



NC Choices Announces New Project to Support Beginning Meat Producers in North Carolina with Land-Lease Opportunities, Business Resources, and Training

Media Contact: Sarah Blacklin, NC Choices Director, sarah@ncchoices.com or 919-928-4771

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NC Choices has launched a new project focused on increasing the number of beginning farmers in North Carolina raising meat in either pasture-based or silvopasture systems by providing them with novel land acquisition strategies, resources, and training opportunities. The three-year project is funded by the United States Department of Agriculture's Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program.

NC Choices is an initiative of the Center for Environmental Farming Systems in collaboration with N.C. Cooperative Extension that promotes sustainable food systems through the advancement of the local, niche, and pasture-based meat supply chain in North Carolina.

Land costs remain one of the biggest barriers to entry for new farmers, especially meat producers who typically require more acreage for grazing animals. This project aims to identify affordable long-term lease opportunities for new farmers by pairing them with land that might be considered marginal for crop production (for example silvopasture systems which integrate trees, forages, and grazing livestock), protected lands under conservation easement, and lands designated for solar installations that might benefit from animal grazing management.

"CEFS and N.C. Cooperative Extension have a great team ready to support farmers and landowners with grazing plans, lease agreements, market-buyer connections, and best management practices with the goal of making successful pairings and having a real impact here in North Carolina that can be shared nationally. North Carolina ranks second nationally in solar production, and with more than 24 local land trusts, almost half a million families owning small woodlots, and a rising number of pasture-raised meat producers, we think this is the right time and place to pilot a project like this," said NC Choices Director Sarah Blacklin.

NC Choices is working with [NC FarmLink](#) – a program of NC State Extension that seeks to connect aspiring and expanding farmers with landowners and retiring farmers through a user-friendly database – to maximize ways to find favorable farm/land pairings.

Currently, the project is recruiting North Carolina beginning meat producers (defined as raising meat animals for 10 years or less) looking to lease land, and North Carolina land owners with woodland acreage, land under conservation easement, or solar panel installations interested in working with grazing animal production.

Farmers seeking land, and landowners seeking farmers to graze their land, can submit interest forms on the NC Choices website: www.ncchoices.com; or contact Lee Menius, NC Choices Technical Program Coordinator, at lamenius@ncsu.edu.

For more information about the NC Choices Beginning Farmer Project, please visit the [NC Choices website](#).

The Center for Environmental Farming Systems (CEFS) is a partnership of NC State University, NC Agricultural and Technical State University and the NC Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services. 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. For more information, visit www.cefs.ncsu.edu.

