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## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **Haywood Community College Serves Student-Grown Produce**

**ASHEVILLE, NC (December 3, 2008)** – This spring, the greens served in Haywood Community College's cafeteria couldn't have been more local—they were grown at the college. Students cultivated the produce using the Horticulture Department's aeroponics system as a part of greenhouse operations and greenhouse production courses. Even though it's winter now, the growing season isn't over; staff are working to increase their horticultural capacity and offer more local food in the cafeteria.

When Jim Hill took the position as Haywood Community College's Food Service Manager, he saw that the Horticulture Department was growing lettuce and approached instructor George Thomas about supplying the cafeteria with produce. Thomas's students provided lettuce to top burgers and stocked the salad bar with fresh spring mix several times. Hill watched with pleasure as diners sought out the greens grown on site. "There was really buy-in from the students who eat in the cafeteria," he says.

Thomas says, "I like that students in the classes are growing for a purpose." Haywood students are learning about alternative growing methods such as organics, hydroponics, and aeroponics. (Instead of planting crops in soil, hydroponic systems feed plants with a nutrient rich liquid solution and aeroponic systems apply a fine mist of nutrients and water to the roots.) What's more, they're learning a practical skill: how to produce much-needed food.

The college's current aeroponics system was made possible by a mini grant from the Haywood Community College Foundation. Hill and Thomas are seeking more support so they can expand their systems, and expand the college's food production. In addition to more lettuce, Hill wants to serve herbs, tomatoes, and mixed vegetables grown on campus.

Hill is also working to support our area's farms by requesting local produce from the cafeteria's distributor, Haywood County-based Christopher Produce. The Appalachian Sustainable Agriculture Project (ASAP) is in the process of certifying Christopher Produce as an Appalachian Grown distributor. Appalachian Grown branding identifies farm products grown or raised on family farms in Western North Carolina and the Southern Appalachian mountains. Hill, in addition to participating in Farm to School programs offered by ASAP, will work with the organization to design a promotional campaign for local food in the cafeteria.

"Local food production is a vital part of any community. It provides jobs [for growers] and a sense of connection to food for the consumer," Thomas says, looking at local food not only as a product for his students, but as a benefit for all.

**ABOUT THE APPALACHIAN SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE PROJECT** The Appalachian Sustainable Agriculture Project is a nonprofit organization that supports farmers and rural communities in the mountains of Western North Carolina and the Southern Appalachians by providing education, mentoring, promotion, web resources, and community and policy development. ASAP's mission is to create and expand regional community-based and integrated food systems that are locally owned and controlled, environmentally sound, economically viable and health-promoting.

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