

High Country Farm Pathways Launch Meeting

High Country Farm Pathways brings together land-focused and sustainable agriculture-focused organizations to develop the framework for a viable Farm Pathways program in the High Country. Farm Pathways is a model for farmer training and land access support created by Organic Growers School, Southern Appalachian Highlands Conservancy & WNC FarmLink.



We need to invest in the next generation of farmers, and by replicating this model we will begin to rebuild a path towards agriculture in our region.

This work is made possible through a collaborative seed grant from the North Carolina Community Development Initiative, the Conservation Fund, and the Conservation Trust for North Carolina.

On February 5th, 2018, we held the first High Country Farm Pathways meeting at Blue Ridge Women in Agriculture in Boone, NC. This meeting was facilitated by Abbey Piner of Community Food Strategies.

Desired Outcomes for the February 5th Meeting:

1. Create a cohesive structure and lay the groundwork for collaboration for the Farm Pathways model/collaboration, by introducing people to each other, introducing them to the idea of the collaborative, and getting folks to buy-in to the model.
2. Develop an understanding of how we can build our joint capacity as a group.
 - a. What does each organization have going on and where do they fit into the Farm Pathways model? How do they promote farm careers and preserve rural communities?
3. Start to understand the (potential) linkages between organizations that can build a most robust Farm Pathway for developing farmers and working farms in the High Country.

Document Outline

Overview

Desired Outcomes

Participants

Summary & Next Steps

Full Notes

Participants

First Name	Last Name	Affiliation
Eric	Hiegl	Blue Ridge Conservancy
Anne	Fanatico	AppState - Sustainable Development Dept.
Suzanna	Denison	WNC FarmLink
Nicole	DelCogliano	Organic Growers School
Cameron	Farlow	Organic Growers School
Richard	Rheingans	AppState - Sustainable Development Dept.
Ben	Loomis	Patterson School
Dave	Walker	Blue Ridge Women in Agriculture
Margaret	Newbold	Conservation Trust for North Carolina
Richard	Boylan	NC Cooperative Extension
Caroline	Rothkopf	WNC FarmLink

Meeting Summary & Next Steps

Using the Results-Based Accountability (RBA) decision-making process, we identified a shared goal (or Result Statement) amongst our organizations.

Our work focuses on making farming a thriving, viable livelihood in the High Country.

We know what this looks like and can articulate ways that it would appear in our region. It means:

New farmers come and stay in the High Country.

Farming and sustainable agriculture is part of the education, at all ages.

We have a just, resilient, and fair economy.

Farmers are a visual professional class, supported by the surrounding community.

Farm growth protects conservancy values.

Please see Full Notes for more representations of what it looks like.

We also know what activities are already occurring in the High Country to lead to this shared goal.

There are established organizational partnerships.

Farm education is happening here through conferences, workshops, and one-on-one training for traditional and non-traditional students.

Each existing incubator farm has a conservation easement.

Please see Full Notes for more representations of what it looks like.

Each of our organizations uses different metrics to understand their work, but we identified several measurements that will let us know how much progress we have made toward making farming a thriving, viable livelihood in the High Country.

Are farmers meeting their farm income goals

Percentage of food grown in the High Country that is consumed in the High Country

Please see Full Notes for more potential measurements.

Organic Growers School uses the measurement of Farm Income Goals because it recognizes that our region hosts many different forms of sustainable agriculture, in scale, production methods, etc. Organic Growers School also values that this measurement seeks to understand how *the farm's* sense of if they are satisfied with their farm income/profitability.

Several studies have been completed about the Watauga County Farmers' Market as a market channel and about local restaurants' interest in sourcing local food. Blue Ridge Women in Agriculture also collects data about the amount of food that is sold through the High Country Food Hub, Boone's Winter Farmers' Market, and the Tuesday King Street Market. In July, 2012, ASAP produced "Food and Farm Assessment for a Five-County Region in the Southern Appalachians: Alleghany, Ashe, Watauga, Wilkes, and Johnson County," which can be found at: <http://asapconnections.org/downloads/asap-food-and-farm-assessment-high-country.pdf>. This study analyzes agricultural production, local food consumption, and food spending for the five county region.

To reach our shared goal (**Farming is a thriving, viable livelihood in the High Country**), we identified several near, medium, and long-term strategies that individual organizations and the Farm Pathways group can take. Each participant used colored sticky dots (2 of each color) to recognize their favored strategy. Red indicates short-term strategies. Green indicates medium-term strategies. Blue indicates long-term strategies.

Strategy	6 months	1-2 Years	3-5 Years	Total Votes
Create a coordinated calendar				4
Hold regular/coordinated gatherings/events among organizations				4
Write grants together				4
Form a scholarship pool for farmers to participate in trainings				4

Please see Full Notes for more potential strategies.

The strategies listed above represent the top four strategies suggested by the group. They reflect an interest from the group to name the Farm Pathway and begin to formalize a framework for greater collaboration.

Already, we work together. We understand that local food systems and rural communities are integral elements of strong, diversified local economies. However, we also understand that we need to do more to rebuild our fractured regional food system, create viable agricultural career opportunities, and protect our region's farmland.

Together, we can work to fill the current gaps in regional agricultural services for beginning farmers by providing comprehensive and holistic farmer training, ongoing support & mentorship, and innovative land access opportunities in the High Country.

Moving Forward

Blue Ridge Women in Agriculture (BRWIA) is committed to encouraging the development of the High Country Farm Pathways group. Through support from a collaborative seed grant from the North Carolina Community Development Initiative, the Conservation Fund, and the Conservation Trust for North Carolina, BRWIA has dedicated funding for 2017-2018 to:

1. Facilitate a framework for the group
2. Encourage collaborative activities and outreach amongst the group

One Example of a Collaborative Activity

On March 22nd, Blue Ridge Women in Agriculture is partnering with WNC FarmLink and Andrew Branan of NCSU to host a training that will focus on how organizations and individuals, who frequently work with landowners, may be able to better advocate for good farm transition planning. This workshop will provide participants with tools to ensure that High Country farmland remains available for tomorrow's generation

This is one example activity of the work that our organizations can do to work together to fill the current gaps that we have identified.

Farming today takes courage and perseverance, dedication and time, but few who start will succeed without help. The success of beginning farmers and the WNC region are entwined.

Full Notes

Overview of the Process

Using the Results-Based Accountability (RBA) decision-making process, we identified a shared goal (or Result Statement) amongst our organizations. Our work focuses on making farming a thriving, viable livelihood in the High Country. We know what this looks like and can articulate ways that it would appear in our region. We also know what activities are already occurring in the High Country to lead to this shared goal. Each of our organizations uses different metrics to understand their work, but we identified several measurements that will let us know how much progress we have made toward making farming a thriving, viable livelihood in the High Country. To reach this result, we identified several near, medium, and long-term goals that individual organizations and the Farm Pathways group can take.

Result Statement

Farming is a thriving, viable livelihood in the High Country.

Experience

If farming is a thriving, viable livelihood in the High Country, what would we see, do, or hear?

- New farmers come and stay.
- More land is kept in farming.
- Our tourism market is full of fresh, local food.
- AppState sources local food.

- Second homeowners have long-term leases with farmers.
- Farmers have easy access to services and supplies (feed & seed stores, processors, etc).
- Farmers are a visual professional class, supported by the surrounding community.
- We have a farmers union.
- Beginning farmers can find training, support, and access to land.
- There are available farm workers.
- Farm growth protects conservancy values.
- Conservation easements promote farms' viability.
- There is a healthy ecosystem.
- Farming and sustainable agriculture is part of the education, at all ages.
- Health outcomes of the community are great/optimal (physical, social, mental)
- We have a just, resilient, and fair economy.
- Animal welfare is a priority.

What's Working?

*These are activities that are already happening in the High Country to ensure that **farming is a thriving, viable livelihood in the High Country.***

- There are established organizational partnerships.
- Farm education is happening here through conferences, workshops, and one-on-one training for traditional and non-traditional students.
- There are diversified "on-ramps" to the Pathway, to becoming a farmer.
- Farming is cultural and place-based, here.
- Each existing incubator farm has a conservation easement.
- Our region's biodiversity is impressive and important.
- Our region's farms are diverse in their enterprises and production.
- Land conservancies have farmers in mind.
- People want to come to our region because it's beautiful.
- There are innovative new markets, like the High Country Food Hub's online farmers' market.

How Would You Know?

These are measurable data points.

Indicator	Total Votes
Are farmers meeting their farm income goals	9
Percentage of food grown in the High Country that is consumed in the High Country	4

Percentage of farmers that would like to stay in farming that can stay in farming	3
Degree of diversity among farmers and farm operations	3
Measure of psychosocial stress	2
Average age of farmers	2
Number of conservation or restoration projects	1
Percentage of food needs of the High Country met by the High Country's food economy	1
Degree of connectedness within the community	1
Percentage of farm workers with labor protections (interns/apprentices, H2A, etc)	1

Listed but not prioritized:

- Percentage of farms with specified certifications (Organic, biodynamic, etc)
- Number of stream miles restored
- Number of agricultural easements
- Do residents have the access they need to quality healthcare
- Number of locally owned businesses
- Wages of farm workers

What Could We Do to Make a Greater Impact?

These are the strategies. Darker colors represent more votes.

Strategy	6 months	1-2 Years	3-5 Years	Total Votes
Create a coordinated calendar				4
Hold regular/coordinated gatherings/events among organizations				4
Write grants together				4
Form a scholarship pool for farmers to participate in trainings				4

Form a stakeholder advisory committees/stay in touch with farmers and hold listening sessions with farmers				3
Create materials that show/explain the pathway				3
Connect across state/outside of the region (visits to CEFS, CFSA, etc)				3
Capture High Country food system visually through asset mapping				2
Encourage conventional/long-time farmers to serve as mentors				2
Adopt affirmative ag easement language				2
Create an MOU between orgs involved				1
Encourage institutional markets				1
Encourage incubator farms participate in Farm Beginnings program				1
Hold agroecology intensives in summer				1
Use the Farm Tours to highlight the pathway (incubator farmers, conversency land)				1