

# APPALACHIAN GROWN™ 2018 PRODUCER SURVEY REPORT



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# INTRODUCTION

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## About the Appalachian Grown Program

ASAP's mission is to help local farms thrive, link farmers to markets and supporters, and build healthy communities through connections to local food. To support Southern Appalachian farms and build a local food system, ASAP developed the Appalachian Grown program in 2007 with the goal of expanding local market opportunities for farmers by providing a way for the public to easily identify products from local farms.

Appalachian Grown is a branding program for farms, farmers tailgate markets, retailers, and wholesalers that annually certifies food and agricultural products grown or raised on farms in Western North Carolina and the Southern Appalachian Mountains. This region includes 60 Appalachian counties in North Carolina, Georgia, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia. A trusted label helps buyers and shoppers know when they are spending their dollars to the benefit of local family farms and communities. When consumers see the Appalachian Grown logo they know they're buying fresher foods that support family farms, strengthen the local economy, preserve rural culture, and protect the region's natural beauty.

**In 2018, 885 farms were Appalachian Grown certified.**

## The Appalachian Grown 2018 Producer Survey

Every year since the Appalachian Grown (AG) program was founded, a survey has been sent to all AG farms to assess the impact of program services and support and gather feedback to shape the program's future direction.

In December 2018, this annual online survey was sent to 828 AG certified producers - those farmers for which we had a valid email address. The survey asked about their experiences in 2018. It opened December 7, 2018 and closed on January 6, 2019. A total of **193** out of the 828 producers completed the survey, a response rate of **23%**.

This report contains the findings from the survey.

# KEY FINDINGS

Farmers and Farm Operations
<b>Nearly ¾ of farmers farm in North Carolina</b> - The largest number of respondents farm in Buncombe County followed by Henderson County.
<b>Farmers produce food on a wide range of acres, but on average farms are smaller</b> - the number of farm acres in production (including grazing and foraging lands) range from 1/4 of an acre to 900 acres. The average was 31 acres, the median was 7.
<b>Nearly ¼ of farmers are new or beginning farmers</b> - 31% have been farming for 10 years or less.
Markets and Farm Sales
<b>Farmers feel market opportunities are stable or increasing in 2018</b> - 86% felt there were the same number of market outlets or more market outlets available to them compared to 2017
<b>Farmers' entering new market outlets is influenced by a number of factors</b> - the top factor identified was improved relationships with buyers, followed by increased market opportunities.
<b>Farmers use many strategies for building relationships with their customers</b> - the highest rated strategies were sampling their products (83%), sharing their farm story (81%), and using social media (76%)
<b>Farmers sell to both direct and wholesale markets</b> - 90% of farmers sell to direct markets, 52% sell to wholesale markets. The average farmer sells to 2 different market outlets.
<b>Farmers markets are the most popular market outlet, followed by restaurants and farm stores/stands-</b> 66% of farmers sell some or all of their products at farmers markets, 58% sell some or all of their products to restaurants, 48% sell some or all of their products at farm stores/stands
<b>Overall sales in many market outlets increased in 2018</b> - farmers reported that sales at farmers markets, farm stands, to restaurants, and online all experienced 30% increases over last year.
<b>Farmers expect to increase sales and expand into new market outlets in 2019</b> - the greatest number of farmers expect to increase sales in farmers markets (54%) followed by farm stores/farm stands (48%) and restaurants (42%).
<b>Farmers sell primarily to local markets</b> - 76% of farmers' total sales occurred within 100 miles of Asheville.
<b>Farmers face multiple challenges in selling to local markets</b> - among the most frequently cited challenges are competition (with both local and non-local products), marketing, and inadequate consumer demand or, conversely, inadequate supply to meet demand.
Participation in the Appalachian Grown Program
<b>Farmers label their products with AG branding materials</b> - 66% of farmers report labeling some or all of their products with AG materials (with labeling, boxes, twist ties, signage, etc).
<b>Farmers report that the Local Food Guide is important for increasing their sales</b> - 69% reported the online guide is important for their sales, 61% reported the print guide was important for their sales
<b>Farmers report that participation in the AG program impacts their farm business</b> - the top reason given is the credibility the logo gives to their farm products which makes it easier for customer to buy local.

## Summary of Key Findings Over the Last 4 Years

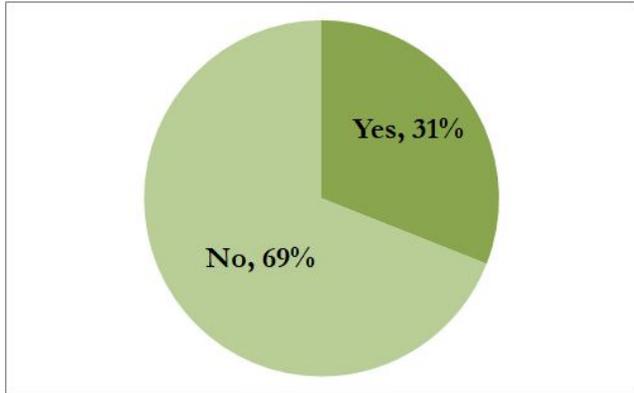
	2015	2016	2017	2018
<b>Farmers and Farm Operations</b>				
% of respondents who have been farming for 10 years or less	<b>53.5%</b> n=209	<b>46%</b> n=252	<b>56%</b> n=237	<b>31%</b> n=191
% of respondents who fit the USDA's definition of a limited resource farm	<b>38%</b> n=210	<b>34%</b> n=252	<b>35%</b> n=235	<b>37%</b> n=192
% of respondents currently growing or that have grown tobacco	<b>15%</b> n=187	<b>15%</b> n=253	<b>18%</b> n=239	<b>14%</b> n=193
% of respondents who are former tobacco quota holders	<b>18%</b> n=187	<b>17%</b> n=253	<b>19%</b> n=238	<b>11%</b> n=193
% of respondents growing on former tobacco land	<b>30%</b> n=186	<b>31%</b> n=252	<b>31%</b> n=239	<b>32%</b> n=193
Average # of farm acres in production (including grazing and foraging lands)	<b>37.9</b> n=188	<b>38.5</b> n=245	<b>42.8</b> n=236	<b>30.8</b> n=188
<b>Markets and Farm Sales</b>				
% of respondents who indicated that there are fewer market outlets available in the current year than in the previous year	<b>4%</b> n=212	<b>13%</b> n=231	<b>10%</b> n=228	<b>14%</b> n=175
Average % of respondents' sales that were sold to local markets (within approximately 100 miles of Asheville)	<b>77%</b> n=186	<b>81%</b> n=191	<b>73%</b> n=220	<b>76%</b> n=162

# FINDINGS

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## Farms and Farm Operations

**31%** of farmers have been farming for 10 years or less



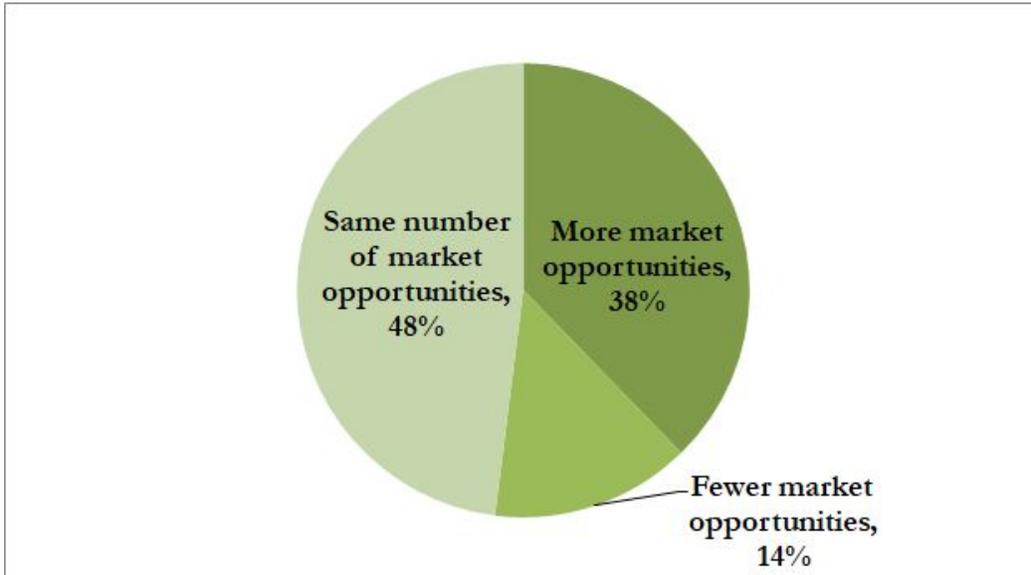
**78%** of farmers farm in North Carolina



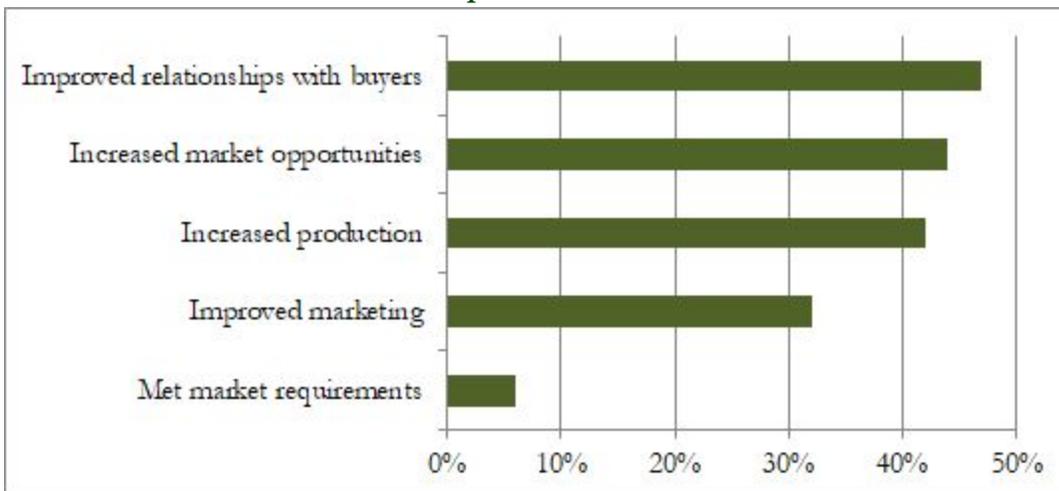
The average farm size is **31 acres**, the median is **7 acres**

## Markets and Farm Sales

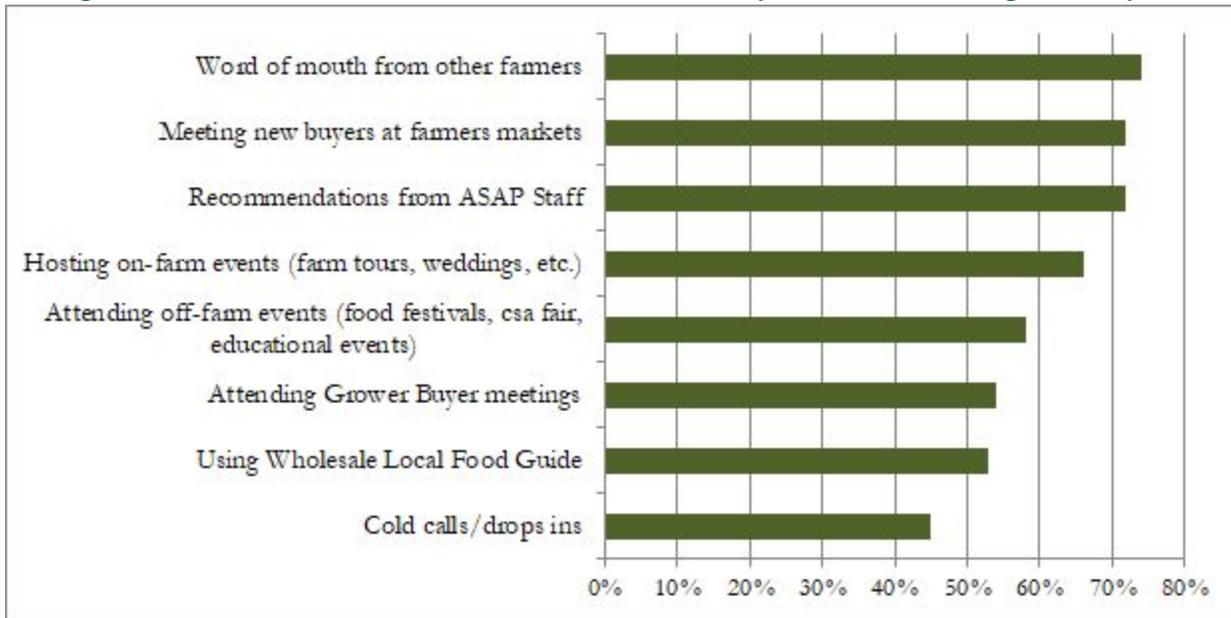
**38%** of farmers believe there were more market opportunities to sell their products in 2018 than in 2017



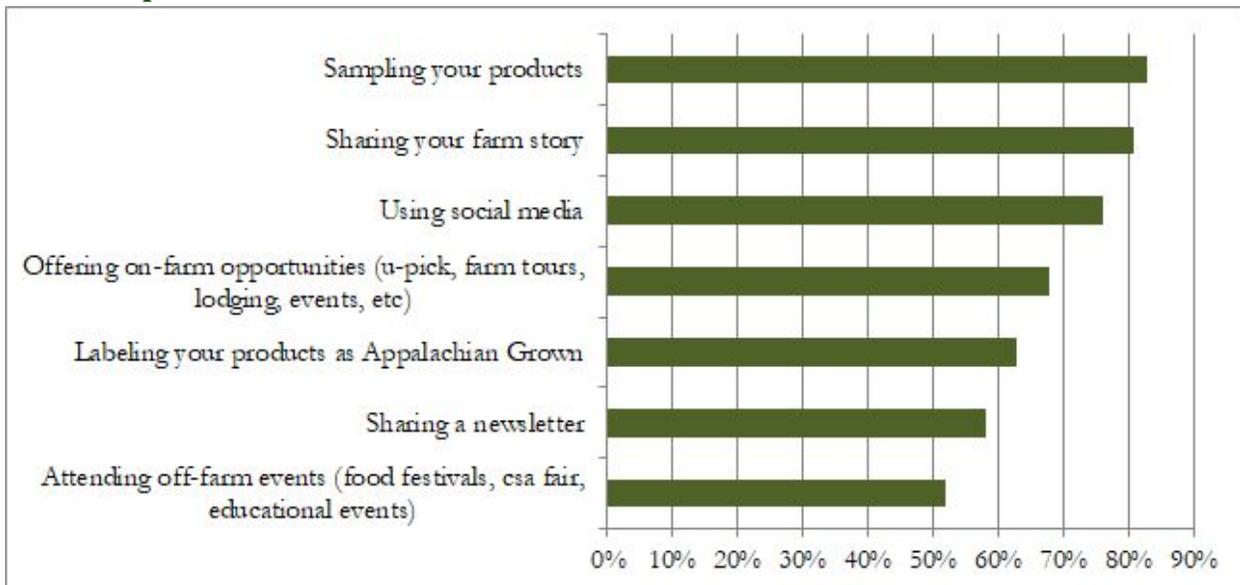
### Factors that influenced farmers' expansions into new markets in 2018



Strategies farmers used and rated as ‘useful’ or ‘extremely useful’ for finding new buyers

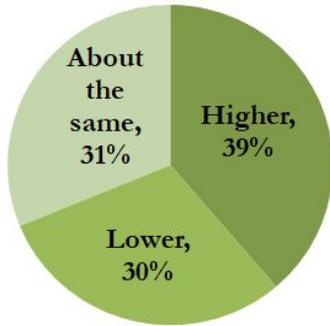


Strategies farmers used and rated as ‘useful’ or ‘extremely useful’ for building customer relationships

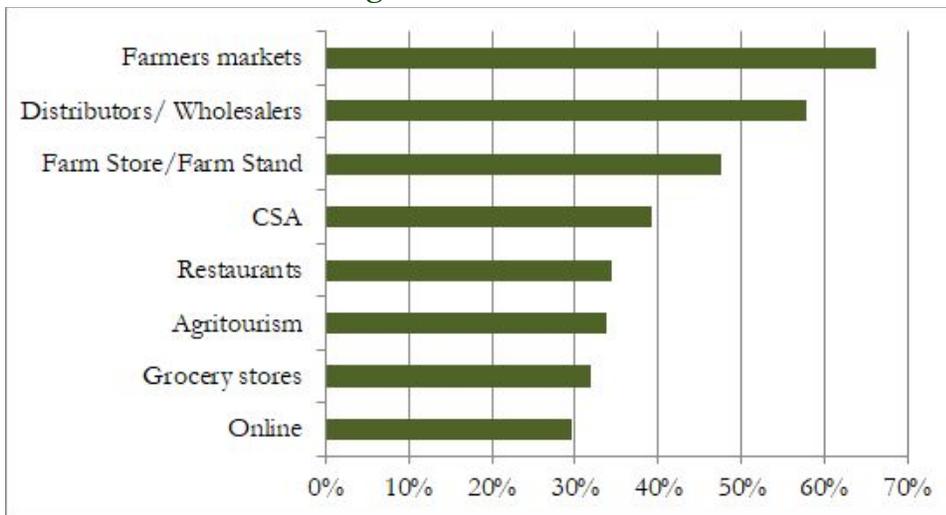


On average, **76%** of farmers’ total sales occurred within 100 miles of Asheville

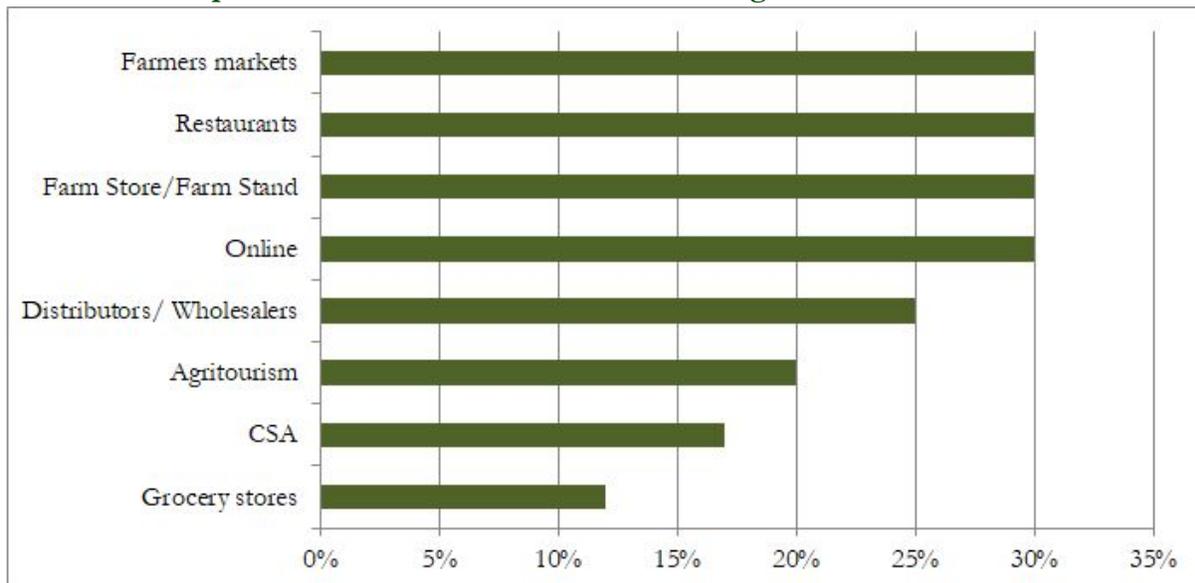
**39%** of farmers reported their gross sales were higher in 2018 than 2017



**Farmers sell to the following market outlets**



**Farmers that experienced sales increases in the following markets from 2017 to 2018**



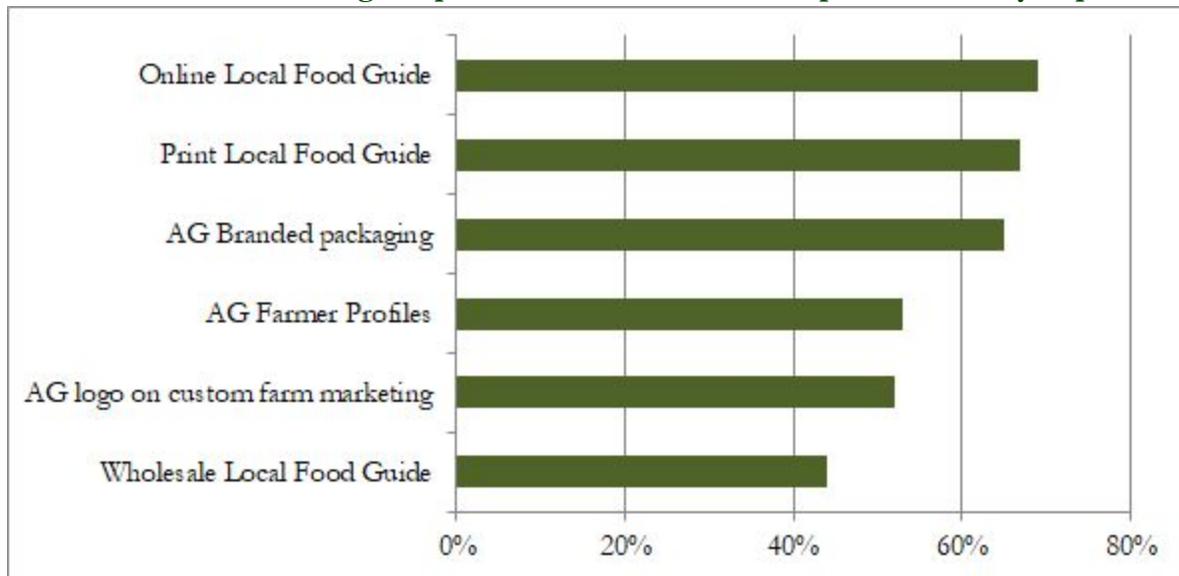
### Farmers face the following challenges in selling to local markets

Emergent Theme	Illustrative Quotes
<b>Competition (n=18)</b>	<p>“Competing with the pricing of Trader Joes”</p> <p>“Too many farms doing the same thing”</p>
<b>Producing enough/meeting demand (n=18)</b>	<p>“Producing enough product to meet demand.”</p> <p>“Having a consistent supply of product to sell”</p>
<b>Not enough demand (n=18)</b>	<p>“Relatively low numbers of customers that are coming to the farmers market”</p> <p>“They can't support the volume we want to sell.”</p>
<b>Marketing (n=15)</b>	<p>“Getting our name out there”</p> <p>“Getting the word out about availability and ordering options”</p>
<b>Production challenges/weather (n=15)</b>	<p>“Lack of storage space”</p> <p>“2018 was a bad year; the weather was our biggest challenge”</p>
<b>Transportation/remote location (n=11)</b>	<p>“Transportation, delivering the product”</p> <p>“Our distance from Asheville”</p>
<b>Time (n=10)</b>	<p>“Time constraints attending markets”</p> <p>“Time to cold call, reach out to, and show prospective new customers my products and still be able to be in the field, shop, or kitchen creating products”</p>
<b>Labor (n=9)</b>	<p>“Limited production due to limited labor”</p> <p>“Labor at harvest time on farm”</p>
<b>Price (n=7)</b>	<p>“Lack of profitability; have to work my day job to pay bills”</p> <p>“Finding customers willing to pay the price for grass fed beef”</p>
<b>Challenges with restaurants and farmers markets (n=7)</b>	<p>“Farmers market fees, overlapping times, etc.”</p> <p>“Keeping up with all the changing restaurant owners, managers, and employees who order for their business”</p>
<b>Customer education (n=7)</b>	<p>“Explaining growing practices to consumers”</p> <p>“Educating customers on price differences from the grocery store”</p>

## Participation in the Appalachian Grown Program

**66%** of farmers reported identifying some or all of their products with AG labeling

Farmers rated the following AG promotional materials as ‘important’ or ‘very important’



### The impact ASAP’s Appalachian Grown Program has had on farmers (selected testimonials)

“ASAP has helped us gain skills we use every day in making our farm a successful business. The friendly, supportive and helpful staff has made us feel a part of the region's local food movement. We are proud to display the AG label on our products, and appreciate the message AG communicates to our community.”

“We really like having AG certification to distinguish us from other producers. The stickers look great on our products.”

“ASAP is consistently our first reference as a resource to every farmer we know, especially the new ones. ASAP consistently offers mind-blowing resources to our local and regional farm community - thank you!”

“ASAP's staff has been invaluable to us in finding new markets for our products. When we have chef turn-over or find ourselves with a ton of product, ASAP staff have always been able to connect us with chefs or distributors interested in buying local. In moments of panic (we have 800 bunches of harvested kale a buyer didn't end up purchasing at the last minute!), ASAP staff has helped us. Thank you. You all are so important to our farm and our family.”

“AG has been an instrumental partner during my first two years of production. The staff is immensely helpful and has been willing to work with me to help my farm gain exposure in region. I couldn’t imagine starting a farm business without them!”