



Agritourism

Agritourism refers to the integration of agriculture and tourism. Agritourism links tourism with agricultural production and processing to attract visitors to farms, ranches, wineries, and other agricultural industries and activities. Agritourism also provides a way for producers to generate additional income and give communities an opportunity to increase their local tax bases.

Buy Haywood

The Buy Haywood Market Development Project is a grant-funded non-profit organization that supports agricultural vitality in Haywood County. The initiative was founded in 2007 by the Haywood County Economic Development Commission (EDC), which is funded by the Haywood County government and is located in Waynesville, North Carolina. Buy Haywood supports Haywood County farmlands and farmers through various outreach projects and promotes locally grown products. As a community-based organization, Buy Haywood receives support from community partners and collaborations such as the Bethel Rural Community Organization, Golden LEAF, Healthy Haywood, the WNC Food Policy Council, Haywood County Cooperative Extension, and many other local and regional stakeholders. Tina Masciarelli, Buy Haywood Project Coordinator, provided insights on the initiative. For more information, go to www.buyhaywood.com.

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NCACC / Dominique Walker: What are the short- and long-term goals for Buy Haywood?

Tina Masciarelli: In short Buy Haywood is a grant-funded initiative designed to support Haywood County farmers, locally grown products, farmlands, and the preservation of our rich agricultural heritage. In 2007, three community-minded individuals came together and conceived of the Buy



Haywood Market Development Project: Mark Clasby (Executive Director of Haywood County Economic Development Commission, which is now Haywood Economic Development Council), George Ivey (Bethel Rural Community Organization), and Bill Yarborough (Waynesville resident and regional agronomist representing the mountain region with the NC Department of Agriculture & Consumer Services). At the time, the trio recognized the significant role that agriculture played in Haywood County's economy and aimed to strengthen existing markets and grow new markets for local producers.

In the last ten years, Buy Haywood has celebrated the completion of many successful initiatives. Buy Haywood's first project targeted grocery store chains and successfully enlisted Whole Foods, Ingles, Food Lion, BI-LO, Lowes Food and others into carrying tomatoes, peppers, and cucumbers grown in Haywood. Next, it tackled the limitations of a short growing season and encouraged farmers to create "value-added products," like salsa, jams and sauces to keep their products on the shelves year-round.

Once both those initiatives were achieved, the organization's leadership expanded marketing efforts to include a "Farmer to Chef" initiative that served to bridge the divide between local farms and chefs/restauranters. That project is ongoing and has expanded to include value-added artisanal producers, microbrewers, and whiskey makers. In the last five years, two new economic development initiatives were born—Cooking Local Project and Agritourism. Cooking Local aimed to connect consumers with the wide variety of products raised and produced in Haywood County through a series of cooking demonstrations and recipe creation. Agritourism is another layer of connecting consumers to local products by bringing visitors to the farm and other destinations for educational experiences and recreation.

Our long-term goals are to continue to foster farmer-to-producer relationships, continue to shift the consumer palate to seasonal local products through a variety of educational and marketing initiatives, growing local agritourism destinations, and partnering with surrounding counties to highlight the vibrant regional marketplace.



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DW: What role did the county play in the establishment of Buy Haywood and how does the county contribute to the ongoing operations?

TM: Haywood County government contributes to the ongoing operations by supporting the EDC financially. Mark Clasby, acting as Executive Director of Haywood Advancement Foundation (HAF), formed a partnership with two other local stakeholders to develop the concept for Buy Haywood and secure start-up funding from Golden LEAF Foundation. When that funding ran out, HAF picked up the financial support and has served as the parent organization through which Buy Haywood has pursued other grant support including Specialty Crops Block Grant administered through NC Department of Agriculture & Consumer Services and more recently an Agricultural Development & Farmland Preservation Trust Fund (ADFP) grant.

DW: What economic development impact does Buy Haywood have in your county?

TM: See this article for more information:

<http://www.smokymountainnews.com/news/item/20273-what-s-in-the-cards-growing-the-greens>

DW: How can other communities and counties with similar needs replicate this initiative? Who should they involve in the process and what first steps would you recommend?

TM: From the very beginning, Buy Haywood has involved local farmers, growers, and producers in the conversation to prioritize development and outreach projects. In my opinion, that has contributed significantly to the organization's success. Being a county-specific organization, we've been able to respond rather quickly to local needs as they have been brought to our attention.

Secondly, maintaining both an academic understanding and cultural understanding of trends in farming and agriculture has been another key to our success. Retaining a project coordinator who is capable of analyzing the above mentioned data then developing outreach models that will be embraced by the rural culture remains at the top of our priority pyramid. Building a strong relationship between the many sectors of farming and agriculture has also been important—rather than serving silos, we serve an interconnected community to drive economic



development. Lastly, the final key to Buy Haywood's ten year success story has been connecting with regional stakeholders to benefit from innovation strategies and creativity in other areas.

DW: How can county commissioners and other elected officials contribute to raising awareness about investing in projects like Buy Haywood in areas with similar communities across the state?

TM: The Economic Development Council (EDC) realized that agriculture is an important sector in our economy; thus, the EDC & Haywood Advancement Foundation stepped up to support the formation of Buy Haywood with HAF taking ownership of the project's success and sustainability.

Mark Clasby: "Be patient." Buy Haywood has worked hard over the last ten years but the success wasn't built in a day. In 2007, the founding team identified one achievable goal and worked for a solid year until that goal was met (getting Haywood County grown products into local grocery stores). As each initiative was achieved, the team strategically identified a new market for local products, developed a new strategy to achieve that initiative, sought funding for said strategy, built stakeholders to assist in achieving said strategy and worked in a focused manner until the goal was met. Thus, Buy Haywood has built the various outreach projects slowly over time, not adding too many outreach projects at one time to avoid spreading the limited human and financial resources too thinly.

TM: County commissioners and other local stakeholders can contribute to raising awareness about investing in projects like Buy Haywood by linking to the organization's website directly from their website. This shortens the breadcrumb trail for potential stakeholders to find out that the initiative exists and what value it adds to the local farming and agriculture community. Authority sites such as county government, chambers of commerce, and tourism receive a wealth of traffic. By providing a link to a Buy Haywood-type organization's website, they signal to the public that the organization's mission is an important one for the community, lending credibility to the organization. In addition, by providing support via website linking and writing letters of endorsement to Buy Haywood-type organizations, this opens up more markets for grant funding potential. If your county commissioners believe in the work you do, it helps to establish credibility to potential grant funders that your organization impacts farming and agriculture and you are



more likely to use the money well in successfully completing whatever project proposal is on the table. Establishing credibility and likelihood of success is the name of the game when procuring grant funding.