

**Appalachian Sustainable Agriculture Project**  
**729 Haywood Rd., #3**  
**Asheville, NC 28806**  
**(828) 236-1282**  
[www.asapconnections.org](http://www.asapconnections.org)

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**MEDIA CONTACTS:** Emily Jackson (828) 236-1282 [emily@asapconnections.org](mailto:emily@asapconnections.org)  
or Rose McLarney (828) 236-1282, [rose@asapconnections.org](mailto:rose@asapconnections.org).

**WNC Leads the Way  
for Southeastern Farm to School Programs**

**ASHEVILLE, NC (July 23, 2008) – The Appalachian Sustainable Agriculture Project (ASAP)** Kids *will* eat their vegetables—participants in Farm to School programs know this. But kids must have access to healthy food and associate positive experiences with it, and that’s what Farm to School programs provide. Across the country, they connect schools with local farms, for the good of both. This month, in Asheville, NC, the Southeast Region Farm to School Conference connected Farm to School participants from Kentucky, Tennessee, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, or Florida with each other.

Children are disconnected from their food sources, and childhood obesity rates are approaching epidemic proportions. Nine million children over the age of six are considered obese or overweight (American Heart Association). At the same time, decades of dramatic economic and cultural change threaten small family farms.

Addressing both these problems, Farm to School can work with farmers, educators, and communities to get local food into cafeterias and encourage farm field trips, experiential nutrition education, and school gardens. When schools cafeterias serve local food, farms and kids can benefit each other. Schools create markets for local farms, especially in rural, outlying areas where farmers don’t have access to many grocers or restaurants that will buy their produce. Meanwhile, kids get the freshest food possible and establish relationships with the people who grew the food and the place where it was grown. Furthermore, when kids see their food growing on a farm, meet the farmer who grows it, grow it themselves, or prepare it, they’re more likely to value their food and eat healthily.

Western North Carolina-based Growing Minds, the Appalachian Sustainable Agriculture Project’s Farm to School program, hosted the conference. Now the lead agency in the southeast for the National Farm to School Network, Growing Minds was one of the few efforts of its kind when it started. Growing Minds knows 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.

Different participants shared their views, with administrators and growers explaining their perspectives and limitations to each other. One participant commented, “I gained

valuable info on child nutrition programs – how they work, how to communicate more effectively with child nutrition directors.” Another enjoyed broader interactions: “I learned that there is a strong Farm to School movement and found support in numbers.”

In addition to workshops, the conference, held at the experiential Asheville school Isaac Dickson Elementary, demonstrated Farm to School programming in practice in a school garden, a cafeteria that serves local food, and cooking class demonstrations.

Growing Minds not only helped to educate people from other regions. Through the conference, they brought in experts from other regions to speak and attracted attention to Farm to School achievements and possibilities in our area.

To find out more about local efforts to further kids’ connection to their food, foster young farm supporters, and form healthy, lifelong eating habits, visit [www.growing-minds.org](http://www.growing-minds.org).

#### **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.

###