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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

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Community Foundation Helps ASAP Connect Chefs and Classrooms

ASHEVILLE, NC (February 9, 2011)—Appalachian Sustainable Agriculture Project (ASAP) recently received funding from the Community Foundation of Western North Carolina to connect chefs and schools for cooking demonstrations. ASAP's Growing Minds Farm to School program has been linking the two and helping children establish healthy attitudes and behaviors through positive experiences with fresh, locally grown food since 2004.

Thanks to the nationwide launch of first lady Michelle Obama's Chefs Move to Schools campaign last summer and the interest of local chef Laurey Masterton, whose passion after attending the launch ignited a spark in her colleagues, ASAP has seen a rise in the number of those interested in the program. The grant award will help ASAP meet this new demand; specifically, funding will allow the organization to fulfill the important roles of matchmaker and trainer.

As matchmaker, ASAP will ensure appropriate pairings that meet the needs and preferences of the classrooms, chefs, and community volunteers. To ensure successful cooking demonstrations, ASAP will train chefs in age-appropriate cooking techniques and provide them with lesson plans, cooking tools, and other resources, as well as connect them with area growers and farm-fresh foods.

"Featuring locally grown food is key to this project," says Growing Minds Program Director Emily Jackson. She notes that a focus on healthy food with a connection to local agriculture will help decrease rates of childhood obesity, retain family farms, and increase appreciation for our rural landscapes and lifestyles.

Chef Adam Hayes of Red Stag Grill began leading cooking classes at Glen Arden Elementary in Asheville last fall, including a local winter squash soup demonstration that got multiple classrooms and grade levels, along with faculty, participating. More than 100 students now take part, and he has big ideas for them this year. "I'm excited to create regular cooking classes around ASAP's Get Local initiative, which highlights a local food each month," he says. Not stopping at this monthly goal, he plans to bring in farmers and incorporate farm field trips as well. "This month, we're all visiting Sunburst Trout Farms in Canton. I'm looking forward to the students making the connection that the ingredients we use can come from just around the corner."

"We are thrilled that chefs want to draw attention to healthy local food," shares Jackson, adding, "We are certain this will resonate not only with schools but with families."

[High resolution photos of past cooking demonstrations available upon request.]

ABOUT APPALACHIAN SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE PROJECT (ASAP)

ASAP's mission is to help local farms thrive, link farmers to markets and supporters, and build healthy communities through connections to local food.

Growing Minds, ASAP's Farm to School program, works to connect farms and schools and give children positive experiences with healthy foods. ASAP provides resources and training for all components of Farm to School: farm field trips, nutrition education, school gardens, and local food in cafeterias. Growing Minds has been the Southeast Regional Lead Agency for the National Farm to School Network since 2004.

To learn more about Growing Minds, visit growing-minds.org. For information about all of ASAP's work in the region, visit asapconnections.org, or call 828-236-1282. Search their online Local Food Guide at buyappalachian.org.

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