



2025 IMPACT REPORT

Carolina Farm Stewardship Association

Letter from Leadership

Dear friends,

2025 brought a convergence of pressures that tested nearly every part of our food and farm systems. Federal funding and policy disruptions created uncertainty for the programs farmers depend on. At the same time, climate-driven challenges intensified, including uneven recovery from Hurricane Helene, which devastated small farms in Western North Carolina and the Upstate and Midlands in South Carolina. For many of our communities, it was a year marked by difficult choices.

Yet farmers kept showing up to do the essential, hopeful work of feeding their communities and caring for their land. And at CFSA, we continued to show up for them when and where it mattered most, thanks to your support throughout the year: from our spring emergency fundraising campaign to our year-end appeal and through every donation and membership contribution.

In the following pages, you'll find some of the farms and organizations that we partnered with in 2025. Across these stories, what stands out is the sharing of knowledge, a deep sense of community, and a spirit of collaboration, showing that when we come together around a common purpose, we can create the conditions for meaningful change.

Thank you for standing with farmers and for helping keep this work steady in an unsteady year.



Roland McReynolds, Executive Director



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Contents

Letter from Leadership.....2

Farm Services.....3

Advocacy.....22

Education.....26

Membership & Financials.....31

Carolina Farm Stewardship Association unites farmers, consumers, and businesses around a shared vision: a sustainable regional food system that is good for all consumers, farmers, farmworkers, and ecosystems.

Our work focuses on three pillars: farm services, advocacy, and education, each reinforcing the others to strengthen farm viability and rural economies, keep land in farming, and uphold the integrity of organic agriculture.

We believe food should be produced in ways that improve soil, ecosystems, and communities. And since 1979, we've been doing the work to make that possible.

FARM SERVICES

CFSA's Farm Services team acts as a bridge between sustainable ideals and operational realities, providing practical, individualized guidance through free technical assistance and educational programming on organic production, food safety, high tunnel production, conservation planning, and market access, and conducting research on best practices for organic production.

171

farms received
Technical
Assistance

1,061

learners reached
across 30 workshops,
webinars, and courses

16

peer mentorship
pairings for farmers
transitioning to
organic production

5

Farmers-in-Training
at CFSA's Lomax Farm
in Concord, NC

Organic Transitions: From Aspiration to Action

The Transition to Organic Partnership Program (TOPP) is a network assembled by the USDA's National Organic Program to support transitioning and organic producers with mentorship, technical assistance, and resources. In the Southeast, Florida Organic Growers coordinates a coalition of partners, including CFSA, across Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, Puerto Rico, South Carolina, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. [Learn more here.](#)

Field Notes: Learning to Farm, Organically

Building Soil, Systems, and Community at Hercules Acres

Hercules Acres didn't begin as a lifelong plan to farm. It began with land, sunlight, and a question.

After clearing trees on her nearly three-acre property in Irmo, South Carolina, Simonne Johnson found herself standing in front of an open field. What started as a simple desire for more light and a better view became something much bigger. *"I remember standing there thinking, Okay, now what am I going to do with all this grass? And that's when I heard my dad's voice telling me, 'Mo, turn the property into a farm.'"*

That moment marked the beginning of Hercules Acres, a nonprofit agricultural charity founded in March 2025, and a commitment: **if food was going to be grown here, it would be grown with care for the land, the soil, and the people who eat it.**

As a first-generation farmer, Simonne is learning, with great intention and process, how to farm organically. While formal organic certification will come later, the principles of organic production already shape every decision she makes on the farm.

A First-Generation Farmer Focused on Organic Practices

Simonne was born and raised in the Bronx, but farming runs deep in her family. Her paternal ancestors were farmers in Virginia and South Carolina, a legacy she knows mostly through old photographs and stories. Her father, Charles Holloway, fondly known as "Herc," short for Hercules, often spoke of growing food and living close to the land, even while raising his family in New York City. *"He always told me, 'If you ever buy a house, get one in the woods,'"* Simonne says. *"And that's exactly what I did."* Naming the farm Hercules Acres was an easy choice. ***"This farm is really about carrying his spirit forward."***



FARM SERVICES

Simonne farms on three acres using an elevated, container-based growing system that allows close monitoring of soil health, nutrients, and water use.

She approaches farming with curiosity and an eagerness to learn, studying organic methods, observing outcomes, and adjusting her approach season by season. And her interest in organic farming, specifically, is deeply personal. As a longtime vegan, Simonne wanted to grow food she could feel confident feeding her family and community. That commitment made organic practices non-negotiable.



“For me, organic isn’t just a label,” Simonne says. “It’s a practice. It’s about what I put into the soil, what I leave out, and the quality of food I’m willing to grow, eat, and share.”

Organic Systems at a Small Scale

Today, Simonne manages ten elevated beds and thirty containers, carefully tracking inputs: she relies on OMRI-listed materials, compost, worm castings, and soil-building practices rather than synthetic fertilizers or pesticides. Crop diversity, polyculture, and succession planting are central to how she maximizes productivity in this limited space. So far, her most successful crops include peppers, tomatoes, herbs, and brassicas. Root crops have been more challenging, a reminder, she says, that organic farming requires patience as much as planning. “Organic growing doesn’t forgive shortcuts,” Simonne explains. “If the soil isn’t right, the plants will tell you.”



Learn more about Hercules Acres: herculesacres.org

Applying Process Thinking to Organic Farming

With more than 25 years as a corporate project manager and process engineer, Simonne brings a systems-oriented mindset to the farm. Every bed and container is clearly labeled, inputs are logged, and planting and soil regeneration schedules are mapped out in advance.

“That structure is how I manage risk,” she says. **“Organic farming depends on observation and consistency.** Documentation helps me understand what worked, what didn’t, and why.”

While paperwork and recordkeeping come naturally, Simonne is candid about where she’s still learning: pest pressure, nutrient timing, and crop selection among them. “The documentation and systems part? That’s easy for me,” she says. “I’m a project manager by trade. I label every bed, every container. I know what went where, when it went in, and what inputs I used. The real learning curve is growing without losing a crop.”



Learning From Experienced Organic Farmers

Simonne participates in the SE TOPP initiative's farmer-to-farmer mentorship program and is mentored by Chris Sermon of BioWay Farms in Ware Shoals, South Carolina. With over 20 years of experience in agriculture, including more than a decade in Certified Organic production, Chris brings both expertise and dedication to his work. BioWay Farm produces a diverse range of organic products, such as mixed vegetables, tree fruit, and grapes. Motivated to support the next generation of farmers and give back to people and the planet, Chris willingly shares his knowledge in cover cropping, crop rotation, crop planning, biodiversity, native plants, forest farming, irrigation, soil health, and marketing.

"We talk every week," says Simonne. "Chris answers every question, from soil health and crop planning to conservation practices. We spent almost three hours walking his farm, learning how he manages land and livestock. And he's coming to visit my farm next. **Seeing how someone else manages soil, conservation practices, and crop planning reinforces that organic farming is a long-term commitment,**" she adds. **"It's not about quick yields, it's about resilience."**

In addition to working with CFSA and participating in the farmer-to-farmer mentorship program, Simonne has built a broad network of support, connecting with farmer coalitions, conservation programs, and organic agriculture organizations that help guide her learning and long-term vision – such as NRCS/EQIP, RAFI, the Rodale Institute, SAAFON, and the South Carolina Black Farmers Coalition – to strengthen both her technical knowledge and long-term planning.



"It really does take a community," she says. "You can't do this alone."

Organic Farming in Service of Community

As a nonprofit, Hercules Acres is structured around access and education. Simonne's goal is not just to grow organic food, but to show how organic practices can be adapted for small spaces, limited mobility, and new growers. Down the road, her plans include container-growing workshops, a community garden, sponsored elevated beds for seniors and people with disabilities, and an "adopt-a-tree" program to establish fruit and nut perennials. As production increases, she also hopes to donate organically grown produce to local food access partners. **"I want people to see that organic farming doesn't have to be out of reach," she notes. "You can start where you are and grow into it."**



Committed to the Process

Simonne describes Hercules Acres as being in its early stages, and she is comfortable with that. Her focus over the next 12 to 18 months is on strengthening organic systems, improving soil health, and building the foundation needed for future programs and certification.

"This is a long game," she says. "I'm not rushing the land. I'm learning it. I'm not assuming certification is automatic or easy. Right now, I'm focused on doing the work: building healthy soil, learning the crops, and documenting everything so that organic integrity is real, not theoretical."



Field Notes: Keeping Organic Integrity Intact

Why SC Food Hub, GrowFood Carolina, Chose Organic Food Handler Certification to Support Its Farmers

South Carolina's first local food hub, **GrowFood Carolina**, was launched in 2011 by the Coastal Conservation League. Based in Charleston, GrowFood's objective is to tap into the existing assets of small-scale agriculture to help create a stronger rural economy – spurring job creation and building capacity in rural communities – by connecting farm businesses to the thriving local food movement.

Since opening, the food hub has expanded from serving 5 growers to more than 100 farms representing 6,600 production acres, providing essential sales, marketing, warehousing, and distribution services. The hub connects farmers to major wholesale buyers, restaurants, and other institutional buyers, and has paid over \$13.9 million to local growers, helping build long-term economic vitality in rural communities.



A Values-Based Decision That Strengthens the Local Food System

For GrowFood, pursuing organic food handler certification was about more than regulatory compliance. It was a values-based decision grounded in long-standing relationships with farmers and buyers, as well as their commitment to strengthening the local food system. A small but dedicated group of certified organic farmers in GrowFood's network had already invested significant time, energy, and financial resources to meet organic standards. Without handler certification, GrowFood would have been unable to sell their products as organic, disrupting the organic certification chain and limiting these farmers' access to key markets.

While updated federal regulations accelerated the decision, **GrowFood chose to move forward because supporting environmentally responsible farming practices aligns with its mission and ensures that farmers' work is recognized and valued in the marketplace.**

The certification process required meaningful organizational investment: additional staffing capacity, infrastructure upgrades, and ongoing compliance costs. However, **maintaining GrowFood's role as a connector between farmers and buyers through certification makes the investment well worth it.** By becoming certified, GrowFood preserves and expands market access for organic farmers and ensures buyers can continue sourcing local, certified organic produce.

**“As a values-based organization,
we decided that it was the right thing to do.”**

- Becca Watson, GrowFood Carolina Farm Outreach Manager



FARM SERVICES



Certification didn't happen in isolation: it happened in a community of peers. GrowFood's certification journey was possible through collaboration and shared expertise with other food systems organizations, highlighting the power of peer networks in strengthening regional organic infrastructure. Technical assistance and mentorship from CFSA staff, North Carolina food hub Farmer Foodshare, and peers in the Eastern Food Hub Collaborative's compliance working group helped translate complex regulations into achievable steps.

By becoming a certified organic handler, **GrowFood Carolina removes a major bottleneck for farmers considering an organic transition**, helping them feel confident that a certified market partner is already in place.

"Organic certification at the food hub level signals our long-term commitment and opens the door for future conversations with conventional growers considering transition. It also reinforces trust that the supply chain will support their investments in organic practices."

- Becca Watson, GrowFood Carolina Farm Outreach Manager

Today, GrowFood is not only maintaining its certification but also building internal capacity and serving as a resource for other food hubs and handlers navigating organic compliance. What began as a values-driven decision for regulatory compliance has become a model for how coordinated support and shared learning can strengthen organic supply chain infrastructure and expand opportunity for farmers across the region.



Resilience in the Wake of Hurricane Helene

Hurricane Helene irrevocably changed the landscape of food and agriculture in Western NC in 2024. In the months since, CFSA has built an ongoing, responsive recovery program for farmers in the region driven by partnerships, resource development, and a long-term climate resilience approach.

Field Notes: Soil Health, Advocacy, & Knowledge-Sharing at Red Scout Farm

Now in its tenth season, **Red Scout Farm** is a certified organic, no-till, diversified vegetable farm in Black Mountain, North Carolina. Farmer Mary Carroll Dodd founded the farm on land once cultivated by her grandfather, whose red Scout pickup truck inspired the farm's name. After a decade in education, she made the leap to full-time farming, bringing with her a passion for teaching, experimentation, and continuous learning. The farm grows a wide variety of vegetables for a 65-member CSA, local markets, and an online store, while also supplying food to community organizations.



Photos courtesy of Red Scout Farm

Building Soil and Managing Risk Through Diversification

From the outset, Mary Carroll focused on building healthy soil as the foundation of a resilient farm. **She sought technical assistance from CFSA to navigate organic certification, a process that opened the door to deeper learning and led to a two-year, on-farm research project on the use of winter rye as a cover crop.** She helped design and manage multiple test plots, comparing practices such as roller-crimping versus flail mowing, with and without landscape fabric, alongside control plots.

The goal was practical: understand how to terminate cover crops effectively and plant directly into that biomass as a living mulch. The results shaped how she farms today: keeping soil covered year-round, minimizing disturbance, and using cover crops not only to build health but to improve water infiltration and reduce erosion.

These practices proved critical when Hurricane Helene swept through Western North Carolina in September 2024. Red Scout Farm experienced significant damage, including the loss of a greenhouse, extensive tree fall, and erosion across sloped fields. Yet in areas where cover crops were established, the difference was clear. **“With over 30 inches of rainfall, some areas where we had planted cover crops, they just soaked it all right up... you could see where the cover crop was really holding onto the soil.”** Years of soil-building had created a buffer, demonstrating how farm management decisions directly influence its ability to withstand climate pressures.

In addition to cover cropping, diversification plays a central role in risk management. Red Scout Farm grows a wide range of crops and varieties, ensuring that if one fails due to weather or disease, others can still succeed. High tunnels provide further protection, acting as a buffer against heavy rain and extending the growing season. Careful attention to water flow, through field layout, ditches, and natural windbreaks, also helps reduce damage during extreme weather events.



Learn more about Red Scout Farm: redscoutfarm.com

Photos courtesy of Red Scout Farm



From Farmer to Advocate to Peer Supporter

As Mary Carroll worked to rebuild her own farm, she also stepped into a critical role supporting others. A previously scheduled trip to Washington, DC, just weeks after the storm, became an opportunity to share firsthand accounts with lawmakers and the USDA of the realities facing small farms in the region. That experience prompted her to quickly learn the landscape of federal disaster programs offered through FSA and NRCS.

As part of CFSA's Western NC Food System Recovery & Resilience Initiative, Mary Carroll began helping other farmers navigate relief programs and grants, interpret requirements, assist with applications, and connect them to available resources. In one full-circle moment, she supported a fellow farmer who had once mentored her when she attended Organic Growers School's Farmer Beginnings program.

*"We have all been impacted in some way by the devastation of Helene," says Mary Carroll. "Farmers who have been through the process of applying for grants and federal assistance can help you navigate the many resources to assist you in getting back on your feet after the storm. **I am so grateful for this farmer-to-farmer network.**"*



This peer-to-peer support filled an important gap. While federal programs like the Emergency Conservation Program (ECP) and Emergency Forest Restoration Program (EFRP) provide essential funding for debris removal, fencing, and soil recovery, accessing those resources is not always straightforward. Many farmers face significant barriers: complex and time-consuming applications, limited staffing at local FSA offices, and the requirement to pay upfront costs before receiving reimbursement.

Mary Carroll experienced these challenges firsthand. "I turned in all my receipts for ECP at the end of March and got my payment at the end of September. There was a six-month lag," she shared. "It's hard to pay all the money to get the work done and then not get it back for a long time, especially when everything, from personal to business, has been impacted all at once."



Photos courtesy of Red Scout Farm

Since then, she has returned to Washington, DC, multiple times to advocate for practical improvements, including increased staffing in FSA offices, streamlined and simplified applications, and accessible financing options to help farmers bridge the gap between upfront costs and delayed reimbursements. "Programs to support farmers are out there," she said, "but they're simply not adequately staffed to help farmers apply."

FARM SERVICES

Community, Recovery, and Collective Strength

Despite these challenges, recovery at Red Scout Farm and across the region has been shaped by strong community support. Soon after the storm hit, customers stepped up to place orders, neighbors cleared roads and shared meals, and volunteers arrived from across the state to help farms begin the long process of rebuilding.

Photos courtesy of Red Scout Farm



Photos courtesy of Red Scout Farm



That same spirit carried into 2025, as farmers shifted from immediate response to long-term recovery and adaptation. On her own farm, Mary Carroll continues to refine practices that reduce risk: maintaining continuous cover, diversifying crops and varieties, using high tunnels for protection, and managing water flow across the landscape. Just as importantly, she continues to share those lessons widely.

“We’re always learning what works best for our land,” reflects Mary Carroll. “And when we figure something out, we share it, because that’s how we all get stronger.”

CFSA in Action: FarmsSHARE Provides WNC Food Hubs Funds, Flexibility Post-Helene

In 2024 and 2025, food hubs participating in the CFSA FarmsSHARE Program provided essential on-the-ground food systems relief after Hurricane Helene, leveraging the flexibility and funding offered by the FarmsSHARE program to serve their WNC communities in the ways they needed it most.

“The community self-help and mutual support—mutual aid—that was happening all across Western North Carolina... that’s the most amazing, hopeful part of the whole story, the way that communities came together and helped one another survive.”

—Roland McReynolds, CFSA Executive Director

Food Hubs Stepped Up:

- Providing cold storage to partner organizations with damaged infrastructure, preventing harvested food going to waste
- Distributing free, fresh produce to community members in need
- Offering a consistent market channel for small-scale farms through weekly purchasing
- Growing staff capacity and strengthening compensation to reflect a living wage
- Developing new community-led local food procurement initiatives



High Tunnel Production

High tunnels allow farmers to extend their season, grow specialty crops, reduce disease, and more. High tunnels have great possibilities, but finding and maximizing that possibility can be difficult and sometimes time-consuming. Since 2016, CFSA's [High Tunnel Technical Assistance Program](#) has helped more than 100 farms across the Carolinas with everything from site selection and installation to crop planning for efficient, profitable production and troubleshooting issues.

CFSA in Action: High Tunnel Restoration at Growing High Point

Growing High Point is a community organization in High Point, NC, transforming vacant lots into centers for urban agriculture to advance business development, food security, and local food systems. As a CFSA Member organization, Growing High Point participated in CFSA's High Tunnel Production Technical Assistance program in 2025, leveraging CFSA's expertise for a boots-on-the-ground high tunnel restoration project at their Pershing Street neighborhood site. With guidance and practical assistance, food systems organizations can grow knowledge, capacity, infrastructure, and impact.



Photos by Lauren Maske



Photos by Lauren Maske

Photos by Lauren Maske

"These greenhouses will allow us to grow more fresh produce and expand our impact in High Point."



FARM SERVICES

Elma C. Lomax Farm

The Elma C. Lomax Research & Education Farm, located in Concord, NC, is managed by CFSA in partnership with Cabarrus County.



On the farm, CFSA:



Conducts applied research to support solutions to the challenges faced by organic farmers in the Southeast. Our current research projects are focused on organic seed production and high tunnel seasonal organic cucumber production.



Provides individuals interested in starting a farm business **access to land, equipment, and technical assistance** through the Farmer-in-Training program, to help them launch and maintain successful farming operations.

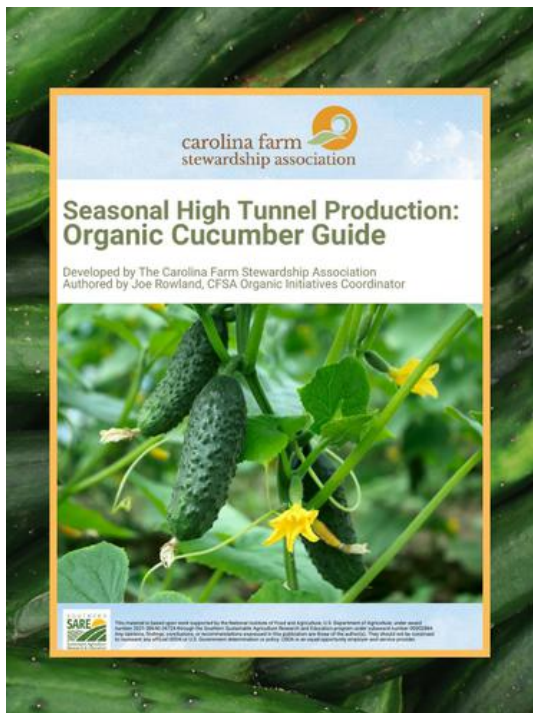


Hosts **hands-on service-learning** opportunities for college students and local businesses, and STEM activities for K-12 students.



Donates produce grown on the farm to community partners addressing food insecurity.

CFSA in Action: Seasonal Organic Cucumber High Tunnel Production Research & Guide



The demand for cucumbers has steadily increased nationwide, while US acreage has declined as imports take a greater share of the market to meet year-round demand. To support Carolina farmers in taking advantage of this expanding market, CFSA conducted research beginning in 2023 to evaluate the yield, disease pressure, plant loss, and labor requirements of six cucumber varieties grown using common high-tunnel trellising techniques, to assess each method's economic advantages and disadvantages.

In July 2025, CFSA published the Seasonal High Tunnel Production: Organic Cucumber Guide synthesizing the findings of the research project, providing practical instruction for successfully growing organic cucumbers in high tunnels. The guide has now been accessed nearly 400 times via CFSA's website by growers and agronomists nationwide.





Closing the “GAP” in Food Safety

Through hands-on workshops and 1:1 direct technical assistance, CFSA's food safety team helps farms develop customized food safety plans. Through "mock audits," they demystify the USDA Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) certification process needed to access key wholesale and institutional markets.

Field Notes: Growing Deep Roots with Purpose

On their family farm, **Deep Roots CPS Farm**, spread across seven acres in Charlotte, NC, and 44 more in nearby Monroe, the work of first-generation farmers Cherie and Wisdom Jzar has always been focused on stewardship, community, education, and a commitment to creating something that serves people beyond the farm gate. This is central to who they are and why they do this work.

Since purchasing their first piece of land in 2021, they have transformed acres of suburban woods into a diverse farm, gaining valuable experience in designing farm infrastructure, building healthy soils, and managing wildlife. As they expanded their CSA and farmers market sales channels, they remained dedicated to serving their community while building a sustainable farm business.



Photos courtesy of Deep Roots CPS Farm



Photos courtesy of Deep Roots CPS Farm

“Our purpose for Deep Roots CPS Farm extends beyond just produce and livestock production. In addition to growing food, we are working to sustain a diversified farm business that also includes herbs, mushrooms, value-added products, education, and community-centered programming.

A major driver of our work is strengthening access to healthy food for community well-being, supporting local farmers, and contributing to a stronger local food system,” says Cherie Jzar.

A Turning Point

The next step in growing their business was to enter new markets that required food safety certification. **Cherie worked one-on-one with CFSA's food safety team to prepare for Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) certification.** This rigorous process requires farms to document, standardize, and verify how food is grown, handled, and tracked. Together, they built a food safety plan from the ground up, and Deep Roots CPS Farm successfully passed its first GAP audit.

"It was comprehensive,"** Cherie says of the Food Safety Technical Assistance Program. **"A pure game changer. If it wasn't for that support, we wouldn't have been ready. We wouldn't have been successful."



Photos courtesy of Deep Roots CPS Farm



Photos courtesy of Deep Roots CPS Farm

Building Systems for Growth

Like many family farms, their operations had grown organically over time, with heart, hustle, and hands-on experience. **Through the GAP certification process, those efforts came together into a unified system as recordkeeping improved, workflows became clearer, and operational roles were better aligned.** Beyond new market access, Wisdom and Cherie shared how GAP certification provided a framework to improve overall farm systems.

"It helped bring order and organization. We could finally see the process we needed to follow and believe that we could actually do it."



That clarity didn't just make the farm run better; it made growth possible. **With GAP certification in place, new markets opened, and the farm expanded its sales channels, including institutional buyers such as the school system.**

Farmers Supporting Farmers

But for the Jzars, success didn't stop at their farm gate. **In April 2025, they partnered with CFSA to host a workshop for fellow farmers, inviting them to see GAP certification in practice.**

Farmers were walked through their food safety plans, saw their wash/pack systems in action, and learned how the digital tools the Jzars use help manage the complexity. **What emerged was more than a training. It was collective knowledge-sharing, embodying an important part of Deep Roots CPS's mission: building capacity and community through education and shared experiences.**



As CFSA members, the Jzars are part of a network of farmers who believe in mutual support and shared success. "That's what keeps me engaged," Cherie says. "The knowledge, the connection, the inspiration. Farmer education and shared learning are not extras for us. They are an important part of our mission and our vision for impact. This is why we started a mutual aid support group in our area called the Grower's Network."

Deep Roots CPS Farm stands as both a strong business model and a living example of what's possible when farmers have the right support. And they are helping lead others along the same path.

For CFSA, the goal is not just to help farms succeed, but to create a multiplier effect in which one farmer's progress helps many more. That peer-to-peer learning is invaluable.

The Jzars plan to use their experience by writing a guide for turning undeveloped property into farmland.



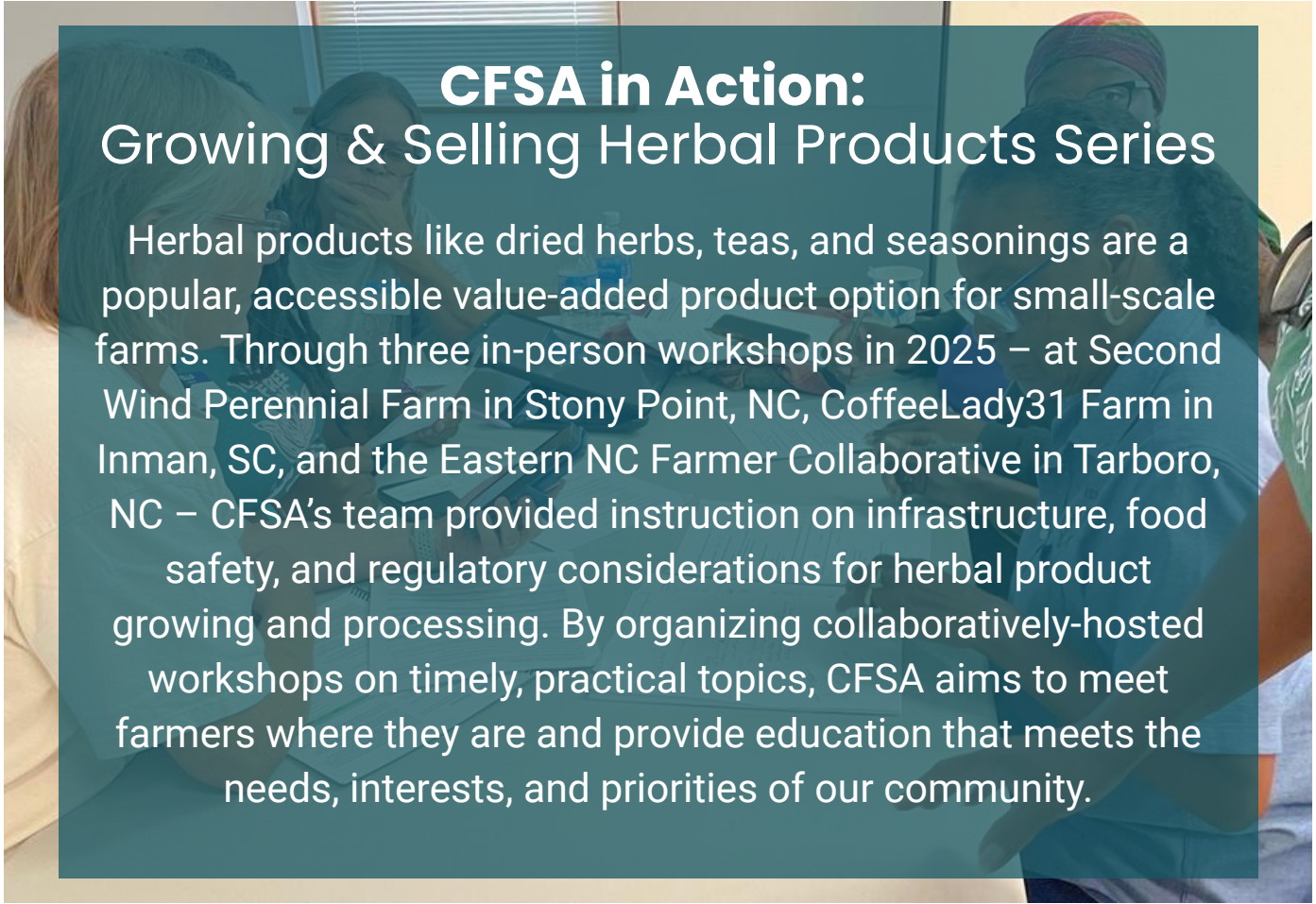
Learn more about Deep Roots CPS Farm: deeprootscpsfarm.com



CFSA in Action: Diversified Farm Food Safety Workshops

In 2025, CFSA hosted grower and train-the-trainer workshops at Lomax Farm focused on diversified small farm food safety, covering water testing, Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) certification, cleaning and sanitation, traceability, and more through interactive instruction and activities.

On-farm food safety competency is a key building block for access to wholesale and commercial market channels for small-scale farms, and CFSA's direct technical assistance and education helps bridge the "GAP" as farmers build their food safety management skills and confidence.



CFSA in Action: Growing & Selling Herbal Products Series

Herbal products like dried herbs, teas, and seasonings are a popular, accessible value-added product option for small-scale farms. Through three in-person workshops in 2025 – at Second Wind Perennial Farm in Stony Point, NC, CoffeeLady31 Farm in Inman, SC, and the Eastern NC Farmer Collaborative in Tarboro, NC – CFSA's team provided instruction on infrastructure, food safety, and regulatory considerations for herbal product growing and processing. By organizing collaboratively-hosted workshops on timely, practical topics, CFSA aims to meet farmers where they are and provide education that meets the needs, interests, and priorities of our community.

Demystifying Market Access

Whether you are just starting or are years into farming, CFSA can advise on market channel selection. Through our Market Access Technical Assistance program, we help farmers assess managerial strengths, agricultural market trends, and the financial health of their operations to help create a sustainable farm enterprise and find markets that work for their unique needs and priorities.

CFSA in Action: Know Your Cost to Grow Program

In response to farmers' need for stronger business tools to remain viable in a volatile landscape, CFSA launched the **Know Your Cost to Grow (KYCTG) cohort program** in the fall of 2025. KYCTG is a practical, farmer-focused initiative designed to help specialty crop farmers understand the true costs of production – a central factor in farm success – using a step-by-step process for calculating crop-specific costs and applying that data to real-world decisions. In the six-session virtual course developed in partnership with Oregon State University's Small Farms Program and Oregon Tilth, **seventeen participants** learned how to track production expenses, conduct labor time studies, and use a dedicated web-based calculator to analyze profitability by crop.

“When you are farming on limited acreage, every crop you grow needs to pay the rent!”

-KYCTG farmer participant

Participant Snapshot

A beginning farmer in Greenville County, SC has a secret advantage in local carrot production – naturally loamy-sandy soil. They want to capitalize on this opportunity, but they know when they go wholesale, every penny is going to count. With that in mind, the farm began using the Know Your Cost To Grow resources to identify all of their production steps. Time studies proved particularly valuable: post-harvest washing was costing the farm more than they realized. Now, they are considering the purchase of a barrel washer to increase farm efficiency.

A producer in Watauga County, NC runs a diverse vegetable and flower farm on less than an acre. Looking to maximize their limited growing area and limited labor, this producer used the KYCTG program to analyze the potential of adding a salad mix to their market stand and restaurant offerings. They concluded that although the mix could be profitable, the labor and space they would need for the crop could be used more profitably otherwise. They decided to pivot to lower-maintenance, longer storage root crops and a higher-value greens power mix, which better serve their current markets.

Participant Snapshot

With actionable, clear insights into which crops deliver the strongest return on limited land and labor, farmers can make more strategic planting, pricing, and marketing decisions. In an environment where every acre and every hour count, KYCTG equips farmers with the tools to optimize resources, improve efficiency, and build more resilient businesses, with informed decision-making and a stronger financial footing.



In the heart of a rapidly growing residential area in northeast Charlotte-Mecklenburg, NC, Eliseo and Wendy Pascual are cultivating more than just tomatoes, leafy greens, and peppers on Pascuales Farm; they're building a pathway to new markets.

With support from CFSA on market access and GAP certification technical assistance, the Pascuales began preparing their farm for wholesale and institutional opportunities. While they continue to grow their direct-to-consumer sales, their long-term vision is clear: expand into larger markets that require certified food safety standards. CFSA worked alongside them to develop a food safety plan and prepare for their first GAP audit, an essential step toward that goal.

Since then, the farm has made a lot of progress. Through an RFSI* equipment grant, the Pascuales installed a commercial-grade cooler and produce washing systems, and purchased a refrigerated truck, essential infrastructure for maintaining the cold chain and meeting wholesale requirements. With one final piece of packaging equipment on the way, their packhouse is nearly complete.



Just as important, Eliseo and Wendy have deepened their knowledge of greenhouse and high-tunnel production, strengthening their capacity to manage crops for consistent, high-quality wholesale sales.

As they head into the main growing season, Pascuales' Farm is ready to put its new systems to work and to give back. They plan to open their packhouse to neighboring growers who lack access to food safety infrastructure.

“Most growers cannot maintain the cold chain needed for wholesale,” Eliseo shared. “We now have that ability, and we want to help.”

This sense of community is what motivates them, stemming back to 2001, when Eliseo, upon moving to the area, noticed a lack of locally grown, fresh produce available for a large part of the community. His background as an agricultural engineer and managing a farm previously made the leap to purchasing land and creating a community-focused farm easier. All in support of their mission to provide fresh, locally and responsibly grown produce and to create welcoming spaces for connection and opportunity.

FarmsSHARE

Since launching in 2020, **FarmsSHARE** has built a statewide food distribution network grounded in partnerships with farmers and food hubs, strategically investing in local food and agriculture to support North Carolina’s rural economies, small farms, and communities.

By providing long-term, flexible funding, **FarmsSHARE** gave farmers the confidence to invest in infrastructure and stabilize their businesses amid uncertain markets. Food hubs expanded operations, creating jobs and building stronger regional supply chains that connect local producers directly to consumers and institutions. The result is a more resilient, locally rooted food system, one that keeps dollars circulating within communities while strengthening agriculture as a driver of economic development.

FarmsSHARE funding in 2023-2025 came from the USDA’s Local Food Purchasing Assistance cooperative agreement program (LFPA) in partnership with the North Carolina Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services.

In 2025, FarmsSHARE distributed **27,191 boxes of fresh food** sourced from Carolina farms to families experiencing food insecurity and paid **\$821,000 to farms and food hubs**.

Although the LFPA program has concluded, the evidence from North Carolina is clear: **purchasing food locally with public dollars delivers strong economic, social, and health returns.**

Impact Highlights:

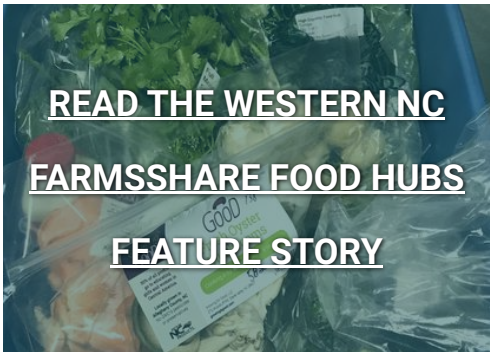
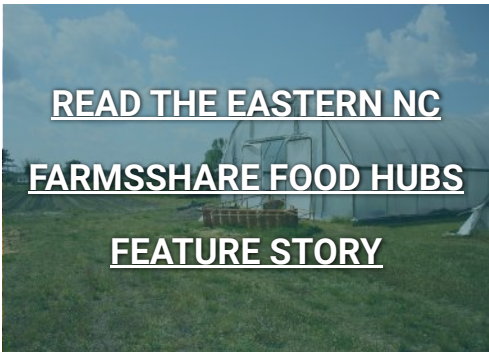
- Measurable place-based impact, with every dollar invested circulating within the community, supporting farmers, small businesses, and regional economies.
- Consistent market access and new sales channels strengthened farm business, enabling them to plan, invest in infrastructure, expand production, and hire labor.
- Food hubs scaled operations, adding staff, expanding facilities, and increasing distribution capacity.
- Infrastructure investment supported cold storage, transportation, and aggregation systems essential to a strong local food economy.
- Proven local economic development through food system investments that drive measurable returns, keeping money in-state while strengthening rural economies.

An independent evaluation showed:

91% of farmers and 100% of food hubs increased direct revenue

Community-based organizations increased their reach, many by more than 10x

92% of food recipients reported better nutrition and food security status



FarmsSHARE Impact 2020-2025:
\$8.7 million paid to farms and food hubs
206,000 boxes distributed
1.8 million pounds of produce
315,000 pounds of proteins & dairy

"The more we purchase from local farmers, the more we contribute to North Carolina's economy. We're supporting a statewide economy. Fresh food is reaching people in need, on the prevention side of health... Everyone should have access to fresh produce."
-Athan Barkoukis, Farmer Foodshare Executive Director



FOOD

By Amanda Hege, Monica McCann, Dave Walker, Lenwood Edwards, Claire McLendon, Sara Runkel, and Roland McReynolds

ANALYSIS

North Carolina's FarmsSHARE: Farmers, Food Hubs, And Community-Based Organizations Sustain Healthy Food Programs

ABSTRACT The North Carolina FarmsSHARE program distributes healthy, locally sourced food to low-income households across nearly 100 counties in the state through the Department of Agriculture's Local Food Purchase Assistance Cooperative Agreement. In this article, we present insights from a cross-sectional survey of stakeholders who were involved in implementing the program. We explore measures of satisfaction, perceived value, economic impact, quality of food, and community relationships within each stakeholder group (farmers, food hubs, and community-based organizations). We also discuss FarmsSHARE's impact on local farms, businesses, and food systems. In 2024, FarmsSHARE connected 217 local farms, 16 food hubs, and 117 community-based organizations that worked together to distribute more than 72,000 healthy food boxes. Our findings suggest that FarmsSHARE is strengthening collaborations and local food systems, specifically through partnerships with farms owned by members of racial and ethnic minority groups, and improving access to nutritionally tailored healthy food boxes for low-income households. These insights can be used to guide efforts to integrate local food within the Food Is Medicine paradigm to address nutrition insecurity and promote more equitable food systems within communities.

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Poor diet quality is associated with more deaths than any other risk factor in the US.¹ Despite decades of interventions aimed at improving nutrition, research has documented rising rates of obesity and type 2 diabetes.² Obesity alone costs the US health care system nearly \$173 billion annually.³ At the same time, in 2023, approximately eighteen million US households experienced food insecurity, having limited or uncertain access to adequate food.⁴ The Department of Agriculture (USDA) has recognized that food insecurity and diet-

related disease can coexist, prompting an agency-wide focus on the importance of addressing nutrition security.⁵

Food Is Medicine frameworks are emerging as potential solutions to address nutrition insecurity.^{6,7} Food Is Medicine encompasses a broad range of interventions that leverage access to nutritious food to manage, treat, and prevent chronic health conditions.⁸ Approaches vary widely in their scope, encompassing interventions connected to health systems as well as community-based programs.^{9–16} One Food Is Medicine approach includes providing low-income

APRIL 2025 44:4 HEALTH AFFAIRS 483

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Health Affairs White Paper
April 2025

ADVOCACY

CFSA's Policy team advances practical, farmer-centered policies that strengthen local food systems and support small and mid-scale sustainable and organic farms. Through grassroots advocacy, coalition building, and policy analysis, we ensure that farmers and communities have a voice in shaping the decisions that affect their livelihoods.

In 2025, the political landscape shifted as unpredictably as the weather. Through it all, our members and partners remained steady voices, stepping into uncharted waters, from Columbia and Raleigh to Washington, DC.

91

community
leaders trained

8

stakeholder site
visits at farms
and food hubs

116

meetings with
legislators and
elected officials to
advance fair food
and farm policies

Advocacy thrives on collaboration: CFSA, food hub representatives, farmers, and food systems leaders join forces for a day of federal legislative meetings in Washington, DC, February 11, 2025 (Pg. 24).

FarmsSHARE Funding Advocacy

Since the termination of USDA's Local Food Purchasing Assistance cooperative agreement program, **CFSA and the FarmsSHARE network are leading a coordinated push for \$4 million in state funding over two years to sustain and scale one of North Carolina's most effective local food system initiatives. This investment would allow:**

- Strengthened statewide coordination
- Expansion of critical infrastructure, including cold storage, aggregation, and distribution
- Increased integration of local food into health and nutrition programs



A multi-year evaluation confirmed what farmers and communities already knew: FarmsSHARE is a proven engine for economic development and food access. **And at a time of federal rollbacks, CFSA mobilized farmers and partners in 2025 to ensure FarmsSHARE remained a state priority**, hosting 3 lobby days and 8 site visits bringing a total of twelve legislators to visit farms, food hubs, and mobile markets, engaging key legislators through on-the-ground visits to farms and food hubs, and activating 350+ farmers to contact their representatives directly.



"Programs that prioritize local food do more than just feed people. They are an investment in the local economy, in the health of the communities, and in the farmland that is so precious in NC."
 –Jordan McLean, Piedmont Fresh Food Hub Manager



This work continues in 2026 with a coordinated lobby day in Raleigh in May with the NC Food Hub Association, NC Local Food council, NC Farmers Market Network, and the American Heart Association to showcase the importance of local healthy food access through programs like FarmsSHARE, Double Up Bucks, and Sun Bucks, that not only support community wellbeing but have a big impact on local and regional food economies.

Amplifying Voices

CFSA continued to invest in farmer leadership and civic engagement: At the federal level, CFSA maintained consistent communication with policymakers on the impacts of funding freezes, USDA staffing cuts, and disaster aid shortfalls, ensuring that real-time farmer experiences were taken into account in policy discussions.



Brought 4 member farmers to **Washington, DC**, to meet with 8 federal legislators

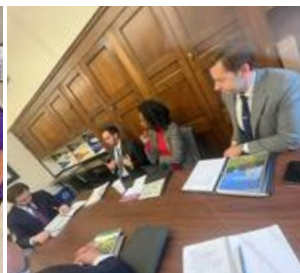
Graduated 61 farmers from the Member Advocacy Program

Published 4 policy analyses on timely topics

Trained **30 leaders from local food councils** on advancing food security and sustainability

Hosted **81 legislative meetings and 3 lobby days** in North Carolina and South Carolina

23 key community-based event appearances and speaking engagements



CFSA in Action: Member Advocacy Program

*The **Member Advocacy Program** is an interactive professional development program to build skills in grassroots and grassroots-style advocacy campaigns, network with fellow food and farming advocates across the Carolinas, and gain hands-on experience with legislative policy advocacy work.*

After completing CFSA's Member Advocacy Program in 2021, Reverend Keith Sexton was inspired to bring together a statewide coalition of United Methodist Church leaders doing similar farm and food access work. Encouraged by the success of getting a House representative to sign on to the Fresh Produce Procurement Act and building a dedicated advocacy group of 40 that is tasked with outreach to congressional leaders regularly, Keith is adding a voter education program to equipping them "with the right kinds of questions to ask their elected leaders, whether it's on a county council or Congress, so they get answers that aren't pre-prepared or designed to shut down the conversation, but that invite more conversation and hopefully build partnerships."

Keith serves on the CFSA Board of Directors and has recently started a farm in Oxford, NC.

State-Level Wins Amid Federal Instability

Against a backdrop of federal instability and volatility, CFSA secured meaningful victories.

In North Carolina, we helped secure **\$142 million in disaster relief for agricultural losses** following Hurricane Helene. We successfully advocated to simplify the state's disaster relief application process, improving access for farmers.

In South Carolina, we partnered with the SC Department of Agriculture to **advance the Certified SC Cafeteria program**, expanding markets for local farmers and increasing access to local food in schools.

Federal disruptions, from funding freezes and USDA staff reductions to a 30-day government shutdown, posed significant risks to farmers and local food programs. **CFSA responded quickly and strategically:**

- Advocated for bipartisan legislation to establish a new Local Food Purchasing Assistance program, with support from five Carolina legislators
- Mobilized staff and supporters during the federal shutdown to push for a "skinny" Farm Bill that would address the funding cliffs that threatened conservation and local market programs

In a year of uncertainty, CFSA and coalition partners ensured that farmers were not navigating it alone; securing critical resources, shaping policy solutions, and strengthening the systems that keep local food economies resilient and growing.

READ THE 2025 POLICY
YEAR IN REVIEW:
DISRUPTIONS AND HOPE
FOR THE FUTURE

READ THE ANALYSIS: HOW
THE 2025 GOVERNMENT
SHUTDOWN AFFECTS
FARMERS, AND WHAT
COMES NEXT

READ THE ACTION ALERT:
PROTECT FEDERAL
FUNDING FOR LOCAL FOOD
& SMALL FARMS

"The coalition has grown exponentially over the four years it has existed, and I don't think it would exist without CFSA's support. It's hard to keep up with what's happening in the policy realm. **CFSA is such a knowledge bank of food policy** and is our insight into farm impacts. We've been able to make really convincing arguments [with legislators] because **we have the clout of having farmers at the table.**"

-Brett Rapkin-Citrenbaum, NC Food System Advocacy Coalition



EDUCATION

CFSA's Education and Outreach team brings together farmers, researchers, agricultural service providers, buyers, and consumers through annual conferences and a farm tour to build networks and strengthen knowledge throughout our food and farming system. CFSA's education pillar contributes to a broader understanding of how food relates to climate, health, and local economies through three annual signature events: The Organic Commodities & Livestock Conference, the Piedmont Farm Tour, and the Sustainable Agriculture Conference.

670

attendees at the Sustainable Agriculture Conference

2,177

visitors on the Piedmont Farm Tour

90

workshops hosted, including standalone events and at signature events

155

attendees at the Organic Commodities & Livestock Conference



Local farms, firsthand: Piedmont Farm Tour visitor cuddles with a goat kid at Boxcarr Farms & Handmade Cheese in Cedar Grove, NC, April 25, 2025 (Pg. 28).

Organic Commodities & Livestock Conference

The **Organic Commodities & Livestock Conference (OCLC)** is a one-day conference hosted each March by the Carolina Farm Stewardship Association and NC State, designed for growers of specialty crops, commodities, and pasture-based livestock, and for other growers, educators, extension agents, and agronomists from the Carolinas and beyond to learn, network, and explore opportunities in organic agriculture.

By The Numbers:

155 attendees

12 exhibitors

17 speakers

13 workshops



Each year's conference features a full day of educational sessions, farm visits, research updates, panel discussions, and networking. The 2025 conference was held on March 3rd in Greensboro, NC, at the NC A&T State University Farm.



"Farmer presentations were excellent. Great to see hard numbers that show potential for profit!"

- 2025 OCLC attendee



"I learned a lot for improving my farm as I heard from others."

- 2025 OCLC attendee

Piedmont Farm Tour



The **Piedmont Farm Tour**, hosted by the Carolina Farm Stewardship Association and Weaver Street Market since 1996, is an annual celebration of sustainable, local food and farming in North Carolina’s Piedmont region. In 2025, **33 farms** scattered across the beautiful landscape of Alamance, Chatham, Durham, Orange, and Person counties opened their farm gates to the public and invited **2,177 visitors** to experience and enjoy local agriculture at work firsthand.

2025 Participating Farms:

- Benevolence Farm
- Bountiful Acre
- Boxcarr Farms
- Catawba Trail Farm
- Cedar Grove Blueberry Farm; Botanist & Barrel
- Celebrity Dairy
- Chapel Hill Creamery
- Eco Farm
- Ever Laughter Farm & Nursery
- Faithfull Farms
- Fickle Creek Farm
- Fireside Farm & Sawmill
- Full Plate Farm
- Granite Springs Farm
- Haw River Mushrooms
- Hawk’s Nest Healing Gardens
- Jireh Family Farm
- Little Pond Gardens
- Little Way Farm
- Minka Farm
- One Soil Farm
- Parker Farm & Vineyard
- PlowGirl Farm
- Sankofa Farms
- Stoney Mountain Farm
- Student Organic Farm at CCCC
- Sunset Ridge Buffalo Farms
- The Farm at Common Ground Ecovillage
- The Garden at Spring Forest
- Transplanting Traditions Community Farm
- WildSide Farm
- Wolfberry Hawthorn Farm
- Woodcrest Farm & Forge

“This was our fourth year on the Piedmont Farm Tour and it is always a **highlight of my year**. I’ve learned so much about how we get our food and **there’s something to discover at each farm.**”
-2025 Piedmont Farm Tour Visitor





Sustainable Agriculture Conference

The Carolina Farm Stewardship Association's **Sustainable Agriculture Conference** is a professional development event bringing together small- and mid-scale farmers, homesteaders, locavores, food systems changemakers, educators, and community leaders from across the region to learn, network, and build momentum and community focused on local and organic agriculture.

The 2025 Sustainable Agriculture Conference, held November 14th-16th in Columbia, South Carolina, was **CFSA's 40th anniversary conference**. It was an **inspiring, joyful, busy, and deeply meaningful** weekend, spent doing the vital work that's been at the core of CFSA's mission since the start: **learning with and from one another, building strong networks, and growing solidarity and momentum for local, sustainable food and farming.**



"THE BEST conference I have attended throughout my career!"
-2025 Sustainable Agriculture Conference attendee

CFSA's movement has come so far since our very first Sustainable Agriculture Conference forty years ago, and there's never been a more important time to harness our **ever-growing collective strength** and dedication: it takes all of us to create the bright future we envision for local food and agriculture.



**670 attendees • 102 speakers • 60 exhibit booths • 58 workshops •
20 Dow Scholars • 6 pre-conference intensives • 1 keynote panel**



Sustainable Agriculture Conference

"My favorite part of the conference was the **energy** that everybody brought to the event. There was a lot of **enthusiasm and excitement to see one another** despite the challenging political climate that we're in.

It helped to hear others share their successes as it **provides inspiration and hope for moving forward.**"

-2025 conference attendee

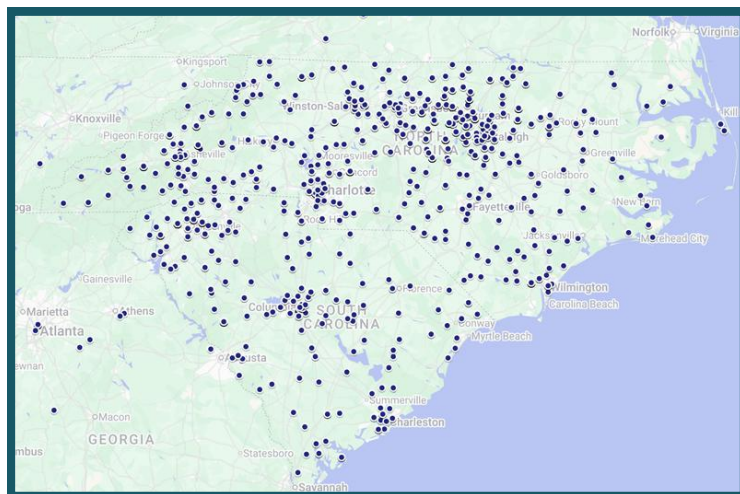


MEMBERSHIP & FINANCIALS

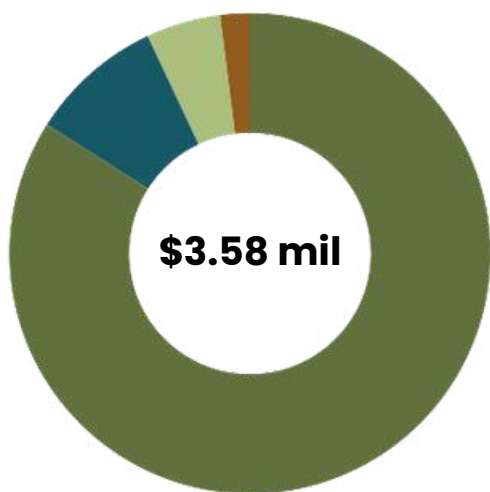
CFSA welcomed **281 new members** to our network in 2025, finishing the year with over 2,500 total members across North Carolina, South Carolina, and beyond.

“Definitely get the membership! I’ve been farming for less than three months, and with CFSA I was able to get a farming number, I’m confident in planting, I’m confident in getting chickens – and I will definitely be renewing my membership.”

-CFSA Farm Member



carolinafarmstewards.org/membership



Income:

84% Grants
9% Gifts and Dues
5% Conferences
2% Consulting & Misc.

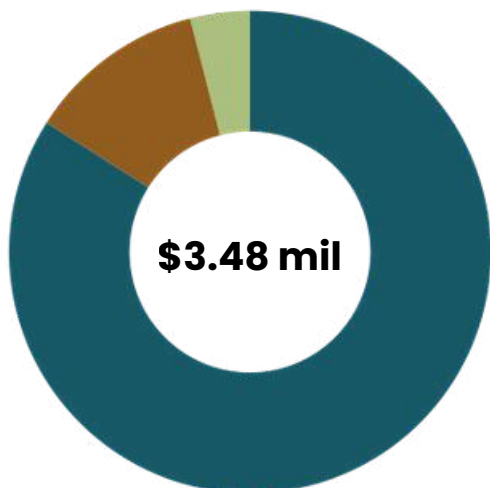
Platinum
Transparency
2025

Candid.

Charity
Navigator



FOUR-STAR



Expenses:

84% Program Services
12% Admin
4% Fundraising



This Impact Report went to press prior to audit.

carolinafarmstewards.org/donate



carolina farm stewardship association

Join The Movement

Become a CFSA member to connect with a vibrant network of farmers, advocates, consumers, and organizations working together to build a fair, healthy, and sustainable food system where small-scale farms thrive.

Support Our Work

CFSA's work is possible thanks to the dedicated, ongoing generosity of our network. Make a one-time donation today, or set up monthly giving to sustain our programming and impact.

Stay Connected

Subscribe to our monthly newsletter, receive timely policy action alerts, and follow us on social media to be the first to know about upcoming events, urgent advocacy items, and important announcements.



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