



THE APPALACHIAN FARM SCHOOL IS A PILOT PROGRAM OF THE WESTERN NORTH CAROLINA FOOD POLICY COUNCIL, HOSTED BY WESTERN CAROLINA UNIVERSITY'S PUBLIC POLICY INSTITUTE.
360-A STILLWELL BUILDING • CULLOWHEE, NC 28723 • WNCFP@GMAIL.COM •
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Appalachian Farm School

2015 Pilot Program Final Report

The 2015 Appalachian Farm School, a pilot program of the Western North Carolina Food Policy Council, was developed to serve new and experienced farmers in the seven western counties of North Carolina and the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians. The nine-week course provided six classes on alternating Thursday evenings. Locations alternated between Jackson and Swain counties, two locations most central to our farmers to minimize travel time and costs.

Partners

The program was supported through financial assistance from the Community Foundation of Western North Carolina and by staff time and resource from our partners at the Western Carolina Public Policy Institute, North Carolina Cooperative Extension, Southwestern Community College Small Business Center, North Carolina Rural Entrepreneurship Through Action Learning (NC REAL) and TenBiz, and Riddle Design Company of Macon County.

Course Schedule

Class 1: Soils, Pests, and Diseases

Class 2: Marketing and Pricing

Class 3: Agribusiness Planning

Class 4: GAP & Food Safety Regulations

Class 5: Land, Insurance, and Taxes

Class 6: Resource Fair

These courses were selected based on the knowledge base of our partnering agencies; our previous experience with farmer input; and utilizing models from other farm schools, including the [Virginia Growers' Academy](#) and the [NC Cooperative Extension farm schools](#) in other regions of the state. (NCCES does not come to the west because of the cost of travel time and the distance involved.) An introductory workshop on agritourism was also made available to participants as part of another WNCFP project.

"The Farm School was a very informative, rich series of workshops that provided me with many ways to discern how and if I'd like to enter into a food-production venture. I am just exploring whether or not to get involved with local food production and attending these programs was a welcome way to begin exploring my options. Many thanks to all involved for making it happen."

- AFS 2015 Participant



Our Farmers

- 94.6 years of experience
- Selling at 7 Farmers' Markets in 9 counties
- Two wholesale farmers
- Six new farmers and twenty experienced farmers
- 15 women and 11 men
- 16 farmers under age 40



Their Farms

- Haywood, Jackson, Macon, Swain, and Cherokee counties
- Over 250 total acres
- 125 acres to which they'd like to expand production
- Beef cattle and poultry
- Eggs, Honey, Vegetables, Fruits, Berries, Trout, and Worms
- Corn/grain for feed

"I met great people and made some wonderful contacts. I'd never have met these regulatory agents without the farm school, and I'm glad I did!"

- AFS 2015 Participant

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Course Details and Program Costs

Participants were solicited through newspaper, radio, and social media advertising in the region. Instructors were identified from two primary sources: regional providers already working in the area, or state representatives, such as regulators. At the marketing course, participants were offered a reduced rate for graphic design and business card services and free business card printing.

Through CFWNC assistance, we were able to cover the costs of the program through the grant, and participants were only charged \$75.00. Their registration included a binder with weekly printed materials, instructor documents and CDs containing reference information, and dinner at each course.

Dinner was provided by Mad Batter Food & Film of Sylva, and since WNCFCPC staff picked up and delivered the food, meals were provided at a donated cost of \$3.50 per person. Other program costs included:

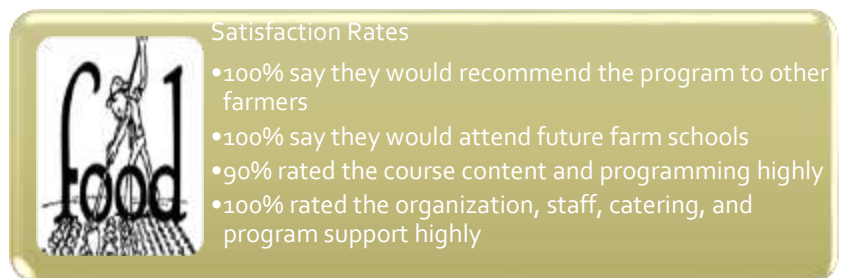
- staff time (from WCU PPI);
- graphic design services (donated by Riddle Design Company);
- room rentals (donated by Southwestern Community College);
- travel fees (donated by every instructor);
- instructor hourly fees (donated by 85% of instructors);
- graphic design and printing of farmers' business cards; and
- promotional materials, including tote bags, stickers, and award certificates given to participants and instructors upon completion.

The total program cost was approximately \$5,650.00, with donated or in-kind services of \$2,950.00. The total cash expense was approximately \$2,700.00.

Data Collection and Evaluation

Participants were provided written one-page surveys at four of six courses. These surveys helped gauge feedback on the previous class and obtain specific details of what information was desired from upcoming classes.

The final evaluation was a two-page survey which asked participants to rate each course, as well as to rate overall program characteristics like staff communication, timing, organization, catering, and overall quality and content of the program.



Satisfaction Rates

- 100% say they would recommend the program to other farmers
- 100% say they would attend future farm schools
- 90% rated the course content and programming highly
- 100% rated the organization, staff, catering, and program support highly



Areas for Improvement

- Hold courses weekly or earlier to avoid April season
- Increase specificity by tailoring course content to regional issues and needs
- Hold a longer class to cover regulatory topics
- Offer tracks or levels with different course content for new/experienced farmers or for small/large producers

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