The future looks bright.
LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR

At Lowcountry Local First, we continue to evolve in order to meet the changing needs of our constituents and to ensure that the place we call home continues to be a unique and vibrant place to live – and one where all can prosper. As our city and region grow, it brings with it both challenges and opportunities.

Our work as an advocate for the local-independent business community has meant we are building strategic partnerships that allow us to address those issues that are most pressing to our members, including transportation, hiring and retaining workforce, flooding and sea level rise, and affordable housing. We will continue to be a voice for local and stay at the forefront of those issues that impact our businesses across all sectors – from accountants, to farmers, to manufacturers.

Thanks to your support, we have had some significant wins this year. One of these wins was working alongside the City of Folly Beach to develop a Formula Business ordinance that will “Keep Folly Funky” for generations to come. This unanimously-approved ordinance will ensure that the Folly Beach we know and love continues to be the unique community that draws both residents and visitors alike to the edge of America. We hope that this model can be used to maintain the individual qualities of many of our neighborhood business districts across the region.

Our organizational blueprint calls for us to be an organization that reflects and serves the community in which we live. We know that change happens at the pace of trust and that an investment is necessary to making all feel welcome at Lowcountry Local First. Over the past year, we have taken an assessment of our entrepreneurial ecosystem and realized that it is not one where all have an opportunity to participate. In 2018, we launched our Community Business Challenge that will provide affordable commercial space and wrap around services in partnership with Metanoia in the Chicora-Cherokee neighborhood of North Charleston. After engaging in conversations with stakeholders and community leaders, we will be launching Good Enterprises in 2019 to provide equitable opportunity for business ownership that will transform lives, families, and communities.

I am optimistic about the future and know that the work we have done over the past 12 years has taken Lowcountry Local First from a grassroots movement to one that is impacting our lives everyday. Together, we are keeping the place we call home one that reflects the unique flavor, people and character of the Lowcountry.

Executive Director
and Founder
In order to fulfill its mission, Lowcountry Local First dedicates considerable time, energy and resources producing awareness campaigns to inform and sway the habits of our citizens, as well as advocating for policies that recognize the importance of a strong, diverse local economy.

Our Advocacy Priorities for 2018 included:

**Expand Community Well-Being**
- We acted as a voice for the local business community;
- Engaged in the development of a Local Food Policy Council, sharing a platform of support for local agriculture.

**Build Local Character and Culture**
- We advocated for land use planning, zoning, and policy to help local businesses thrive including: bike, transit, and pedestrian-oriented improvements; street and façade improvements; and affordable housing and commercial space;
- Engaged local developers in proactively incorporating local businesses into commercial space and including space that is right-sized and affordable for locals.
- Unanimously passed a Formula Business District with the City of Folly Beach that supports the recruitment of unique businesses and ensures the island’s business district doesn’t become homogenized by chain businesses.

**Keep Dollars in the Local Economy**
- We raised awareness of the benefits of local businesses through campaigns like Eat Local Month, Buy Local Month, and Move Your Money Week initiatives;
- Reoriented state and local economic development incentives to support locally-headquartered businesses already invested in our community;
- Advocated for municipalities and institutions to give preference to local businesses in purchasing practices.

**Grow Entrepreneurship and Local Ownership**
- We addressed workforce hiring and retention issues in partnership with other organizations;
- We provided programs including the Good Business Summit and workshops, Growing New Farmers Program, and Local Works as infrastructure to support entrepreneurs and industries that are often ignored by traditional economic development agencies;
- Advocated for less burdensome regulations on small, local businesses and a swifter permitting process.
MEMBERSHIP
In 2018, Lowcountry Local First was comprised of more than 869 members (business and Localist individuals) and more than 13,000 employees form our loud, collective voice.

- More than THREE QUARTERS of companies grew or remained at steady employment levels, with only 5% downsizing.
- For companies with hourly employees, the majority (\(\frac{2}{3}\)) provided wages above minimum wage.
- 67% of member businesses worked with local companies for more than half of their B2B contracts. 64% of member businesses actively increased business with local companies.
- For the fourth year in a row, hiring and retaining qualified workers ranked as the top challenge faced by our members. Competition from online companies ranked as a close second.
- Business owners from underrepresented categories increased by 6% from 2017 to 2018, including women-owned, veteran-owned and minority-owned businesses.

“"The team at Lowcountry Local First is passionate about being advocates for the local business community. They are very genuine people who believe in what they do and we are the better for it.”

- Steve Kelleher
Bottom Line Digital Communications

\[
\text{Median Company Age} = 4 \text{ YRS}
\]

\[
\frac{2}{3} \text{ of companies experienced revenue growth in 2018}
\]

*Lowcountry Local First’s full membership was surveyed in December 2018, with 121 responses collected (22% of total business membership).
100% of participants said their expectations were met and/or exceeded

100% of those who did not know their plans post graduation said they will be changing their career path

126 ACRES of land owned by participants

Most valued part of the apprenticeship for participants was hands-on experience. Mentor farmers most valued the ability to pass on experiences and skills to young farmers.

“I was in the position of needing a job and the program gave me the opportunity to get there and learn about the day-to-day. I’m going to continue working at Lowland Farms. 100%, that was the best part of the program for me.”

-Justin Hancock
Apprenticed at Lowland Farms

IMPACT 2018
GROWING NEW FARMERS PROGRAM
Training the next generation of farmers and food system leaders for the Lowcountry.

26 Participants
14 Mentor Farmers and Food System Leaders
77% Female Participants
63% of graduates are currently farming or working in peripheral agricultural roles

VIEW THE 2018 GRADUATES
The 6th annual Good Business Summit was a one-day event presented by Lowcountry Local First spotlighting ideas and workable solutions for building your company with profit and purpose.

**Attendees Favorite Sessions**

- Karalee Nielsen Fallert (Taco Boy, The Park Cafe, Royal American, etc.) and Steve Palmer (The Indigo Road Group) getting REAL about why culture and values must underpin their work everyday; outside-the-box approaches to building culture; and why profit and purpose should not be mutually exclusive.

- Thoughtful growth strategies and the real story behind the shiny exterior from leaders at Half-Moon Outfitters, Gotcha, Charleston Gourmet Burger Co, David Thompson Architect, and Obviouslee Marketing.

- How to navigate and stand out in the lightening speed world of social media from gurus at Rawle Murdy, with insider tips on how you should invest your time and money for best ROI.

“Charleston takes care to reinvest in small businesses through education and opportunities like the Good Business Summit. Our culture is unique and this is just another way our city shines by example.”

- Kirstin Karczmarczyk
  Lilli’s Old Style
  2018 Good Business Summit attendee

**IMPACT 2018**

**GOOD BUSINESS SUMMIT**

- Attendees: 300
- Presenters: 28
- 51% of attendees were business owners
- 90% of attendees were delighted or satisfied by overall experience
Local Works is an affordable and flexible open sector community workspace for entrepreneurs to collaborate, co-create, and support other local business owners so that all can thrive.

- **91 ENTREPRENEURS** and business leaders used this affordable, flexible community work space to start or grow their businesses in 2018
- **$22.5M** estimated gross annual revenue generated by Local Works companies
- **$323,000** paid to locally-headquartered suppliers and service providers
- **167 NEW BUSINESS CONNECTIONS** formed through interactions at Local Works

“Just starting my business, Local Works provided me with a professional environment to work in and to meet with clients and potential clients. The daily interactions with others working in the space is very beneficial, along with some of the programs that are offered, i.e. freelance Fridays. These are all things that I would not have access to if I were working from home.”

- 2018 Local Worker

*Numbers based on a survey of current Local Works members in December 2018 with an 46% response rate. Actual numbers may be higher than reported.*
A report released by the Institute of Local Self-Reliance in 2016 ranked rising retail rates in 13 cities across the country, and Charleston topped the list with a citywide 26% increase in retail lease rates over the course of a year. This reality makes finding an affordable space particularly challenging for entrepreneurs. We proudly offer our members two different resources to address challenges that may arise when it comes to a physical location for their business – be it finding, leasing, opening or keeping the location.

We regularly connect those looking for space to our commercial real estate broker members, but also provide a Local Space Database to connect our members with affordable, unique, or shared spaces that may not be listed on MLS.

Our Commercial Space Advisory Team is comprised of a dozen local volunteers on call to provide free, confidential sessions with other members who are navigating the often complex regulatory and build-out process.

THROUGHOUT 2018, LOWCOUNTRY LOCAL FIRST:

- Directly mentored SIX LOCAL MINORITY BUSINESS OWNERS with business planning, connecting to capital, and uniquely curated advising sessions

- Provided consultations or in-person advisory sessions to SIXTEEN ENTREPRENEURS through the Commercial Space Advisory Team

“Deciding on this space was a very intimidating decision to make, and we used the Commercial Space Advisory Team to validate our plans and make sure we were considering every angle possible. They went through numbers with us and validated that we were on the right track, which gave us the encouragement to move forward.”

-Rachel & Jeremias Paul
Broom Wagon Coffee
Better Block Reynolds Avenue took place on October 26-27 based on a proven, community-led model designed by the Better Block Foundation to temporarily reshape a community and as a result, create permanent change.

Many volunteers implemented streetscape improvements including building and installing street furniture, sharrows for bikes, fencing for safety and traffic management, patterned crosswalks, plantings and shade structures. Traffic was slowed, local entrepreneurs were engaged, and the community held a concert, wing-eating contest, children’s play area and much more – ultimately creating a vibrant, unforgettable day.

Extensive door-to-door surveys and interactive elements at the event showed that all residents want expanded economic development along Reynolds Avenue, but only 33% felt that they were currently offered opportunities.

The leadership of the City of North Charleston is evaluating how to permanently implement the façade, streetscape, and safety improvements that were recommended to them after Better Block.

“A lot of times we think people don’t care, but they do care... they love their community, they just need a little help sometimes.”

-Apostle Elect
Emily Shaw-Drayton

BETTER BLOCK REYNOLDS AVENUE PARTNERS:
What we’re excited about in 2019...

2019 looks to be a transformative year for Lowcountry Local First as we continue to make the Lowcountry a vibrant, livable, and unique place that supports the local business and farming communities. Here are a few of the things we are excited about:

- Being the **VOICE OF THE LOCAL BUSINESS COMMUNITY** in addressing transportation, housing, and flooding issues
- Tracking the long-term impact of our **GROWING NEW FARMERS PROGRAM**
- Holding **GOOD BUSINESS WORKSHOPS** that will support the long-term sustainability of the local business community
- Partnering on **GROWERS GROUP WORKSHOPS** that will support the success of the agricultural community
- **LAUNCHING GOOD ENTERPRISES** which will bring entrepreneurship training into underestimated areas of the region
- **INCUBATING EMERGING ENTREPRENEURS ON REYNOLDS AVENUE** in the Chicora-Cherokee neighborhood in partnership with Metanoia

We are optimistic about the future with you by our side.
Lowcountry Local First is committed to financial transparency and accountability in appropriately stewarding our supporters’ dollars to further our mission. For more information, please contact matt@lowcountrylocalfirst.org or visit our ‘About Us’ page to view our 2018 IRS Form 990.
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