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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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ASAP Convenes Farm to School Network in Asheville

ASHEVILLE, NC (June 27, 2008) -The Appalachian Sustainable Agriculture Project (ASAP) Eager kindergarteners gather around as their teacher pulls back the leaves of a cucumber plant in the school garden. "What do you think this is?" she asks them. "Pickles!" they shout. What's getting these students outside and excited about vegetables? They are participating in a Farm to School program.

Farm to School programs all over the country connect schools with local farms. In Western North Carolina, Growing Minds, the Farm to School program of the Appalachian Sustainable Agriculture Project's (ASAP), works with farmers, educators, and communities to get local food into cafeterias and encourage farm field trips, experiential nutrition education, and school gardens. On July 17th, Growing Minds will gather potential Farm to School participants from throughout the region at Isaac Dickson Elementary in Asheville, NC for the Southeast Region Farm to School Conference, an event that could bring the program to a school in your community.

"Farm to School programs are so valuable because they let kids see their food growing on a farm, meet the farmer who grows it, grow it themselves, or prepare it. Connecting them to their food creates young farm supporters and forms lifelong healthy, eating habits," says Emily Jackson, Program Director for Growing Minds. The programs benefit kids, and in turn, farmers and the larger community.

The first step in getting a Farm to School program started--or expanded--is bringing together child nutrition directors, farmers, agricultural professionals, and school personnel. If you are involved or plan to be involved in a Farm to School program and live or work in Kentucky, Tennessee, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, or Florida, you are welcome to attend.

Growing Minds, now the lead agency for the southeast for the National Farm to School Network, was one of the few efforts of its kind when Jackson started it. She knows the

challenges of getting started: "You've got to learn from other organizations." Workshop sessions will address topics such as how to approach nutrition directors about purchasing local food and how to work with policies.

The location, Isaac Dickson Elementary School, serves local food in its cafeteria and demonstrates school gardens, farm field trips, and cooking for students while bolstering standard course of study objectives and giving kids vital, positive experiences with healthy, local food.

The conference, including a full day of workshops, resource notebook, breakfast, and lunch, costs \$50. Registration is limited; reservations are required. For more information, visit the Growing Minds' website, www.growing-minds.org. Or, for questions about the conference, contact Libby at 828-236-1282 or libby@asapconnections.org.

The Southeast Region Farm to School Conference is sponsored by the Appalachian Sustainable Agriculture Project, the Community Farm Alliance, and the National Farm to School Network.

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.

ABOUT THE NATIONAL FARM TO SCHOOL NETWORK

Farm to School programs have the objectives of serving healthy meals in school cafeterias, improving student nutrition, providing health and nutrition education opportunities that will last a lifetime, and supporting local small farmers.

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