



In this report

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Listening to the Lincoln County Food System: A summary report

A Glimpse of History...

We all associate Lincoln County with the beach and the forested hills of the Coast Range, but how often do we think of farming as part of the culture of Lincoln County? Lincoln County continues to have a strong fishing tradition centered in Newport, the 4th largest commercial fishing port on the west coast. Oysters were first exported from Yaquina Bay in the 1860's and fish processing soon became a mainstay of the local economy with several canning and packing companies in operation in Newport. The Siletz river's strong salmon population warranted the building of a salmon cannery in 1896, about a mile up stream from the present site of Kernville.

As one of the most productive areas in the world for growing conifer trees, logging also became an important local industry. Compared to the Willamette Valley, Lincoln County has geographic limitations which constrain food production in unique ways. Despite these challenges, farming was also an important industry early on in the history of the county, especially dairy farming.

During the mid twentieth century, there were several creameries in operation in Lincoln County as well as fruit and vegetable canneries. For example, Toledo Canning Company was, "prepared to handle your evergreen blackberries, Bartlett pears, prunes, plums, etc" (Lincoln County Leader, April 1918).

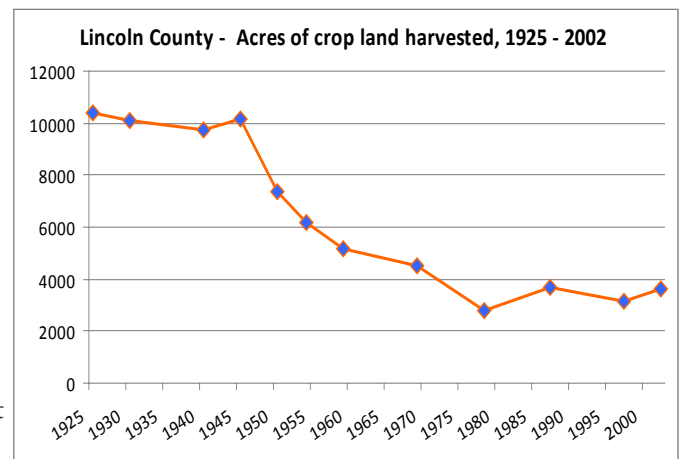


From: *Pictorial recollections of Toledo, Oregon* by Evelyn Payne Perry. Photo provided by the Lincoln County Historical Society.

As an example of what was possible with some encouragement and steady demand, blackberry production in the county increased from 600 pounds in 1950 to 20,000 pounds in 1960. Overall berry production increased from 30,000 to 124,000 pounds in the same period.

Decline in acres dedicated to growing food or forage

Sometime in the late 1940's, the number of acres used to grow food began to decrease. Today under 4,000 acres of land are used for food and forage production.



U.S. Censuses of Agriculture, 1925-2002

Patronize Your Home Creamery

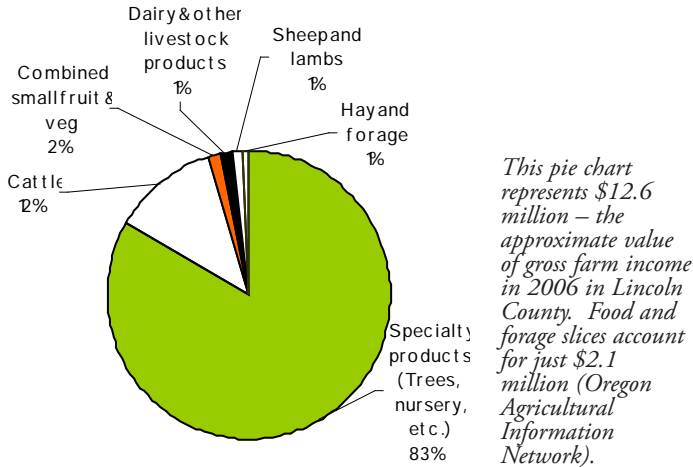
"To all members of the Toledo Co-Operative Creamery Association, and all others who are interested in the dairy business: You are hereby notified that the (creamery) is now ready for business and you have a home creamery that is a credit to any place, and it only requires the united support of the dairymen within Lincoln County to assure the creamery a success from the start and by giving your milk and cream careful attention and see that it reaches the creamery in good condition, we will be able to produce a quality of butter that will make Yaquina Bay famous as a dairy country, and thus help to build up our own county instead of shipping away to build up some other place."
Lincoln County Leader
April 1914

This newspaper advertisement from 1914 shows that the creamery cooperative was well aware of the importance of working together to build up a dairy industry. It's also an early example of "acting locally."

Current Conditions & Challenges

Small numbers of food producers in the county now (from 2002 Census of Agriculture)

- 374 farmers (includes tree & nursery production)
- Approximately 105 direct market producers involved in commercial crop and livestock production.



How much local food is consumed in Lincoln County

- Value of Lincoln County agricultural products sold direct: \$219,000 from 105 farms.
- About 0.2% of the “food dollar” was used to purchase Lincoln County-grown food sold direct to consumers (i.e. farmers’ markets, u-pick, and roadside stands, locker meat).
- Does not include seafood.

The population of Lincoln County has doubled since the 50’s, so why did local farm production decline? Why is this important?

Some of the possible contributing factors are:

• Distance to markets

In 1950, the distance traveled by Lincoln County farmers to market averaged 11 miles, while the state average was just 7 miles. For Tillamook farmers, this number was just 5 miles. Since that time, roads have improved, but most of the farmland is away from the coastal areas where the majority of residents live.

• Trees over food

While the real (inflation adjusted) prices paid to farmers have decreased nationwide since the 1950’s, the price of wood in the Pacific Northwest generally increased during the same time-frame. What this means to landowners is that growing trees has been more economically rewarding than growing food.

• Climate and topography

While Lincoln County has milder winters than inland Oregon, it also has fewer warm days in the summer. This makes it more challenging to grow certain kinds of crops,

such as tomatoes. Also, the varied topography creates many microclimates, making it difficult to predict what plants will do well, even within a small geographic area. Another factor is of course that there is a relatively small amount of flat ground in this county suitable for agriculture.

• Processing capacity

There are no longer any commercial fruit and vegetable canneries in the county. There are no creameries either. A few fish processing companies maintain operations on the Yaquina Bay, however, the majority of landings for the Newport fleet are processed in Astoria for distribution to other parts of the nation and world.

A lack of slaughter facilities and certified butchers has created a situation whereby cattle owners have been taking their cows to auction yards in the valley. Many of these cattle end up being shipped all the way to Nebraska to be fattened in feedlots and then slaughtered. Other ranchers have a mobile slaughter operator from the Willamette Valley come to their farms –then they must go to the valley to pick up the packaged meat.

CHALLENGES

Some residents have trouble obtaining enough food

Not only are these factors important to farmers trying to grow food efficiently in order to make a living, these difficulties impact the ability of residents to access fresh, local food.

Poverty rate and food insecurity

Food security is something that affects people at an individual and community level.

• In 2004 Lincoln County’s poverty rate was 15.3%

• Oregon’s statewide average was 12.9%

• Oregon ranks poorly compared to other states in food insecurity and hunger

LINCOLN COUNTY FARMERS: FACTS & CHALLENGES

- Average age of farmers ~58 years old
- Few farmers have an interested relative to pass their farm to once they are no longer able to farm it
- Cool, wet springs are not ideal growing conditions for some crops
- Hard to compete with valley farmers
- Picky and price-sensitive customers (“I can get this for less at XYZ grocery store...”)
- “Selling produce locally doesn’t pencil out”
- Frequent staff changes at restaurants
- Few markets for beef producers
- “Can’t compete with large wholesalers on price”
- Organic certification expensive

- Lincoln County Food Share, in operation since 1981, continues to expand services due to increased demand: now receiving one semi-truckload of food per week
- At the community level, food travels far to reach our plates. The national average is 1,500 miles from farm to fork. Due to it's outlying nature, this number is most likely higher for the average item consumed in Lincoln County (excepting fish).

Tough business climate for restaurateurs

Though some food producers in Lincoln County have direct connections to the many area restaurants, it is a competitive business climate. Farmers may find a good client one year is out of business the next. In addition, chefs often switch places of employment, making it more difficult for farmers to maintain stable relationships. Restaurants may also find it challenging to buy from local farmers who have limited selection and higher costs than large wholesalers, who provide the vast majority of food consumed in the county.

Price of land and the ability to make a living as a farmer

A 94 year old farmer from Yachats bought his dairy and land in 1943, paying it off in two years of work (i.e. from dairy income). This would be hard to imagine today. Not only are land and farm buildings expensive to buy, but places to sell products are more limited now. Regulations and permitting are also a hurdle for small farmers and processors. Unless people start with a lot of money or already own land, it's not easy to earn a living at farming in Lincoln County.

How the food system is structured

Our national food system is geared for big farmers, big processors and big infrastructure. Building community support for a more locally centered food system, complete with processing in the county, runs contrary to global trends. Nurturing a local food system might seem backward to some people.

Water?!

Though it seems unlikely, water is a limited resource during the summer growing season in Oregon. A lack of irrigation water is a limiting factor for many Lincoln County farmers.

Opportunities for a More Locally Centered Food System

Lincoln County has many strengths in regard to food production.

Fishing remains on of Lincoln County's strongest industries

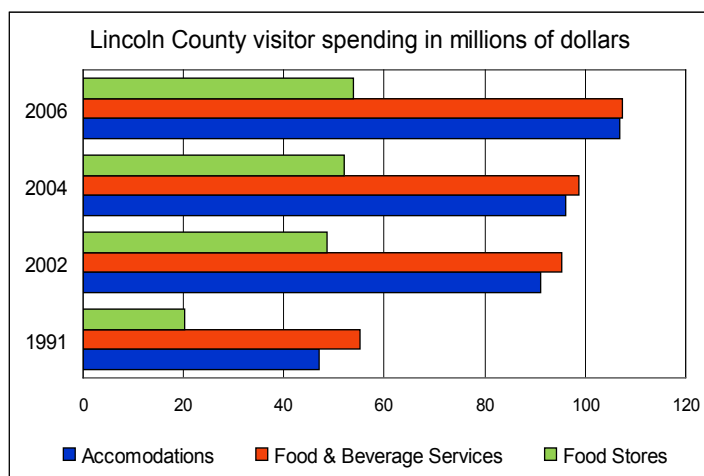
The volume of fish landed at Newport is impressive: about 110 million pounds in 2005 according to Oregon Dept. of Fish and Wildlife data. Depoe Bay also brings in a lot of fish. Many fishers sell direct to outlets like Local Ocean Seafood, a

locally owned and operated retail store on Newport's bay front, and to area restaurants. In addition, many fishers sell whole (cleaned and gutted) salmon and tuna to the public directly from their vessels. With some creativity, more such direct relationships could help keep more fresh fish in the area and local dollars from leaving the area.

Tourism is another strong industry in Lincoln County and one that could significantly influence local food production and food security

Tourists spent over 100 million dollars in the year 2006 on food and beverage services in Lincoln County. Spending on food and beverages has nearly doubled since the early 90's. Spending on accommodations and at food stores has increased similarly.

Rogue Brewery of Newport and Siletz Brewery of Siletz are examples of processing facilities which take raw ingredients, in this case barley and hops, and add value to them while creating jobs for the local community. Tourists are often drawn to uniquely Oregon specialty products such as craft beers.



Oregon Travel Commission. Lincoln County Travel Impacts, 1991-2006.

Other strengths of the local food system:

With a resident population of 46,000 and a vigorous tourist season, a point of optimism is the sheer volume of food that is consumed in the county. Including tourists, food demand would greatly exceed 126 tons/day during the summer. Most of this food is now supplied via Portland by large wholesalers like Sysco, Food Services of America, Unified Western Grocers, Inc. and Safeway.

Climate – a relatively mild, maritime climate with it's long growing season and ample winter rains create good growing conditions for some crops.

Ag land available

- 14,000 acres zoned for agriculture with another 13,000 acres zoned rural residential (Central Coast Economic Development Alliance).
- As of 2006, only 1,600 acres were harvested for food or forage production (Oregon Agricultural Information Network).

Farms don't need to be large to be very productive. Many of the most financially stable farmers in the county tend just a few acres. These farms often integrate greenhouses into their system in order to grow starts and extend the season of some plants.

Farmers' Markets and community gardens

Lincoln County has four farmers' markets operating seasonally. These markets provide an excellent way for customers to meet local farmers and support their work:

Lincoln City Farmers Market, Sundays, 9 – 2 at Delake School

Newport Farmers' Market, Saturdays, 9 – 1, behind City Hall

Toledo Wednesday Street Market, 10 – 2, Downtown Toledo

Yachats Farmers' Market, Sundays, 9 – 2, Yachats Commons

Lincoln County also has many community and school gardens. Lincoln City, Newport, Waldport and Yachats all have gardens open to people interested in growing food. This is an example of how community food security can be increased one tomato at a time.



Dave Pickering of Fog End Farm, Otis, carefully tends this lettuce patch for the benefit of lucky restaurant patrons in Lincoln City. Photo provided by Dave Pickering

OPPORTUNITIES

There are many enthusiastic and ambitious people out there who want to make a difference by growing, processing or selling local food.

Restaurants – many restaurant owners and managers have indicated keen interest in selling more local food, even if it costs a little more.

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Processing – Eric Clark, former owner of Clark's Market in Yachats and Waldport, has started a mobile slaughter business in South Beach. He is serving livestock owners who formerly had to call operators from the valley. Now people can pick up their cut and wrapped meat in South Beach, a good bit closer for many county residents.

Certified kitchens allow growers to process food for storage and to "add value" to their products for sale to the public.

Irrigation – catchments collect water in winter for irrigation in the summer months instead of drawing water from streams or groundwater. The Natural Resource Conservation Service's

EQIP program, among other government programs, can provide support for solving water issues.

Marketing – seafood has long been a highlight and a draw for the coast. Could other local products share in that glow? Things that grow well here, including berries, greens, and beef, could be promoted by local restaurants as part of the coast's cuisine.

Institutional buying – schools, hospitals and other facilities must serve many meals. This provides another arena where farmers

could sell their products locally.

Creating links between farmers and restaurants – OSU Extension Service of Lincoln County and our partner organizations realize that connecting food producers to local restaurants has great potential for encouraging more local food production. Extension has been working to create such links through a Local Foods Message Center. If you would like to get involved in this effort, call 541-574-6534.

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