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The Community Foundation of WNC Supports a Collaborative & Region-wide Farmer Training Program

PRESS RELEASE

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MEDIA INQUIRIES, CONTACT:

Cameron Farlow, Farmer Programs Coordinator

(828) 338-9465

cameron@organicgrowersschool.org

For Immediate Release

Asheville, NC—Organic Growers School (OGS) is pleased to announce the award of \$15,000 from *The Community Foundation of Western North Carolina* for its Farm Pathways project. This grant will enable OGS to fund a Farmer Programs Associate position to support the creation of a comprehensive, farmer-inspired, nationally-informed farmer training curriculum tailored to maximize economic possibilities for WNC farmers. Farm Pathways--Access to Land, Livelihood, and Learning will not only cover all facets of whole-farm business planning from fiscal management and marketing to sustainable production, but will pull together the best practices and training components of regional organizations into a one-stop “school-and-field” educational program, to be rolled out in 2016.

OGS is in a valuable position to offer leadership in this project as the organization has been committed to carving a path of success for regional farmers. OGS has been serving the Southern Appalachian community with organic growing education since 1993 and offering targeted farmer programming, through the Collaborative Regional Alliance for Farmer Training (CRAFT), since 2008. Since that time, OGS has supported over 500 farmers and farmworkers with peer-to-peer, practical education in 16 counties in Western North Carolina.

As the average age of farmers reaches 58 and traditional methods of transferring farm wisdom are lost, our region needs an influx of farming entrepreneurs in order to sustain and grow regional production. New farmers are more likely to be interested in sustainable agriculture practices and running farm operations in the small-to-mid-sized range, which is ideal for the Western NC. At the same time these farmers face many challenges including access to land, capital, skills, support, and training. Despite the challenges, many people are turning to careers in agriculture. The OGS farming programs have increased by 75% from 2011 to 2014.

If the success rate of new farmers in our area is to increase, assistance and training must be provided during the transition of new growers to viable agricultural business owners. Farming today takes courage and perseverance, dedication and time, but few who start will succeed without help. The success of beginning farmers and the WNC region are intertwined.

To support the sustainability and profitability of WNC farms our region must rebuild a path to agriculture for new and expanding growers. This generous grant from *The Community Foundation of Western North Carolina*, will allow OGS to create a robust and dynamic training program based on the real needs of local farmers.

To provide farmers with a structure of training and land access that allows them to successfully build and grow long-term farm businesses is to invest in the revitalization of our local food system.

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Organic Growers School is a 501c3 non-profit with a mission to inspire, educate, and support people to farm, garden, and live organically. www.organicgrowersschool.org

Organic Growers School • PO Box 17804 • Asheville, NC 28816

<http://www.organicgrowersschool.org>

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