CEFS
CENTER for ENVIRONMENTAL FARMING SYSTEMS

NCSU  |  NCA&T  |  NCDA&CS

www.cefs.ncsu.edu

Sustainable Farms,
Local Foods,
Healthy Communities
It began with a farm.

In the early 1990's, a small circle of leaders in sustainable agriculture came together with a single vision: to create a center for the research and demonstration of environmentally sustainable farming practices in North Carolina.

A task force of university faculty and administrators, state and federal agencies, non-governmental organizations, farmers, and citizens was charged with developing strategies to build a strong sustainable agriculture program in North Carolina.

The state’s two land-grant universities — North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University and North Carolina State University — formed a groundbreaking partnership with the North Carolina Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, creating an institutional “home” for the new endeavor.

The Center for Environmental Farming Systems (CEFS) was dedicated on February 1, 1994 at the 2,000-acre Cherry Research Farm in Goldsboro, North Carolina. CEFS was dedicated to long-term, large-scale sustainable agriculture research and demonstration, the first such site in the state of North Carolina, and one of only a handful in the country.

What began as a vision in 1994 has grown into a movement that is shaping agriculture across North Carolina and the nation. In the more than 25 years since its founding, bold and innovative programmatic initiatives have expanded CEFS’ footprint beyond the boundaries of the research farm, reaching every corner of North Carolina and forming deep partnerships in local communities.

Today CEFS is one of the nation’s leading centers for research, education, and outreach in sustainable agriculture and local food systems. It is recognized as a national and international leader in the local foods movement, and is celebrated for its work in building consensus around policies, programs and actions that facilitate a vibrant local food economy.
MISSION

CEFS develops and promotes just and equitable food and farming systems that conserve natural resources, strengthen communities, improve health outcomes, and provide economic opportunities in North Carolina and beyond.

FIELD RESEARCH

CEFS’ Field Research, Education, and Outreach Facility at Cherry Research Farm in Goldsboro is one of the nation’s leading research and demonstration sites for large-scale organic and sustainable production systems. Research is based out of seven core programs, or “units”:

The **Farming Systems Research Unit** is the Southeast region’s premier long-term, large-scale, replicated experiment comparing conventional cropping, organic cropping, crop-livestock integration, timber production, and successional land use.

The **Agroforestry Research Unit** is home to a long-term, replicated experiment on 30 acres comparing timber species and forage management on production and environmental responses.

Research on organic grains based at the farm’s **Organic Research Unit** is helping to build an organic grains industry in North Carolina.
The **Pasture-Based Dairy Unit** is home to CEFS’ herd of approximately 140 cows, and is the top research and demonstration site for pasture-based dairy production systems in the South.

The **Pasture-Based Beef Unit** is home to Amazing Grazing, a pasture-based educational initiative that teaches hands-on grazing and pasture management to livestock producers.

Educational workshops, hands-on training, tours and field days demonstrate small-scale, diversified sustainable farming practices at the **Small Farm Unit**.

The antibiotic-free **Alternative Swine Production Unit** supports research and education on sustainable pork production systems in North Carolina.

Each unit provides research opportunities for faculty, graduate students and visiting scientists, in addition to demonstration models for farmers, extension agents and students.

**ACADEMICS & EDUCATION**

The **CEFS Graduate Fellows Program** was developed to provide financial support and recognition for future researchers, scholars, and leaders in sustainable agriculture and local food systems. Fellowships are available for Master’s or Doctoral students at NC State and N.C. A&T.

CEFS’ NC State **Agroecology Education Programs** include an Agroecology and Sustainable Food Systems major, an Agroecology minor, and the Agroecology Education Farm, which provides food to NC State Dining.
CEFS also collaborates with the N.C. A&T University Farm and Urban and Community Horticulture Concentration Program.

CEFS’ Summer Sustainable Agriculture and Food Systems Internship Program has been attracting college students from across the nation and around the world since 1999. Interns work at a university-affiliated farm, research, or extension site four days a week and spend one day a week engaging in field trips, professional development and discussions around current issues in sustainable agriculture. Working with farm staff, researchers, faculty, Cooperative Extension, and community groups helps interns understand farming and food issues from a systems perspective.

CEFS also offers an in-depth, 6-12 month Sustainable Agriculture Apprenticeship Program housed within different programs and research units, where apprentices gain hands-on experience and mentorship designed to help prepare them for future careers in agriculture and agricultural education.

As part of the EmpowerRing Mountain Food Systems Project, the Mountain Food and Farm Apprenticeship Program brings education and workforce development opportunities to southwestern North Carolina.

**EXTENSION & OUTREACH**

CEFS works closely with North Carolina Cooperative Extension and its Local Food Program to support and promote local foods throughout the state. Many CEFS-affiliated faculty are N.C. Cooperative Extension Specialists.

CEFS organizes year-round educational workshops, webinars and training sessions on topics ranging from postharvest handling to farm profitability, pastured poultry to organic grains, season extension to Good Agricultural Practices. CEFS also hosts an annual Sustainable Agriculture Lecture to engage the public on a variety of food system issues.
The annual Farm to Fork Picnic pairs the region’s most acclaimed chefs with Piedmont farmers in a celebration of our local foods and the people who grow and make them. A benefit for beginning farmer programs, Bon Appétit magazine called the Picnic the “country’s best all-you-can-eat feast.” The event series has grown to include the Charlotte region’s Farm to Fork Picnic in the Garden.

**YOUTH ENGAGEMENT & LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT**

The Food Youth Initiative (FYI) supports the advancement of a just food system by providing training and networking opportunities to young people ages 16-24 who are already working on agricultural and food justice issues in their local communities. FYI amplifies the youth perspective on food system needs and opportunities while developing an experienced collective of young leaders in the local and sustainable food system movement.

**Local Food Ambassadors** form a diverse network of students who work to promote local foods on their college campuses. Working at Historically Black or American Indian public universities, they are part of a team that includes their school’s dining services, sustainability office, faculty and staff, as well as local farmers and the county Cooperative Extension office. The Local Food Ambassador Program is organized by the NC 10% Campaign and N.C. Cooperative Extension.
BUILDING FOOD SYSTEM NETWORKS

Community Food Strategies works to inspire connection and amplify community voices so that food policies shift and outcomes are more equitable. This multi-organizational initiative supports local food councils across North Carolina with tools, trainings, and networking opportunities. With Community Food Strategies’ support, North Carolina now has the second-highest number of food councils in the country.

Through NC Farm to Early Care and Education (Farm to ECE), CEFS and its partners work directly with early childhood facilities and their communities to purchase local food for meals and snacks, and to provide children with experiential learning around local food. The Farm to ECE Collaborative is a professional development hub that organizes and networks 15 community teams throughout the state to connect food and early childhood systems.
CEFS' Farm to School work focuses on building networks and collaborative relationships in ways that center racial equity, both to strengthen individual programs and to build statewide capacity. CEFS' Farm to School work operates on the principle that farm to school offers both direct action and institutional change, positively impacting the health and food literacy of all children in North Carolina while simultaneously supporting local farms and rural economies.

EQUITY IN THE FOOD SYSTEM

The Committee on Racial Equity in the Food System (CORE) works to create institutional food system change by addressing the historical and current impacts of structural racism on our food and agricultural systems through the lens of racial equity. Through racial equity trainings, on-the-ground organizing with community partners, and the development of shareable resources, guides and tools, CORE creates spaces for constructive dialogue around race and opportunities for institutional transformation.

Through CORE, CEFS is integrating racial equity work into many of its other initiatives, including Community Food Strategies, NC Farm to Early Care and Education, and Farm to School.
CONSUMER ENGAGEMENT

The NC 10% Campaign encourages consumers, organizations, agencies, and businesses to commit 10 percent of their existing food dollars to locally grown and produced foods. Since 2010, the Campaign has signed on over 8,200 individuals and 1,180 businesses, and tracked over $71 million in local foods purchases.

SUPPLY CHAIN AND BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

The EmPOWERing Mountain Food Systems project supports the development of the local food economy in the seven western counties of North Carolina and on the Qualla Boundary with the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians. The initiative works with N.C. Cooperative Extension and other regional partners to build educational and training opportunities, infrastructure development, and business incubation for farm and food businesses.

Local Food Economies is designed to engage local and regional governments in the work of building local food systems. Housed within the EmPOWERing Mountain Food Systems initiative, Local Food Economies provides resources, tools, and information to assist planners, economic and business developers, and public administrators in building resilient local food economies across the state.
NC Choices advances local and niche meat supply chains in North Carolina by providing networking opportunities, educational programming, and technical assistance for producers, meat processors, buyers and food professionals. NC Choices organizes the Carolina Meat Conference, a nationally recognized event that brings together every part of the meat supply chain, and offers award-winning programming specifically for women working in the meat business.

In 2018, NC Choices launched its Beginning Farmer Project, focused on increasing the number of beginning farmers raising meat through pasture-based and silvopasture systems.

Through Whole Crop Harvest, CEFS is taking a supply-chain approach to tackling the problem of food waste. Innovative interdisciplinary research is focused on understanding common farming practices and market policies that increase vegetable losses in the field, developing protocols to determine how much edible produce is left unharvested, and finding ways to increase the recovery of unharvested crops – all of which support increased farm profitability and the sustainability of our food system.
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