

# Community Agriculture Resilience Audit Tool (CARAT) for Nantucket

## Executive Summary

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Nantucket's once-strong agroecosystem supported its whaling industry in the 1800s with over 100 farms on the island. Today, the number of farms on Nantucket is less than 20, which when paired with high food production costs makes access to fresh and nutritious island-grown produce challenging for many. To help address this problem and promote greater agricultural resilience on the island, Sustainable Nantucket, a non-profit founded in 2000 has partnered with the Marion Institute to conduct a community food assessment (CFA).

The goal of this project was to assist Sustainable Nantucket in preparing to implement the Community & Agriculture Resilience Audit Tool (CARAT) assessment for Nantucket. To achieve this goal, we:

1. Clarified the data needs and entry protocols of the CARAT assessment model.
2. Identified current and best practices used by other communities to implement the CARAT assessment.
3. Determined how different community stakeholders might contribute data, expertise, and resources to the CARAT assessment effort.
4. Provided recommendations to Sustainable Nantucket on key stakeholders and the suitability of the CARAT assessment on Nantucket.

To complete these objectives, the team reviewed the data needs of CARAT's seven themes and 101 indicators by interviewing a CARAT developer about the motivations behind the tool's design. Additionally, we conducted interviews with 21 representatives of different organizations across the island to gauge community expertise on the topics explored by CARAT. This includes representatives from island farms, nonprofits, and community investment organizations. We also interviewed representatives from two other pilot CARAT communities to learn about effective data collection and scoring strategies from their implementation of the tool.

## Discussion & Recommendations:

Through our research, we identified a core group of stakeholders whom we recommend Sustainable Nantucket collaborate with in CARAT data collection and scoring. Additionally, we recommend a strategy for Sustainable Nantucket to approach the assessment with. Recommendations to the North American Food Systems Network (NAFSN), the developers of CARAT, include changes to the tool's indicators and scoring system.

**5.1 We recommend that Sustainable Nantucket collaborate with a core group of stakeholders to implement CARAT data collection and scoring.**

A diverse core group of island stakeholders would include Matt Haffenreffer, Chuck Larson, John Bartlett, Aidan Feeney, Vincent Murphy, Rita Higgins, Jerico Mele, Cormac Collier, Anne Dougherty, Brooke Mohr, and Rachael Freeman. These stakeholders have different individual and organizational perspectives on farming and food systems on Nantucket, including the role of Town offices, conservation groups, and other nonprofits. These individuals have indicated an interest and willingness to participate in the CARAT data collection and scoring phases alongside Sustainable Nantucket. This diverse group will also establish connections between individuals and organizations that may not normally interact, helping to build a more reliant and connected community.

**5.2 We recommend that Sustainable Nantucket adopt a “two convention” approach for CARAT data collection and scoring.**

Communities that have completed all three phases of CARAT have used a “two convention” strategy to effectively assess their local food systems. The strategy involves an initial meeting with the core group of stakeholders where they answer as many of the indicator questions as possible. The core group of stakeholders should spend significant time in the first meeting to determine the proper order for the indicator questions and their wording applicability. For indicators that cannot be scored initially, small subgroups of core group members should confer with various other community stakeholders to learn more about policies, practices, and programs within a local context. With these new insights, the core group comes together once more to finalize the scores on each CARAT indicator. Following this method will ensure a range of community figures inform data collection on the island.

**5.3 We recommend that the core group of stakeholders adapt CARAT indicators to better reflect Nantucket’s food system.**

Grouping similar or related CARAT indicators from across the seven themes will make data collection and scoring more intuitive. CARAT’s indicators emphasize policies and programs developed by local food policy councils, which are pragmatically inappropriate for Nantucket which has no active food policy council. Therefore, the core group should make any necessary adjustments to indicator wording to better suit Nantucket’s community, such as deemphasizing policy councils in indicator questions. When completing the CARAT assessment, individuals need to have a clear understanding of what each indicator means.

**5.4 We recommend that NAFSN adapt the structure of CARAT indicators to make the tool more intuitive.**

We found specific indicators that ask about similar policies, practices, and programs are grouped far apart in CARAT. We recommend that the indicators of CARAT be rearranged in a more intuitive order that clusters similar indicators together. Additionally, we found that the phrasing of the indicator questions leaves too much room for interpretation among stakeholders. CARAT has a glossary explaining what these

specialized terms mean, though it is not immediately accessible from within the webpage for scoring CARAT indicators. We recommend that the NAFSN integrate glossary entries directly into the phrasing of the CARAT indicators. This could be accomplished using hyperlinks or a mouse-hover feature on the CARAT indicator scoring webpage.

**5.5 We recommend that the NAFSN adapt the scoring system of CARAT to reflect the impact, not merely the presence, of policies, practices, and programs.**

Many of the CARAT indicators ask merely if a particular policy, practice, or program exists. The indicators do not ask if the policies, practices, or programs are widely adopted or effective. We recommend that the NAFSN include an additional scoring column that measures the usage and impact that a policy, practice, or program has on a community. Additionally, we recommend that the NAFSN standardize CARAT's scoring system. First-time users of CARAT may not pragmatically understand the three different stages of policy implementation laid out by the scores. Including concrete examples of these stages of policy implemented in other communities as a reference alongside the scoring guidelines may aid in user understanding and create more thorough assessments.

**5.6 We recommend that the Town of Nantucket reconsider the makeup of the Agricultural Commission and its mission.**

Currently, the members of Nantucket's Agricultural Commission have limited farming and food system expertise. We recommend that the Agricultural Commission fill upcoming vacancies with members who have relevant food supply chain experience. This includes potential members with farming, food processing, food distribution and restaurant experience. Furthermore, we recommend the Town consider broadening the Agricultural Commission's mission to encompass wider aspects of the food system on Nantucket. When determining how to connect with the larger food system on Nantucket, the Agricultural Commission may wish to model its board after a diverse group of food system actors, similar to the recommended core group of stakeholders that may assist Sustainable Nantucket with CARAT.

By implementing the CARAT assessment, Sustainable Nantucket will reveal the gaps in the island's food system and its resilience, taking note of what areas need further investment. Having this knowledge would enable Sustainable Nantucket and other nonprofit organizations to apply for grants and secure funding to establish new programs to fill the gaps. Additionally, the interviews we have conducted with island organizations have created new connections for Sustainable Nantucket, which will help them enhance cohesion and collaboration among the various organizations.