

Grow Warren



With over 72,000 acres of farmland, Warren County New Jersey is a major agricultural producer in the region. In an effort to support local agriculture, the county established the Grow Warren Initiative. The initiative seeks to connect local farmers with consumers and improve the marketing of small and emerging producers. And since the county is strategically located between Philadelphia and New York City, growers have the potential to expand into new and highly profitable markets.



Greener by Design (**GbD**) was retained by the Warren County Board of Chosen Freeholders through the US Department of Agriculture's Rural Business Development program. **GbD** conducted extensive research to inventory the county's existing small and emerging farms, related agribusiness, and other resources. Following this research, **GbD** analyzed the industry's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. Strengths include accessibility to large urban markets, preserved farmland, and productivity, ranking fifth in the state in terms of agricultural sales. Weaknesses can be summarized as slow technological adaptation, processing and distribution limitations, and the lack of comprehensive marketing strategy. Fortunately, there are many opportunities for Warren County farmers, like participation in local food systems, expansion into niche markets, the ability for value-added processing, and agritourism experiences. All of these opportunities are threatened by an aging average farmer, shrinking farm sizes, and growth stagnation.

This SWOT analysis was the basis for a series of recommendations regarding the most viable and effective actions for the county to take to assist its small and emerging farms. Recommendations include the development of a marketing program to promote the county's produce. Other potential strategies include encouraging young people to farm, assisting new farmers, developing a food enterprise center, helping retirees transition their farms to the next generation, and cooperatively marketing local food. Marketing can be accomplished through participation in the Jersey Fresh Program or through the design and promotion of a regional brand or identity.