

**Outstanding Subject Matter Program by a Team**  
The NC Growing Together Project (NCGT), is a five year USDA-NIFA-AFRI funded initiative of the Center for Environmental Farming Systems (CEFS) and is truly an integrated project of Research, Academics, and Extensionwith the aim of bringing more locally-grown foods, produce, meat, dairy, and seafood into mainstream retail and food service supply chains, thus enhancing food security by increasing access to local foods and by strengthening the economics of small to mid-sized farm and fishing operations.

The approach being used by the NCGT project is to identify the most promising solutions, by which local production can be connected to conventional markets, and to evaluate and share the results, building extension training and resources to support the work along the way.

# This project includes membership by faculty, extension professionals as well as public and private sector partners. The target audience includes all of the participants along the local food supply chain, but can be broken down into four target audiences: 1)Small and mid-size farmers. NCGT supports training and capacity-building on the farmer end so that they are equipped to meet the requirements of larger buyers (ie Good Agricultural Practices certification), and works with buyers to develop farmer-friendly practices and processes to support successful business relationships. Finally, NCGT supports branding efforts that distinguish locally-produced foods in the marketplace. 2) NCGT is a connector, and plays a key role connecting buyers who want to buy from small and mid-sized farms and farmers who are looking to supply mainstream markets. 3) NCGT’s Local Food Economies initiative has produced an extensive suite of resources for [planners](https://www.ncgrowingtogether.org/news/ncgt-supports-planning-focus-on-agriculture-food-systems-in-partnership-with-the-nc-chapter-of-the-american-planning-association/) and local government officials seeking to support local agricultural economic development.  4) NCGT offers a summer Local Food Supply Chain Apprenticeship. Through this 8-week program, apprentices have the opportunity to work with local food hubs, businesses and organizations and gain hands-on training related to local food systems and value chains work.  Every year several apprentices are placed in county Cooperative Extension offices. NCGT also has several Supply Chain Fellows (MBA students at the Jenkins School of Management), who engage MBA supply chain and Marketing Research student teams to tackle projects along the local food supply chain, as well as have co-designed and offered a Local Food and the Supply Chain course to introduce MBA candidates to the unique place of local foods in the supply chain.

**Project successes include:**  
Training for 256 farmers in food safety and post-harvest handling techniques   
Produced two video guides on post-harvest handling   
Distributed over 500 guides on Wholesale and Retail Product Specifications to growers and extension educators   
An estimated 272 ranchers and 100 fishermen and affiliated businesses across the niche meat and seafood supply chains have attended workshops and on-site tours on the business of selling into retail and wholesale markets.   
An estimated 148 primarily produce growers attended grower-buyer speed networking and other events to meet with buyers face-to-face.