



Growing Local Radio

Growing Local Radio was a radio series developed by ASAP to engage individuals more deeply with the region's developing local food system. It was designed to use storytelling to increase the audience's awareness of what was happening regionally around local farms and local food and provide them ways to actively participate.

The series was directly informed by the theoretical framework that developed over the course of the research project and, specifically, by the understanding that activating the participation of more people in the food system is primary to the work of changing it. Local food system building is a unique way of engaging people. Direct sensory experiences with local farms and food bring people closer to food production and in the process activate their curiosity to know more and desire to engage more with local farms and food. Storytelling is a powerful way to connect people viscerally to local farms and farmers, to farmers markets, to unique farmer collaborations, and to the businesses and projects that have developed around the region's expanding food system.

Between 2017 and 2021, a four-minute story aired weekly on regional public radio station WNCW. Over 200 unique stories were produced with ambient sound and first person narration - through the voices of farmers, entrepreneurs, community members, etc - to create experiences for listeners and ground them in a sense of place. Listeners toured farms, experienced the atmosphere of farmers markets, listened in on cooking demos, witnessed the experiences of children at farms and in school gardens and cafeterias. They heard the stories of farmers, entrepreneurs and other business owners focused on local food, and community members taking actions to change the food system in the communities where they live.

Stories resolved around several central themes:

- **Information about farming in the Southern Appalachians:** stories that educate listeners about farms and farming in the Southern Appalachian region - what farming in the region looks like and how it differs from industrial-scale farming, what it means to farm and grow food for local markets (e.g., the skills needed, the challenges faced, the multiple hats farmers wear). Includes stories that focus on cultural traditions in Cherokee agriculture - e.g., growing methods and culturally significant food crops - and the current revitalization of and renewed interest in growing food among the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians.
- **Connecting children and schools to local food:** stories that spotlight the work of ASAP's Growing Minds farm to school program - using gardening, cooking, experiential learning on farms, and classroom education to connect children and the adults that facilitate these activities to the region's farms and fresh local food.
- **Eating local:** stories providing the public with ways to shop and eat locally throughout the year - shopping at farmers markets (in each season) and roadside stands, choosing and participation in a CSA, finding and identifying local food in grocery stores and restaurants, serving local holiday meals, using local resources like the Local Food Guide to find local farms and food, and more.

- **Experiencing local farms and food:** stories that spotlight different regional agritourism opportunities - upick in different seasons, farm tours (include ASAP's annual regional farm tour and the WNC Cheese Trail), and various other local food and farm events to attend.
- **Farm/Farmer stories:** stories that feature particular farmers to tell their unique story (e.g., the location and history of their farm, what they produce, their experience of farming, unique collaborations with other farmers and businesses, innovations they've made, etc.), and equally to tell the story of farming more broadly in the region (e.g., what it takes to grow food for local markets, the challenges of farming, how farmer-farmer and farmer-business collaborations are changing the food system, etc.).
- **Impacts of consumer demand:** stories that illustrate the ways our decisions around food and eating have changed and created the region's evolving local food system.
- **COVID-19 impacts on farming and local food:** stories documenting the challenges of the pandemic for farmers, farmers markets, local-food focused businesses, community members, and community-based organizations like ASAP and the strategies and innovations developed to adapt.
- **Local food and food access:** stories that educate listeners about programs designed to provide local fresh food to people experiencing food insecurity, e.g., SNAP and its increased availability at the region's farmers markets, ASAP's Appalachian Farms Feeding Families program, which connects farms to food relief organizations and feeding sites during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- **Local food and wellness:** stories from businesses and organizations in the region that have developed workplace wellness programs that embrace locally grown food (i.e., through onsite farmers markets or farm CSAs) to help workers adopt healthier lifestyles.

The entire Growing Local Radio archive can be found here: <https://asapconnections.org/broadcasts/>