

Ally Meetings and Outreach: Executive Summary

July 3 & 11th, 2015

In June 2015, Organic Growers School hosted two regional ally input meetings with farmer support agencies within western North Carolina. The intention was to hold open sessions with experienced farmer support agencies as OGS develops a new comprehensive farmer training program. We had 15 organizations attend to give input and advice based on their expertise into what a farmer training program should look like and include in western NC.

The session included:

- An overview of what the mission and role of OGS is today and historically
- An introduction to Farm Pathways, including our new Farm Beginnings training program
- Asset mapping- a chance for each organization to share what services and support they offer farmers and at what stage in their farm development (new, beginning, established, mature). (*compiled separately)
- Open discussion of what a farmer training program in our region needs to include, challenges for success, what is missing in our region, and what are the most important things to teach
- Ongoing opportunities for involvement as the program begins

The main themes that emerged in these discussions focussed around creating a program that realistically presents farming today. What does success look like for a farmer today? This area historically and even today, has many farmers and others pursuing a multiplex livelihood, not relying on farming alone to provide their income. Many contributed that this is an important concept to start with - be realistic in your goals and encourage a stepped process to farming.

Community connections and mentoring were also considered to be highly valuable and necessary to successful farming and should be included and encouraged in a training program. This network would allow newer farmers a place to go with their questions and challenges as they begin to farm. This highlights another theme, the need for more clarity about where to go for information. There is an overwhelming amount of resources available, but many do not know which entity to go to for help. All of the ally organizations provide some services to farmers and we all stressed the need to communicate better about

what we do and share our resources with each other to better support the region's farming community.

Beyond these themes, many nuts and bolts ideas were discussed that a farmer training should include, such as:

- business planning and record keeping
- real farm experience and hands on training
- technical skills
- marketing and valuing products/ work
- adaptability
- land tenure issues
- farmlife sustainability- how to avoid burnout
- mentoring/networks
- a certificate for completing the program

The success of a farmer training program in our region would be measured by increased land in farming and the preservation of rural lands. This program would create a pool of skilled farm workers, managers and potential farm owners. Marketing opportunities and venues would be diversified and customer demand for local food increased. By stressing realistic goal setting and a stepped process to farming, newer farmers would have an increased likelihood of long term success, with built in networks for ongoing mentorship and advice.