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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Bring a Chef to Your Classroom: ASAP Provides Free Cooking Demos for WNC Schools

ASHEVILLE, NC (March 30, 2010) Want kids in your school to make salsa, mix up flavored goat cheese, and taste all kinds of vegetables? They can, for free, with cooking demonstrations provided by Appalachian Sustainable Agriculture Project's (ASAP) Growing Minds program. As a part of ASAP's work to give children positive experiences with fresh, healthy food, the nonprofit organization is now offering Western North Carolina teachers cooking demonstrations for pre-school and elementary school classes.

Here's how cooking demos work: A teacher contacts ASAP requesting a cooking demo and is matched with a volunteer chef. The chef comes to the classroom prepared with food and supplies. All the teacher has to provide is the space and the students. The cooking demos normally range from one hour to one and a half hours. ASAP asks that, in exchange for this service, teachers provide pictures and anecdotes from their students.

Local food cooking demonstrations have multiple benefits including:

-Creating positive relationships with fresh, healthy food. Children may think they hate vegetables or other healthy food, but when they cook those same foods themselves and feel invested in the process, kids are likely to taste anything. By learning how to cook in a fun context, children develop positive associations with good food.

-Exposing children to new foods. Studies have shown that the foods young children are exposed to influence lifelong eating habits. Introducing kids to fresh, healthy foods at an early age can have a long term positive impact.

-Teaching children about local farms. Local food cooking demos provide a great opportunity to talk about seasonality and the origins of food. ASAP has a wealth of information on family farms that can help children get to know the neighbors that grow their food.

-Using cooking as a learning tool. Cooking is a great way for children to use math, science, and reading skills, and teaches children how to follow directions. It also gives children an opportunity to express

themselves and use descriptive language. What did that herb smell like? Which part of this dish did you like best?

Charles Hudson from Sunburst Trout has cooked with children at Central Elementary in Waynesville and Vance Elementary in Asheville and encourages teachers to take advantage of ASAP's program. "Cooking with kids is fun. It's great to see how proud kids are after they've had a hand in cooking a dish, and how willing they are to try something new."

If you would like a chef to teach your class about local food and how to prepare it, please contact ASAP at brook@asapconnections.org or 828-236-1282 by **April 16**. As funding is limited, cooking demonstrations will be provided on a first come/first serve basis.

In addition to offering cooking demonstrations, ASAP has resources for school gardens and farm field trips. ASAP's farm field trip directory, *The Hayride*, helps teachers to find a farm that meets their class's needs. *The Hayride* and other Farm to School resources are available on the Growing Minds website, www.growing-minds.org. ASAP also has funding available to help make farm field trips possible. For school gardens, ASAP has free seeds available at the office. "Feel free to stop by and get your garden growing," the ASAP staff invites.

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.

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