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Organic Growers School Hires Nicole DelCogliano of Green Toe Ground Farm as Farmer Programs Associate

PRESS RELEASE

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For Immediate Release

Asheville, NC—Organic Growers School (OGS) is pleased to announce the hiring of their new Farmer Programs Associate, Nicole DelCogliano, who joined the OGS team in April of 2015. The position, funded by The Community Foundation of Western North Carolina, will support the creation and implementation of a comprehensive, regionally-informed farmer training curriculum in Western NC, called Farm Pathways—Access to Land, Livelihood, & Learning.

The Western NC region needs an influx of farming entrepreneurs in order to sustain and grow regional production. The organic foods market has grown to more than a \$35 billion national market and the demand for locally grown food is at an all-time high. Yet the average age of farmers in the US is 58 (Briefing on the Status of Rural America). In NC, over 70% of the farms are owned by farmers over the age of 55 and nearly two-thirds of those are over 65 (USDA 2012 COA).

If the retention and success rate of new farmers in our area is to increase, there needs to be assistance and training during the transition of new growers to viable agricultural business owners. “We know that the training and support needs of new farmers includes production training, whole-farm business planning, mentorships, peer-to-peer access, and sustained support through the start-up years,” says Cameron Farlow, the Farmer Programs Coordinator for OGS.

Yet in Western NC, we face these specific challenges:

- Currently, there are no comprehensive farmer training programs in WNC.
- Farmer training in our region is complicated by the confusion and crossover of regional organizations focused on farming, but with no accompanying roadmap for the student farmer to find his/her way. A program that encompasses the best practices of our regional allies is sorely needed.
- There have been no inclusive evaluations of new farmers in our region to assess their specific needs in achieving viable farm businesses. Nor has there been a cogent analysis of the successful farmers to assess the ingredients to a thriving and tenable life in agriculture.
- To our knowledge there has not been an assessment of functional farmer training programs nationwide with accompanying success rates, evaluations of curriculum, graduate statistics, and student satisfaction. This is an important step in crafting a program with maximum efficiency and successful outcomes.

In order to address farmer needs and resolve the above challenges, Organic Growers School is developing a program called *Farm Pathways: Access to Land, Livelihood, and Learning*, which is a whole-farm training and innovative land access program for new and aspiring farmers in Western North Carolina (WNC). This program is being developed along with two other collaborative partners: Southern Appalachian Highlands Conservancy and WNC FarmLink. This team received a grant award from the USDA's Beginning Farmer Rancher Development Program (BFRDP) to develop capacity

for creating the farm production, business, and land access curriculum and resources that beginning farmers in our region need to start successful farm enterprises.

The Farmer Programs Associate position was created to support the development of [Farm Pathways](#) through these key steps:

- Local Farmer Survey: The evaluation, through survey, of aspiring and new farmers in the WNC area to ascertain their obstacles, needs, and suggestions for an integrated training to start or expand farm businesses.
- Regional Asset Mapping: Assess and map the educational assets of our regional allies in the area of farmer training so that we may work together more effectively to train new farmers.
- National Curriculum Search: Conduct an assessment of replicable farmer training programs that have strong statistical backing, student references, curriculum data, and success rates. An analysis of the best national programs is crucial to a resourced approach.
- Strategic Participation: Participate strategically in the development of Farm Pathways in 2015.

"With these key steps, we will not just be 'filling in the gaps' of what's missing in farmer training, but creating a new farmer-inspired, collaboratively-driven, and nationally-informed training program of the broadest scope, substance, and merit," says Nicole DelCogliano, Farmer Programs Associate at Organic Growers School.

Farm Pathways will serve beginning and expanding farmers in the mountain counties of Western NC. Programming is open to farmers in surrounding Southern Appalachian states - Tennessee, Virginia, Georgia, South Carolina. Trainings will be inclusive of farmers of all ages, races, genders, experience levels, and production models.

The outcome of the Farm Pathways project is an increased number of successful beginning and expanding farmers in our area by providing a structure of training and land access that allows farmers to successfully build and grow long-term farm businesses.

"As a food and farming community it is crucial for us to identify the barriers to farming in our area in order to define and develop the best possible programs for overcoming them. Additionally, developing and building relationships between sustainable farming organizations is the only way to create more regional resilience, healthy interdependence, and a revitalization of our local food systems," says Lee Warren, the OGS Executive Director.

Nicole DelCogliano Biography

Nicole DelCogliano is a farmer, activist, writer, and grassroots organizer.

She is the owner and operator of Green Toe Ground Farm in Celo, NC where for 14 years she has managed, along with her husband, a 16-acre diversified organic and biodynamic farm. She was the Mountain Outreach Researcher for Clean Water for North Carolina, providing research, outreach and education in the mountain counties regarding hydraulic fracturing and water privatization and a Grassroots Organizer with the French Broad Member Accountability Project. Nicole has a bachelor of arts in anthropology and is a Masters of Arts in Appalachian Studies Candidate (Fall of 2015) at Appalachian State University with a thesis in Community Engagement in Shale Gas Development: A Foray into Sustainable Development in an Unsustainable Industry.



She is a member of the Golden Key International Honour Society 2014-present, Appalachian Studies Association 2013-present, and the Geological Society of America 2012- present. Nicole is professionally affiliated with Biodynamic Farmer Cooperative of Western N.C., The Biodynamic Association, Clean Water for N.C., Collaborative Regional Alliance Farmer Training (CRAFT), Carolina Farm Stewardship Association (Board member 2001-2002), and a member of many WNC Farmers Markets and farming organizations.

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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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