

Carolina Farm Stewardship Association

Connecting the greater farm community

by Frances Nevill

Whether you're an established farmer wanting to "go organic" or a new farmer learning the trade from the ground up, the Carolina Farm Stewardship Association (CFSA) is digging deeper into the issues that affect farmers and giving them a helping hand along the way.

Now in its 36th year, CFSA started out in North Carolina as a small group of farmers and farm enthusiasts. "Originally, it was a way to make connections and share resources," says Elizabeth Read, communications and development director. "In the 1980s it remained true to its roots, but grew to include not only farmers, but homesteaders, permaculture proponents, environmentalists and those who wanted to find a way to unite policymakers with producers."

Today, CFSA has thousands of members including farmers, urban gardeners, businesses, community leaders and individuals who want to support local, sustainable farming. Even local breweries have benefitted from the services of CFSA. "We are always looking for local farms to provide seasonal ingredients and CFSA makes that connection possible," says Jessica Reiser, owner of Asheville-based Burial Beer Co.

CFSA has a three-fold approach to meeting the needs of area growers. Technical assistance, advocacy and consumer outreach are the staples of CFSA's mission.

Through technical assistance farmers get hands-on guidance on everything from the organic certification process to food safety training. "Many small farmers are

also very diversified in what they produce so there are different regulations for certifying each crop and CFSA helps farmers navigate the process," says Read. "We've also encountered farmers who grew up on their family farm and now want to convert it to an organic farm."

Advocacy is a big part of CFSA's work as well. As a voice for small farmers and consumers alike, the association helps connect them with legislators and policy makers. CFSA jumps in and takes the time to research complex

legislation like the Food Safety Modernization Act, analyzes how it impacts farmers and shares this knowledge with its membership.

Through farm tours, workshops and conferences, CFSA achieves its consumer outreach mission. Working throughout the Carolinas, consumers have the chance to connect with their food producers and have the

confidence of knowing more about the food supply chain process and where their produce originates.

"We've worked everywhere from Greenville, to Raleigh, to Black Mountain and it's great to not only work with farmers but get to hear first-hand from the consumer what it means for them to be able to provide nourishing food for their families and support sustainable farming methods," says Read.

Farmers continue to face struggles like access to land, education and networking opportunities. CFSA remains committed to tirelessly working to find solutions to those struggles while exploring and expanding options for North and South Carolina farmers.


For more information about CFSA and how you can join, visit them at carolinafarmstewards.org. 



Photo by Bryan Martin