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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

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**ASAP's Appalachian Farms Feeding Families Receives \$500,000 Grant**

*Blue Cross and Blue Shield of North Carolina Foundation will fund a one-year expansion of ASAP's food insecurity and farmer support program.*

**ASHEVILLE, NC (July 27, 2021)**—ASAP (Appalachian Sustainable Agriculture Project) is expanding its Appalachian Farms Feeding Families program in Western North Carolina thanks to a \$500,000 grant from Blue Cross and Blue Shield of North Carolina Foundation. The program pays farmers to grow and deliver fresh fruits and vegetables directly to food relief sites in their own communities. The program serves a dual purpose to both improve the quality and variety of fresh produce available to families who need assistance and create new market opportunities for farms that have lost restaurant and other sales due to COVID-19.

ASAP's Appalachian Farms Feeding Families program, created in response to the pandemic, now serves 56 feeding sites and 47 farms, working in 22 WNC counties. Last season, farms were able to provide fresh, local food to between 3,000 and 4,000 families. The funding from Blue Cross NC Foundation will double local food purchasing through the program as well as allow ASAP to add new sites and farms.

"This has been a year of such uncertainty for so many of our neighbors, the families and farmers in our communities," said ASAP Co-Director Charlie Jackson. "We are grateful to Blue Cross NC Foundation support to expand this program as there continues to be a strong need for it."

"We are so encouraged by what ASAP is doing to build a healthier Western North Carolina by connecting the needs of residents and farmers across the region," said Amon Marsteller, Communications Director for Blue Cross NC Foundation. "We value the opportunity to support the expansion of their response to increase access to healthy local food for those who are struggling to feed themselves and their families."

Rates of food insecurity have grown dramatically during the pandemic. Feeding America projects that more than 200,000 people in WNC experienced food insecurity in 2020, a 15 percent increase from before the pandemic. Food insecurity among children is especially high. Nearly a quarter of children in WNC experienced food insecurity in 2020, a 21 percent increase from 2019. Many of the feeding sites included in Appalachian Farms Feeding Families have even starker numbers. For instance, Haywood Christian Ministries, in Waynesville, served 12,000 people in 2019. In 2020, it served more than 60,000 people. So far in 2021, the site is assisting 200 to 300 people per day.

In addition to providing additional market outlets, farmers also benefit from a greater connection to their communities. "We are very grateful to ASAP for giving us the opportunity to sell our produce so close to home, to the people who often need it the most," said farmer Erica Fernbach of Seven Oaks Farm in Rutherford County. "The connections we've made through our participation have helped us immensely in finding our footing as a first-year farm, and also in feeling more rooted in our community."

*[High resolution photos are available. Contact [sarah@asapconnections.org](mailto:sarah@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](http://asapconnections.org).

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