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Farm to Fork Picnic Benefits New, Beginning Farmers

RALEIGH, NC, May 31, 2013: Will Cramer is the successful farm manager behind Ever Laughter Farm just north of Hillsborough. He and his business partner Sam Hummel, along with friends and interns, cultivate nearly 40 different vegetable crops year-round on 4 acres, and sell at four weekly farmers' markets.

But when Cramer was starting out five years ago, he didn't have business experience or the money to purchase land. He had worked as a farm intern and a WWOOFer (organic farm volunteer), but didn't know if he could manage a farm on his own. Meanwhile, Hummel had a dream and some land, but minimal farming experience.

They decided to enroll in PLANT at Breeze Farm, a farm enterprise incubator program run by Orange County, just down the road from their now-successful farm. They submitted a business plan and leased a quarter-acre plot.

Cramer says it was, "a good opportunity to test whether or not you really want to farm, without making a big investment." He and Hummel took workshops on different farming techniques such as trellising and growing with black plastic. He learned that farming was far more time-intensive than he first thought, even on their small plot. But by the end of his first year, he was convinced that he could farm on his own, and Ever Laughter Farm was born.

Now, he is grateful for his incubator farm experience. "It really allows you to test yourself to see if farming is for you and gives you a cushion while you work out some of the kinks," Cramer said.

Breeze Farm is just one North Carolina program supporting new farmers in the state. The Center for Environmental Farming Systems also offers new farmer education programs, along with internships and apprenticeships for aspiring farmers.

The annual Farm to Fork Picnic at the Breeze Farm raises support for beginning farmer programs at Breeze Farm and the Center for Environmental Farming Systems. The event is on June 9, from 4–7 p.m. For tickets and information, visit the website: <http://www.farmtoforknc.com/>

At the Farm to Fork Picnic, restaurant chefs are paired with local farmers to create special dishes with seasonal, local ingredients. The event is co-hosted by the Center for Environmental Farming Systems, Friends of Breeze Farm, Slow Food Triangle and the North Carolina Agricultural Foundation Inc.

The Center for Environmental Farming Systems (CEFS) is a partnership of North Carolina State University, North Carolina A&T State University, and the North Carolina Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services. CEFS' mission is to develop and promote food and farming systems that protect the environment, strengthen local communities, and provide economic opportunities in North Carolina and beyond. For more information please see <http://www.cefs.ncsu.edu/index.htm>.