FY 2014

$83,229 to the Appalachian Sustainable Agriculture Project, Asheville, NC, to train farmers in conducting farm tours and promote agritourism in the Appalachian Region of North Carolina.

Final Report

Farmers Market Promotion Program (FMPP)
Final Performance Report

Report Date Range: *(e.g. September 30, 20XX-September 29, 20XX)*	September 30, 2014-September 29, 2016
Authorized Representative Name:	Charlie Jackson
Authorized Representative Phone:	828-236-1282
Authorized Representative Email:	charlie@asapconnections.org
Recipient Organization Name:	Appalachian Sustainable Agriculture Project
Project Title as Stated on Grant Agreement:	Appalachian Grown: Training and Networking to Build Successful Farm Tours and Farm Tourism
Grant Agreement Number: *(e.g. 14-FMPPX-XX-XXXX)*	14-FMPPX-NC-0106
Year Grant was Awarded:	2014
Project City/State:	Asheville, NC
Total Awarded Budget:	$83,229

FMPP staff may contact you to follow up for long-term success stories. Who may we contact?
☐Same Authorized Representative listed above (check if applicable).
XX Different individual: Name: Molly Nicholie ; Email: molly@asapconections.org ; Phone: 828-236-1282

State the goals/objectives of your project as outlined in the grant narrative and/or approved by FMPP staff. If the goals/objectives from the narrative have changed from the grant narrative, please highlight those changes (e.g. "new objective", "new contact", "new consultant", etc.). You may add additional goals/objectives if necessary. For each item below, qualitatively discuss the progress made and indicate the impact on the community, if any.

i. Goal/Objective 1: Develop new farm market opportunities and improve farm tourism experiences through farmer training and technical assistance

a. Progress Made: Through training and technical assistance specific to agritourism, ASAP helped develop new farm market opportunities and improved farm tourism experiences for farmers and visitors. More than half farmers trained indicated they would use the training to implement changes to improve the farm tour experience for visitors and increase farm sales. In 2016 survey results found that, 82% of farm tour visitors across all tours rated their experience as very good or excellent. Building on workshop and Learning Community feedback from year one, ASAP conducted spring farmer training/mock tours on farm tourism in the far west region and central mountains of Western North Carolina. The trainings were promoted to all farms in the region, with targeted outreach specifically to farms participating in the Jackson County, Polk County, and ASAP tours. Farm tour organizers and area agriculture professionals were also invited to provide them with the knowledge and resources to conduct trainings in the future. An additional farmer training was held in the high country region (comprised of 7 counties in the northern most region of Western North Carolina) in May 2016 that was led by Learning Community partners ASAP worked with to improve training in year one. Training resources including the Farm Tour and Agritourism Guide and agritourism liability signs

were made available to all tours and farms participating in training workshops. The Farm Tour and Agritourism Guide developed for this project has been very well received and is being used by farmers as a tool to assess whether agritourism is a good fit for their farm, expanding market opportunities, and improving visitor experiences on their farm. Farm tour coordinators scheduled and conducted site visits to assess new farms interested in being on tours and offer one-on-one assistance to farms in the region considering agritourism.

b. Impact on Community: Farmers in Western North Carolina learned best practices for farm tourism, and we are building the capacity of tour organizers and area agriculture professionals to offer assistance and tools to farms across the region. New farms interested in being on tours or participating in agritourism receive individualized assistance, tools, and resources to understand what they need to do to make their farms visitor ready and better access this farm market opportunity. The impact on community can be seen in the growing awareness of agritourism opportunities and the interest to participate and support local farmers. Awareness and interest is demonstrated in the number of special interest articles in local publications that discuss or promote agritourism, as well as the increasing number of farm visits seen on organized tours and individual farms.

ii. Goal/Objective 2: Develop a "Learning Community" to coordinate and collaborate with farm tour organizations to increase consumer access to local farm products and experiences

a. Progress Made: To achieve this goal ASAP partnered with organizers from four farm tours across the region to share strategies, resources, and lessons learned, as well as collaborating to develop new resources, promotions improve visitor experiences and connect with a wide range of consumers. ASAP conducted regular meetings of the Learning Community and applied feedback from the group to the promotions plan, training content, resources, and standardized evaluation tools. Findings and feedback from the first year's evaluation were incorporated into farmer tools and trainings, as well as shared with tour organizers. In year two, ASAP put systems in place to improve dissemination and follow-up for better evaluation response rates. Farmer and farm tour participant surveys were conducted for ASAP's Farm Tour, the Jackson County Farmers Market Farm & Garden Tour, the Polk County Farm Tour and the High Country Farm Tour. Data was analyzed, and a summary report was created and shared with Learning Community. The Learning Community gave feedback and input to help us better understand the impacts and effectiveness of farmer trainings and farm tour promotions and as we did this year, ASAP will continue to use that information to inform future farm tours and training. After all farm tours had been conducted for the year, we facilitated a Learning Community conference call to assess overall project activities and outcomes, and to develop a plan for moving forward. All Learning Community members communicated the value of the group and the project for their individual tours, as well as building interest in agritourism across the region, and agreed to participate in continued communications and conference call meetings over the next year. Project collaborators also expressed the value of, and need for continued, training and technical assistance and we will continue to include each other in training and resource opportunities moving forward. For shared promotions, ASAP has agreed to include a regional farm tour page as part of our community engagement website and will update information and share through our networks annually.

b. Impact on Community: The Learning Community has been very successful for both building a network of tours in the region to increase demand, but also to build capacity of tours in the region to be more successful. The group provided an important forum for discussing needs and strategies for improving training, technical assistance, resources, systems, promotions, and evaluation of tours across the region. Sharing systems and resources allowed the Learning Community to also act as a conduit for building the capacity of tours. For example, the High Country Farm Tour is primarily coordinated by an Americorps volunteer, who typically changes year to year. Rather than having a new coordinator start at square one each year, the High Country Tour was able to modify a detailed timeline for planning, recruitment, training and promotion shared by ASAP rather than trying to recreate an identical

resource. The Jackson County Farmers Market Farm & Garden Tour needed advice on implementing online ticket sales and the group was able to share the variety of options used across other tours. ASAP was able to work with them to implement a system that worked for their tour in 2016.

iii. Goal/Objective 3: Increase farm tourism and consumption of local farm products through development and implementation of farm tour promotions

a. Progress Made: Revising the farm tour promotion plan based on feedback from the Learning Community, ASAP updated promotion materials in year two (e.g., save the date magnets with the locations and dates of all farm tours, coordinated advertising, print advertising, etc.) and implemented the plan in regional publications and social media. Additionally, we also had the opportunity to include radio promotions as part of a weekly radio story series, Growing Local, that shared stories of farms on the tours and directed listeners to the fromhere.org website that include information on all tours in the region, including tours in Upstate SC and North Georgia. We promoted farm tour itineraries on ASAP's "trip planner" that was integrated into the online Local Food Guide website as part of the year two promotion plan and began dissemination of other updated promotional materials (e.g., magnets, ads, social media, radio/sound cloud, etc.). Farm tour promotions were included in ASAP's Local Food Guide (70,000 print copies) that reaches a regional audience including distribution points in more than 20 counties, area visitor centers, the Mother Earth News Fair (10,000+ attendees), the Asheville Regional airport, and included regional distribution through a local grocery store chain. Farm tour promotions were also included in special events and promotions for area farmers markets that highlight the farms that will be on various tours.

b. Impact on Community: A wide range of farm tour promotions increased the awareness of farm tourism options across the region and promoted local food and farm products to residents and visitors to the region. An increase in farm tourism and consumption is indicated by the increased number of farm visits and sales per farm over the course of the project.

2. Quantify the overall impact of the project on the intended beneficiaries, if applicable, from the baseline date (the start of the award performance period, September 30, 2014). Include further explanation if necessary.

i. Number of direct jobs created: Not applicable

ii. Number of jobs retained: 684 farmers have benefited from the project and will continue farming.

iii. Number of indirect jobs created: Not applicable

iv. Number of markets expanded: Based on farmer survey results, 102 farms reported an increase in visitor traffic and 78 farms reported increased sales at their farm. Because of farm tour cancellations in 2015 due to the threat of the highly pathogenic avian flu, we had insufficient data to include 2015 survey responses. In 2016, 91% of farmer survey respondents across all tours indicated they had increased public traffic on the farm tour and 70% indicated increased sales.

To calculate the increase in farm tour sales and customer traffic, we used available 2014 data as the baseline (because of insufficient 2015 data). Average reported farm sales increased by 45% from $1231 in 2014 to $1784 in 2016.

For the 2016 ASAP made the strategic decision to limit the number of farms on the tour. For 2016 there were 43% fewer farms than there were in 2014.

The total number of farm visitors did not increase from 2014 to 2016, but taking this in context of fewer farms participating, the average number of visitors per farm increased by 10%. Additionally the average visits per farm more than doubled, from 161 to 243, indicating that while there were fewer farms on the tour, on average individual customers visited more farms in 2016 than in 2014. Across the other three tours in the region we saw a 28% increase in visitors over the course of the project.

v. Number of new markets established: 39 new farms participated on farm tours in the region since the beginning of the project.
vi. Market sales increased by $insert dollars and increased by insert percentage%. N/A
vii. Number of farmers/producers that have benefited from the project: 684 farmers benefited from this project with 361 planning to implement changes to improve farm tour/agritourism experiences for visitors, and 383 planning to implement changes to increase sales of farm products through farm tourism.
   a. Percent Increase: Based on our post training survey results, 86% of the 684 of the farmers served have increased knowledge and skills relevant to hosting visitors on their farm.

3. Did you expand your customer base by reaching new populations such as new ethnic groups, additional low income/low access populations, new businesses, etc.? If so, how?
We expanded outreach and promotion of farm tourism and local food through this project, including distribution of Local Food Guides through a regional local grocery store chain and promotions at farmers market that accept SNAP/EBT to reach a broad range of customers. Specific indicators that show how many new populations may have been reached through these promotions are not available, as it was not a focus on this particular project.

4. Discuss your community partnerships.
i. Who are your community partners? The primary partners for this project have been Blue Ridge Women in Agriculture, Southern Appalachian Family Farms, Jackson County Farmer's Market, and Polk County Agricultural and Economic Development Center, representing communities in the far west, central mountain, foothills, and high country regions of Western North Carolina through the Learning Community. Other partners for outreach, training and resources included farmer's markets, Cooperative Extension, NCDA, Mountain BizWorks, Ward and Smith P.A., and NC Choices.
ii. How have they contributed to the overall results of the FMPP project? The Farm Tour Learning Community has been critical for increasing understanding of the needs of farmers in the region, exploring opportunities for collaboration, and identifying resources, training, and technical assistance needed to help farmers be more successful in their agritourism ventures. Over the course of the project the Learning Community convened in meetings, conference calls, trainings, and email communications to provide input and direction for collaborations, regional tour promotions, and resources and trainings developed for farmers engaged in farm tourism. The Learning Community provided invaluable information and direction for the project from start to end, and ensured that the diverse needs of farms and farm tour organizers in the region were understood and could be more effectively addressed. The other partners involved in this project played key roles in assisting with outreach, as well as training and resource development. Engaging community partners across government agencies, private businesses, NGOs and farm groups allowed us to offer a broad range of resources and knowledge, as well as build support networks for farms across the region.
iii. How will they continue to contribute to your project's future activities, beyond the performance period of this FMPP grant? Farm Tour Learning Community members have expressed their desire to maintain group communications and continue to convene in biannual meetings or conference calls to maintain a forum for support and collaboration. Group members also plan on opening future training and workshop opportunities for regional farmers and other farm tour organizers. We will continue partnering with government agencies, private businesses, NGOs, and farm groups on future and on-going projects to sustain a resource and a support network for farmers.

5. Are you using contractors to conduct the work? If so, how did their work contribute to the results of the FMPP project? We worked closely with a web developer to create the trip planner feature on our

website that farm visitors could use to help plan their route. Building on an existing database of local farms, web developers added the ability for users to select any number of farms to the trip planner which would in turn offer them optimal routes and a map for their trip. This trip planner was beta tested and feedback was incorporated before summer tours. While many farm tour visitors still rely on printed maps/guides, this online tool is available for farm tours as well as any visitor planning trips to local food and farm destinations across the region. Contractors also supported this project through assistance of Farm Tour Guide distribution during Q2 and Q3 of 2016. Working with an external contractor for this type of work made more efficient use of funds than, tapping into existing routes, rather than drawing on staff time.

6. Have you publicized any results yet?* Yes

i. If yes, how did you publicize the results? Results for this project included farmer tools and resources, as well as promotions. The Farm Tour and Agritourism Guide and other farmer tools have been published on our websites, as well as disseminated through farmer training, ASAP's newsletter, and the Farm Tour Learning Community. Farm Tours across the region were publicized in ASAP's Local Food Guides, advertising in local and regional publications, newsletters and websites, social media, magnets, radio and print farm stories, and farm tour guides.

ii. To whom did you publicize the results? Resources and tools were targeted primarily to farmers, farm tour coordinators, and Ag professionals in the Southern Appalachian Region. Farm tour promotions and the Trip Planner outreach was targeted to both residents and visitors to the region.

iii. How many stakeholders (i.e. people, entities) did you reach?

*Send any publicity information (brochures, announcements, newsletters, etc.) electronically along with this report. Non-electronic promotional items should be digitally photographed and emailed with this report (do not send the actual item). In addition to the 684 farmers served by this project, more than 100,000 consumers were reached through advertising and promotions in publications like *Blue Ridge Outdoors* whose readership is 110,000 and *WNC Magazine* whose readership is 78,000.

7. Have you collected any feedback from your community and additional stakeholders about your work?

i. If so, how did you collect the information? Feedback from community and additional stakeholders was gathered in an ongoing evaluative structure that enabled project collaborators to monitor project progress and modify activities as needed. This included evaluation with each training, farm and visitor surveys for each tour, as well as through Learning Community and 1:1 discussion.

ii. What feedback was relayed (specific comments)? Through the course of this project we found that there is both a need for shared resources and community specific customization for training and technical assistance. The farm tours participating in the Learning Community were diverse in structure, capacity and management, so initial feedback indicated the need for more established and structured tours to share resources such as planning timelines, promotion plans and training strategies. Moving forward in the project we heard that these tools were helpful guides, but modifications were needed for tours with less capacity. For example, the Jackson County farm tour was coordinated by a farmer's market manager with limited time and support to implement the event. While other tours were looking at training and resources to help farmers make the most of tours, improving visitor experiences and maximizing marketing opportunities, Jackson County needed a training that engaged farms in the idea of agritourism and built buy in for why they should be part of a tour. ASAP's ongoing evaluative structure enabled us to share resources across diverse communities, while also customizing them to fit multiple levels of farmer engagement and capacity.

Following each of the agritourism trainings, participants were asked to complete a survey about their experience at the training and how they plan to use the information they learned. From these surveys,

we learned that participants felt that the trainings were informative, relevant, and useful. One participant shared that they "had no idea what to expect but [the training] was far more helpful than [they] had anticipated." When asked how much information they knew about the topics covered in the training before attending, only 35% of participants indicated that they knew "a great deal" or "a lot". After the training however, 93% of participants indicated that they knew "a great deal" or "a lot" about the topics covered. Participants planned to use the information presented in a variety of ways to improve visitors' farm tour experience. This includes improving safety at their farm, offering a self-guided tour, and sharing their farm story with visitors. According to one farmer, "the workshop encouraged me to develop ideas for our visitors." Another farmer shared that they plan to use the information "in crafting how [they] design and manage [their] tour." We also asked participants about their ideas for how the trainings can be improved. We heard that participants would have preferred for the trainings to be longer and include more real-life examples of how farmers are presenting their farms on regional farm tours. Overall, participants were pleased with the trainings and walked away with specific ways in which they plan to use the information that they learned and the resources that they were provided with to improve farm tour experiences for visitors.

8. Budget Summary:

i. As part of the FMPP closeout procedures, you are required to submit the SF-425 (Final Federal Financial Report). Check here if you have completed the SF-425 and are submitting it with this report: yes XX

ii. Did the project generate any income?

a. If yes, how much was generated and how was it used to further the objectives of the award? $21,290 was generated in ticket sales and sponsorship for ASAP's 2016 Farm Tour. These funds were used to cover staff time, printing and promotions for the central mountains farm tour. These funds support the objectives of this award in building a successful farm tour in the central mountain, as well as raising awareness and driving demand for local food and farm products across the region. Income generated in ticket sales for ASAP's 2015 Farm Tour were refunded due to cancellation of the tour due to the threat of the highly pathogenic avian influenza. $6,630 in sponsorship was used in 2015 to cover staff and printing costs incurred before the tour was canceled.

9. Lessons Learned:

i. Summarize any lessons learned. They should draw on positive experiences (e.g. good ideas that improved project efficiency or saved money) and negative experiences (e.g. what did not go well and what needs to be changed).

a. <u>Benefits and challenges of working with a diverse range of Farm Tours:</u> Working with multiple partners in the region has been a valuable shift of approach and perspective, focusing on ways in which we can collaborate to leverage our impact as a whole rather than compete for visitors. The initial convening of farm tour organizations set the stage to establish a strong working relationship, with identified challenges as well as opportunities, to develop a proactive plan for collaboration. The group convened multiple times, sharing valuable experiences and input, which directed our development of shared resources and trainings to meet group member needs, and the diverse needs of farms in the region.

This Learning Community had a wide range of tour structures represented as well as organizational capacity, ranging from more informal small tours coordinated by volunteers to multi-county tours with an application process and established training for farms. This diversity of tours is part of what makes this project and Learning Community so valuable, but it also proved hard to engage everyone equally and get full participation throughout the project. The

mix of tour organization and capacity was also a challenge for data collection and evaluation. In year one, we identified several communication and resources barriers that resulted from working in a group with partners with limited staffing and resources, and devised strategies for working more effectively with partners especially around data collection, technical assistance, and communicating with farmers. We worked 1:1 with partners to plan and implement strategies to improve data collection methods for surveys of farmers and farm tour goers, leading to increases in the amount of overall tour data we received in year two. Despite improved systems and implementing a standardized evaluation methods, turnover of tour coordinators and lack of farmer buy-in for evaluation resulted in inconsistent and incomplete data impeding our ability to to analyze consistent measures over multiple years. The support of ASAP's Local Food Research Center allowed us to draw on the consistent data from ASAP's Tour (the largest in the region) to evaluate the impact of this project. Moving forward we will continue to offer technical assistance to other tours who see the value of standardized evaluation for the development and improvement of their tours.

b. A two year project provided the opportunity to determine most effective plan for regional promotions: During the first convening of the Farm Tour Learning Community members provided recommendations for a plan to promote farm tours across Western North Carolina. This plan consisted of ideas for cross-promotional materials including ads, posters, postcards, and magnets to identify and market tours across the region. A look and brand for "Western North Carolina Farm Tours" was created, and that spring promotional materials were produced and given to group members to distribute. Custom ads were also placed in each tour group's local newspaper using the regional farm tour look.

   At the end of year one, the group provided feedback on the effectiveness of the promotional plan, and expressed that it was confusing to promote both the regional tours and each group's individual tour in the same publications and locations, since each tour had their own tour brand and look. We took the group recommendation in year two to concentrate ads in select regional publications and nearby cities, streamline promotional efforts with one "save the date" handout (a magnet with tour dates), and expand social media and radio promotions. We also modified our distribution plan of the tour magnets to focus on events, visitor centers, and places targeting tourist audiences. The two year project enabled the group to test and evaluate promotions in year one, and determine what was most effective for the second year of the project.

c. Pros and cons to technology tools: The timeframe of this project also allowed us the time to develop and test an online "Trip Planner". We were able to build this tool into ASAP"s existing Local Food Guide, to be used for any tours in our region or for any combination of local food and farm destinations. While Internet and technology tools are becoming more popular, we found that many tour goers still rely on printed maps. While some of this may be due to spotty cell service is some rural areas, some of it may also be what visitors find most comfortable. Promotion of this tool is another opportunity for raising awareness of farm tours in the region, but it can also be lost in the increasing number of web tools and did not seem to attract as much attention as printed farm tour guides distributed throughout the region. We plan to continue to promote and improve the Trip Planner for future tours and hope it becomes one of many ways to expand the reach of agritourism across a variety of audiences.
d. Including experiential and networking components as part of training: While this project included classroom training sessions about agritourism as part of a larger conference in 2015 and 2016, we found participants reported the most value in training which included experiential and

networking components. The on-farm half day training session offered as part of our 2015 Business of Farming Conference sold out early in the registration process and evaluation of the workshop showed that the networking and sharing between farms was one of the main highlights for participants. Many participants cited the value of learning from other farmers, and getting "a farmer's perspective" on the challenges and opportunities of opening your farm to the public. While the feedback on other more traditional classroom sessions was also positive, the questions and discussion that come from on-farm mock tours (including the spring and summer farm tour trainings both years) seem to be worth the extra logistics. In addition to general logistics (weather, location, facility, etc.) it was challenging to cover the wide range of content in addition to the hands on and networking elements of the on-farm tour. Planning future training ASAP will most likely offer half day workshops, and/or a series in order to both cover the wide range of topics, from logistics and liability to marketing and cross promotion, as well as incorporate experiential and networking components. One training opportunity that is often overlooked is farm tours themselves. For farms considering agritourism we often recommend attending farm tours and exploring other agritourism activities themselves. These experiences, in combination with resources such as the questions and checklists in our Farm Tour and Agritourism Guide, can be a valuable training and readiness evaluation tool. Moving forward we are looking at the potential of adding a farmer tour component to our existing tour weekend, building training into an existing event.

e. Learning Community provided a network of support and continuity staff transitions: Over the course of this project all four of our Learning Community partners experienced changes in staffing and oversight of their farm tours. Most of these were anticipated shifts, as several of our group members relied on seasonal help through AmeriCorps volunteers, contracted employees, and part-time market managers to coordinate their tours. While staff changes presented minor delays for the Learning Community in our planning and communications, the continuity of the group as a whole provided a focused network of support during those transition periods. Additionally, they shared resources and tools helped ease the learning curve that often comes with staff changes, including templates for planning and promotion timelines and standardized evaluation tools. The group was able to fairly quickly assimilate new members and incorporate them into collaborations and activities. The role of a consistent point person for overseeing the Learning Community however should also be noted. ASAP performed this role from the start to the end of the project, and kept the group on task with meeting our goals. From this experience, our recommendation is that a Learning Community establish a consistent point person to oversee group communications and activities between meetings, and help orient new members during turnover periods.

f. Community specific strategies and resources: One of the goals of convening with organizations that coordinate farm tours across the region was to assess current barriers for expanding agritourism and marketing opportunities for farmers, and to devise strategies and resources for addressing some of those barriers. Initial discussions revealed common challenges around time and resource limitations of tour organizers, as well as a need for outreach and promotions strategies, farmer training and straightforward evaluation tools. The group made recommendations for a collaboration plan for cross-promotional materials, farmer trainings, marketing/agritourism resources and standardized evaluation tools. Through the course of year one of the project, we realized that while the resources and tools created were valuable for all tours, smaller tours were not able to fully utilize them due to barriers around limited volunteer coordinators, minimal community use of technology, geographic constraints (farms being too spread out/distance from population centers of potential visitors), and a lack of buy-in from farmers less familiar with direct marketing or agritourism opportunities. As a

result, the Southern Appalachian Family Farm and Jackson County tours did not have the capacity to effectively disseminate materials, gather evaluation data or improve tour experiences for farms or visitors. Subsequent meetings were used to delve more deeply into barriers and strategize ways to better support small, more rural tours. One lesson learned from this project is there is not a "one size" fits all model for farm tours, and multi-farm tour models are not always a good fit for every community. Customizing farmer resources, training and agritourism activities based community resources, opportunities and capacity is critical for expanding agritourism in small rural communities.

ii. If goals or outcome measures were not achieved, identify and share the lessons learned to help others expedite problem-solving: While we were able to meet the overall goals and outcomes for this project the cancellation of the ASAP and Polk Farm Tours in 2015 due to the threat of the Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) had a significant impact on our project data, as well as our lessons learned. The decision to cancel the tours was a very difficult one, in that it resulted in the loss of income for both the coordinating organizations (who had already expended staff time, printing and promotions) and potential income for participating farms. This issue was a wake-up call for the impacts that biosecurity can have on agritourism and agriculture in general and we worked diligently to turn this into an educational opportunity to inform farmers and the general public about HPAI, how it might affect farms in our region, and what we can do to continue supporting local farms. Many variables are present with any agricultural business and agritourism is no different. Understanding potential risks for agritourism ventures is important in assessing its potential as a market opportunity for farms. Educating farmers about these potential risks and variables, as well as staying up to date on new issues affecting farms is an important role that support organizations can play moving forward. ASAP prides itself in our ability to deliver high quality programming and impactful farm to consumer connections, but also in our ability to adapt and respond to issues and education where needed.

iii. Describe any lessons learned in the administration of the project that might be helpful for others who would want to implement a similar project: Learning Communities are a great forum and tool for resource sharing, support, and collaboration but do require time, commitment of members, and an appointed member or members to oversee its operation. During busier periods many group members understandably became difficult to reach and dropped off for periods of time. The success and continuation of the Learning Community depended on a point person (in this case ASAP) to keep the project on track, and to follow up with group members for scheduling, activities, evaluation. It would be a beneficial strategy to have appointed roles within a Learning Community to keep members on track.

10. Future Work:

i. How will you continue the work of this project beyond the performance period? In other words, how will you parlay the results of your project's work to benefit future community goals and initiatives? Include information about community impact and outreach, anticipated increases in markets and/or sales, estimated number of jobs retained/created, and any other information you'd like to share about the future of your project. Moving forward we plan to continue communications with our Farm Tour Learning Community and conduct conference calls at the beginning and end of the farm tour season in the winter and late summer. We will also maintain a shared web page to promote regional farms tours and leverage opportunities to promote tours across the region. Technical trainings and networking opportunities, such as our agritourism marketing workshops and Business of Farming Conference, will be open to farms across the region. Resources created through the project, including an agritourism and farm tour guide, have been posted online at asapconnections.org and are now being shared through Learning Community members to farms and partners both electronically and in printed formats. We plan to create an additional resource for farm tour organizers on best practices

for coordinating farm tours with guidelines on choosing the best model of agritourism for your community. We anticipate that with increased technical assistance and resources for farmers, networking opportunities through events such as the Business of Farming Conference and mock farm tours, more farms will be able to diversify and grown through agritourism. Farms that diversify revenue streams through agritourism may increase their farm's exposure, customer traffic, product sales, and build a greater network of supporters

ii. Do you have any recommendations for future activities and, if applicable, an outline of next steps or additional research that might advance the project goals? One of the deliverables of the project was to create a farm tour resource and curriculum for farmers and farm tour organizers on hosting successful farm tours. We have determined that a complimentary resource on "best practices of coordinating a farm tour in your community" would be an important resource for new and current groups planning to organize farm tours. This resource will help tour organizers assess their goals and capacity for hosting a farm tour, and plan, implement, and evaluate their tours. The resource will contain an appendix of sample templates including planning timelines, participant applications, marketing plans, workshop formats for mock farm tours, and evaluation instruments. We plan to finish and publish this resource for distribution at ASAP's Business of Farming Conference in February, 2017, and to share with the Learning Community members as they go into planning for their 2017 farm tour seasons.

Table of Contents for Supporting Documents
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Section 1: Sample advertisements for ASAP 2016 Farm Tour

- 2016 Farm Tour Magnet
- *WNC Magazine* Best Bet and advertisement

The advertisement that was used in the *WNC Magazine* was also run in *Blue Ridge Outdoors* and *Plough to Pantry.*

- *Food Life* magazine

Section 2: Farm Tour Articles

- *Capital at Play:* Agritourism in Appalachia
- *Tryon Daily Bulletin:* Polk Fresh Farm Tour to Show Visitors Connections Between Consumer and Grower
- *Asheville Citizen Times:* ASAP's Farm Tour Showcases Local Agriculture
- *Mountain Xpress:* Sunburst Chef and Farmer Pairs Aquaponics, Microgreens
- *Plough to Pantry:* ASAP's Farm Tour Spotlights Fertile Agriculture Scene

Section 3: ASAP Farm Tour and Agritourism Guide

2016 Mountain Farm Tours

High Country Farm Tours
June 18, July 16, August 13
farmtour.brwia.org

PolkFresh Farm Tour
June 25
polkcountyfarms.org

ASAP's Farm Tour
June 25 & 26
asapconnections.org

Jackson County Farm Tour and Garden Walk
July 23 & 24
jacksoncountyfarmersmarket.org

APPALACHIAN GROWN LOCAL FOOD Certified by Asap

Choose Your Own Farm Adventure in Western North Carolina.
Find a farm tour near you at *fromhere.org*

BEST BET

ASAP Farm Tour

JUNE 25 & 26 » MULTIPLE COUNTIES

Normally held in the fall, Appalachian Sustainable Agriculture Project's annual Farm Tour is a chance to meet the region's farmers, taste their offerings, and learn how food is grown and raised. About 25 farms in Buncombe, Madison, and McDowell counties are participating. Go online to download a map for this self-drive tour.

» *Locations vary; Saturday & Sunday, noon-5 p.m.; $40 per carload, $30 advance; (828) 236-1282; www.asapconnections.org*

WNC Magazine
May - June 2016

Mountain
Farm Tours
APPALACHIAN GROWN
LOCAL FOOD
Certified by Asap
Choose Your Own Farm Adventure
Explore our beautiful mountain landscapes and learn about the rich agricultural heritage of Western North Carolina.
Find a farm tour near you at fromhere.org.

Asap's farm tour
Visit family farms in WNC
Saturday & Sunday
June 25-26, 12-5 pm
$30 weekend carload pass
available at asapconnections.org
0004698941

Daniel Klein
Seriously Amped *p.12*

Clark Harris & Matthew Simpson
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CAPITAL at PLAY

The Free Spirit Of Enterprise

FINANCIAL COLUMN
Young Money p.74

LOCAL INDUSTRY
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VIDEO INTERVIEW
WITH EAST FORK
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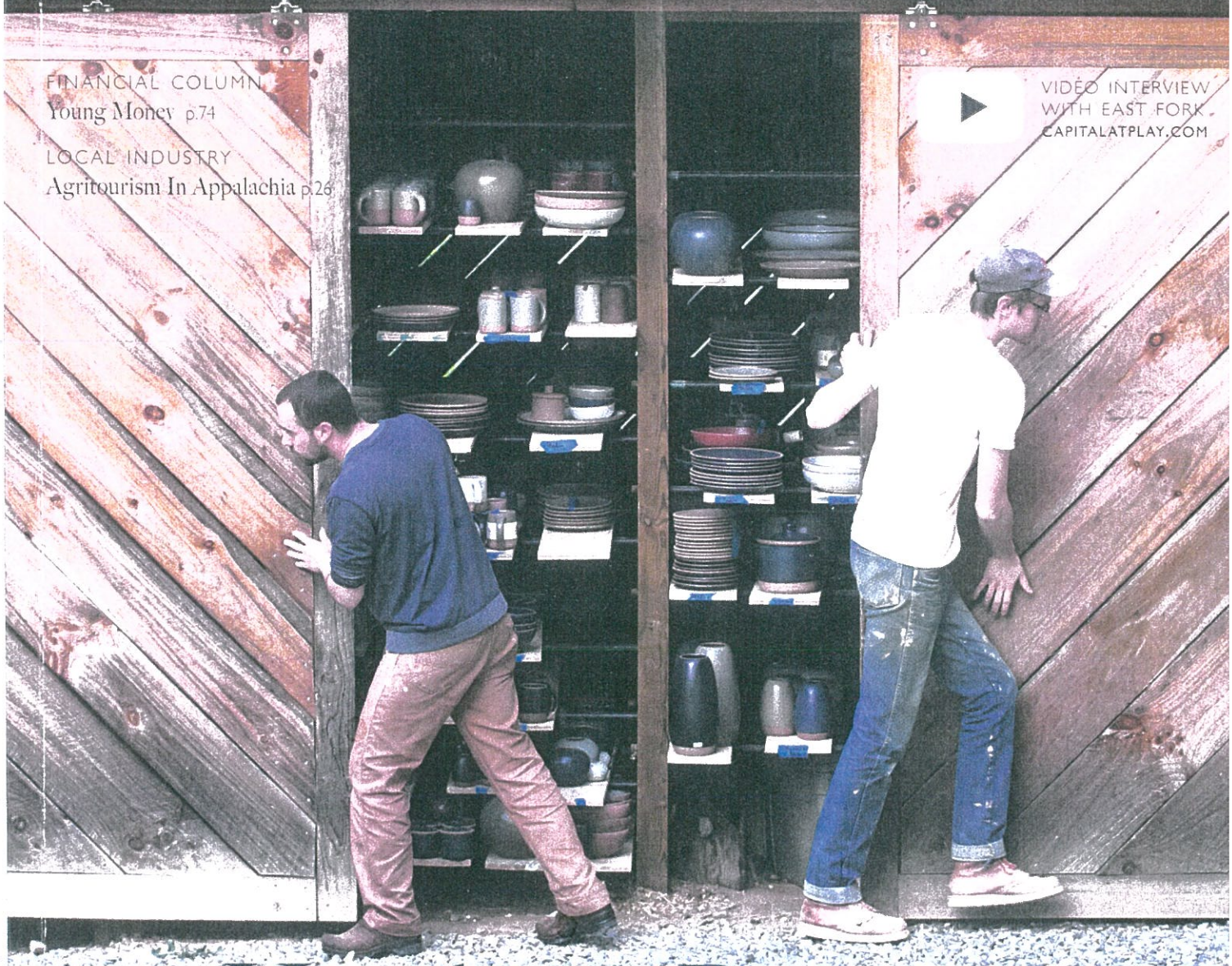
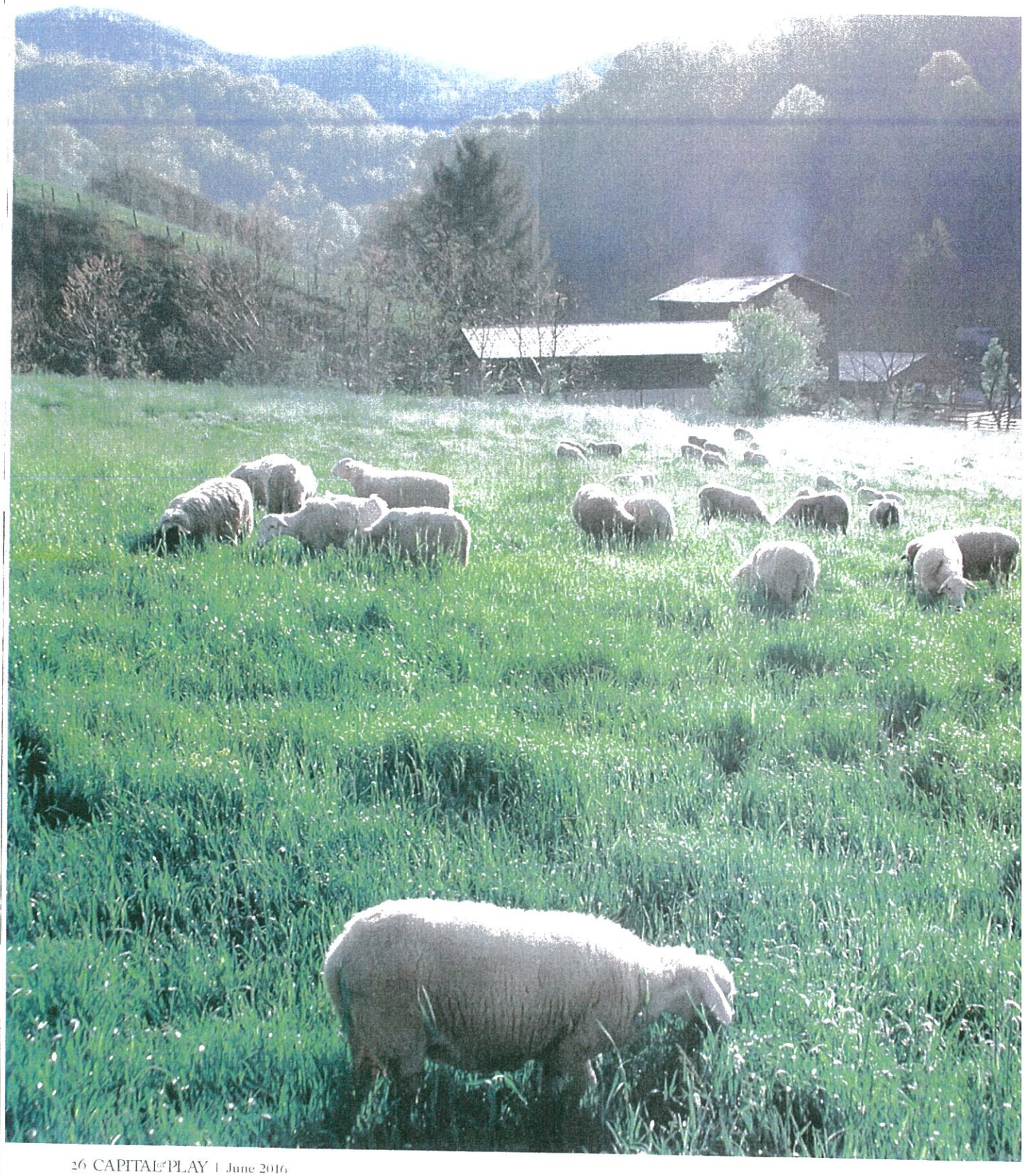


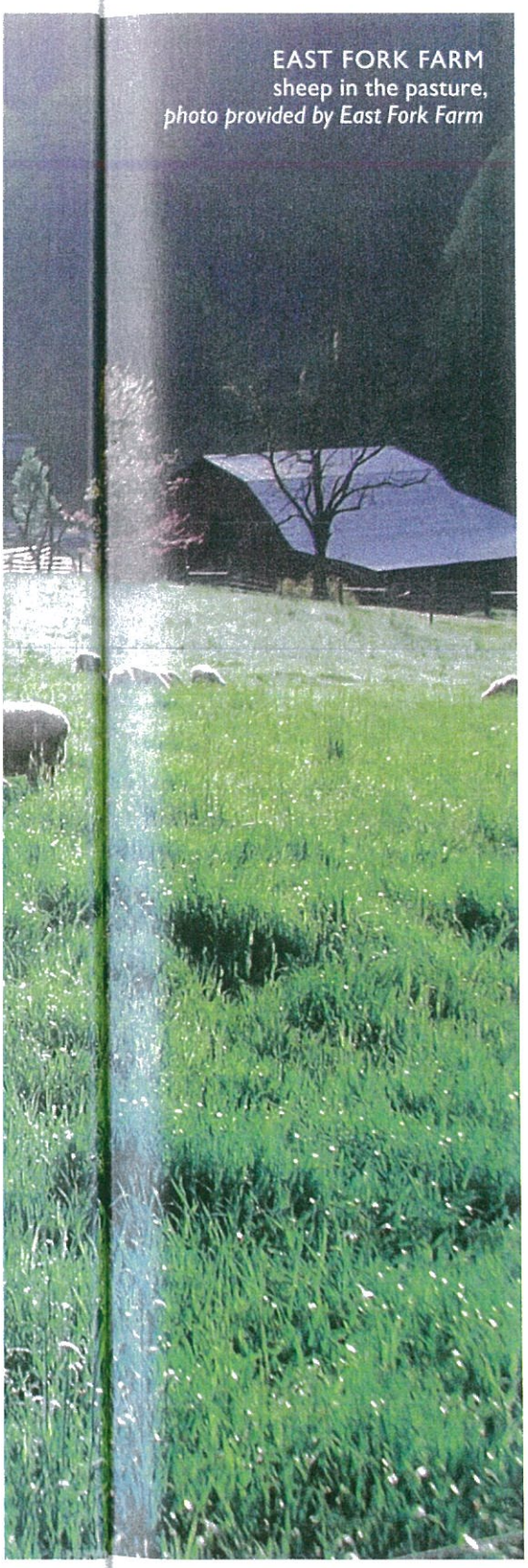
Hands on Business p. 52

WITH EAST FORK POTTERY

Volume VI - Edition VI
COMPLIMENTARY EDITION
capitalatplay.com

June 2016



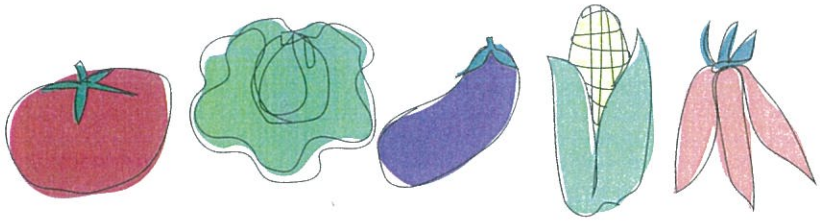


EAST FORK FARM
sheep in the pasture,
photo provided by East Fork Farm

AGRITOURISM IN APPALACHIA

Get Out of the Restaurant & Onto the Land

WRITTEN BY JENNIFER FITZGERALD



Farming is not for the faint at heart. It is a day that begins before the sun rises and ends after dark. It is hard work tending animals and planting and harvesting crops. It is a challenging but, ultimately, a rewarding experience for farmers across Western North Carolina.

Many of these farmers open their farms for tours, realizing the public has a growing interest in local and fresh meats, fruits, and vegetables. People want to meet the farmers, and ask questions of them. Children love to see the animals up close and personal—a fun outing for *all* ages.

"Farm tours are incredibly popular now because there is this increasing awareness and interest in wanting to know where your food comes from," says Ariel Dixon, Farmland Preservation Coordinator for Buncombe Soil and Water Conservation. "Creating the opportunity for people to actually step onto the land, meet a farmer, and see where fresh local food is produced is an incredible experience to connect people with the understanding of the importance of local food, local farms, and farmland."

ASAP Tour 2016

Saturday and Sunday, June 25 and 26, is a perfect time to visit some local farms as Appalachian Sustainable Agriculture Project (*ASAP*) hosts its annual farm tour. ASAP is an Asheville-based nonprofit with a mission to help local farms thrive, link farmers to markets and supporters, and build healthy communities through connections to local food. ASAP has been hosting the tour since 2009, and it typically draws over 2,000 attendees each year.

2016 ASAP Farm Tour

June 25 & 26

PARTICIPATING FARMS

MADISON

- Dry Ridge Farm
- East Fork Farm
- Spinning Spider Creamery
- Zimmerman's Berry Farm

LEICESTER

- Sunburst Chef and Farmer at Smith Mill Works
- Addison Farms Vineyard
- Farm House Beef
- Reeves Home Place Farm

SANDY MUSH

- Lady Luck Flower Farm
- Full Sun Farm
- Long Branch Environmental Education Center

EAST

- Hop'n Blueberry Farm
- Round Mountain Creamery
- Farm Fresh Ventures
- Vandele Farms on Cedar Creek

CANDLER

- Smoking J's Fiery Foods
- Venezia Dream Farm

FAIRVIEW

- Cane Creek Creamery
- Flying Cloud Farm
- Hickory Nut Gap Farm

For more information and farm locations, visit Asapconnections.org

photos above courtesy ASAP

photo provided by East Fork Farm

ASAP is currently selling passes for the tour—$30 in advance (at *asapconnec tions.org*) or $40 at farms the days of the tour. One pass admits an entire carloa at all the featured farms on both days of the tour. Cost to visit an individual farr is $15.

"ASAP hosts the farm tour to connect consumers with their local food producers to raise awareness about farming and local agriculture practices, and to promot local farms and provide them with a valuable marketing opportunity to increas sales and build new customer relationships," says ASAP's Development Directo Scott Bunn. "Ultimately, ASAP wants people to be engaged with the food syster and know where their food is coming from, and the farm tour is a great way t provide people with a truly fun local food experience."

All the farms on the tour are Appalachian Grown certified by ASAP, whic means they are family-owned farms producing food in the Southern Appalachia Mountains. Participating farms have common goals to provide education on loc agricultural practices, build their customer base, generate new revenue option and connect people to their food, farms, and the agricultural heritage of the regio

In addition, the farms on the tour will be selling products, and a number wi have meals available for purchase. Farms are grouped together geographically, wit clusters in Candler, Fairview, East, Leicester, Sandy Mush, and Madison County

Here is a look at a few of the featured farms. Directions to the farms and mo information is available at Asapconnections.org

East Fork Farm

East Fork Farm, located in Madison County, is home to chickens, turkeys, rabbit sheep, cows, fish, pigs, ducks, a donkey, and a waterwheel to drive a small gristmi The farm, owned by Stephen and Dawn Robertson, was the old Buckner farm th

grew predominantly tobacco. The Robertsons own 40 acres of the original 100. They sell their products at the North Asheville Tailgate Market and the YMCA Indoor Winter Tailgate Market.

"Stephen and I have been farming for 20 years and have slowly put together our little piece of heaven in Madison County," Dawn says. "We start our day with feeding at 7AM. All animals are fed, watered, and checked upon. This task usually takes about an hour and half in the morning. After that, we grab breakfast and start barn cleaning. Projects follow. On any particular day this might consist of processing chickens, touring cottage guests, cleaning cottages, fence mending, weed eating—the list goes on and on. Finishing up the day, we check on all of the animals again and close the chicken nesting boxes. After dark, our chicken barn doors are closed, brooder lamps turned on, and the chicken nesting boxes are opened and ready for the chickens in the morning."

The ASAP tour is the only time that East Fork Farm is open to the public. At other times, they reserve farm tours exclusively for their cottage guests. Details: *Eastforkfarm.net.*

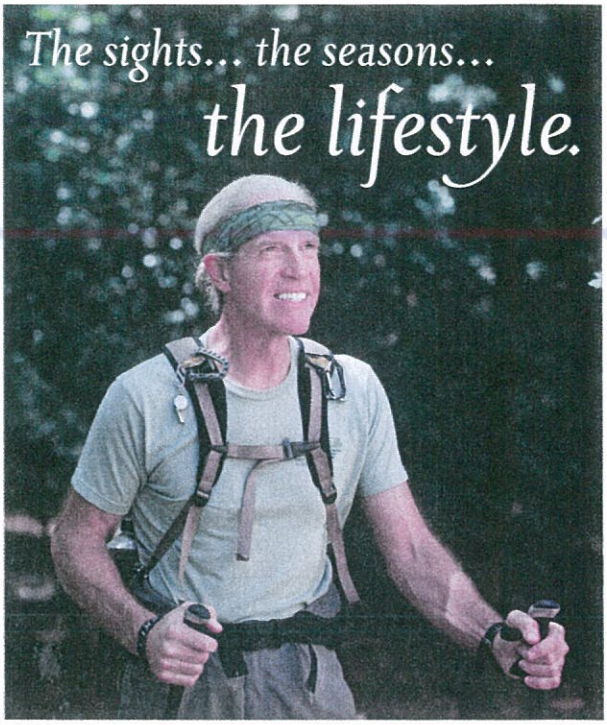
photo provided by East Fork Farm

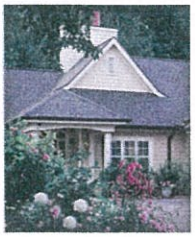
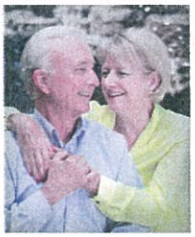
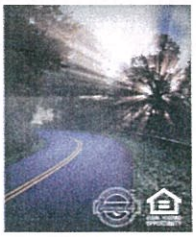
Zimmerman's Berry Farm

Zimmerman's Berry Farm is a 70-acre, pick-your-own berry farm in Madison County—black raspberries, blackberries, and blueberries. Hay and some vegetables are also grown.

Owner Pam Zimmerman has been farming in Madison County all of her life. She grew up on a mountain tobacco farm riding the work horse as her father and grandfather plowed tobacco.

"Zimmerman's Berry Farm is located on my late husband's family farm that we bought in the early 1990s," she says. "It was a traditional tobacco farm until we began the berry farm in 1999. Burley tobacco has been the traditional cash crop that was grown for many years in our area. There were a lot of issues that caused tobacco to no longer be profitable: the



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ending of government price subsidies, increased need to add chemicals to combat disease in plants, inability to hire field labor. Berries are something that can be done without hiring help; there's a growing interest in local food; there's not the tremendous amount of heavy lifting that's required with tobacco; and berries smell a lot better.

"We do pick your own berries beginning mid-June through August. Some are tourists coming to visit the mountains, but most are return customers who bring their families and come back year after year to pick berries."

Zimmerman's Berry Farm will open for the season in mid-June. Details: *Zimmermansberryfarm.com.*

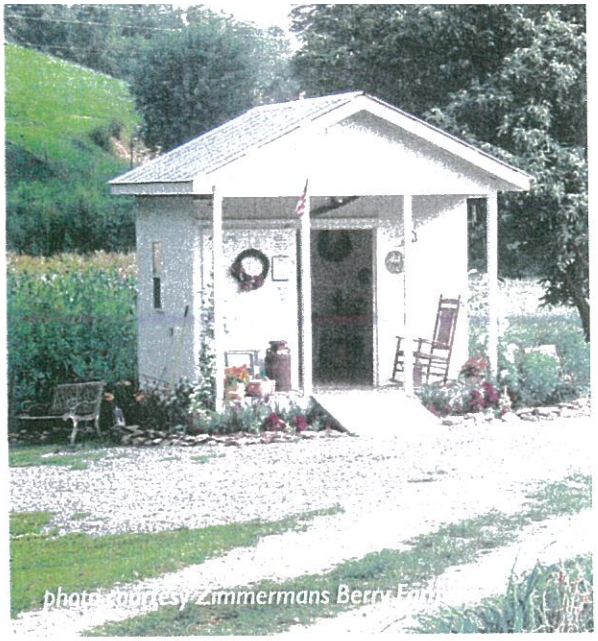


photo courtesy Zimmermans Berry Farm

> "We want to educate people about what farmers do and about how important the land and water are to our livelihood. We want people to understand what it takes to get you the food you eat."

photo provided by Reeves Home Place Farm

Reeves Home Place Farm

Robin Reeves is the seventh generation on his 180-acre family farm in Leicester. Visitors to the Reeves Home Place Farm will meet the cows and poultry, learn the history of the farm, and visit the green house and hydroponic operation.

"We have a long history of being in the same community farming the same land as our forefathers, which is an honor," Reeves says. "The house we live in was built before the Civil War. We want to educate people about what farmers do and about how important the land and water are to our livelihood. We want people to understand what it takes to get you the food you eat."

Reeves sells his products at his farm store, the Asheville City Market South, East Asheville Market, and Trust General Store in Spring Creek.

"The hardest part of farming has to be losing an animal that you have worked so hard to save," Reeves says. "The most rewarding thing is to watch things grow and thrive whether it be animals, plants, or people."

At times other than the ASAP farm tour, call *828 231 2390* or email *reeveshomeplace@aol.com* to make an appointment for tours.

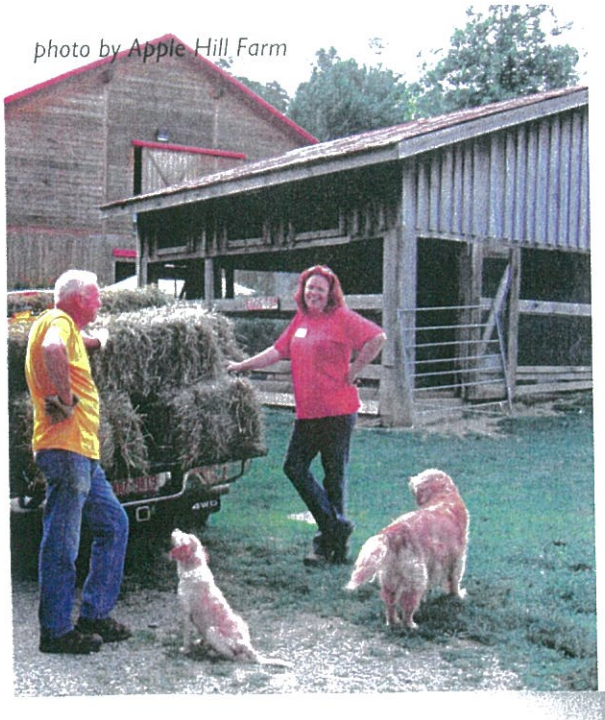
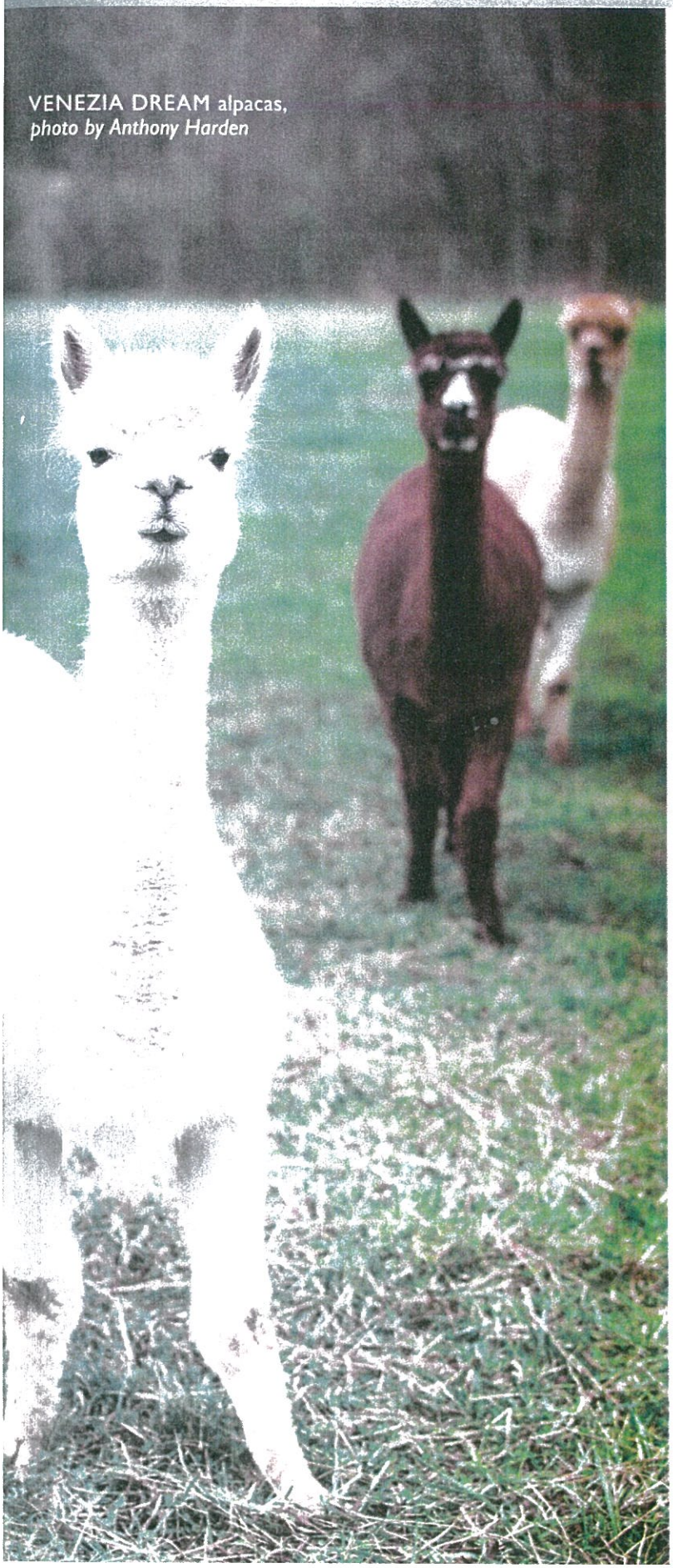


photo by Apple Hill Farm



VENEZIA DREAM alpacas, *photo by Anthony Harden*

Venezia Dream Farm

Venezia Dream Farm is micro— four acres total, only two acres in pasture. Starr Cash's Candler farm is home to "Happy Healthy Alpacas."

"Alpacas are very easy livestock to take care of, and I've planned my farm layout to make my daily care chores as easy as possible," Cash says. "It's my pleasure to spend time with them every single day. That's my way of making sure they are in good health. As long as they have grass or hay to eat and clean water to drink, they don't need a whole lot of personal care on a daily basis."

Cash has a small store at the farm featuring items she creates from the alpaca fibers. She also sells a few things at Asheville NC Home Crafts in the Grove Arcade in downtown Asheville.

The most rewarding day at Venezia Dream Farm is Shearing Day. The alpaca coats come rolling off like a 2-to-4-inch thick blanket as the shears float over their body.

"And they love it when they stand up and they are 10 pounds lighter than they were just 10 minutes before," Cash says. "It's my harvest day and it's a hard work day, but it's a huge amount of fun, too."

Every private tour includes going into the pasture or barn to spend some quality time with the alpacas. Cash says they are not camera shy and love to pose for pictures. In addition, visitors will tour the fiber studio where they see "Farm to Fashion," an explanation or demonstration of each step in the process of taking fiber from the alpaca to finished fabric.

"It used to be people weren't all that interested in how clothes are made or where they came from," Cash says. "Cheap and disposable 'fast fashion' was all anyone wanted. Now, I find that more people are looking for fabrics and products that are well-made and will have a long useful life. They want items made of high quality materials and that were made in a way that is ethical for both people and the planet."

Cash opens her farm to visitors to not only sell her products but also to share her passion for life.

"I care about our planet and I think I have things to say about how we can do better than we have done," she says. "I want to inform and entertain people. I want them to purchase something from my store that is going to give them pleasure for a long time. I want them to turn to each other in the ear after they leave my farm and say, 'Wasn't that amazing?'"

At times other than the ASAP farm tour, call 828 667 2785 or email starr@veneziadreamfarm.com to schedule a visit.

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Farm Workers by the Numbers

3,770

FARM JOBS IN WESTERN NORTH CAROLINA (2015)

5.1%

18 COUNTIES

2010 JOBS: 3,587
2015 JOBS: 3,770

-0.8%

NORTH CAROLINA

2010 JOBS: 49,475
2015 JOBS: 49,062

4.1%

UNITED STATES

2010 JOBS: 1,841,815
2015 JOBS: 1,917,223

* Industry Summary for Crop and Animal Production - Settings (2), QCEW, Non-QCEW, Self-employed

QCEW: Stands for Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages

Non-QCEW Employees: Attempts to cover jobs which fall under an employer-employee relationship but are not covered by QCEW. The major types of employment covered in this set include military jobs, railroad jobs, many nonprofit and religious workers, certain salespersons, miscellaneous Federal Government, and more.

Self-Employed: Covers people who, when responding to Census surveys, consider self-employment to be a significant part of their income or time spent working. Most people normally considered "self-employed" would fall into this dataset.

AGER FAMILY of Hickory Nut Gap Farm, *photo by Chelsea Lane Photography*

Hickory Nut Gap Farm

The history of Hickory Nut Gap Farm began one hundred years ago in 1916, with the arrival of Jim and Elizabeth McClure. Newly married and still on their honeymoon, they fell in love with the old Sherrill's Inn and the surrounding farm. Elizabeth devoted herself to restoring the old inn and its landscaping. On April 30, 1918, Jim held the first official meeting of the Hickory Nut Gap Farm Company.

In 2000, Jamie Ager, a fourth generation descendant of the McClures, and his wife, Amy, took the reins and began their grass-fed beef and pasture-raised pork business. In 2007 the land was put into an agricultural conservation easement, which allowed the Agers to continue to use the land and grow their business.

"Our farm rests on 90 acres of land here in Fairview, and we also lease another 200 acres in Rutherford County, which we use for winter grazing our cattle," says Amy Ager. "Visitors will often see our cows roaming out in the pasture, our pigs rooting in the woods, and baby chicks pecking in the brooder house. We have 90 acres of pasture, six acres of organic apples, a hill with U-Pick blackberries, blueberries, and raspberries, and several play areas for children. We have an event space for birthday parties and for larger events such as reunions and weddings.

"Our farm store is open to the public seven days a week, from 9AM to 6PM, where you can buy cuts of meat and local products. Lunch is served daily, and is both farm and locally sourced. We also sell our meats in local farmers markets: the West Asheville Tailgate Market, the Asheville City Market, and the North Asheville Tailgate Market. You can also find our meat in the community at local grocery stores and over 50 restaurants in Asheville and regionally."

Over the last 15 years, the Agers have observed an increase in the demand for sustainable, ethical farming and the products that they raise. They say they are thankful to have the opportunity to farm in a time of increased customer awareness and to be able to provide the community with healthy, sustainable meat; they open the farm to the public as a way to share the family farm experience and set an example of healthy land stewardship. Details: *Hickorynutgapfarm.com.*

The Farm Heritage Trail

Another farm tour option is the Farm Heritage Trail—a scenic driving and cycling route through the rural agricultural communities of Alexander, Leicester, Newfound, and Sandy Mush in northwestern Buncombe County. The trail includes six stops at conserved family farms that are marked with designated signage. The public is welcome to travel the public roads of this trail year-round, a leisurely two-hour drive while enjoying a few stops along the way.

Trail riders may choose to follow the specific route or enter and exit at any point, selecting farms they may want to drive by or visit along the way. Stops include Dr. King's Carolina Bison, Sycamore Valley Farm Store, Addison Farms Vineyards, Sandy Hollar Farm, Long Branch Environmental Education Center, and Sandy Mush Herb Nursery.

Buncombe County Soil and Water was awarded a community grant from Buncombe County Recreation Services in October 2015 to create the Farm Heritage Trail. Northwest Buncombe

County was chosen because it has the largest concentration of conserved farms in the county.

"The Trail was created to showcase some of the most beautiful rural agricultural areas in the county, as well as inform the community about the importance of farmland preservation," says Buncombe's Farmland Preservation Coordinator Dixon. "We hope to share these beautiful areas with tourists and the community to raise awareness for the importance of protecting farmland in conservation easement—so that the land will forever be used for farming and forestry. We hope that by creating this fun opportunity to drive and participate in the trail, we will create an understanding that, without the protection of these lands, we could slowly lose our fertile farmland, the opportunity to have fresh food in the community, and the scenic views and agrarian beauty so imperative to Buncombe County.

"We are hoping to create this trail as a pilot project and possibly have other farm heritage trails in other regions of the county in the future, with possibly one in the southeast region of the county." Details: *Farmheritagetrail.org*.

Apple Hill Farm

In addition to the ASAP farm tour and the Farm Heritage Trail, there are numerous farms throughout Western North Carolina that welcome visitors. Apple Hill Farm in Banner Elk is one of these farms. "A place where animals talk and people listen," as the motto announces, the farm is owned by Lee Rankin and sits on 43 acres, with approximately 15 acres used for farm operations.

"The farm was part of an 80-plus acre tract of land that was cleared and planted as an apple orchard in 1960," Rankin says. "When I acquired the property in 2001, there was only a section of the orchard remaining, as well as a field planted in Frazier Firs. I bought my first alpacas in 2003, and we have slowly added more types of animals over time to meet our different needs as they have arisen. We first opened to the public in 2006, and things have really taken off in the last few years. In 2015 we led 443 guided walking tours of our farm."

A tour of the farm offers mountain views, wooded footpaths, and landscaped gardens that provide the setting for the alpacas, goats, donkeys, chickens, dogs, horses, and other animals calling Apple Hill Farm home. The guided walking tour winds its way around the farm, giving guests a chance to meet all the animals.

According to Rankin, the tour also provides a snapshot view of what life can be like on a working alpaca farm. "Each animal at Apple Hill Farm has a job—and many have stories to share as well! We raise alpacas and angora goats for their fiber, which we

Priestley Cummings Ford and Laura Cummings McCue

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shear off and sell in our farm store. We raise donkeys and Great Pyrenees dogs to guard and watch over our alpacas and goats. Chickens provide eggs, Mr. Pickles the mini-pig is the 'boss hog' of the farm, and the horses and ponies provide companionship and love to all who visit. We have a very active chicken coop and a small vegetable garden as well. The garden is primarily for our own use, but we do invite our guests to take a walk through it, and [we] sell some of the produce grown there."

Yarn from the personal animals is available for purchase in the farm store, which is stocked with over 20 types of alpaca yarn, plus socks, scarves, vests, gloves, and more. Rankin also works with several co-ops of fellow alpaca farm owners and artisans around the world. They have some of these products in Sew Original in Boone, as well as the Great Train Robbery and Bayou Smokehouse & Grill in Banner Elk.

> "There is much more awareness about the importance of farming and more interest in learning about farming. There is also a movement of people searching for ways to reconnect with things that are tangible, real, and meaningful."

From mid-May to mid-October they will be offering a public tour daily at 2PM. The farm store will be open from 10AM to 4PM, Monday through Saturday, and from noon to 4PM on Sundays.

Rankin says they have people from all walks of life visiting that are interested in learning more about alpacas, farming, and fiber.

"There is much more awareness about the importance of farming and more interest in learning about farming. There is also a movement of people searching for ways to reconnect with things that are tangible, real, and meaningful. Many people are finding this through farming." Details: Applehillfarmnc.com. C

The Tryon Daily Bulletin - PolkFresh Farm Tour to show visitors connections between consumer and grower

Published 10:00pm Friday, June 17, 2016**Area farms, wineries, markets open June 25**

On Saturday, June 25, Polk County and nearby residents can see where their food comes from, and make connections with those who produce it, on the PolkFresh 2016 Farm Tour.

Because the farms, wineries and other locations cover a wide area, Farm Tour coordinator Erica Shanks noted that the sites comprise three clusters — Saluda, Green Creek and Columbus/Mill Spring.

Erica Shanks, PolkFresh Farm Tour director for Polk County, was on hand at Bradley Farms, one of the stops on the June 25 tour. farm's pastured pigs.

To see the farms, wineries and other locations on the tour, and to see maps and purchase tickets, go online to growrural.org.

This is the sixth year the tour has been scheduled. Last year's scheduled tour was cancelled due to concerns over avian flu. This year's tour will happen rain or shine.

This year's tour represents a partnership between Polk County's Agricultural Economic Development office and the recently-formed Growing Rural Opportunities (GRO), a Polk County-based initiative to help make farming

more practical, and to encourage younger farmers to work the land. The tour is funded by Polk County.

“We want people to know where their food comes from,” said Erica Shanks, Farm Tour coordinator through Polk County.

“It gives us the opportunity to showcase farms,” noted GRO’s executive director, Patrick McLendon.

McLendon remarked that while guests become educated about local food sources and who provides them, farmers also make connections, and have the chance to earn additional income through sales of merchandise on the tour, and afterward.

Affirming what is not obvious to all consumers, McLendon emphasized that if consumers want farms, those farmers must make a living.

McLendon, an Americorps volunteer at the time of the first farm tour, recalled, “That first one was pretty exciting for us. We’ve grown and honed the farm tour. The exciting part is the young farmers.”

Among those younger farmers are Aaron Bradley and his wife Nicole, fifth generation farmers at Bradley Farms on Howard Gap Road outside Saluda. The farm provides grass-fed beef, eggs and meat from pastured chickens and meat from pastured pigs.

“Experience and education,” are the main takeaways for guests, Aaron Bradley said. “People can actually see how things are done.”

One thing guests will observe at Bradley Farms is a healthy balance between agricultural production and wildlife habitat—not evident on large factory farms.

Pointing out the improvements made in fields where his chickens have already been pastured, Bradley noted, “We want to build as much wildlife habitat as agriculture. It’s all symbiotic. We’re not smarter than nature.”

This year’s tour includes a great variety of sites: Columbus Farmers’ Market, the Mill Spring Agriculture Center and Farm Store, Meanwhile Back in Saluda (a wine and beer outlet featuring local and regional selections), Blue Ridge Mountain Trout, Ashley Meadows, Bradley Farms, Robinson Community Garden, Overmountain Winery, Parker-Binns Vineyard, Russian Chapel Hill Winery, Indigo Farm, Go Garlic, Manna Cabanna (local organic market), Holbert Honey, Adawehi Healing Center and greenhouse, TK Family Farm, and Mountain Brook Vineyard.

Tour guests may visit farms from 9 a.m. through 2 p.m., and wineries from 1-6 p.m.

In addition to guests purchasing tickets online, they may, Shanks said, purchase them beforehand at the Tryon and Columbus farmers markets, or at Meanwhile Back in Saluda and the Mill Spring Farm Store.

Tickets for the Farm Tour will also admit guests to the June 26 Appalachian Sustainable Agriculture Project (A.S.A.P.) on the evening of June 26, and to the A.S.A.P. event from 1 – 6 p. m. Sunday June 26. Tickets for the A.S.A.P. event will admit holders to the Farm Tour.

If guests arrive hungry, they will find treats available, including some free tastings.

In addition, “We’ve encouraged all the farms to have something for sale,” Shanks noted.

Overmountain Vineyards will have grills, where tour guests may prepare food purchased at some of the tour locations.

Also involved in the tour planning are Dawn Jordan, director of the Polk County Office of Agricultural Economic Development, and Ansley Roberts, farm and consumer outreach specialist for that office.

An online map will help guests find their way to various locations on the tour.

“I’m really proud this year of the online map,” McLendon said.

Proceeds from the Polk Fresh Farm Tour go to Polk County farmers. McLendon noted that money raised will enhance the farmers’ tool share program, which allows farmers to collectively own and use tools and other implements (such as feeders), instead of each farmer having to invest in large amounts of equipment used relatively infrequently.

This year’s proceeds will fund a medium-size tractor available to many farmers for the times when each needs it.

“For one person to buy it, it doesn’t make sense,” McLendon noted, observing that many farmers are land rich, but not financially secure.

“It’ll be a really great day,” McLendon asserted.

ASAP's Farm Tour showcases local agriculture

Jake Flannick, Citizen-Times correspondent 2:02 p.m. EDT June 20, 2016

EMAILMORE

Working to strengthen the relationship between farmers and consumers, the Appalachian Sustainable Agriculture Project is finalizing preparations for a two-day farm tour that will offer a glimpse into how food is grown and harvested in the region.

In its ninth year, the tour is expected to draw a large turnout this weekend, covering nearly two dozen farms throughout the area.

The idea is to help people better “understand the scale of agriculture” in a part of the state where sustainable living is a major focal point and where the local food system has flourished, said David Smiley, a program assistant for ASAP.

Scheduled for June 25 and 26, the self-guided tour includes 20 family-owned farms grouped together in six areas, from Black Mountain to Leicester to Madison County. Several are new to the tour this year.

It will involve cooking and other demonstrations, encounters with farm animals and activities for youngsters. Each farm will have its own guide, and volunteers for ASAP will help field any questions along the way.

Roughly 2,000 people are expected to turn out for the tour, another indication that “people have a demand for local food” in Western North Carolina, said Scott Bunn, development director for ASAP. The tour is sponsored by several businesses, many of them in Asheville.

A mixture of livestock and produce operations, the farms vary in size. Perhaps the biggest is Hickory Nut Gap Farm, a long-established cattle and poultry operation stretching over 90 acres in Fairview, about 15 miles southeast of Asheville.

But there is at least one common thread: They are all family owned, from fairly new ones to others that have remained in the same family for generations.

For its part, ASAP has grown considerably in the years since it became an independent nonprofit in the early 2000s, as part of a movement to preserve the region’s rich agricultural heritage and to strengthen the local food system. These days, it arranges school field trips to farms, runs a local food campaign and organizes farmers’ markets.

Moreover, it works with more than 700 family-owned farms within a 100-mile radius of Asheville, or what it calls the Appalachian growing region, offering to certify their products with its own seal.

Food from that region is the “truest definition of local,” said Smiley, the program assistant. He cited findings from ASAP’s research department, which analyzes things like consumer demand and trends in agriculture.

Despite rising land costs and waning interest in farming among younger generations, the amount of farmland in WNC has not decreased in recent years, Bunn said.

At the same time, farming here seems to have proved more prosperous in recent years, with farmers in the region experiencing a 70 percent increase in direct sales between 2007 and 2012, according to the latest U.S. Department of Agriculture census. Meant to track agriculture nationwide, the census is conducted every five years.

That increase was significantly higher than the average increase nationally, which was less than 10 percent. And in the rest of North Carolina, direct food sales decreased.

The draw to local food here is “really strong,” Bunn said, citing an efficient food system and a high concentration of small farms. He noted that although the region is home to an eighth of the state’s population, it has one-fourth of its farms.

Sunburst Chef & Farmer pairs aquaponics, microgreens

SMALL BUT MIGHTY: Sunburst Chef & Farmer staff, including, from left, Bennett Tompkins, Lurissia Hendrix, Casey Adams, Charles Hudson, Sally Eason, Dick Sievers and August Forbes, show off the farm's edible nasturtiums and a tray of spicy mix microgreens. Sunburst Chef & Farmer is one of 20 farms featured on ASAP's Farm Tour June 25-26. Photo courtesy of ASAP

Charles Hudson and **Sally Eason** huddle over a tray of microgreens, meticulously snipping shoots of red-veined sorrel and amaranth with tiny stainless steel scissors. Wearing crisp white coats and disposable gloves, they could be in the lab at some research institution. Instead, they're in the aquaponics greenhouse at Sunburst Chef & Farmer in Leicester, surrounded by leafy greens, 60 tilapia and 10,000 gallons of water.

Aquaponics uses fish waste to fertilize plants. The plants absorb the nutrients, producing clean water for the fish to swim in. It's a closed loop system, except for the water the plants absorb as they grow and what's lost to evaporation. This sustainable reuse of resources was part of the appeal for the business partners.

On June 25 and 26, Sunburst Chef & Farmer will be one of 20 local farms welcoming the public to tour their operations and take home ultra-fresh food during ASAP's annual farm tour (see sidebar).

Microgreens, major flavor

Hudson, the new business's founder and president, has 25 years' experience in the industry, with a focus on value-added foods. He has deep connections with local chefs and restaurateurs. Eason, who's vice president of Sunburst Chef & Farmer, is the former CEO of Sunburst Trout Farms (an entirely separate enterprise). She

brings decades of knowledge from her family's long-running trout farm.

Together, the pair have created a business with the region's culinary community in mind.

As the name suggests, chefs are the primary customers. They're also the reason you'll see microgreens paired with an aquaponics operation, even though Chef & Farmer's microgreens are grown in soil.

Microgreens are immature herbs and greens, such as cilantro, dill and red Russian kale. Grown to a height of 1 to 3 inches, they can be harvested in as little as eight days, making them particularly attractive to chefs who want farm-fresh ingredients.

Microgreens don't lend themselves to aquaponic production, however; they began as a side item but quickly became one of the farm's most popular offerings. Chef & Farmer also grows basil, kale and lettuce aquaponically.

"The chefs that have come here, without exception, have started buying product from us," says Eason. "They all bend down and grab a piece of whatever they're looking at and taste it, and they just go, 'Wow.'"

Twelve restaurants in the region — including Cúrate, Nightbell, Rhubarb, Canyon Kitchen and the Old Edwards Inn — are buying the farm's microgreens, attracted by their intense flavor and attractiveness as garnishes, Chief Operating Officer **August Forbes** reports.

Chefs often come to Sunburst with specific requests, and the farm's custom microgreen mixes enable them to home in on the flavor and appearance they seek.

"I love working with chefs," says Eason. "They're real picky, but so am I."

Chefs, however, "aren't the only folks we service," notes Hudson. "We're excited to show a lot more of the public what we're doing and what we have available."

Science meets agriculture

In the back of the greenhouse, tendrils of Tropicana lettuce roots stretch down into the "float beds." The farm's full-sized collards, kale and basil are also grown in water.

But the highly scientific process requires careful adjustments of temperature and nutrient levels for both fish and plants, and the proprietors spent months doing research and learning hands-on techniques from **Brad Todd** at Lucky Clays Fresh in Norwood, N.C.

"It's been a heck of a learning curve for us," says Eason. "We both have strong science backgrounds, but even so, there's a lot of chemistry buried deep, deep, deep in these brain cells that we had to resurrect."

Sunburst Chef & Farmer got its start in 2014 in an 800-square-foot storefront in Waynesville before moving to the Smith Mill Works in West Asheville last year. The business started with a 10-gallon tank and six guppies but has expanded rapidly, with plans to increase to 150 tilapia by the end of this month.

Trout require cold temperatures and moving water, neither of which is compatible with aquaponics. They chose

tilapia instead, a hearty fish that's proved to be a good match with the farm's aquaponic produce. Chef & Farmer doesn't currently sell its "working fish," as Forbes calls them, but the business hopes to offer them to local restaurants in the future.

Unlike some aquaponics programs, the fish at Sunburst Chef & Farmer aren't visible: They're enclosed in a fiberglass tank. "By doing that, we're better able to control the temperature of the fish, the water quality and many other things," greenhouse manager **Bennett Tompkins** explains.

The farm's water comes from a spring-fed pond and a backup well on the property; the system uses no public water.

"The whole use and reuse of the water and nutrients is probably what excites me the most about what we're doing," says Hudson. In addition, he notes, aquaponics doesn't require a large amount of arable land, which is in short supply here in the mountains. "You can do it in your basement; you can do it in a greenhouse; you can do it in your office."

For Hudson, that's also part of the appeal: "Whether it's dirt farming or water farming, it's exciting to me to see more people growing food by any means."

During the farm tour, visitors will be able to view the aquaponics operation up close and buy microgreens and aquaponically grown produce. Larger groups may even be able to feed the fish, depending on the schedule.

It will be "all hands on deck" that weekend, says Forbes, who hopes the tour will help visitors "realize this is quite an operation — and it's happening in their own backyard."

ASAP's Farm Tour
spotlights fertile agriculture scene

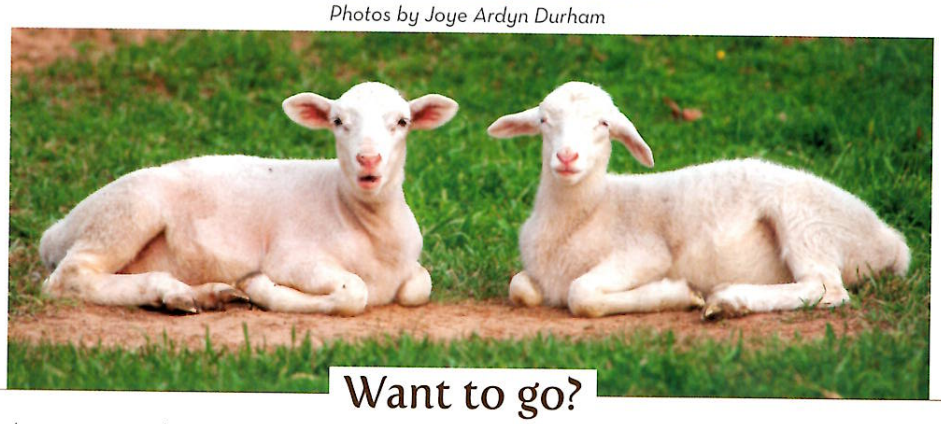
by Tina Masciarelli

Discover firsthand how food is grown and raised in the southern Appalachian region. From vineyards and u-picks to produce, meat and fiber farms, there is something for everyone to experience and enjoy on ASAP's 2016 Farm Tour, June 25-26.

"We look to have a mix of farms on the tour—new farms, returning farms, farms that are regularly open to the public, and many that usually are not," says ASAP development director Scott Bunn. "We want to make sure we have a variety of offerings, from animals to produce, and from small farms to big farms."

The Farm Tour showcases 20 farms across three counties in western North Carolina. "Visitors can explore century farms cultivated by the same family for generations, organic farms and many that are experimenting w new crops and products," says Bunn.

Photos by Joye Ardyn Durham



Farms will be selling products and a number will have meals available for purchase on the tour, offering visitors an opportunity to sample farm fresh product see farm animals up close and connect wi the community's food producers.

All farms on the tour are Appalachian Grown™ certified, which means they own and operate their own business, preserve farmland, sustain agricultural traditions an bring fresh foods to local communities.

New to the 2016 event is the Farm Tour Photo Scavenger Hunt. ASAP will feature your most fun, creative and beautiful phot from the tour on its website and in next ye promotions. Find complete instructic in the Farm Tour Guide.

Tina Masciarelli is the project coordinator for Bu Haywood and blog at boldnarrative.co

Want to go?

Advance passes are $30 per car at asapconnections.org. One pass admits an entire carload to any participating farm both days. Passes can also be purchased the day of the tour at the first farm stop for $40, or individual farms can be toured for $15. Farm Tour guides are available online and from pass vendors. Guides include a map, directions and tour tips. Complete farm tour information can be found at asapconnections.org

Fairview Cluster
Flying Cloud Farm
Hickory Nut Gap Farm
Cane Creek Creamery
Round Mountain Creamery

East Cluster
Hop 'n Blueberry Farm
Vandele Farms on Cedar Creek
Farm Fresh Ventures

Candler Cluster
Smoking Js Fiery Foods
Venezia Dream Farm

Madison Cluster
Dry Ridge Farm
East Fork Farm
Spinning Spider Creamery
Zimmerman's Berry Farm

Leicester Cluster
Addison Farms Vineyard
Farm House Beef
Reeves Home Place Farm
Sunburst Chef and Farmer

Sandy Mush Cluster
Full Sun Farm
Lady Luck Flower Farm
Long Branch Environmental Education Center

Farm Tour and Agritourism Guide

Written and compiled by ASAP staff with expertise from Blue Ridge Women in Agriculture, NCDA&CS, and the Regional Farm Tour Learning Community.

Agritourism is a way of sharing your farm story with the community. Opening your farm to visitors offers the opportunity to engage people in the discussion of local food production and the importance of family farms in our region, as well as diversify your farm marketing and income. This guide is designed to help you determine if agritourism is a good fit for your farm operation, as well as offer resources and strategies to ensure it is a good experience for you and your farm visitors.

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Getting Started: Is Agritourism Right for My Farm?

Welcoming visitors to your farm is only a good opportunity if it is a right fit for your farm and operation. Here are a few questions to ask yourself:

- Do I enjoy interacting with the public?
- What are my goals and expectations for opening my farm to visitors?
- What is my timeline for achieving these goals?
- What resources, skills, and facilities does my farm have to get started?
- What resources do we need to develop?
- What costs we are willing to incur in getting started?

Evaluating Your Time and Resources to Determine if Your Effort is Worth the Gain

Create a timeline with specific tasks leading up to the tour/event to give yourself a realistic look at the time and resources involved. Here are questions to consider:

- What will you gain in exchange for your time (on-farm sales that day, new customers, etc.)?
- Are there specific people you would like to invite to your farm (potential buyers, friends, church members, neighbors, local club members, etc.)?
- Does your insurance cover visitors to your farm? There are risks in opening your farm to the public. Do you have the time and resources to ensure, evaluate, and mitigate those risks?
- How will you balance other weekend duties such as selling at the farmers market, daily farm chores, or off-farm work? Will you need to hire or recruit others to help?
- Are there other ways to generate revenue the day of the tour in addition to selling your farm products?
- How can you engage with visitors to build long term relationships and expand your customer base? How will you share your farm/family story? Do you have materials for visitors to take home (i.e. rack cards, brochures, a list of where to find your farm products, stickers, farm apparel, coupons or promotions of farm offerings and events)?

Benefits of Agritourism and Farm Tours

Why other Appalachian Grown Farms participate:

- Increase exposure for the farm and business
- Raise awareness of what is produced locally and promoting what is "local"
- Expose more people to local food and farms
- Market products and other farm offerings like special events, festivals, and lodging
- Reach new customers and turn occasional customers into farm “fans”
- Provide an education and outreach opportunity to the public
- Sell product
- Drive traffic to the farm and increase customer base
- Connect with the local community

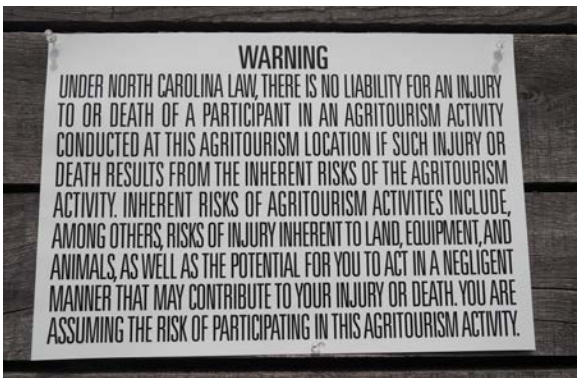
Managing Risk and Reducing Hazards on Your Farm

- ❑ Brainstorm and survey potential hazards on your farm. Invite a friend or neighbor to walk your property to help identify risks and hazards you may have overlooked.
- ❑ Identify and minimize potential hazards, using signage and flagging to close off areas or structures on your farm.
- ❑ Move animals that may be dangerous, or scared of visitors, to areas closed off to the public.
- ❑ Create an emergency plan and make sure cell phones or radios are on hand throughout the tour. Have a first aid kit on site and ensure all staff and volunteers know the emergency plan. If you do not have cell service make certain all staff and volunteers know where the closest phones are.
- ❑ Have a rain plan. Where will people go if it suddenly starts raining? Will you have ‘rainy day’ activities? Will these activities require materials not normally on your farm?
- ❑ Make a list of rules specific to your farm and share them with staff and volunteers to cover with visitors. Rules can be framed in a positive way, but be certain to reiterate those important to safety (don’t stand behind the donkey, pick up the rooster, climb on the tractor, etc.).

- ❑ Do you have the insurance coverage needed to protect you and your visitors? Talk with your insurance agent about what your policy

covers and what supplemental coverage you might need depending on your operation and planned activities. If your agent has not been to your farm in a while, invite him/her out to see what you have been doing, and how your activities/tours will flow. Each year review your insurance policy and tell your agent what agritourism ventures you are planning and implementing. The more they know, the better they are able to protect you.

- The North Carolina Limited Liability Law was designed to protect farms by making tour goers and farm visitors aware of the inherent risks and hazards of agritourism activities on your farm through posted and visible warning signs. This statute has specific guidelines to follow and does not protect you from liability if you are negligent or fail to take steps to remove hazards on your property. This law is not a substitution for insurance, but hopefully a tool for reducing unwarranted litigation. Plan ahead and consider getting professional and legal expertise to assess your farm's individual risks and insurance needs. For a full explanation of the Limited Liability Law and how to use and obtain liability warning signs go to http://www.ncagr.gov/markets/agritourism/laws.htm.



Setting up Your Farm

Signage - Set out directional signs at major intersections or critical turns, as well as locations where road signs or directions are unclear, to make it easier for visitors to find your farm .

Parking - Many farms depend on pasture or other grassy areas for parking, but it is good to have a backup plan in case of excessive rain. Use signs, volunteers, or flagging to indicate parking spaces and places to easily turn around.

Welcome table - Set up a weatherproof and visible welcome station to greet visitors when they first arrive. Orient your welcome station volunteers or staff in advance with what to communicate and where to direct visitors to go.

Restrooms and handwashing - Make signs to clearly indicate where appropriate restrooms and/or hand-washing facilities are.

Product sales - If you are selling items, arrange them in a visible, well-marked, and attractive display so that guests can see and sample your products. Have plenty of information available

about your growing practices, the story of your farm, and where customers can find your product after the tour.

Activities - Offer hands on activities for farm visitors, either as part of the tour, something to do while they wait, or as another income stream for your farm. Activities can be as simple as product sampling or animals to pet, or more elaborate undertakings such as a make-your-own bouquet station or a crop maze.

Staffing and Volunteers

Enlist help - Farms and visitors will have a better experience and on farm sales will be improved, if the farm is well staffed with knowledgeable people. Consider using volunteers or staff to manage: parking, a welcome table, product sampling, activities, sales table, music, station hosts and demonstrations. Make sure everyone is well-trained for their role and knows how to direct questions (parking, accessible areas, hand washing, product sales, etc.) appropriately. If interns or volunteers will assist in leading tours be sure they are equipped with information and stories to share with visitors. If possible, have a pre-tour rehearsal or join in on other tours to pick up tips and frequently asked questions.

Thank your volunteers! These are folks who have given a whole day to show their support of local food and your farm, so be sure to show your appreciation for their time. Volunteers are not only supportive the day of an event, but can be a farm supporter and customer throughout the year.

Marketing your Events and Tours

You are putting time, energy, and resources into welcoming visitors to your farm, make sure you get the word out. Marketing and promotions involve an investment of time and/or money, but here are a few low cost ideas:

- Cross-promote with your farmer's markets and retail outlets - Add posters, tour guides or other marketing materials to your farmers market or retail displays. Ask area businesses that carry your products to display materials and include the event in newsletters, website, or social media. This also offers the business a way to promote their support of local food and farms.

- ❑ Strengthen connections with your customers - It is easier to increase sales to an existing customer than find new ones. Communicate with your customers about your upcoming events through e-newsletters or handouts distributed in CSA boxes, at farmer's markets, or at any of your retail outlets. Don't forget to invite your wholesale customers to join as well.

- ❑ Tell your story - Local media is often looking for content and community interest stories. Share photos, event details, and a short description of the event with your local newspaper. Be sure to communicate what the "story" is, i.e. "historic farm now open to the public," "celebrate summer with u-pick berries," or "come meet the next generation of farmers". Invite local news, radio or other media to attend and give them ample notice.

- ❑ Distribute marketing materials - Create "save the date" cards or fliers to distribute to friends and customers. Include a picture and/or a coupon (free item or % off on farm sales) to encourage them to hold on to the card and follow through on the visit.

- ❑ Post promotional signage - Put directional signs along your road and nearby high traffic areas. Include event date(s) and times(s) to deter visitors from showing up when you are not open, but also to catch interested folks driving by.

- ❑ Market events on web and social media - Share event information on your website, social media sites (Facebook, instagram, twitter) and on your community event calendars. Post teaser photos and snippets of what people can see and do on your farm.

Leading Tours

What should your tour include? When planning a tour consider why people go on farm tours. Most visitors want to know the story of your farm, learn more about growing practices and products and connect with local agriculture. In addition to planning what to show them on the farm, think about what makes your farm unique. What farm history, growing tips and knowledge, or funny stories could you incorporate? Remember that folks are visiting to learn about your farm, but also about you. While some farmers don't like to talk about themselves, the story of who you are and why you are farming is just as critical as what you grow.

Determine how you would like guests to tour your farm. Will you lead tours or will guests explore on their own? What points of interest on the farm do you want to highlight? Where will the tour pause to allow people to catch up or catch their breath? Be mindful of group size. Everyone on the tour should be able to hear you and see what you are talking about. If groups tend to be more than 20 people consider breaking them into small groups and offering stations for them to rotate through.

Consider a long and short tour option. Tours should aim to be no longer than 30 minutes. There may be some visitors that are not physically able to participate in long or steep walks. What options could be created to engage these customers?

Plan interactive activities. In addition to hearing your stories, visitors also want to engage with your farm and create their own stories. Offering taste tests, cooking demos, art activities, hiking, farm tasks, u-pick, or demonstrations (milking, harvesting, cheese production, wool processing, etc.) builds a personal connection to your farm.

Staying Connected to Your Visitors - Establishing "Farm Friends"

- Send guests home with a way to engage with your farm again – Offer an invitation to your next farm event, a coupon for your product at market, information about your CSA, or a list of places where they can find your farm products. Give them a reason to come back and support you again.

- Gather names and contact information - If one of your goals is to build your customer base, it is important to know who they are and how to connect with them again. You don't have to commit to a monthly newsletter, but do have visitors sign up to hear about future events and happenings on the farm. It is easier to promote your products and events to folks that already have a connection to your farm.

- Sample and sell products - Farm tours are a great time to share and sell products. Visitors are often disappointed if there aren't opportunities to support your farm with a purchase and take home a piece of the experience. Dedicate a staff member or knowledgeable volunteer to manage and replenish your product table/sales area, and locate it in an area visitors walk through on their way in and out. Make sure prices are well marked and there is information about where your products are available outside the tour.

- Encourage visitors to share their stories - Ask visitors to post pictures from their farm visit on social media, offer a photo contest or give out "refer a friend" coupons. This type of engagement not only builds on the experience visitors had on your farm, but encourages them to share it with their family and friends.

Additional Resources:

- ASAP (Appalachian Sustainable Agriculture Project) www.asapconnections.org
- Growing Minds Farm to School (An ASAP Program) www.growing-minds.org
  Lesson plans, activities, and ideas for engaging children in local food and agriculture.
- Fromhere www.fromhere.org - community events calendar and classifieds
- NCDA&CS Agritourism Marketing www.ncagr.gov/markets/agritourism
  Includes agritourism newsletter and "Monday Marketing Messages"
- NC Agritourism Networking Association www.nc-ana.org/
- NC Agritourism Liability www.ncleg.net/Sessions/2005/Bills/House/HTML/H329v6.html

Pre-Tour Checklist

Use this checklist to assess your farm's preparedness for hosting visitors and to start planning your farm tours and agritourism activities.

Directions and Parking	Y/N	Notes:
Is there a well placed farm sign at the entrance to your farm?		
Is there good visibility/turnaround for visitors to enter/exit safely?		
Is it easy to figure out where to park (i.e. signage, barriers, volunteers)? Is there adequate parking free of potholes and mud? If it rains, will people get stuck? Will you need parking attendees?		
Facilities	**Y/N**	**Notes:**
Are walking paths and roads in good condition (relatively smooth, no tripping hazards)?		
Are there signs with instructions/rules/safety information? Do you have agritourism liability signs posted?		
Is your farm senior or low mobility friendly? Are there places to sit?		
Do you have a bathroom facility open to the public?		
Visitor Experience	**Y/N**	**Notes:**
Do you have a designated registration spot/welcome area to greet visitors? Is the sign-in table in a flat, shaded spot near the entrance?		
Is there shelter for visitors in case of rain or a sudden thunderstorm?		
Is there an activity to engage visitors while they wait for a tour (i.e. product samples, one self-guided aspect of the farm, handouts)?		
Marketing	**Y/N**	**Notes:**
Do you have a sign-up sheet for visitors to give you their information (newsletters, email lists, future events)?		
Do you have products to sell or samples to offer? Are they attractively displayed? Are prices visible?		
Do you have materials to distribute about your farm's history/practices and how to connect with you or find your products after the tour (business card, rack card, handouts, coupons)?		
Have you done pre-tour promotion to invite people to your farm and the farm tour?		

Conducting Tours	Y/N	Notes:
Have you prepared a short presentation that highlights the main aspects of your farm?		
Can your presentation be tailored to your audience (i.e. children, non-farmers, large groups)?		
Does your tour last thirty minutes (allowing for extra time for rest, travel, and questions) and does it show off your farm's unique qualities?		
Are there interactive activities on your tour (i.e. tastings, demonstrations, hands-on activities)?		
Do you have a self-guided tour option? A printed map with information about your farm?		
Safety and Risk Management	Y/N	Notes:
Do you have a list of “rules” specific to your farm? If so, what is the plan for communicating them to volunteers and visitors?		
Have all possible hazards been removed, flagged, or roped off? (i.e. junk piles, farm equipment, old barns, fuel containers, steep slopes, poison ivy, ponds)		
Does your farm have animals? Will visitors interact with them? If so, do you have hand or foot washing facilities available to prevent disease transmission?		
Are electric fences marked or turned off during tour hours?		
Is your farm family-friendly and kid safe? Do kids need to be tightly supervised or kept out of certain areas?		
Do you have an emergency plan? Do farm staff/volunteers have cell phones or radios to communicate during open hours/tours?		
Is all fire and safety equipment in operational condition?		
Are all buildings in safe condition? Is public access to barns, paddocks, storage, workshops limited for safe management?		
Staffing	Y/N	Notes:
Do you have a staffing plan? Consider the staffing you will need for the different experiences you are offering such as tours, demonstrations, product tables/farm store, kids activity area.		
Will you need volunteers? How will you recruit volunteers? (Family, neighbors, local schools/universities, community groups?)		