



2019 IMPACT REPORT



Supporting you to GET GROWING

Letter from Executive Director

One of the greatest joys in life is sharing meals with friends where everything on the table has been grown by people we know and love. It is during meals like this that the topic turns to stories of the crop, the harvest, the weather, and the preparation. Our food becomes imbued with soil, sun, rain, as well as the human and non-human stewardship that got it to our plates. When the eaters at the table are also growers, the stories abound and the pleasure of the meal is magnified. The entire group take turns regaling others with tales along these lines:

“The local origins of these great greasy bean seeds,”

“The recipe of that delicious honey mead,”

“The process of fermentation used for those vegetables,”

“The local nuts and foraged greens that were used to make this fabulous wild pesto,”

“The candy roaster squash that were the biggest we’ve ever seen,”

“The chickens my family and I grew and learned how to process.”

When the conversation at the table revolves around growers and their crops, it makes for the richest and fullest of lives. At Organic Growers School, this is the life we want for everyone. This is the world we imagine.

What if we were willing to create that world? What if it were easy and fun? We believe it can be.

We believe that:

- A direct relationship to soil and to homegrown food can cure all manner of ills.
- Growing food makes people healthier. Not only from increased physical activity and the consumption of fresher food, but also the natural antidepressants in the soil and in nature that contribute to improved mental health.
- Growing food and implementing sustainability practices builds community, which reduces loneliness, violence, and disconnection.
- Supporting a local food system:
 - Increases the money that stays in the community and in our farmers pockets.
 - Contributes to land preservation and scenic beauty.
 - Helps prepare individuals and the collective for the vicissitudes of economic and political upheaval.
 - Contributes to climate resilience, because any scale of soil building takes carbon out of the atmosphere and helps cool the planet.
 - Makes food more accessible for all, therefore making the kind of equitable world we all want.

What’s standing in the way of this world?

One humongous roadblock known as the “corporate industrial food system”, which has resulted in global poverty and hunger, unsafe, high calorie, and low quality food that makes people sick and obese, unending damage to our ecosystems through resource depletion and pollution, and a drastic loss of land based literacy.

Many regional non-profit organizations are doing the important work of feeding the hungry, sheltering the homeless, caring for the sick, and protecting the environment, which are all crucial services in times of crisis and stress.

Yet these services rarely solve the root causes of hunger, homelessness, illness, and ecological destruction.

We believe that resurrecting the local food system, renewing local farmers, and recreating abundant self reliance in all members of our community is instrumental in addressing the root causes of our complex social, economic, and environmental issues.

“For nearly 27 years OGS has been offering affordable, accessible, and hands-on training, workshops, conferences and partnerships that inspire, educate, and support people to farm, garden, and live organically.”

Instead of giving people the proverbial fish, we have been teaching them to fish. And farm, and garden, and orchard, and ferment, and store, and cook, and live sustainably.

We believe in systemic transformation from the ground up, literally. Tending the soil will transform us, both personally and collectively. As lovers of the soil, we are the grassroots of a movement that will create the equitable, vibrant, sustainable, and accessible food system we all want to be engaged in.



Lee Warren
Executive Director





Fundamental Statements

About Us:

Organic Growers School is the premiere provider of practical and affordable organic education in the Southern Appalachians. Since 1993 we have been building a vibrant food & farming community by boosting the success of organic growers. A 501c3 non-profit, our hands-on training, workshops, conferences and partnerships inspire, educate, and support people to farm, garden, and live organically.

Our Goals:

- ★ **We want** more farmers on the land using organic practices and a system in which family farms can flourish.
- ★ **We want** a garden, an orchard, and chickens in every yard.
- ★ **We want** the average person to populate their daily lives with home-grown food.
- ★ **We want** healthy, informed, and engaged consumers choosing local and organic food.
- ★ **We want** a democratic, equitable, and just food system.

In short, we want to reclaim agriculture.

We believe this reclamation will transform the health crisis, create strengthened communities, establish regional food sovereignty, and prepare for climate resilience.





Guiding Principles

Organic growing

and believe that it benefits the grower, the community, the consumer, and the earth.



Ensuring quality, integrity, and equity in our organization and programming.



Providing accessible, affordable, practical, and regionally appropriate education on regenerative and organic farming, gardening, eating, and living.



Building community and strengthening connections among people, healthy food, and land.



Our Service Area

OGS serves adult growers of all races, ethnicities, and income levels in the Southern Appalachian mountains which spans: Alabama, Georgia, Kentucky, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, Ohio, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia. 42% of the region's population is rural, compared with 20% of national population.

The region boasts a strong history of agriculture, forestry, and mining. Yet big agriculture and big industry have long capitalized on the rich resources while failing to bring long-term relief to poverty. We serve many "transitional" or "at-risk" counties, defined as economically worse than the national average on at least three indicators (3-year average unemployment rate, per capita market income, and poverty rate).

OGS serves growers of all scales, sizes, and production methods. Our programs focus on a holistic view of organic growing and highlight successful practices that thrive in our mountain region, which means systems that are resilient enough to function in different microclimates, generally function at a smaller scales, employ sustainable techniques, and incorporate forest products.

Constituents from all racial, economic, and growing scales serve on OGS steering committees, as track leaders, in cohort groups, as scholarship recipients, as board members, and provide ongoing feedback. We are community based.





The Problems

At OGS, we define the unmet needs in these social, environmental, political, and community contexts:



The Environmental Problem: Industrial agriculture results in heavy chemical input, subsidized commodity monocrops, loss of diversity, contamination of soil, water, and air, oceanic dead zones, and reduced resilience, all leading to catastrophe for people and planet alike.



The Food Insecurity Problem: The promise of mechanized agriculture to feed the world has fallen short, with 40 million U.S. citizens and 842 million people in the world facing food insecurity.



The Health Care Problem: We have a health care crisis of epic proportions. Half of all adults in the U.S.—117 million individuals—have one or more preventable chronic diseases which are related to diet and lifestyle.



The Loss of Land-Based Knowledge Problem: 150 years ago 90% of the population farmed. These land-based families provided their own food, fuel, clothing, lighting, transportation, and storage systems. 100 years ago it was 50%. 50 years ago it was 30%. Today it is less than 2%.



The Family Farms Problem: The average age of farmers nationally is 58, traditional methods of farming and knowledge transfer have been lost, and the barriers to farming are many.



The Community Engagement Problem: In 1944, 20 million home and community gardens, known as Victory Gardens provided 45% of the fresh fruits and vegetables consumed in the US. The industrialization of food and growing leaves the average person out of touch with the basics of food, kitchen, and garden literacy and communities have little cohesion with regards to interdependence, skill-sharing, or celebration of food and growing.



The Consumer Problem: A glut of cheap and nutrient deficient foods from commodity crops (corn and soy) flood our grocery shelves. That along with misinformation and manipulation by the food system leave eaters sick and ill-informed. More than two-thirds of adults and nearly one-third of children and youth are overweight or obese. The estimated annual health care costs of obesity-related illness is \$190 billion or nearly 21% of annual medical spending in the United States.



The Low-Wealth Problem: Low-wealth folks are disproportionately subject to higher disease and stress rates and are more impacted by rising food prices, low wages and a broken health care system.



The White-Supremacy Problem: Systemic oppression and institutional racism have led to inequalities in our food system that perpetuate disenfranchisement and marginalization of people of color.

“ The first supermarket supposedly appeared on the American landscape in 1946. That is not very long ago. Until then, where was all the food? Dear folks, the food was in homes, gardens, local fields, and forests. It was near kitchens, near tables, near bedsides. It was in the pantry, the cellar, the backyard. ”



Outcomes Of Our Work

INCREASE ORGANIC FARMING

- # Viable Organic Farmers
- # Advocating for Sustainable Farming

INCREASE ORGANIC HOME- GROWING

- # Successful Organic Home-Growers
- # Advocating for Home Growing

INCREASE ORGANIC CONSUMERS

- # Shopping & Eating Organically & Local
- # Eating at Home
- # Advocating for Food Sovereignty
- # Implementing Sustainable Solutions



Our Programs: Strategies to Grow Growers

We envision a regional, small-scale, organic food system made up of prosperous farmers, engaged and resourced home growers, and healthy eaters resulting in a thriving food shed that exemplifies justice, resilience, and community.

HOME GROWER

Sustainability Consulting

Living on the Land Learning Circles

Homestead Tours

Spring Conference

Harvest Conference

ORGANIC FARMER

Apprentice Link

Holistic Farm Planning

Spring & Harvest Conference

Navigating Farm Labor

Farm Beginnings® Farmer Training

One-on-One Mentoring

Sustainability Consulting

C.R.A.F.T.

Farm Dreams

Living on the Land Learning Circles

Homestead Tours

Sustainability Consulting

Spring & Harvest Conference

CONSCIOUS CONSUMER

Our Audience

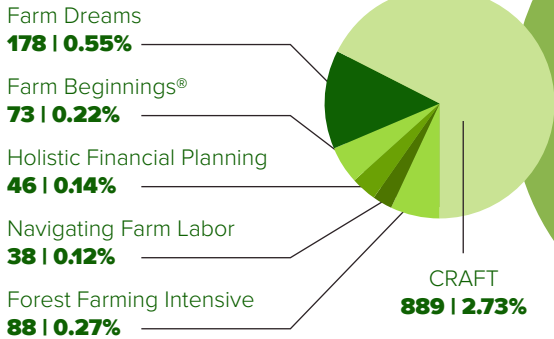
Number of Program Participants

CONFERENCES

Total Conferences: 30,078 | 92.22%

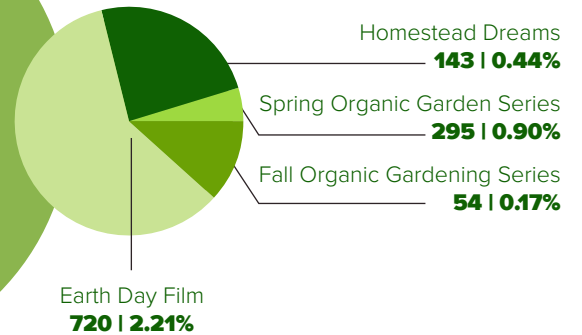
FARMER PROGRAMS

Total Farmer Programs: 1,312 | 4.02%

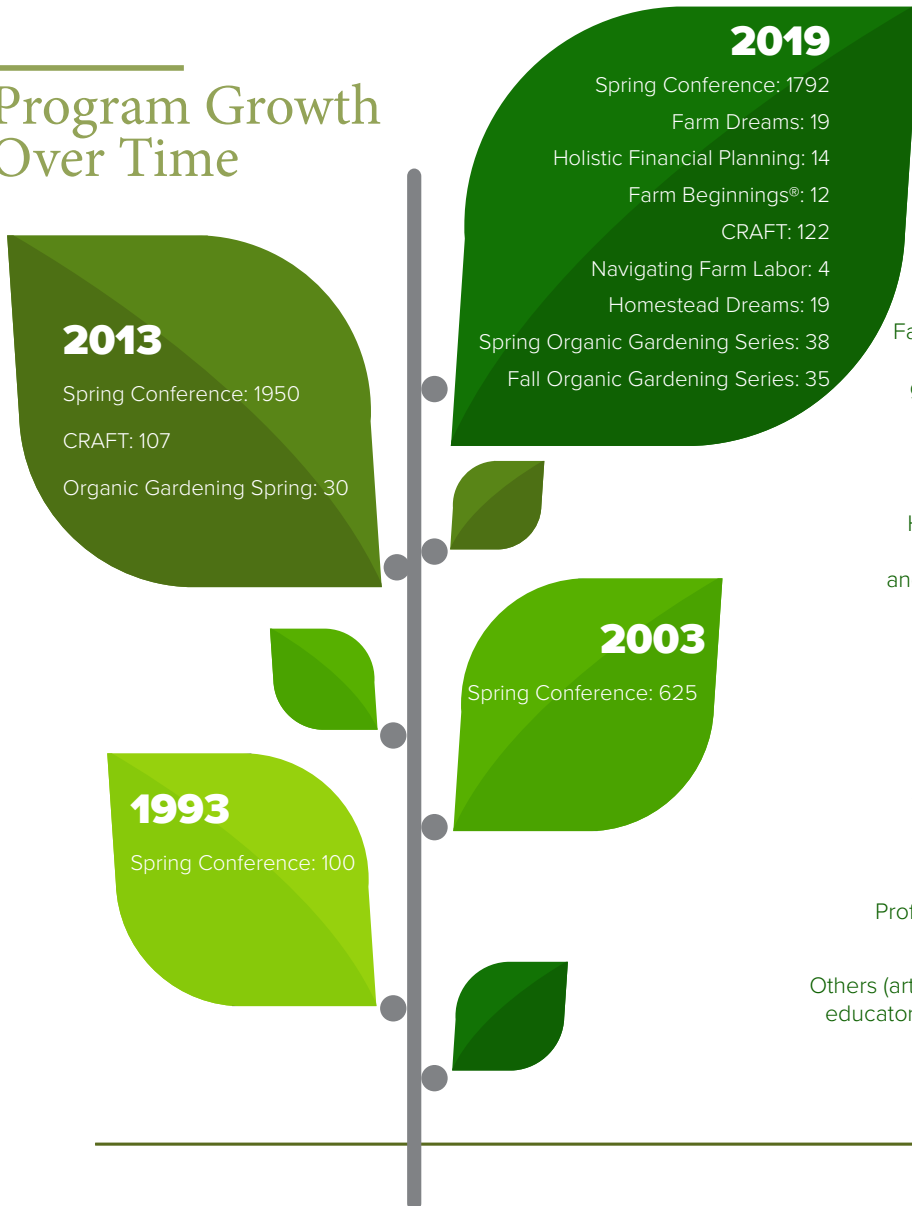


HOME GROWER PROGRAMS

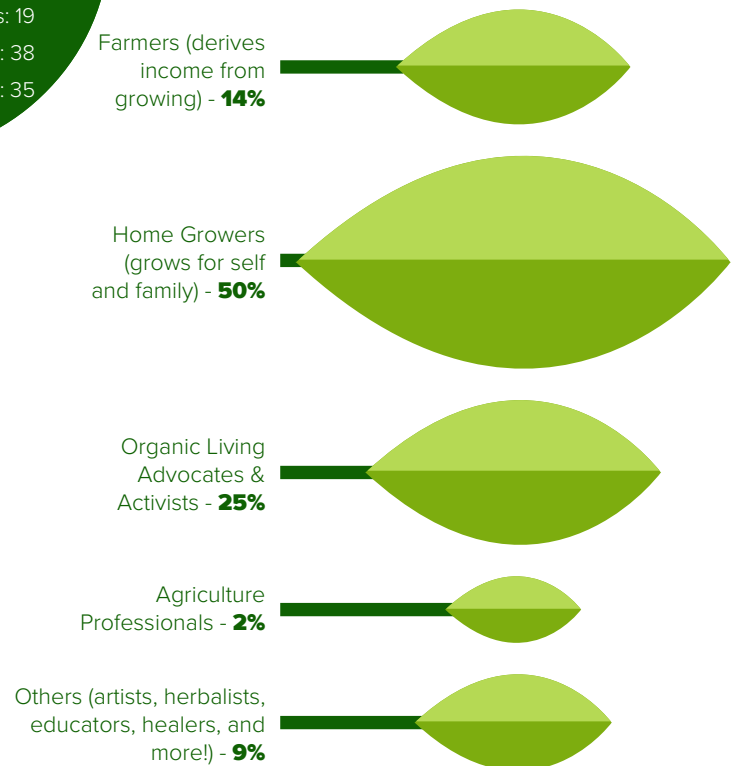
Total Home Grower Programs: 1,212 | 3.72%



Program Growth Over Time

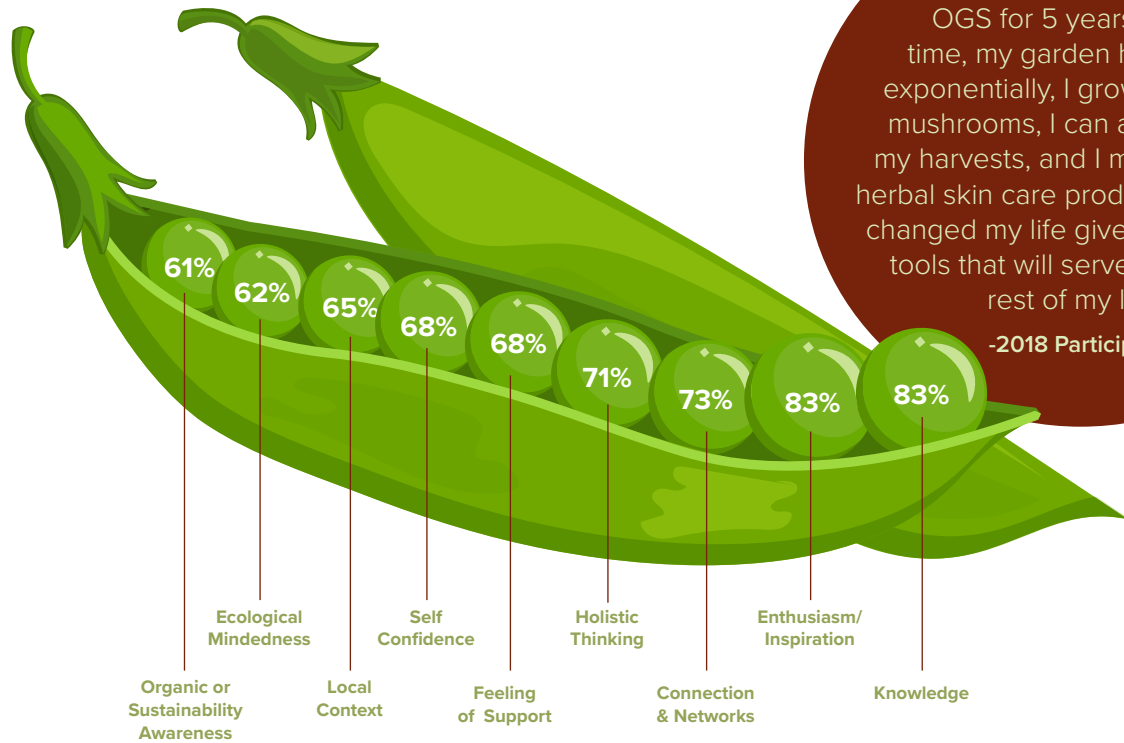


Participant Composition



Short Term Outcomes

What has increased as a result of attending OGS programming?



“I’ve been attending OGS for 5 years. In that time, my garden has grown exponentially, I grow and clone mushrooms, I can and ferment my harvests, and I make my own herbal skin care products. OGS has changed my life given me a set of tools that will serve me for the rest of my life.”
-2018 Participant

Changing Lives

“After attending this program, will you change something in your life?”

“In over 15 years of attending OGS I have been awakened in so many ways. I talk about organic options with people, I grow food, I think about my habits of use and reuse with intention. I have developed awareness and learned to implement actions to make my choices healthier not just for me but in keeping with nature. And it's not hard at all.”

- 2018 Attendee



Why It Matters

We have Increased Farmer Viability



“OGS is most affordable conference of its kind. I would not be able to afford to learn and grow anywhere else within my means. The Conference has encouraged me to learn and implement more sustainable practices in all that I do. Each time I participate, I walk away with a tool or some knowledge I did not have before. It has made a huge impact on my life.”

We have Increased Home Growing



In 2018, the average household spent \$503 on lawn and garden retail, up nearly \$100 from the previous year.



More American households are gardening than ever before (77%).

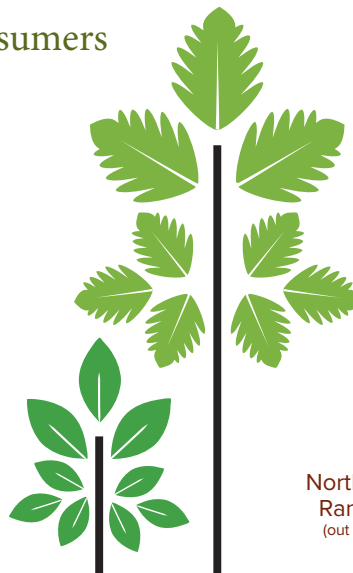


Five million of the six million “new” gardening households were Millennials.

We have increased Organic Consumers

Locavore Index in North Carolina

2017
North Carolina
Ranked 37th
(out of 50 states)



2019
North Carolina
Ranked 21st
(out of 50 states)

*SECTION 1: “Organic Product Sales” comes from the USDA Ag Census 2017. “Certified Organic Acres” comes from USDA 2016, National Agriculture Statistics Service, Certified Organic Survey, NC **SECTION 2: All statistics come from National Gardening Survey 2018 from gardenresearch.com and gardencentermag.com. ***SECTION 3: “Locavore Index” comes from Strolling of the Heifers, Locavore Index, 2019.





Funders & Partners

Our Philosophy:

It is crucial that we not only build capacity and skills to better educate farmers, but also build resiliency and mutual support between agricultural support agencies in our region. The focus on strengthening our leaders, building trust and creativity, and enhancing community-based actions is the very nature of resilience and “attainment”. When we work together effectively our collective impact is far greater than that as individuals. Our future farmers need this from us.

Our Current Partners:

OGS is actively partnering with University of North Carolina at Asheville, Warren Wilson College, NC State University, area and state Soil and Water Conservation Districts, Southern Appalachian Highlands Conservancy, WNC Farm Link, Appalachian Sustainable Agriculture Project, Mountain Valleys Resource Conservation & Development, Carolina Farm Stewardship Association, Carolina Farm Credit, Farm Bureau Chapters throughout WNC, Rural Advancement Foundation International (RAFI), Asheville-Buncombe Community Food Policy Council, Blue Ridge Women in Agriculture, Urban Agriculture Alliance, Living Web Farms Education Center, Southern Sustainable Agriculture Working Group, Southern SARE, Natural Capital Investment Fund, Mountain Biz Works, Community Foundation of WNC, USDA-Farm Service Agency, USDA-NIFA, USDA-Rural Development, USDA-Conservation Innovation Grants, Cultivating Resilience, Appalachian Foodshed Project, Center for Environment Farming Systems (CEFS), SAAFON, Black Urban Growers, Appalachian Regional Council, Land of Sky Regional Council, Western Regional Food Network, Healthy Food Access Cohort, Racial Equity Institute Training, NC Cooperative Extension in many counties, Clemson University, Polk County Agricultural Development Office, McDowell County Local Food Advisory Council, Gaia Herbs, Chelsea Green Publishing, Southeaster Seed & Plant Exchange, Sow True Seeds, Community Food Strategies, WNC NonProfit Pathways, Buncombe County TDA, Madison County TDA, NC Rural Center, Veterans Healing Farm, Growing Rural Opportunities, Food Systems Leadership Network, and a myriad of local and regional businesses.





The Ultimate Outcome

As Organic Growers thrive, they:

- Produce food for their regions, enhancing personal and regional food security.
- Increase their capacity for environmental stewardship, ecological awareness, nature reverence, and best land use practices.
- Generate income for themselves and others.
- Run and support successful, viable, and profitable businesses.
- Become community leaders advocating for a healthy food system.
- Improve health outcomes for themselves and others.

The ultimate outcome is an empowered population, successfully growing organically on a farm, home, and community scale, who are financially and nutritionally resourced, ready to take a seat at the political table and use their voice to advocate for a more equitable, sustainable and accessible food systems and a vibrant, engaged community.

“ Organic Growers School has been there to spearhead and facilitate personal knowledge and growth in my long-term life goals of creating a resilient homestead food forest. OGS has helped inspire projects from the ground up, has helped keep goals grounded in reality in order that they may come to fruition, has provided and encouraged top notch educators and networking within the very supportive and motivated sustainable farming community of WNC, and no-doubt has spared me the agony of reinventing the wheel too many times in this on-going learning process I am in. ”

- Ellen Selm,

2016 Farm Dreams Participant & 2017 Farm Beginnings® Graduate

Learn more. Stay involved. Donate.



www.organicgrowersschool.org

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