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EAT DRINK AND BE LOCAL EVENT SUPPORTS FARMERS, RESTAURANTS, LOCAL ECONOMY

In this age of information, people can Google their kids' teachers, get updates on the lives of high school acquaintances from Facebook, and find out what their neighbors paid for houses. But how much do you know about the farmers responsible for your daily sustenance?

Catawba County residents will have an opportunity to show support for local farmers, local restaurants, and the local economy by taking part in Catawba County's first Eat, Drink and Be Local event. During the event, which runs from Thursday, September 20 through Saturday, September 22, Bistro 127 at 2039 North Center Street Hickory, NC 28601, Youssef 242 at 242 11th Avenue NE Hickory, NC 28601, The Roasted 'Tater at 2220 North Center Street Hickory, NC 28601, and Hatch Sandwich Shop at 268 1st Avenue Northwest Hickory, NC 28601, will feature specials made from local food. Everyone eating at the restaurants during those evenings will get to learn about agriculture in Catawba County and see exactly which farms and farmers provided the food for their meal.

"Buying locally and patronizing restaurants that source their menu items from the local area helps people better understand the successful agricultural economy in our county, and also supports local farmers," said Jeff Carpenter, a local cattle producer and the Director of North Carolina Cooperative Extension-Catawba Center. "Most consumers are several generations removed from a farming background and don't have a personal knowledge of food production or modern agriculture."

Carpenter said technology has become so advanced that it now only takes one farmer to feed over 100 people. Most food now travels long distances, through multiple wholesalers, distributors and processors before it reaches the dinner table. Many Catawba County residents don't realize that there are currently over 737 farms in the county.

Carpenter said that, while more efficient production has removed past concerns that the foods which area citizens need will continue to be produced, he is concerned that "our understanding of and appreciation of agriculture has suffered."

"Everyone benefits from the use of local foods and the support of our county's farmers," says Julie Lehmann, Manager of the Conover Farmers Market. "When selling locally, farmers get to keep three times more of the total price of that product. So farmers benefit by selling their crops and agricultural product for a good price close to home, and consumers benefit by getting better, fresher products that have consumed much less fuel and energy to get to them. Buying locally is truly a win-win exchange for everyone."

According to a Bureau of Labor Statistics' Consumer Expenditure Survey, the average consumer spent \$679 on fruits and vegetables, \$380 on dairy, and \$784 on meat products consumed in the home in 2010. Given Catawba County's population of over 154,000 people, and the fact that many of those products are produced locally, households making small changes can have a large impact county-wide. Adding to this impact is what is known as the Local Multiplier Effect, which holds that every \$1 spent locally has the economic impact of approximately \$3 because of the way the money is recirculated within the local economy.

The Eat, Drink and Be Local event is part of the Cooperative Extension's ongoing Farm & Food Sustainability Plan,

which is exploring ways to link farmers with consumers, which will help support agriculture in the County. “We find that people enjoy local food and one great way is to introduce local foods in our local restaurants,” said says Mary George, Catawba County’s Assistant Planning Director. “People can then connect with the local farmers and know that they are helping their neighbors make a living while eating fresh and healthy food.”

For more information on the Eat, Drink and Be Local events at Bistro 127, Youssef 242, The Roasted ‘Tater, and Hatch Sandwich Shop, September 20-22, visit <https://www.facebook.com/events/499858966690963/> or you may contact the Catawba County Cooperative Extension at 828-465-8240.