

PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

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For Immediate Release: Farm Pathways Team Completes a Successful Development Year

Asheville, NC - The *Farm Pathways* collaboration – consisting of the Southern Appalachian Highlands Conservancy (SAHC), Organic Growers School (OGS), and WNC Farmlink (WNCFL) – reports success as they near the end of a year-long project to develop capacity for farm production, business, and land access curriculum and resources. Over the past year, the three partners used grant funding from the U.S. Department of Agriculture National Institute of Food and Agriculture (USDA-NIFA) Beginning Farmer Rancher Development Program to grow programs that help beginning farmers in the Western North Carolina region start successful farm enterprises.

“We are thrilled with the results of this development year for *Farm Pathways*,” says Cameron Farlow, OGS’s Farmer Programs Director. “We are grateful for the opportunity the Beginning Farmer Rancher Development Program gave us to really dig into growing our capacity and partnership, and to establish cohesiveness between our programs.”

The team made significant progress in both individual and collective initiatives. Funding from USDA-NIFA Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program enabled the organizations to meet the following goals:

- 560 aspiring, beginning, and seasoned farmers received training in farm production, whole-farm business planning, and land access support.
- 49% were emerging or in-training farmers, 45% are beginning farmers meaning they have been running their farm business for 10 years or less.
- A combined 26 workshops and trainings were held across WNC.
- 10 new farmers are now in production.
- 137 new acres of land are in active agricultural production.



The funds helped the partners build the foundation for *Farm Pathways*, which will roll out as a comprehensive program in 2016. The USDA’s Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program provides grants to organizations for education, mentoring, and technical assistance initiatives for beginning farmers or ranchers.

“This grant provided critical support to enable us to develop the Beginning Farmer Incubator Program at our Community Farm in Alexander, NC, and to host a workshop series on varied topics, benefitting the greater farming community,” said Kristy Urquhart, SAHC’s Associate Director. “It also enabled us to

develop our enterprising “Buy-Protect-Farm” strategy of establishing beginning farmers on farms that have been purchased or protected with conservation easements.”

Some particularly noteworthy results of the project include:

- SAHC accepted three start-up farmers for 2015 into the incubator program and made significant infrastructure improvements to its Community Farm.
- SAHC closed on 5 agricultural conservation easements to protect over 300 acres.
- SAHC hosted 250+ visitors to the Community Farm including multiple school groups, partnering agencies, international students, local farmers and landowners.
- OGS’s “Barriers to Farming in WNC” Survey Report: A multi-faceted, three-part, research report was published August 2015 and includes a broad survey, one-on-one interviews, & a farmer focus group.
- OGS was accepted into the Farm Beginnings® Collaborative, a nationally recognized farm production and business planning program with a more than 79% success rate in keeping farmers on the land and creating systems in which farmers can flourish. OGS is now licensed to offer Farm Beginnings®.
- OGS developed and launched a pilot version of Farm Beginnings®, a year-long farmer training in October of 2015 with 14 farms & 24 farmers and 15 local farmer-presenters.
- WNCFL matched 6 farm seekers with land, predominantly leased or work-trade tenure.
- WNCFL provided one-on-one assistance to 150 farm seekers and 100 farmland owners.
- WNCFL provided 10 land access workshops across Western North Carolina.



In Western North Carolina the demand for locally grown food is at an all-time high. Yet, the retention and success rate of new farmers in the area has been low. Prospective farmers face many challenges, including access to land, capital, skills, support, and training. There is a strong need for assistance during the transition of new growers into owners of viable commercial operations.

“To support the sustainability and profitability of WNC farms we must rebuild a path to agriculture for new and expanding growers,” added Farlow. “The collaborative goal of the *Farm Pathways* partners is to meet the

needs of beginning farmers in our region so that they may create viable farm businesses.”

In order to achieve this goal and take the training to the next level, the *Farm Pathways* team has applied to the USDA for further support in the form of a three-year grant, to provide extended capacity as the project builds momentum in 2016. According to the USDA “Ensuring there will be a “new generation” of beginning farmers and ranchers—regardless of age or production choice—is especially important to the continuation of agricultural production in the United States.”

With such strong internal capacity, excellent momentum, region-wide support, as well as demand from local farmers, the *Farm Pathways* team is poised to move forward. The strength of partnership, as a whole, puts the organizations in a position to contribute significantly to provide education, mentoring, and technical assistance to give beginning farmers the knowledge, skills and tools needed to make informed decisions for their operations and enhance sustainability, something that is central to the mission of the Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program.

About Farm Pathways:

Farm Pathways: Access to Land, Livelihood, and Learning, is a whole-farm training and innovative land access program for new and aspiring farmers in Western North Carolina (WNC). This farmer training

program is being developed by three collaborative partners: Southern Appalachian Highlands Conservancy (SAHC), Organic Growers School (OGS), and WNC FarmLink (WNCFL). This team received a grant award from the USDA's Beginning Farmer Rancher Development Program (BFRDP) in 2015.

About Organic Growers School:

Organic Growers School is the premier provider of practical organic education in the Southern Appalachians. OGS is building a mutually supportive network of prosperous farmers, productive gardeners and informed consumers engaged in creating healthy communities. Founded in 1993, OGS Farmer Programs offer a variety of training opportunities for on-farm, experiential production training in sustainable & organic agriculture, and comprehensive, whole-farm business planning and management. For more info, visit Organicgrowersschool.org.

About Southern Appalachian Highlands Conservancy:

The Southern Appalachian Highlands Conservancy is a non-profit land trust, founded in 1974 to protect the natural treasures of the Highlands of Roan and surrounding areas. SAHC has protected over 69,000 acres of unique plant and animal habitat, clean water, farmland and places for outdoor recreation in the mountains of Tennessee and North Carolina. For more info, visit Appalachian.org.

About WNC Farmlink:

WNC FarmLink matches farm and forest land owners with new and experienced farmers eager to find land to farm in WNC. The program is a free service to WNC residents. WNCFL offers personalized one-on-one consultation, provides group workshops to help beginning farmers negotiate equitable leases and prepare logistically and financially for long-term land tenure and purchase, which is a major obstacle for beginning farmers. For more info, visit wncfarmlink.org