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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

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Jackson County Educators Discuss Farm to School Impacts Over Local Dinner

ASHEVILLE, NC (September 26, 2011)—On Friday, September 16, professors from the Health Science and Education departments at Western Carolina University (WCU) and teachers from Cullowhee Valley School (CVS) joined ASAP for dinner—local, of course. ASAP’s goal? To better connect those involved in their multi-year Jackson County Farm to School Education Project.

The dinner was held at Cashier’s Lonesome Valley Community, the site of the original Sunburst Trout Farms. Soul Infusion Tea House & Bistro of Sylva catered the event using fresh produce from Balsam Gardens (Sylva), Shelton Family Farm (Whittier), Family Traditions Farm (Cullowhee), and Pomme de Terre Farm (Sylva). Jackson County Public Schools Superintendent Dr. Michael Murray and CVS Principal Kathryn Kantz were also in attendance.

ASAP’s Farm to School Education Project is a partnership with professors at WCU, area community colleges, and Jackson County Public Schools that helps integrate Farm to School programming into the course of study for their pre-service teachers and health science students. Farm to School works to benefit children’s health and education while simultaneously providing market opportunities for local famers. So that area college students can experience the programming in action, the project created and now manages CVS as a “learning lab.” There, ASAP provides educational resources and teachers and parents with Farm to School training. A Head Start center will soon be developed as the project’s second learning lab site.

“We’re trying to make environmental change, while also tying these experiences to the curriculum,” says Emily Jackson, ASAP’s Growing Minds Farm to School Program director. “The dinner showed that change *is* happening. Not only did the educators discuss the project’s impacts on their students, they also shared how the experiences were personally, and positively, affecting them.”

“That’s how you know it’s worthy work and that true transformation is happening,” echoes Superintendent Murray. “Our young children, college students, and educators are all reconnecting with the source of their food: the farmers and farms integral to Jackson County.”

[Photo: WCU dietetic intern Kourtney Vandenburg picks tomatoes off the vine at Shelton Family Farm in Whittier as part of ASAP’s Jackson County Farm to School Education Project. As professors and teachers discussed at a recent local dinner for the project, such experiences are making a positive impact on everyone involved. Photo by Jennifer Callahan Photography, jennifercallahanphotography.com.]

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. Experiences include 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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