

Appalachian Sustainable Agriculture Project
729 Haywood Rd., #3, Asheville, NC 28806
(828) 236-1282
www.asapconnections.org

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

MEDIA CONTACTS: Emily Jackson at (828) 236-1282 or emily@asapconnections.org
Molly Nicholie at (828) 236-1282 or molly@asapconnections.org
Rose McLarney at (828) 236-1282 or rose@asapconnections.org.

**Back to School:
ASAP Invites Participation in Farm to School in Fall '09**

ASHEVILLE, NC (August 19, 2009) – ASHEVILLE, NC (August 19, 2009) – Ever since Michelle Obama and area school children planted a garden on the White House lawn, school gardens have been national news. Western North Carolina is a leader in this trend, and kids heading back to school for the year have a wealth of Farm to School opportunities. Growing Minds, a project of the nonprofit organization Appalachian Sustainable Agriculture Project (ASAP), is helping schools offer local food in their cafeterias, school gardens, farm field trips, and other positive experiences with healthy food.

Western North Carolina is home to an outstanding number of family farms—nearly 12,000--and school systems throughout the region are capitalizing on these resources. Various aspects of Farm to School programs are offered in Buncombe, Haywood, Henderson, Jackson, Macon, Madison, Mitchell, and Yancey County schools.

At Brush Creek Elementary School in Madison County, students are planting a fall garden that will grow crops such as squash and greens to be used in tastings and cooking project in the classroom. In Buncombe County, kindergarteners at Emma Elementary are collaborating with fourth graders at Rainbow Mountain School to grow produce to eat themselves, as well as produce for people in need.

Local food is also freshening up cafeteria trays. For example, Buncombe and Henderson counties are serving local apples, Jackson County is serving local greens, among other foods, and schools in nearby Anderson, South Carolina feature berries from a local farm. In Fall 2009, several schools will take part in Get Local, an ASAP program for restaurants and school and hospital food services. Each month, eateries participating in Get Local all highlight the same seasonal, locally grown ingredient in their own unique dishes.

Farm field trips and cooking demos will continue to provide students with hands on experiences such as milking goats, harvesting potatoes and peppers, planting strawberries, watching sheep shearing, and making salsa and pesto.

Schools that want to start or expand Farm to School programs are invited to contact ASAP for guidance. In September, ASAP is publishing a guide for teachers, *The Hayride: A Resource for Educational Farm Field Trips*. ASAP can link teachers with chefs from the community for cooking classes. ASAP can also provide cooking kits and seeds for school gardens. The organization is particularly eager to aid school

cafeterias in finding sources of local food. To make it easy, ASAP is working within existing systems and involving food service distributors many schools already use.

The need to serve healthy foods in schools is more pressing now than ever, because of rising rates of childhood obesity and diabetes, and because of the economic situation. “More kids are qualifying for free and reduced meals and eating in their cafeterias. Many are eating two out of three meals a day a school. So, it’s very important that these meals have good nutritional value,” says Emily Jackson, Program Director for Growing Minds. “We need to support our school systems’ Child Nutrition Directors. They are doing a great job and many are interested in buying more food from local farms.”

Farm to School also benefits the whole community. It gives family farmers new markets, keeps money in our local economy, and preserves our rural landscape and culture.

To get involved and for more information on ASAP, a nonprofit organization with the goal of keeping farmers farming and reconnecting people with their food, visit www.asapconnections.org. ASAP is the Southeast regional lead agency for the National Farm to School Network.

ABOUT THE APPALACHIAN SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE PROJECT

ASAP is helping to rebuild the local economy, preserve rural land and heritage, encourage sustainable agricultural practices, and increase access to fresher, healthier foods. We work to keep farmers farming and to reconnect people with their food. We involve businesses, shoppers, chefs, children, seniors, healthcare providers, teachers, and all community members in the local food movement.

###