

# SOWING SUCCESS:

The Role of Economic Development Districts  
in Strengthening Regional Food Systems



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NADO provides advocacy, education, research, and training for the nation's regional development organizations (RDOs). NADO and its members promote regional strategies, partnerships, and solutions to strengthen the economic competitiveness and quality of life across America's local communities.



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# NADO – EDD Community of Practice

# Today's Presenters

## **Melissa Levy**

Regional Development  
Researcher/Wealth  
Creation Specialist  
NADO Research  
Foundation



## **Jennifer Bedrosian**

Food Systems Coordinator  
Piedmont Triad Regional  
Council



## **Luis Nieves-Ruiz**

Director of Economic  
Development  
East Central Florida  
Regional Planning Council



(Moderator) **Andrew Coker**, Regional Development Researcher, NADO Research Foundation

## **Melissa Levy**

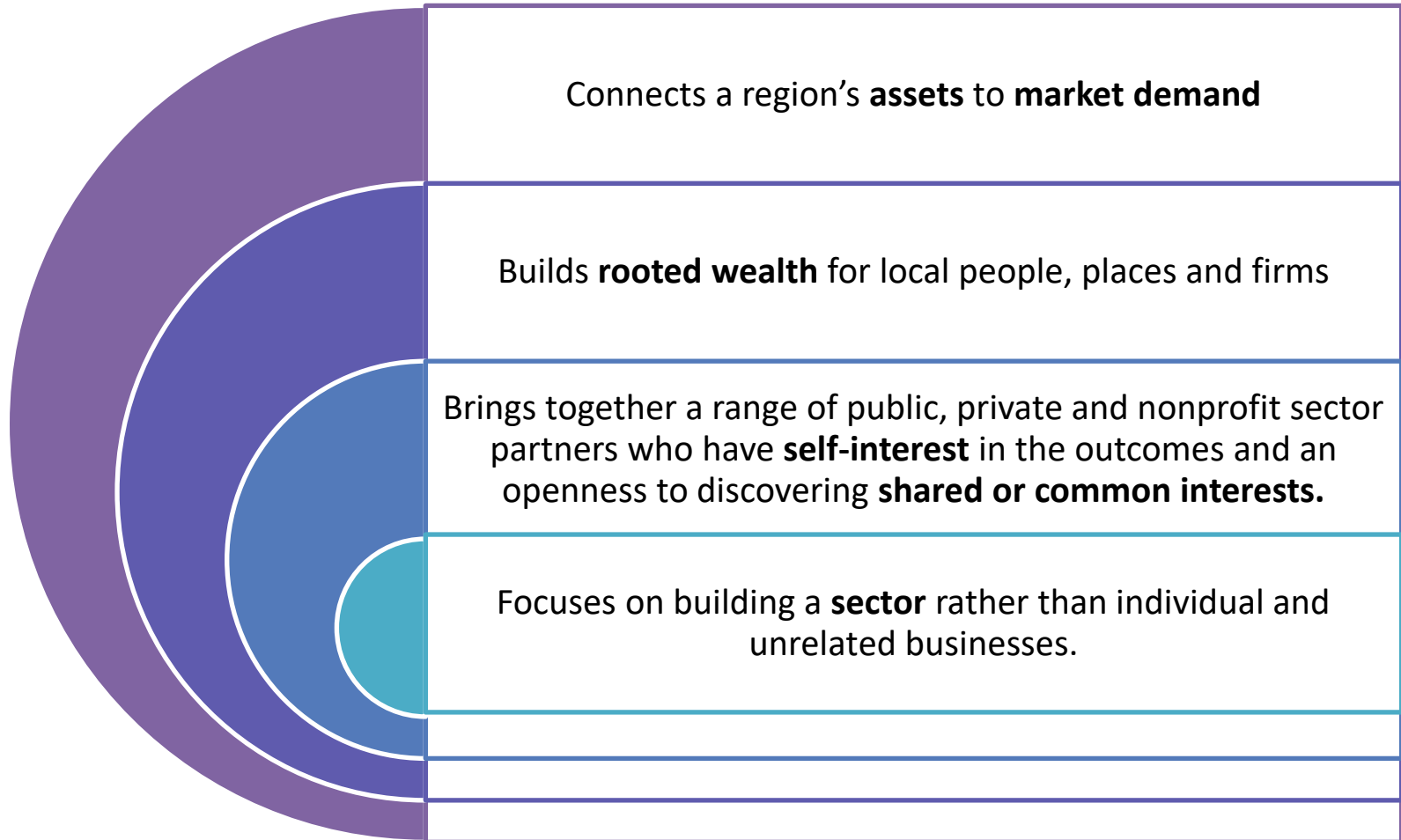
Regional Development Researcher/  
Wealth Creation Specialist  
NADO Research Foundation



# What is a Food System?



# Wealth Creation...





# Principles of Wealth Creation

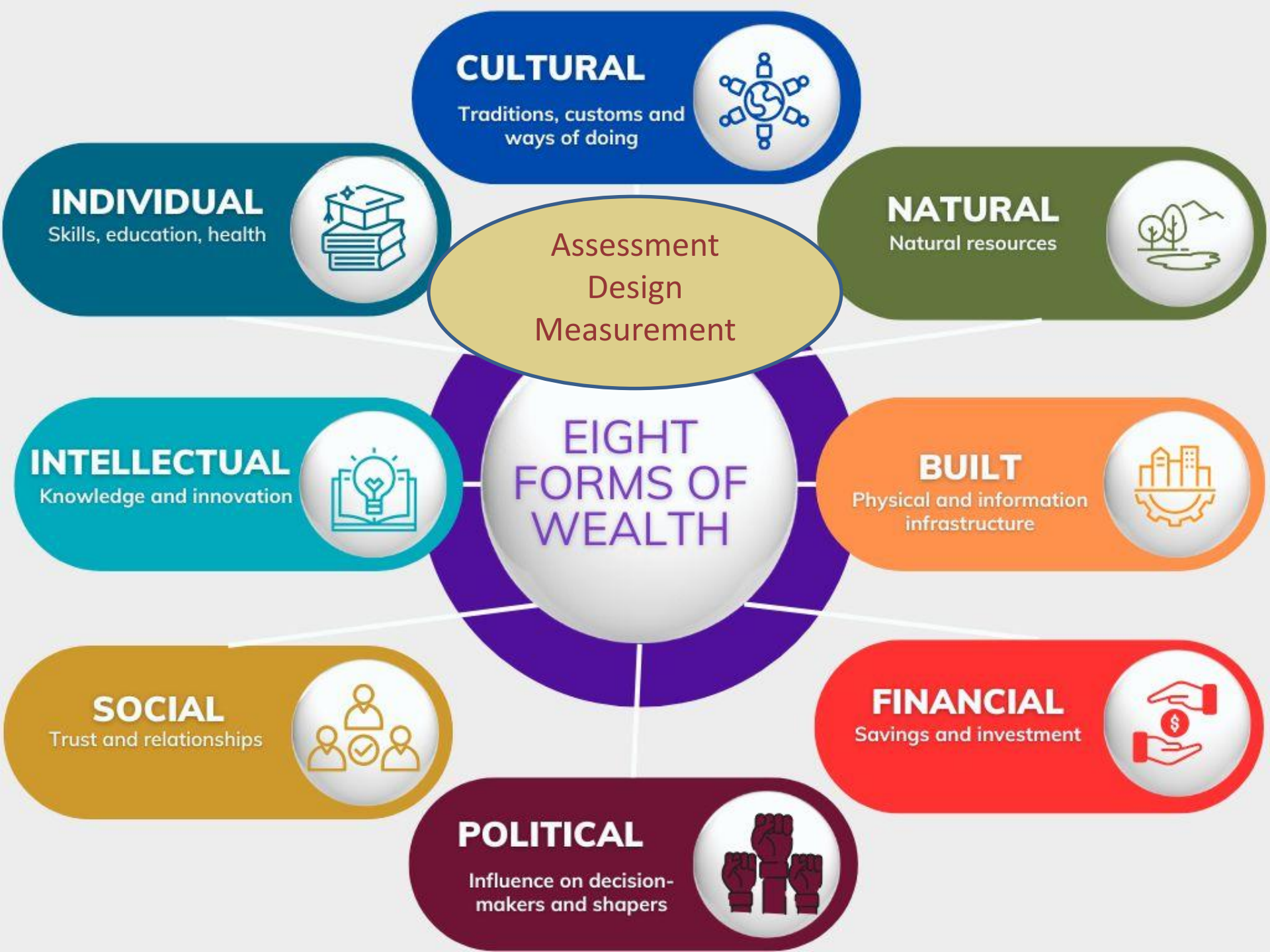


#1 – **Create wealth**, broadly defined, and aspire to do no harm.

#2 – Root wealth in local people, places and firms through **local ownership, control and influence**.



#3 – Build **lasting livelihoods** by intentionally including people and firms on the economic margins.



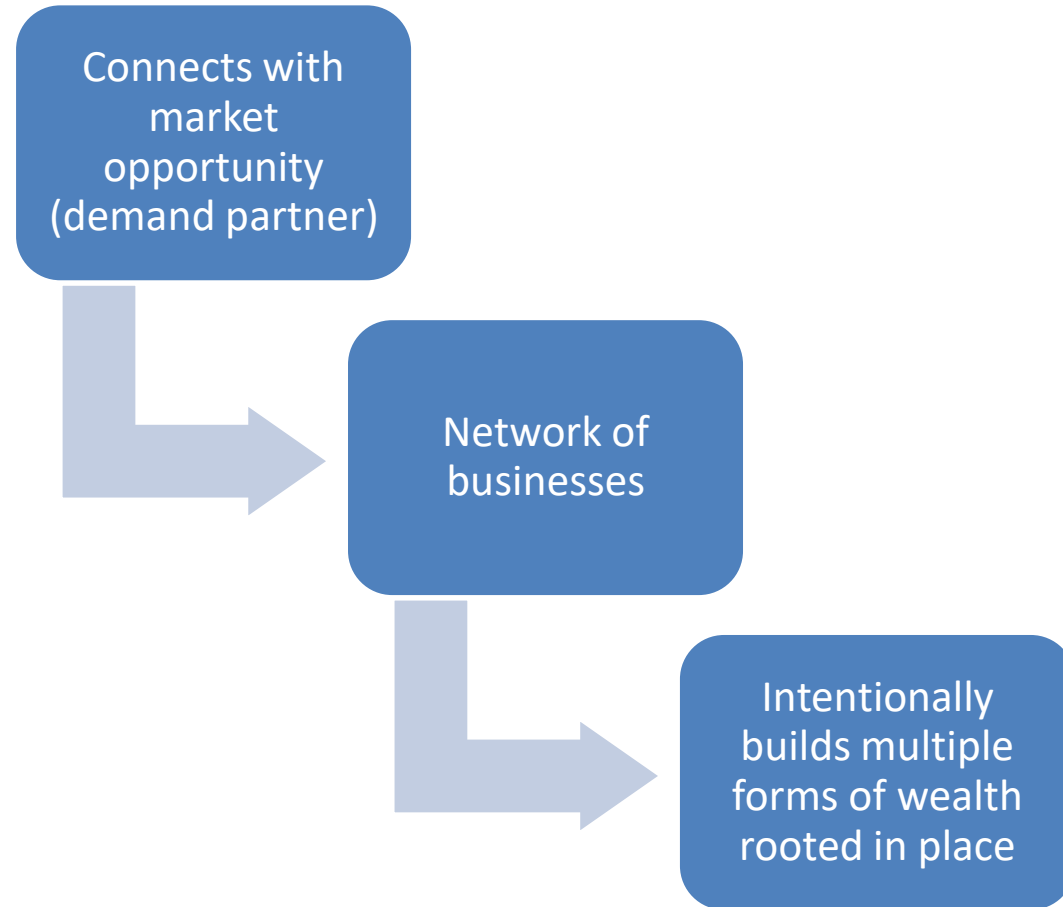
# Value Chains: Tie wealth to place and connect regionally

**Wealth Creation Value Chains connect local production to regional demand to bring fresh money into rural communities, defined as:**

A network of people, businesses, institutions, and non-profits who collaborate to meet market demand for specific products or services – each advancing individual self-interest while together creating greater local wealth.



# Three Parts to a Wealth Creation Value Chain



All 3 parts are necessary.

## Sector

Agriculture

Energy

Health care

## Subsector

Dairy

Solar energy

Maternal health  
care

## Market opportunity

Fortified milk  
powder

Household solar  
panels in remote  
areas

Prenatal care

# How can EDDs engage?

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Economic  
Development  
Districts  
(EDDs) can  
help their  
communities  
address  
complex food  
access and  
affordability  
issues in a  
variety of  
ways:

facilitation and convening

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sourcing and managing federal,  
state, local, and private funding

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providing public and social  
service programs.

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# EDDs and Food

EDDs are regional experts in:

- Identifying regional issues and how they affect local communities.
- Identifying and prioritizing regional and local assets on the ground.
- Building and convening coalitions of interested stakeholders.
- Planning regional and local responses.
- Bringing funding to bear with federal, state, local, and private sources.
- Guiding partners in implementing solutions.

What can EDDs do to support food systems development in their regions



Apply for or help others apply for EDA and USDA funding



Provide support to entrepreneurs



Convene stakeholders in food hub development



Provide planning support for communities



Include food systems in the CEDS



## Jennifer Bedrosian

Food Systems Coordinator  
Piedmont Triad Regional Council





**PIEDMONT TRIAD**  
REGIONAL COUNCIL

# Sowing Success: The Role of Economic Development Districts in Strengthening Regional Food Systems

CREATIVE REGIONAL SOLUTIONS

Jennifer Bedrosian- Food Systems Coordinator



## Who we are

The PTRC is one of the largest regional councils in NC serving the Piedmont Triad Region, serving 78 member governments in a 12 county area.

## What we do



## Piedmont Triad Regional Food Council

Formed in 2019 and represented by ~20 diverse partners and community members across the 12 Triad counties, the PTRFC aims to balance various perspectives in the food system.



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## Food Consumption, Food Security & Equitable Access

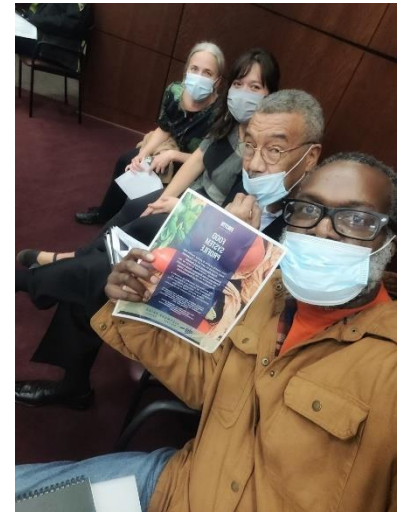
In 2015, the Food Research and Action Center (FRAC) ranked the Greensboro–High Point Metropolitan Statistical Area as number one in the nation in food hardship and number four in food insecurity. Since that time, it has moved to hover around number 14.

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## Regional Food System Assessment

**“Equity is just and fair inclusion into a society in which all can participate, prosper, and reach their full potential.”**

Policylink.org | PTRFC adopted equity definition



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## Food Systems Change

### **Recommendations from 2020 Regional Food System Assessment:**

- Engage leaders of color and small grassroots organizations to co-create strategies;
- Reduce administrative burden to participate in programs and relationships;
- Expand partnerships;
- Integrate food system needs into local and regional economic development strategies;
- Build small grant programs that support food access at micro level;
- Mapping micro farms and food infrastructure; and
- Work with existing lenders to expand access to capital for underserved food businesses.

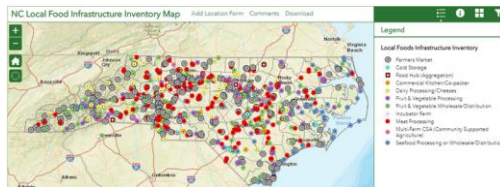
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## Engaging in Food Systems

**Convene and Facilitate Partnerships:** share best practices and resources to increase collaboration, align programs, and energize the work

**Strengthen Systems :** analyze local food system economic development and policy opportunities



### NC Growing Together project, from 2013–2018

- Center for Environmental Farming Systems (NC State) USDA National Institute for Food and Agriculture Grant
- Highly collaborative, over a dozen partners across the state
- NC Local Food Infrastructure Map—inventory of businesses that serve as intermediary steps in food supply chain
- Housed on PTRC website (GIS)

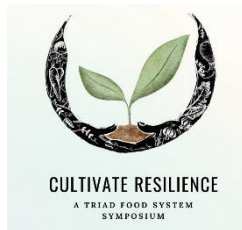
### Task Force → Regional Food Council, 2019

- USDA NIFA Grant awarded to PTRC— food council start up & website development
- Partnered with statewide entity for support to form a Task Force
- Leverage funding for Regional Food Council & staff position (BCBS NC Foundation)

### Regional Food System Assessment, 2019– Learn Build Eat,

- Conduct regional food system assessment, including equity findings, community survey, focus groups, hosting Food Talks webinars
- Learn Build Eat virtual launch event
- Presentations to partners and county commissioners

## Engaging in Food Systems



### Triad Food System Symposium, 2023

- Triad Food Symposium to showcase food efforts, celebrate local food, and promote networking
- More than 120 attended to engage in conversations on Building Equitable Farmer Support and Creating Resilient Food Hubs in the Triad
- Results summarized as part of a collaborative process to develop a grant proposal



### Healthy Food Financing Initiative Grant Award, 2024

- PTRC was one of 16 groups across the nation awarded
- For five years, PTRC provides a technical assistance hub to inform, engage and train those needing external funds for healthy food projects.
- PTRC also offers grants and incentivizes loans from lending partners to eligible projects in low income, low access areas. Priority focus on women-owned, BIPOC-owned, and rural businesses.



### Map Update, Seeking Funding

- Mapping the Pathway to Resilient Regional Food Systems in North Carolina -to raise awareness about food system infrastructure that can help farmers gain access to markets, address equity issues, and identify opportunities for high-impact investment in distressed communities
- Identified partners across the state, including universities, non-profits, and local and regional government
- Community-based approach to data collection will "ground truth" the locations of food system entities throughout NC





## Build Relationships; Build a Stronger Food System

To learn more about Piedmont Triad Regional Food Council, please visit:  
[www.ptrc.org/triadfoodcouncil](http://www.ptrc.org/triadfoodcouncil)

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## **Luis Nieves-Ruiz**

Director of Economic Development  
East Central Florida Regional Planning  
Council



# *Regional Food Systems Planning*



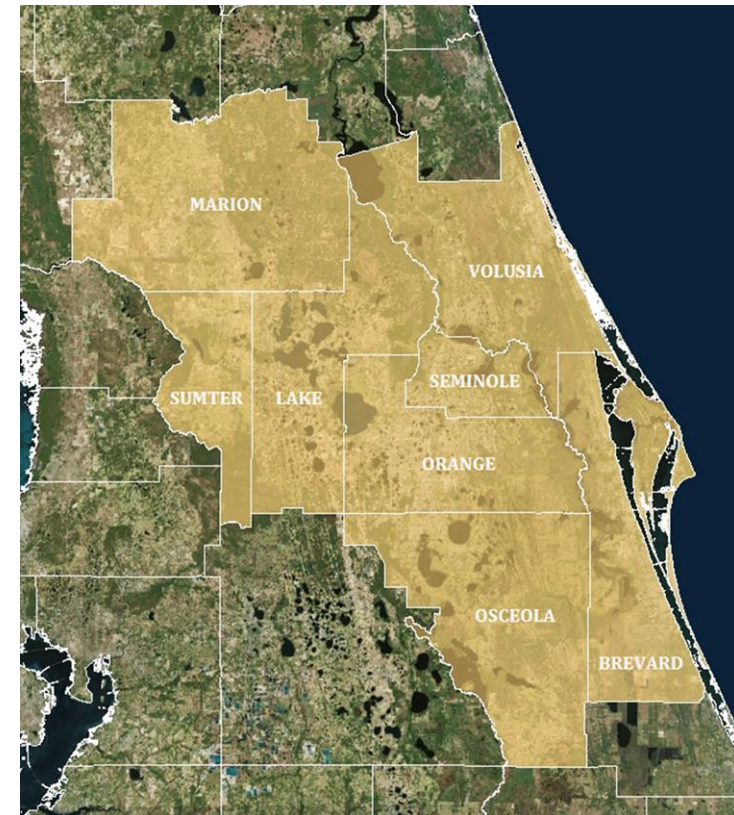
*Luis Nieves-Ruiz, FAICP*  
*Director of Economic Development*  
*East Central Florida Regional Planning Council*

# *Regional Food Systems Planning*



## **About the ECFRPC**

- One of 10 Designated Florida Economic Development Districts
- Technical Assistance to Local Governments and Organizations within an 8-county Region
- 10+ Years Of Regional Food Systems Work



# Regional Food Systems Program



## Regional Food Systems Activities

- Asset Mapping Project
- Resilience and Trends Analysis
- Community Revitalization



# *Mapping Regional Food Systems*



## Why Map Your Regional Food System?

- Thoroughly Understand Expanse of Region's Food System
- Tell the Story by Helping Non Practitioners Visualize the Economic Potential of Regional Food Systems

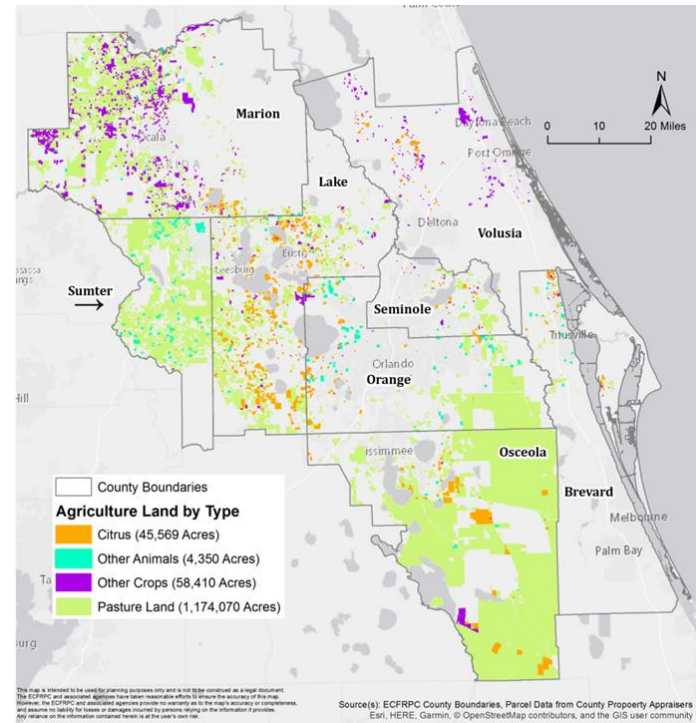
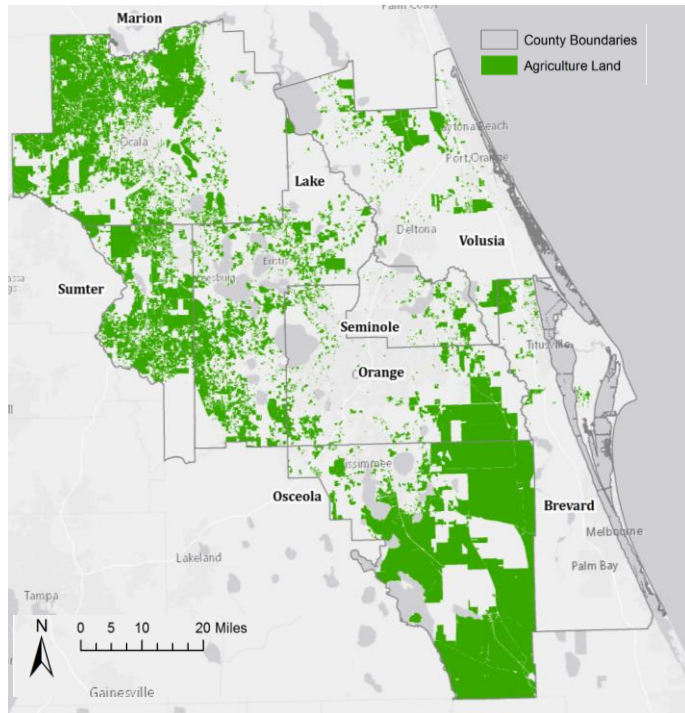
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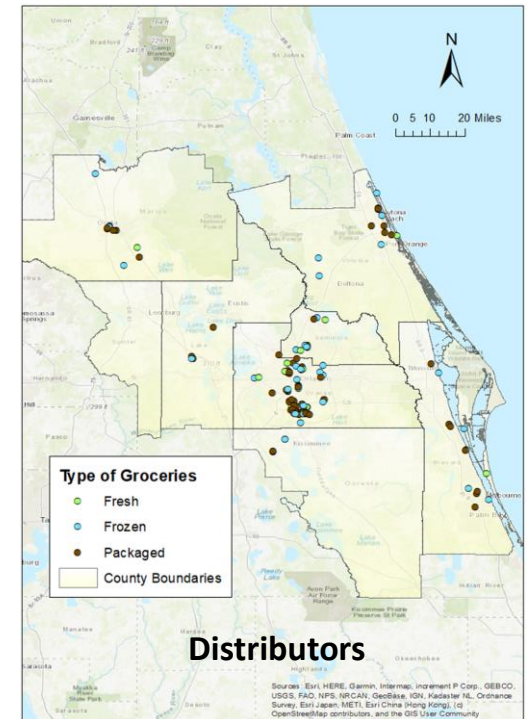
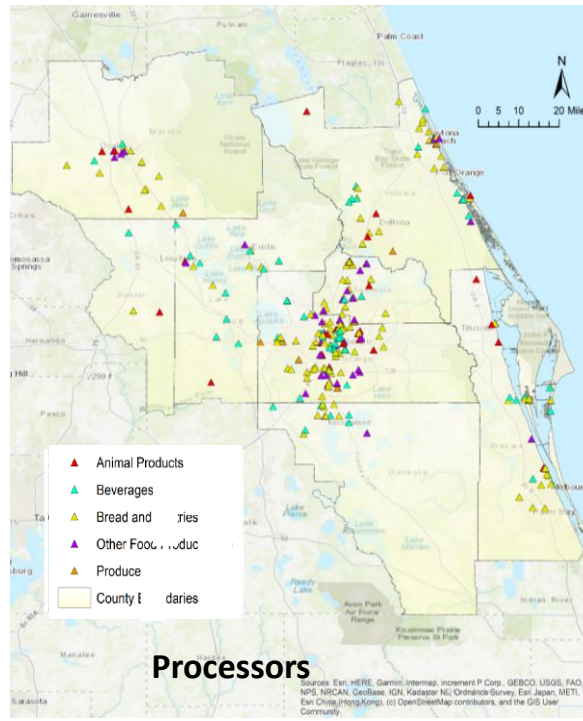
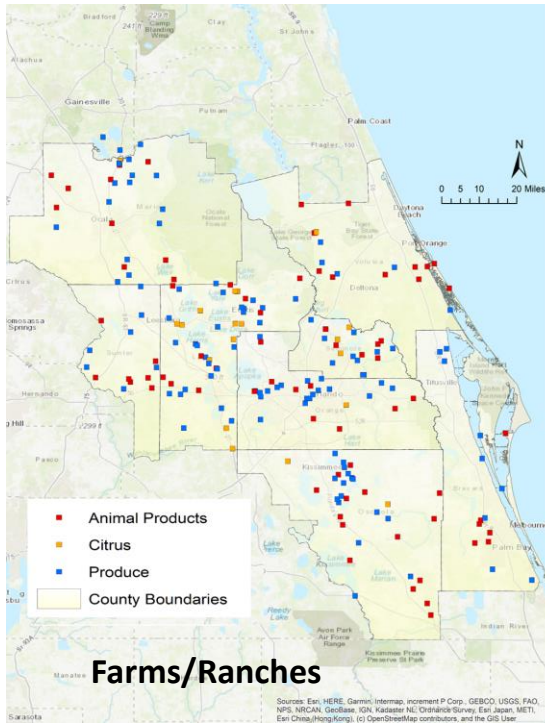
# Mapping Regional Food Systems

## Agricultural Land Analysis



# Mapping Regional Food Systems

## Food Systems Inventory





# Resilience and Trends



## Resilience Approach Project

- Existing Conditions Analysis
  - Asset Inventory
  - Develop Metrics
- Regional Trends Report
  - Underlying Dynamics
  - Gaps and Barriers
- Strategic Matrix
  - SWOT Analysis

## THE WALL STREET JOURNAL. Coronavirus Forces Farmers to Destroy Their Crops

Amid pandemic, orders dry up; 'You don't want to see your crop rot and suffer'

By [Ben Kesling](#) [Follow](#) / Photographs by Eve Edelheit for The Wall Street Journal  
Updated April 26, 2020 10:32 am ET



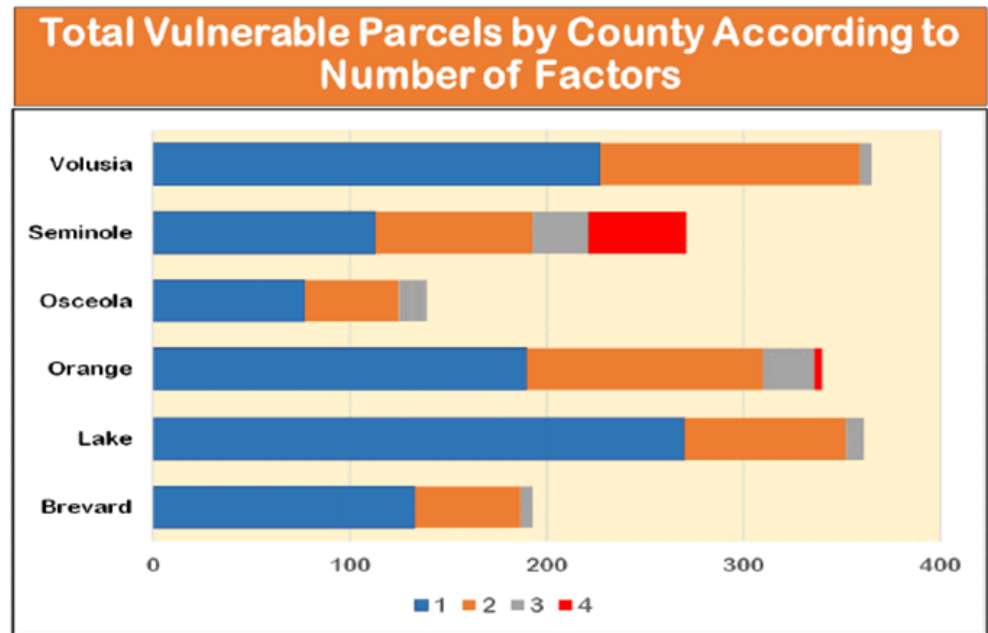
Workers pick squash at Fancy Farms in Plant City, Fla. Demand for produce has fallen sharply amid the coronavirus pandemic.

"We're not just going to let [the food] die, we'll go in and destroy it," said Mr. Grooms, the 74-year-old owner of Fancy Farms in Plant City, Fla. "It's a mental thing, you don't want to see your crop rot and suffer."

# Resilience and Trends

## Land Use Trends

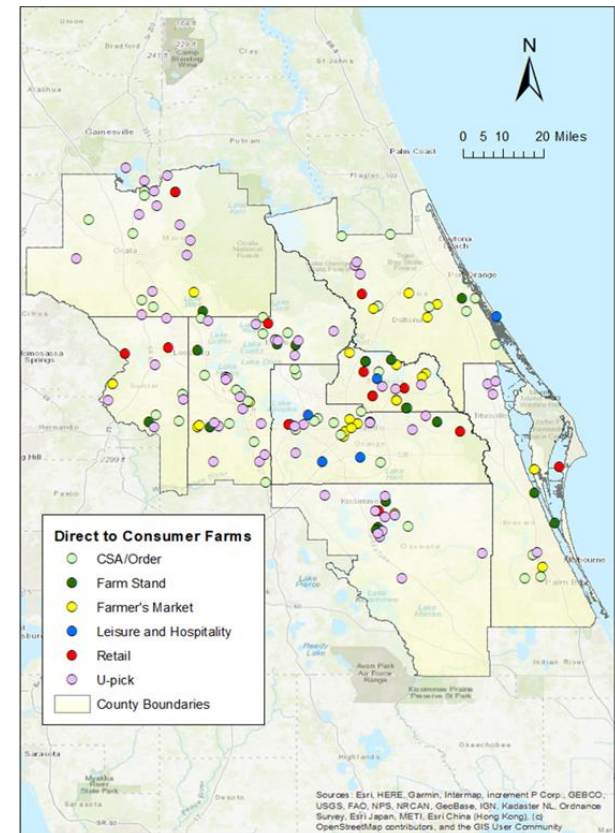
- 1.7 Million Acres of Agriculture Land
- Largest Amount of Agricultural Land is Pasture
- High Level of Land Vulnerable to Urbanization



# Resilience and Trends

## Business Trends

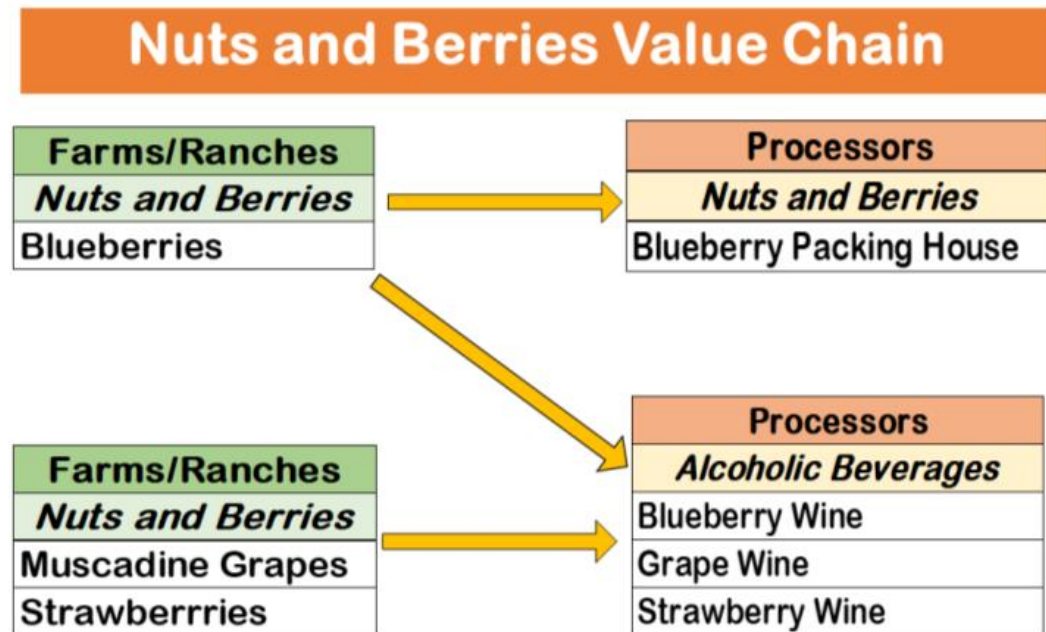
- Farms and Processors are Small Operations
- Direct Sales to Consumers
  - Farmers Market
  - CSA/Direct Order
  - U-Pick
  - Agritourism
- Distribution and Processing Highly Concentrated in Orange County



# Resilience and Trends

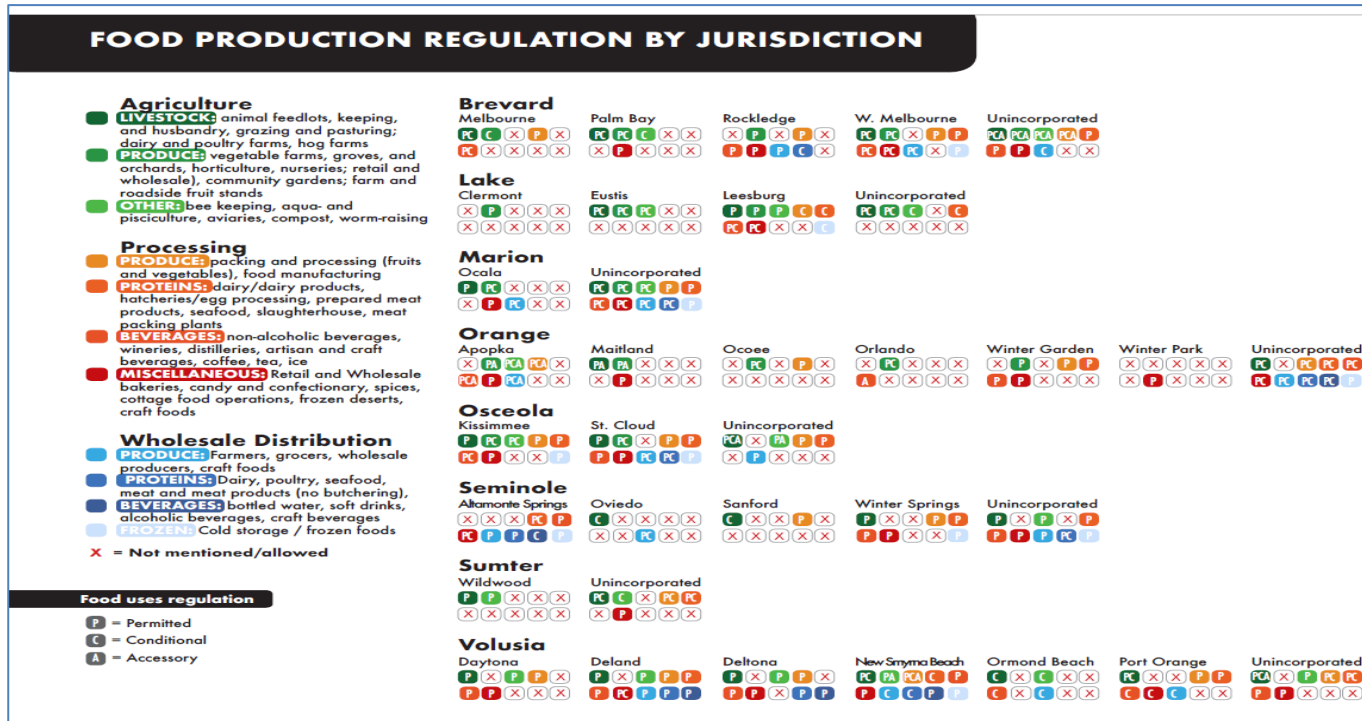
## Value Chain Coordination Activities

- Very Few Commodities go through a Value Chain
- These are Activities that Increase the Value of the Product through Each Step of the Process
- Absence of Hard and Soft Infrastructure



# Resilience and Trends

## Regulatory Barriers



# *Resilience and Trends*

## Strategic Planning Process

### *People*

- Increase Capacity of Food Production Businesses and Organizations
- Educate Public and Elected Officials About Food Production System
- Develop Next Generation Workforce

### *Prosperity*

- Develop Stronger Linkages Between Food Production and Other Sectors
- Develop Value Chain Coordination Opportunities
- Provide Soft and Hard Infrastructure
- Help Develop New Markets

### *Places*

- Coordinate Development Regulatory Policy Framework
- Address Conversion of Agricultural Parcels Into Urban Uses

# Community Revitalization



## Cycles and Sprouts Program

- 2-Year AETNA Foundation Grant
- Increase Vegetable Consumption in Food Desert Neighborhood
- Provide Urban Agriculture and Bicycle Repair Training

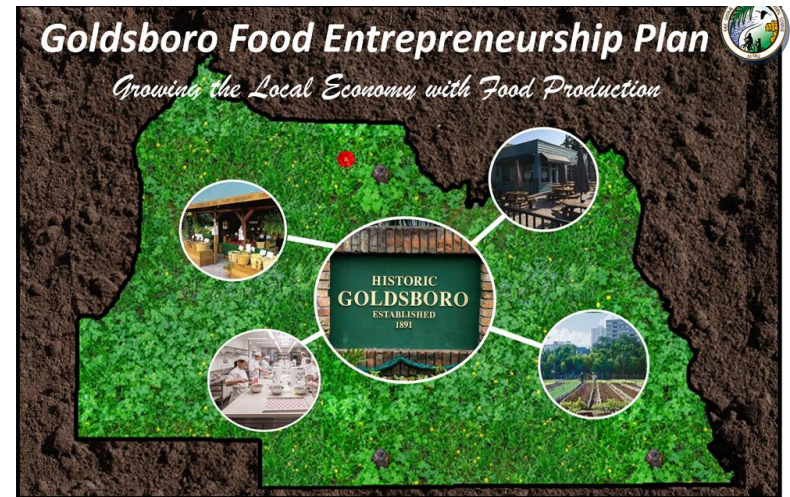


# Community Revitalization



## Goldsboro Food Entrepreneurship Plan

- HUD Choice Neighborhoods Initiative Project
- Use Food Production to Revitalize Distressed Community
- Identify Food Entrepreneurship Opportunities



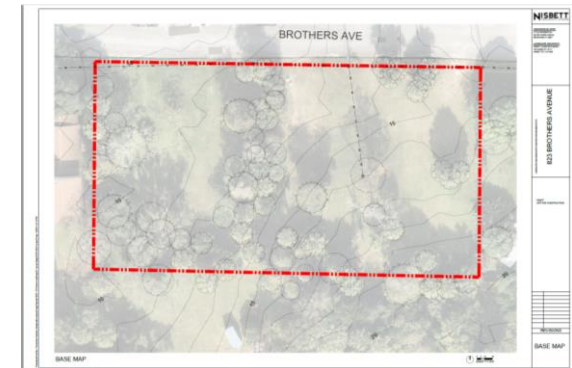


# Community Revitalization



## Brownfields Program

- Awarded \$600,000 Coalition Grant in 2021
- Phase 1 Assessment on Brothers Avenue Property
- Develop Community Garden in Food Desert Community



# Community Revitalization



## Brownfields Program 2.0

- Awarded \$1.5 million Coalition Grant in 2024
- Develop Food Entrepreneurship and Climate Resilience Project
- Repurpose Brownfield Sites to Allow Urban Agriculture, Climate Adaptation, and Expand Economic Opportunities





**EDD CoP**

Economic Development District  
Community of Practice



**More info at: [www.nado.org/EDDCoP](http://www.nado.org/EDDCoP)**

The EDD CoP is made possible through an award from the U.S. Economic Development Administration, U.S. Department of Commerce (ED22HDQ3070106). The statements, findings, conclusions, and recommendations are those of the participants, trainers, and authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the U.S. Economic Development Administration or the U.S. Department of Commerce.



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