I have noticed lately that more than ever, we are bombarded with negative news about the budget and the state of our economy. County, state, and nationwide, people are hurting as our economy stands still. I have always been a positive person, but the continuous negative news has even gotten me down lately. I do a lot of thinking as an Extension agent. This job takes me out into the county where I meet lots of people, see lots of things, and have lots of time alone in my car to and from farms. I just got back from a couple of farm visits this morning and can say that as hot and as bad as its been lately, we still are very lucky as a county to have the agricultural base we do. While other industries have failed us in the past, agriculture keeps our county strong. Export numbers are very high, and farms, even with the increase in inputs, are making money. I don’t even want to think about what our county or state would be like without agricultural dollars.

One way that all of us can support our local economy is through eating local foods. In fact, eating local is a very fashionable trend right now. You’ve probably seen advertisements for eating local in lots of places. The downtown farmers market is a great place to buy fresh and local vegetables, fruit, and even honey. The Cooperative Extension Center also offers a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) Program where participants can pick up a bag of local fresh produce once a week. The participants pay up front and then pick up their bags containing produce that is fresh that week. These participants can also purchase local beef with an additional cost.

We have many local producers who will sell meat directly to you. At the Extension Center, we have a direct marketing beef brochure filled with people from almost every community in our county selling meat that was raised right here in our county by our producers. I’m not from the country, so at first, the idea of buying meat locally caused me to baulk. I wasn’t sure if the meat had been processed properly, handled correctly, et cetera. If you are like I used to be, you may have some of the same fears. However, these fears are invalid. When you buy local beef, it has
been processed at a local USDA- and NCDA-inspected slaughter facility. The meat can even come plastic wrapped just like the meat you find in the stores. When you buy local meat, don’t think of it as slaughtered at someone’s farm or in someone’s backyard. The local slaughterhouses have the same regulations as larger slaughterhouses that package meat sold in stores.

I know it sounds crazy, but local products, including meat, can also make great gifts. As a wife, daughter, and sister, I know from experience that the men in my life are hard to buy presents for, but you come to them with local meat, and they are happy campers.

Many of our local producers have meat that is from different breeds of cattle. We have producers who raise Angus cattle, Angus cattle crossed with other breeds, Charlosis cattle, and Santa Gertrudis cattle. A few producers even cross their Angus cattle with a dairy breed and swear by the meat, saying it has a richer, sweeter taste. Every time I meet with a producer who sells locally, he or she tells me that their beef is the best I have ever tasted, and I can assure you that I have enjoyed every local steak, hamburger, or roast I have had. The different crosses and breeds produce different flavored meat. I think it would be interesting for you to try the different local beef and have a taste for yourself.

Buying local products, including meat, supports local farms, supporting our neighbors who spend their money locally. A win-win for all involved. Also, with local food, you become more connected to the farms and farmers around you and appreciate what it takes for food to get from the farm to your fork. Buying local meat is easy; we have an All Natural Beef Company in the Prospect area - Moore Brothers Natural. At their store, you can buy any cut you’re looking for, and they have also started selling locally raised chickens.

I mentioned the meat directory earlier; you can call or E-mail the Extension Center, and I can get the directory to you. You can contact local producers and buy a quarter, half, or whole cow. You can go in with your neighbors, friends, or family to split the meat. Food prices will continue to rise, and I think you'll be surprised with the satisfaction of buying local meat in bulk from one of our outstanding producers. Most producers will even welcome you to their farms, so you can see the quality and conditions for yourself.

Let’s be known for something positive; let’s share the wealth of agricultural riches in Robeson County with our friends and ourselves. Next time you need a present for that hard-to-buy-for person, buy them something local - buy them local meat.

For more information, please contact Michelle Shooter, Extension Livestock Agent with North Carolina Cooperative Extension, Robeson County Center, at 671-3276, by E-mail at Michelle_Shooter@ncsu.edu, or visit our website at http://robeson.ces.ncsu.edu/.