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Farm Beginnings® Farmer Training Graduates Beginning Farmers

PRESS RELEASE

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For Immediate Release

Asheville, NC—On March 5th, Organic Growers School's Farm Beginnings® Farmer Training program graduated its first "crop" of aspiring farmers! The graduation was hosted at the Organic Growers School offices and classroom located at the AB Tech Small Business Center on the Enka/Candler Campus. The Farm Beginnings® program, launched in October of 2015, consisted of 12 farm units and 24 individual farmers. Over the course of the winter, the farmer-students completed ten classes that covered whole farm planning and topics such as holistic goal setting, financial literacy, business start-up skills, and marketing. All classes were taught by experienced farmers who are well-versed in what it takes to farm in Western NC.



The graduation day was the 11th and final winter class with a focus on Farm Plan Presentations. Each farm team presented a Holistic Farm Plan and either a Farm Timeline or a Strategic Business Plan. Some graduates will be launching a mix of farm enterprises, including mixed vegetables, medicinal herbs, or forest products on land they already own or lease. One Farm Plan focused on a small rabbit meat operation, on leased land with low start up costs and slow growth, aimed to support 2 people part time for the first few years. These aspiring farmers chose rabbits due to the low capital costs up front and a market demand for rabbit meat. Other Farm Plans included: A young couple planning small scale vegetable production system and a long-term revitalization of their family farm in Black Mountain, NC; A hemp production company with plans for value added hemp products; and a Farm-to-Table business that would partner with farms to offer events to tourists.

Most graduating student farmers self-identified as "aspiring and beginning farmers," some even referring to themselves as "infant" farmers. Many of the graduating farmers spoke of the romantic and rosy view of farming that they had when starting their classes back in October. And most expressed learning about the determination, patience and planning needed to make a living at farming. "We entered into this course with a romantic view of farming and have found that the biggest lesson has been our new understanding to the actual realities of trying to farm successfully in this region," said one beginning farmer.

A positive outcome of the program, seen clearly during the graduation presentations, is that many of these new farmers are

planning a slow and measured approach to fulfilling their farm dreams rather than jumping in whole hog. They realized that setting realistic and tangible goals, while also continuing to learn more about farming, is the best possible approach for the long-term success of their endeavors.

The Farm Beginnings® Farmer Training year is not yet complete. Students attended the Organic Growers School's Spring Conference March 11-13 and will attend Collaborative, Regional Alliance for Farmer Training (CRAFT) tours all summer. Yet they have crossed a major hurdle by making clear plans for learning and growing into enduring and seasoned farmers over the 5 years.

Funding partners for this year-long farmer trainin include The Community Foundation of Western NC, UNFI Foundation, Clif Bar Family Foundation, and the USDA's Beginning Farmer Rancher Development Program.

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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



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