Locally grown" has become a catchword for restaurants, small farm operations, nutrition-oriented home cooks and others. But what about "locally caught"? More than a few reports say hunting is on the decline across the United States as the country grows more urban and increasingly rely on convenience meals. Often seen as a father-son activity, hunting may be fading, too, because of the flood of video games and other entertainment easily available to today's youth.

But some signs point the other way. Across South Carolina's plantations and hunting preserves, it's becoming hip for dads and daughters to hunt. Glossy publications such as Garden & Gun crop up. Popular TV shows blend food and outdoor skills. And even if hunting has decreased, spending on it has not.

According to the University of South Carolina's Moore School of Business, the economic impact of fishing, hunting and wildlife viewing totaled $3.8 billion in South Carolina in 2009.

Hunting can be viewed as a land-based form of economic development in which most counties can participate. Even within the Salkehatchie region (Allendale, Bamberg, Barnwell and Hampton counties), hunting preserves annually produce an estimated $2.1 million and 60 full-time jobs, according to a 2008 study by USC's College of Hospitality, Retail and Sport Management. Also, farmers can seasonally transform their agricultural acreage into hunting territory to supplement their income.

To increase this bounty, public and private sectors could promote the state as a hunters' haven, highlighting assets and perhaps contrasting it to neighboring states. A well-designed marketing campaign could attract sportsmen aiming to bag deer, dove, ducks and other game. More hunting licenses, both in-state and out, conceivably could mean more business at firing ranges, gun shops, game processors, taxidermists, sporting-goods retailers and guide services.

In the exurbs, where rural meets suburban, people complain about the presence of deer, bears, coyotes, foxes and other creatures intruding into "their" newly settled space. With deer especially, the lack of predators often means the rise of animal populations, so hunters become conservationists in a way — controlling the number of deer in a given area. Our state long has been considered a deer hunter's paradise, and the state Department of Natural Resources reported that 125,362 South Carolinians and 15,100 out-of-staters hunted deer in 2010. About $200 million in direct retail sales is related to deer hunting in South Carolina annually.

Further, South Carolina enjoys competitive advantages in this market. In 2010, a Massachusetts woman made national headlines for bagging a 1,025-pound, 13-foot alligator in South Carolina. The Department of Natural Resources says more than 100,000 alligators live from the Midlands to the coast, and the population is not threatened by the regulated removal of a relatively small number of alligators. The number of hunts is controlled by a computer-drawn lottery for alligators on selected management properties.

With its rich sporting traditions, South Carolina could be a regional leader in this corner of the tourism market. Got game? Yes, we do.

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