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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Buncombe Schools Serve Local Food

As demand for healthier, local food grows, school cafeterias across the country are trying to keep pace. Lynette Vaughn-Hensley, Child Nutrition Director for Buncombe County Schools, admits, "For a long time, school food has just been the same-old, same-old. But I want our food to represent the beautiful area where we live." The schools and Appalachian Sustainable Agriculture Project (ASAP) have worked together to bring this ambition to fruition--Buncombe County students are now served fresh apples from local growers.

North Carolina is known for growing great apples, and students will find out why when they bite into Red Delicious, Golden Delicious, and Gala apples from Apple Wedge Packers and CL Henderson—Western North Carolina apple farms. Students are also putting a face with their food. Displays created by ASAP have brought photos of local growers to school cafeteria tables. "We live in a region with so many farms. I want our children to know where their food comes from. And I want the people who grow our food to be acknowledged and rewarded," Vaughn-Hensley says. The table toppers also bear the Appalachian Grown logo, developed by ASAP to identify products grown on family farms within a 100 mile radius of Asheville in grocery stores, restaurants, and wherever consumers choose food.

Across the nation, the Farm to School movement is bringing together farmers, educators, and communities to get local food into cafeterias and encourage farm field trips, experiential nutrition education, and school gardens. Growing Minds, ASAP's Farm to School program, is lead agency in the Southeast for the National Farm to School Network and Growing Minds programs are also in action in many western North Carolina counties. Connecting schools and farms benefits both. Schools create markets for local farms and kids get the freshest food possible. Director Emily Jackson also observes, "Getting kids to eat healthy food is easier if they know the story of the food – where it came from, who grew it."

Buncombe County Schools' local buying is part of a larger effort to revamp the school menu. Reducing fried foods and offering more appealing dishes such as homemade pizza, sandwiches on whole wheat bread, wraps, salads, and vegetarian options has elicited "rave reviews," according to Vaughn-Hensley.

The improvements have taken cooperation from the distributor, Carolina Produce, a business that "cares about farmers," Vaughn-Hensley says; the school board; and cafeteria workers who have to be willing to do more work to prepare fresh rather than prepackaged foods. Now what the cafeteria needs is customers, she says. "We hope parents will support our program by letting us provide their kids with great breakfasts and lunches everyday." Vaughn-Hensley wants the apples from Apple Wedge and CL Henderson to be the first of the school system's many local purchases.

ABOUT APPLE WEDGE

View a profile of Apple Wedge at

<http://asapconnections.org/who%20grows%20profiles/applewedge.pdf>.

ABOUT APPALACHIAN SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE PROJECT

Appalachian Sustainable Agriculture Project is a nonprofit organization with the mission to create and expand regional community-based and integrated food systems that are locally owned and controlled, environmentally sound, economically viable and health-promoting. Among many other projects, ASAP works to match chefs and local suppliers, help restaurants advertise local ingredients, and organize events featuring local foods.

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