governor restricting the purchase of sugary drinks and food, will negatively affect sales. This could result in the downsizing or closure of rural grocery stores.



ACCORDING TO THE MOST RECENT REPORT RELEASED BY FEEDING AMERICA, 1 IN 7 PEOPLE IN SOUTH CAROLINA FACE FOOD INSECURITY, INCLUDING 1 IN 6 CHILDREN.

SNAP IS THE MOST PROVEN TOOL COMMUNITIES HAVE TO FIGHT FOOD INSECURITY.

**BECOME A MEMBER
(IT'S FREE)**



**[scfoodsystemsnetwork.org/
become-member](https://scfoodsystemsnetwork.org/become-member)**

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