



## New Center for Environmental Farming Systems Initiative Tackles Farm-Level Food Loss

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**RALEIGH, NC:** The Center for Environmental Farming Systems (CEFS) has announced a new [Southern Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education \(SARE\)](#)-funded initiative to tackle produce loss at the farm level. The goal of the Whole Crop Harvest initiative is to discover ways to recover and utilize produce that would otherwise not leave the field or packing shed. The project complements CEFS' other supply chain initiatives, particularly [NC Growing Together](#) and [UFOODS](#). All of these projects strive to build supply chain capacity and profitable relationships between small/mid-scale food producers and conventional retail and food service markets.

Food waste is a major challenge in the U.S. food system. It's estimated that 40% of food is lost across the supply chain, from the farm through distributor, retailer or food service, and to the consumer. However, those estimates leave out farm-level losses. "A significant amount of healthy, nutrient-dense fruit and vegetables is left unharvested, representing losses of water, inputs, and land," says NC State University graduate student Lisa Johnson. Measuring, understanding the underlying reasons for, and ultimately reducing farm level production losses can benefit the environment and the profitability of the grower.

Johnson, a Ph.D. candidate in the Horticultural Sciences Department, is part of Whole Crop Harvest's interdisciplinary project team of horticulturists, economists, sociologists, and agricultural engineers. Based on Johnson's trials in 107 fields on 10 farms, the team developed an easy-to-use protocol enabling farmers to more accurately estimate quantities of unharvested produce in their fields. Based on that information, farmers can inform buyers or food donation sites and then make an informed decision on the costs and benefits of continuing to harvest the field.

"We're examining what is actually economically feasible for the grower – and what needs to happen further downstream in the supply chain – to move more product out of the field," says project PI Dr. Rebecca Dunning.

For more information about Whole Crop Harvest, please visit: <https://cefs.ncsu.edu/food-system-initiatives/whole-crop-harvest/>

*The Center for Environmental Farming Systems (CEFS) is a partnership of North Carolina State University, North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University and the North Carolina 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 please visit [www.cefs.ncsu.edu](http://www.cefs.ncsu.edu)*