



306 West Haywood St.  
Asheville, NC 28801  
(828) 236-1282

[www.asapconnections.org](http://www.asapconnections.org)

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

**MEDIA CONTACTS:** Sarah Hart, [sarah@asapconnections.org](mailto:sarah@asapconnections.org), 917-406-4917

### **Farmers Impacted by COVID-19**

*ASAP releases a new report detailing immediate and projected effects of the pandemic*

**ASHEVILLE, NC (April 3, 2020)**—The closure of restaurants and disruption of farmers markets due to COVID-19 is having an immediate and potentially devastating impact on local farmers, according to a new report published by ASAP's Local Food Research Center. Farmers rely on a variety of market outlets, including grocery stores and wholesale markets, but farms that sell at farmers markets and to restaurants are the first to feel the effects of these market disruptions. Local sales to restaurants and products sold at farmers markets total over \$16 million annually in Western North Carolina, representing a major revenue source for farmers and an important economic driver.

"Now more than ever we need to come together around food," said ASAP Executive Director Charlie Jackson. "Our farms are innovative and resilient but they are facing unprecedented challenges that are going to take a community effort to address."

According to the new report, nearly 200 area farms sell directly to restaurants and more than 200 sell at one or more of the 50 farmers markets in Western North Carolina. Eighty percent of farms surveyed reported an immediate decrease in customers and sales due to the COVID-19 emergency. Two thirds reported that, if disruptions persist for several months, the long-term financial hardship would be severe enough to result in bankruptcy, business closure, and leaving the industry. An additional 20 percent reported they would need to restructure farm business plans by changing or reducing production or shifting sales to entirely new market streams like online sales and/or home delivery. In Western North Carolina, these farms cover 43,000 acres and employ 1,400 people. The full report is available at [asapconnections.org/report/covid-19-impact-on-local-farms](http://asapconnections.org/report/covid-19-impact-on-local-farms).

"Like with most small businesses, COVID-19 is rearranging and heavily impacting every aspect of our work on the farm," said Anna Littman, owner of Ivy Creek Family Farm in Barnardsville. "Yesterday we harvested baby mustard greens and arugula we planted in January for chefs who requested them. Those chefs are now out of work."

April usually marks the opening of most of the region's farmers markets and the beginning of the tourist season, which drives restaurants to increase local purchasing. Farmers have planned their production schedules, made investments in seeds and supplies, planted spring crops, purchased or bred animals, and are anticipating the first sales of the year. "As the season progresses there will be more need for new markets for farmers and other food producers," noted Jackson.

"Usually this is an exciting time. Right now, it's confusing," said Littman. "The crops keep growing, and so we keep inventing ways to sell it. Every day we review all of our options. Do we keep planting? How do we create more customers and quickly? Can we afford to keep our staff? Can we pay our

mortgage? These are discussions that happen after we put our children (who are with us 24/7 now) to bed, after we finish the unfinished work of the day.”

In ASAP’s survey, farmers identified four areas as top needs: help finding and transitioning to new market outlets, such as online sales; marketing support and communicating to the public how to connect with farms; keeping farmers markets open and safe; and financial support through loans or grants. ASAP is responding by creating new market outlets for farmers that support public health; enhancing the comprehensive online *Local Food Guide* to better connect the community with local farms; providing packaging materials to farmers; offering training and technical assistance for farmers and farmers market managers; and seeking relief funding. These efforts include:

- The new ASAP Farmers Market at A-B Tech ([asapconnections.org/covid-19-response/asap-farmers-market](https://asapconnections.org/covid-19-response/asap-farmers-market)) is designed to protect shoppers and vendors by maintaining social distances and mitigating potential virus transmission points. In addition, ASAP has surveyed and convened farmers market managers from across the region to assess what support is needed to keep markets operating safely.
- New search functions are being added to the *Local Food Guide* ([appalachiangrown.org](https://appalachiangrown.org)), allowing customers to easily find farms offering online ordering, delivery, and pickup options.
- Over the next several weeks, ASAP’s Growing Local podcast will tell stories from farmers as they adapt to new circumstances and try new business models. Growing Local airs every Monday morning on WNCW and is available on SoundCloud and iTunes.
- A list of relief loans and grants available to farmers during the emergency can be found at [asapconnections.org/covid-19-response](https://asapconnections.org/covid-19-response).

“We are fortunate to have a robust and resilient local food system in Western North Carolina,” said Jackson. “Farms are growing food and people want fresh, healthy, and seasonal foods that support their health and the local economy.” Community members can support local farms and food businesses by continuing to shop at the farmers markets that have remained open; by purchasing products directly from farmers through CSAs, online ordering, and at farm stands; and by donating to ASAP at [asapconnections.org](https://asapconnections.org).

#### **ABOUT ASAP (APPALACHIAN SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE PROJECT)**

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 learn more, visit [asapconnections.org](https://asapconnections.org).

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