



# Crossroads Resource Center

7415 Humboldt Ave. S. / Minneapolis, Minnesota 55423 / 612.869.8664  
<kmeter@crcworks.org> <<http://www.crcworks.org/>>

***Tools for Community Self-determination***

## **Western North Carolina Food & Farm Economy**

*Highlights of a data compilation*

by Ken Meter, Crossroads Resource Center (Minneapolis) for  
**Appalachian Sustainable Agriculture Program (ASAP)**

April 3, 2006

### **Western North Carolina Region**

23 Counties — *Alleghany, Ashe, Avery, Buncombe, Burke, Caldwell, Cherokee, Clay, Graham, Haywood, Henderson, Jackson, Macon, Madison, McDowell, Mitchell, Polk, Rutherford, Swain, Transylvania, Watauga, Wilkes, and Yancey Counties*

One million residents hold \$20 billion in annual purchasing power.

### **The region's farms (2002)**

12,212 farms. 22% of North Carolina's farms

- Average size is 85 acres. 57% of farms are less than 50 acres.
- Average value of land and buildings is \$366,166
- 450,641 acres total cropland.
- \$543 million of farm commodities marketed by the region's farmers.
- \$5.4 million of farm subsidies collected by growers (5.6% of state's).
- 11 million pounds of tobacco produced (primarily in Ashe, Buncombe, Haywood, Madison, Watauga, Wilkes, and Yancey Counties — one-quarter of all North Carolina farms raising tobacco are in the ASAP region, but they produce only 3% of the state's tobacco).
- 7.3 million pounds of potatoes produced (primarily in Ashe, Avery, Buncombe, and Cherokee Counties — This is over half of all North Carolina farms raising potatoes, but only 2% of the state's production).
- 268,000 tons of forage (hay) produced (primarily in Alleghany, Ashe, Buncombe, Haywood, Madison, Rutherford and Wilkes Counties — 20% of North Carolina's crop).
- \$218 million of poultry sold — a 10% decline from 1997. One of every seven poultry operations in the state is in the ASAP region, with production concentrated in Wilkes County.
- 287,628 tons of corn silage produced — 33% of state total.
- \$37 million of cattle sold in 2002 (down from \$42 million in 1997), 20% of the state's sales. Primary producers are Alleghany, Ashe, Watauga, and Wilkes Counties.
- \$30 million of milk produced (down from \$37 million in 1997), 20% of the state's sales. Primary producers are Alleghany, Buncombe, Haywood, and Wilkes Counties.
- The region hosts 61% of North Carolina's orchard acreage, with 8,131 acres on 373 farms.

## Highlights of ASAP region Farm & Food Economy (North Carolina)

- One of every five of the state's farms raising vegetables is located in the ASAP region, with 495 farms. However, these farms hold only 11% of North Carolina's vegetable acreage (7,284 acres).
- The 101 farms in ASAP's region that sell organic foods are 25% of the state's organic producers, selling \$425,000 of organic products — 8% of the state's total. Primary organic producers are Ashe, Buncombe, Madison, Rutherford, and Wilkes Counties.
- 740 farms sold \$3.1 million of food directly to consumers in 2002 — a 20% increase over 1997. This is one-quarter of all North Carolina farms selling direct. Primary direct sellers are Ashe, Buncombe, Henderson, and Wilkes Counties. Direct sales account for only 0.6% of all commodity sales in the region.

ASAP region's farmers produce \$945 million of food commodities per year (14-year average 1990-2003), spending \$595 million to raise them, for an average gain of \$351 million for crop and livestock production each year, and a total gain of \$5 billion over those years. Still, 52 % of the region's farms reported net losses in 2002.

Farmers earn another \$146 million per year of farm-related income — primarily custom work, rental income and sale of forest products or Christmas trees.

### **The region's consumers:**

The region's consumers spend \$2.1 billion buying food each year, primarily from outside the region. Only \$3.1 million of food products (0.6%) are sold by farmers directly to consumers.

### **Farm and food economy summary:**

Farmers gain \$351 million each year producing food commodities, yet spend \$200 million buying outside inputs, while the region's consumers spend at least \$1.5 billion buying food from outside. While production of agricultural commodities produces a surplus to the region, consumers buy little of this food. Moreover, consumer expenditures for food essentially leave the community. This is a total loss to the region of \$1.3 billion of potential wealth *each year*. This loss amounts to 4 times the value of all food commodities raised in the region.

### **ASAP region: markets for food**

	<i>millions</i>
Meats, poultry, fish, and eggs	\$ 347
Fruits & vegetables	205
Cereals and bakery products	135
Dairy products	175
"Other," incl. sweets, fats, & oils	414

**North Carolina Highlights (2002 Agriculture Census)**

**North Carolina ranking among U.S. producers:**

	<b>2002 sales</b>
Number 1 in tobacco production	\$630 million
Number 2 in hog & pig production	\$2.2 billion
Number 2 in Christmas tree production	\$57 million
Number 3 in poultry and egg production	\$2.3 billion
Number 6 in cotton production	\$112 million

**Government payments received by farmers:** \$97.7 million in 2002 (86% increase over 1997).

**Individual County rankings and highlights (2002 Agriculture Census):**

**Counties with largest rise in government payments:**

	<b>Pct rise</b>	<b>1997</b>	<b>2002</b>
Henderson	1,628 %	134,000	2,315,000
Alleghany	497 %	70,000	418,000
McDowell	519 %	27,000	167,000
Transylvania	333 %	12,000	52,000
Haywood	237 %	87,000	293,000
Polk	180 %	55,000	154,000

**Counties with largest increase in market income from commodity sales:**

	<b>Pct gain</b>	<b>1997</b>	<b>2002</b>
McDowell	65 %	48,700,000	80,700,000
Transylvania	57 %	10,600,000	16,600,000
Avery	55 %	18,000,000	28,000,000
Rutherford	50 %	6,100,000	9,200,000
Graham	39 %	1,300,000	1,800,000
Henderson	29 %	47,000,000	61,000,000
Polk	27 %	3,600,000	4,500,000
Jackson	26 %	6,400,000	8,100,000

**Counties with largest declines in market income from commodity sales:**

	<b>Pct drop</b>	<b>1997</b>	<b>2002</b>
Clay	-71 %	4,600,000	1,300,000
Swain	-55 %	2,500,000	1,140,000
Buncombe	-38 %	35,000,000	22,000,000
Caldwell	-35 %	24,000,000	16,000,000
Haywood	-18 %	15,000,000	12,000,000

*Highlights of ASAP region Farm & Food Economy (North Carolina)*

**County rankings:**

*Sales:*

<b>Poultry &amp; Eggs</b>	<b>Rank (NC)</b>	<b>Rank (US)</b>	<b>2002 sales</b>
Wilkes	2	12	192,000,000

<b>Christmas Trees</b>	<b>Rank (NC)</b>	<b>Rank (US)</b>	<b>2002 sales</b>
Avery	1	3	18,000,000
Ashe	2	4	16,900,000
Alleghany	3	8	8,800,000
Jackson	4	12	5,200,000
Watauga	5	28	2,200,000
Mitchell	6	34	1,700,000
Burke	7	57	907,000
Macon	8	97	551,000
Madison	9		473,000

<b>Nursery Crops</b>	<b>Rank (NC)</b>	<b>Rank (US)</b>	<b>2002 sales</b>
Burke	6		15,000,000
McDowell	7		15,000,000

<b>Dairy</b>	<b>Rank (NC)</b>	<b>Rank (US)</b>	<b>2002 sales</b>
Alleghany	3		8,400,000

<b>Cattle &amp; Calves</b>	<b>Rank (NC)</b>	<b>Rank (US)</b>	<b>2002 sales</b>
Wilkes	4		6,000,000
Ashe	8		5,000,000

<b>Tobacco</b>	<b>Rank (NC)</b>	<b>Rank (US)</b>	<b>2002 sales</b>
Madison	39	100	4,900,000

<b>Acquaculture</b>	<b>Rank (NC)</b>	<b>Rank (US)</b>	<b>2002 sales</b>
Transylvania	2		3,400,000
Graham	6		1,000,000

<b>Fruits</b>	<b>Rank (NC)</b>	<b>Rank (US)</b>	<b>2002 sales</b>
Wilkes	8		840,000
Polk	9		755,000

<b>Sheep &amp; Goats</b>	<b>Rank (NC)</b>	<b>Rank (US)</b>	<b>2002 sales</b>
Madison	5		119,000
Haywood	7		99,000
Buncombe	8		85,000

*Numbers:*

<b>Chickens, broilers</b>	<b>Rank (NC)</b>	<b>Rank (US)</b>	<b>2002 count</b>
Wilkes	1		17,600,000

*Highlights of ASAP region Farm & Food Economy (North Carolina)*

<b>Chickens, layers</b>	<b>Rank (NC)</b>	<b>Rank (US)</b>	<b>2002 count</b>
Cherokee	5		not disclosed
Wilkes	8		530,583

<b>Sheep &amp; Lambs</b>	<b>Rank (NC)</b>	<b>Rank (US)</b>	<b>2002 count</b>
Madison	1		1,196
Rutherford	2		1,188
Ashe	5		964
Haywood	6		936

<b>Bee colonies</b>	<b>Rank (NC)</b>	<b>Rank (US)</b>	<b>2002 count</b>
Macon	9		462

*Acres:*

<b>Apples</b>	<b>Rank (NC)</b>	<b>Rank (US)</b>	<b>2002 acres</b>
Henderson	1	14	6,618
Polk	2		343
Wilkes	3		306

<b>All berries</b>	<b>Rank (NC)</b>	<b>Rank (US)</b>	<b>2002 acres</b>
Jackson	6		not disclosed

<b>All Vegetables</b>	<b>Rank (NC)</b>	<b>Rank (US)</b>	<b>2002 acres</b>
Henderson	5		4,485

<b>Snap Beans</b>	<b>Rank (NC)</b>	<b>Rank (US)</b>	<b>2002 acres</b>
Henderson	2	22	2,959

<b>Sweet Corn</b>	<b>Rank (NC)</b>	<b>Rank (US)</b>	<b>2002 acres</b>
Buncombe	4		200

<b>Collard greens</b>	<b>Rank (NC)</b>	<b>Rank (US)</b>	<b>2002 acres</b>
Cherokee	4		not disclosed

<b>Dry herbs</b>	<b>Rank (NC)</b>	<b>Rank (US)</b>	<b>2002 acres</b>
Transylvania	2		not disclosed

<b>Forage</b>	<b>Rank (NC)</b>	<b>Rank (US)</b>	<b>2002 acres</b>
Wilkes	3		23,167

<b>Corn silage</b>	<b>Rank (NC)</b>	<b>Rank (US)</b>	<b>2002 acres</b>
Wilkes	2		5,751
Henderson	7		2,822

<b>Sod harvested</b>	<b>Rank (NC)</b>	<b>Rank (US)</b>	<b>2002 acres</b>
Transylvania	6		not disclosed

**Estimated annual consumption of fruits in ASAP region (USDA)**

	<b>million pounds</b>
<b>Apples</b>	43.4
<b>Apricots</b>	0.9
<b>Avocados</b>	2.5
<b>Bananas</b>	26.8
<b>Blackberries</b>	0.1
<b>Blueberries</b>	0.3
<b>Cantaloupe</b>	11.1
<b>Cherries</b>	1.7
<b>Cranberries</b>	2.0
<b>Dates</b>	0.2
<b>Figs</b>	0.5
<b>Grapes</b>	19.8
<b>Grapefruit</b>	12.7
<b>Honeydew melons</b>	2.2
<b>Kiwi</b>	0.5
<b>Lemons</b>	8.8
<b>Limes</b>	1.5
<b>Mangoes</b>	2.0
<b>Olives</b>	1.2
<b>Oranges</b>	77.0
<b>Papayas</b>	0.8
<b>Peaches</b>	9.8
<b>Pears</b>	5.5
<b>Pineapple</b>	13.1
<b>Plums</b>	3.2
<b>Raspberries</b>	0.1
<b>Strawberries</b>	6.1
<b>Tangerines</b>	3.4
<b>Watermelons</b>	13.9

**Estimated annual consumption of vegetables in ASAP region (USDA)**

	<b>million pounds</b>
Artichokes	0.96
Asparagus	1.24
Beans (Dry)	7.36
Beans (Snap)	7.32
Broccoli	7.14
Brussels Sprouts	0.23
Cabbage	9.63
Carrots	12.56
Cauliflower	1.80
Celery	6.53
Corn (Sweet)	26.21
Cucumbers	11.53
Eggplant	0.72
Escarole & Endive	0.31
Garlic	2.50
Lettuce (Head)	22.38
Lettuce (Romaine)	8.28
Mushrooms	4.26
Onions	19.76
Peas (Green)	2.84
Peas & Lentils	0.70
Peppers (Bell)	6.96
Peppers (Chile)	4.99
Potatoes	135.00
Radishes	0.47
Spinach	2.38
Sweet Potatoes	3.69
Tomatoes	87.43

**Key data sources:**

**Bureau of Economic Analysis data on farm production balance**

<http://www.bea.doc.gov/bea/regional/reis/>

**Food consumption estimates from Bureau of Labor Statistics Consumer Expenditure Survey**

<http://www.bls.gov/cex/home.htm>

**U.S. Census of Agriculture**

<http://www.nass.usda.gov/census/>

**USDA/Economic Research Service food consumption data:**

<http://www.ers.usda.gov/data/foodconsumption/>

**USDA/ Economic Research Service farm income data:**

<http://ers.usda.gov/Data/FarmIncome/finfidmu.htm>

**For more information:**

To see results from *Finding Food in Farm Country* studies in other regions of Minnesota, Iowa, California, Hawaii: <http://www.crcworks.org/fffc.pdf>.

To read the original *Finding Food in Farm Country* study from Southeast Minnesota (written for the Experiment in Rural Cooperation): <http://www.crcworks.org/ff.pdf>.

To view a PowerPoint presented by Ken Meter at a keynote appearance to the Minnesota Rural Partners Summit in July, 2005: <http://www.crcworks.org/metersummit05.pdf>.

To link to further analysis of farm and food economies in the U.S.:  
<http://www.crcworks.org/rural.html>.

Contact Ken Meter at Crossroads Resource Center  
<[kmeter@crcworks.org](mailto:kmeter@crcworks.org)>  
(612) 869-8664