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Midsummer Night's Feast

Farm to Table Extravaganza to benefit Local Organic Farming

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For Immediate Release

Midsummer Night's Feast—

Farm to Table Dinner Benefits Local Organic Farmers

Asheville, NC—The dream team of local food organizations including the French Broad Food Coop, Organic Growers School, Hickory Nut Gap Farm, Green Sage Café, RAD & West Asheville Tailgate Markets are partnering to announce the August 4th benefit to fund a project bringing bulk organic animal feed to WNC. The Midsummer Night's Feast is an organic, locally grown, farm to table extravaganza including a sit-down meal, film screening of the movie GMO OMG and a panel discussion featuring leaders of the local food community. The event will take place at the Hub, 278 Haywood Road, in West Asheville. Doors open at 5:30 with Mocktails & H'ors D'oeuvres, followed by the 6:30 showing of GMO OMG film, and at 8:00 by a three-course seated dinner & panel discussion. Tickets are \$40 and can be purchased at brownpapertickets.com. Event details here: <https://www.facebook.com/events/862492903764158/>

"This is an initiative by local businesses for local businesses," says Rebecca Friedman of Farmer's Daughter Catering who is the event coordinator. "It is a collection of local food leaders—farmers, restaurants, and resellers—talking about how to improve the quality of what's produced and sold in our region."

Prepared by a collaborative team of local chefs, the meal will feature fresh, local, organically grown produce, grass-fed meat, and artisanal breads. Every element of the evening is donated including the food, the cooks, and the panelists' time. The panel will consist of the following local food advocates:

- Tom Elmore of Thatchmore Farm and Co-Founder of West Asheville Tailgate Market
- Randy Talley, owner of Green Sage Café
- Jeremy Seifert, Director of GMO OMG

- Lee Warren, Organic Grower's School Representative from the French Broad Food Coop Management Team

Following the panel, which will take questions from the diners, breakout groups will discuss topics such as the process of certification, sourcing organic feed, labeling initiatives, farming cooperatives, funding, eco-tourism, and business opportunities.

The event was inspired by Friedman's challenges in sourcing local, organic meat for her catering business and the subsequent realization that organic feed is not accessible or affordable for small farmers in our region. Organic feed prices are often triple or more of conventional feed and farmers fear the market won't bear the prices of the products as a result. "I want to be able to run a fully organic catering business, because that's my business ethos. As a business owner and as a human, I'm standing for healthier and more sustainable choices. Sourcing local, organic animal feed is an achievable goal and this community has what it takes to make this happen," says Friedman. "We need a lower barrier to entry for anyone who wants to grow organically and still be profitable."

There are a handful of backyard and small farmers who already buy organic feed from either Countryside Organics near Staunton, VA or Reedy Fork Farm, near Winston-Salem, NC. Yet, in order to "do the right thing" small farmers are often subsidizing their customer's purchases out of their own pockets.

The event, geared specifically to the food community of farmers, artisans, restaurateurs, supermarket owners, tailgate managers, and enthusiastic consumers, is an opportunity to talk about practical and specific steps to creating a source for organic feed for animals here in WNC. Proceeds will be donated to Hickory Nut Gap Farm (HNGF), which is installing infrastructure in the form of large grain bins which can receive tractor trailer loads of organic grain, which in turn can be distributed to local producers. HNGF is poised to help create the kind of economy of scale that can help make organic grain regionally available.

Additional outcomes of the event may include:

1. Creating a more active, collaborative food community through business owners talking face-to-face.
2. Visioning the kind of interconnected web of food businesses that can help & support each other.
3. Helping farmers see that there is an enthusiastic market for organically raised animal products.
4. Furthering our joint goal of progressive food values and authentic ecotourism in the Asheville area.

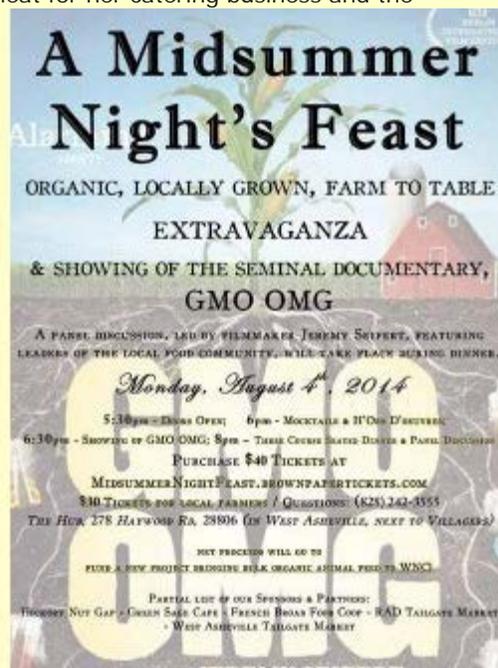
"It's really a question of investment," says Friedman. "I'd love to see an Organic Trade Association in Asheville that rallies the troops around this issue. They would help us lay out a vision for attracting the kind of residents, tourists, business, and leaders that cultivate, support, and inspire an organic region."

Local business-owners have a strong recent history in putting food on the map in our region and cultivating the relationship between producer and customer. Carolina Ground raised kickstart money to launch a campaign to support locally grown and milled wheat for WNC bakers; The Green Restaurant Initiative, which was a group of Asheville-area restaurant owners, created America's first green dining destination in Asheville; The WNC Cheese Trail offers tourists the opportunity to sample some of the best handmade cheese being made in our area as well as to connect directly with the cheese makers.

Friedman again: "When businesses get involved, they can solve problems creatively, because they come at it as a business problem, not a policy problem. And if these business owners happen to share the value system that the customers are asking for, it's just a matter of letting the solution happen. This event is one more example of how a collaborative model offers seeming competitors so much to gain by working together."

Event page: <https://www.facebook.com/events/862492903764158/?fref=ts>

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