

CSA Training and Survey Release a Success!

More than 75 people turned out for a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) training workshop on January 5 in Carthage. Cooperative Extension Agents from Moore, Richmond and Lee Counties organized and hosted the event for farmers and local food advocates and organizations.

The strong turnout at the workshop and the 600+ responses to Sustainable Sandhills Local Food Survey point out this area's high level of interest in accessing local food. There is a great opportunity for the farming community to build new revenue streams by establishing CSA's that offer individualized seasonal delivery of fresh local fruit, vegetables, meat, cheese, herbs and flowers directly to your door. Already underway this spring is the [Sandhills Farm To Table Cooperative](#), your chance to get weekly home delivery of the Sandhills' best local food.



Jon Parsons, Executive Director of Sustainable Sandhills, introduced the results of the SS Local Food Survey (**it's still open – take it [here!](#)**) to the standing room only



audience from Moore, Richmond, Lee and surrounding counties. Among the key findings of the survey was that while 89.5 percent of respondents had no previous experience with CSA's, 60 percent were willing to spend up to \$375 per season (or \$15 per week) for such a service. Nearly 50 percent of respondents requested seven types of fruits and vegetables per week. Instead of requiring farmers to

meet certified organic growing standards, nearly 70 percent of respondents preferred sustainable growing practices. This is of critical importance to local farmers transitioning fields from large-scale production crops such as tobacco to small yield harvests.

Guest speaker **Judy Lessler**, an early leader in the CSA movement in the Chapel Hill/Durham area, introduced the group to the planning, planting and harvesting schedules she utilizes to serve the hundreds of customers subscribing to her Harland Creek Farms CSA. Using organic methods, Ms. Lessler provides nearly

year-round produce and flowers for her customers. When scheduling her production, Ms. Lessler references detailed records from past growing seasons and forecasts her harvests with traditional spread sheet formulas. Her methods of marketing Harland Creek Farm include a regularly updated website, a weekly blog, a Facebook page and printed recipes and shopping lists that are included in each delivery box.

The forecasting and planning required to successfully manage a CSA is a challenge for even the most seasoned growers. Taylor Williams, Moore County Extension Agent, provided attendees with DVD's containing detailed analytics that farmers can use to plan production and forecast the growth of each crop they plant. Specific to our Sandhills region, Williams demonstrated the use of "Average Seasonal Growing Degree Days" for planting common crops. "Degree Days" estimate the warmth of the soil over the growing season in a particular area, and can be used as an accurate predictor of plant maturation.

Marketing is a critical component to maintaining a CSA. Paige Burns, Richmond County Agricultural Extension Agent, presented the group with examples of successful marketing via website maintenance, blogging, Facebook and Twitter. While many in the audience were unfamiliar with current internet marketing tools, it was clear that the methods of reaching consumers today could be accessed cheaply and quickly to support a farm's CSA program.

Sandhills Farm to Table is one local food cooperative that is committed to building resiliency into our local food supply. Co-founders Jan Leitschuh and Fenton Wilkinson plan to begin delivery to subscribers in Moore County this spring. The Co-op will draw from growers in the area and fill orders for dairy, produce, vegetables and meat. Local farms will be able to participate by delivering produce to the Sandhills Farm to Table sorting and packaging center. Subscribers will then receive their box of in-season produce on a weekly basis.

As Jan Leitschuh explained, "We are just now stepping away from our traditional food system". From young entrepreneurs to multi-generational farm families, we are seeing a groundswell of interest in local agriculture. The comprehensive Local Food Survey conducted by Sustainable Sandhills lays the groundwork for successful implementation of a Sandhills area CSA program. Results of the survey clearly indicate local interest in this type of food delivery system. Most important, the survey encourages our farming community to re-think its old model of food production and recognize the demand for and appreciation of a food source that is local, fresh and highly valued.