

# NC AgVentures Grant Program



In today's global marketplace, innovation has become the key that allows one business to rise above others. Farmers are both creative and entrepreneurial, but transitioning an agricultural operation to compete in the global economy is a huge undertaking. Extension professionals, with their agricultural expertise and ties to the land-grant system are uniquely positioned to help local producers explore new opportunities, access local and university resources, and enhance project success.

NC AgVentures is an Extension grant program sponsored by the NC Tobacco Trust Fund Commission (NCTTFC). The overall goal is to strengthen the rural economy, particularly in places negatively impacted by the downturn in the tobacco industry.

## Two Grant Opportunities

The program offers two grant options; an individual farm grant or a community grant. The individual farm grant offers cost-share grants up to \$10,000, for family farms with innovative ideas to diversify, transition, or enhance their farm operation. This could include adapting new technology, such as using a drone to monitor field crops, converting a tobacco greenhouse for microgreens production, or using social media for marketing.

The second option, a community grant up to \$10,000, provides funds for NC Extension Agents and Extension County Directors to pursue project ideas that will strengthen their agricultural community.

The project should build collaboration between three or more Ag producers. There is no limit on the size of the group and the Agent can invite farms in other counties to participate. Some of these grants have been used for research projects and others have been used to purchase equipment that can be shared (rented) by multiple farms.

Currently, the NC AgVentures grant opportunity is available to farmers and Agents in the following counties: Martin, Wilson, Pitt, Edgecombe, Nash, Forsyth, Stokes, Surry, Rockingham, Yadkin, Guilford, Wayne, Lenoir, Sampson, Johnston, Duplin, Harnett and Greene. (We hope to expand the program in the future.).

*Photo provided by Emma and Elliot Seldner. They own Fair share Farm in Forsyth County, and received a NC AgVentures grant in 2019.*

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## GRANT IMPACTS 2014 – 2017

Awarded 89 farm grants

Awarded 10 Community grants

Invested \$880,000

Jobs Created – 230

Jobs Sustained – 689

Current or former tobacco farmers and farm workers assisted – 450

Workers with upgraded skills – 285

Acres of farmland impacted – 56,788

Acres of new crop production - 607

Value of product produced – \$10,999,96

*Impact numbers are gathered from project reports submitted by the grant recipients.*

## NC AgVentures Farmer Grants

### Fair Share Farm (Forsyth County)

*Using Caterpillar Tunnels to Mitigate Climate Change Related Risks in Annual Vegetable Production*



Elliot and his wife Emma own and operate Fair Share Farm. They grow salad greens and niche vegetables in year-round in inexpensive, ROI hoop houses on 1.25 acres. In 2017 they invested in ten 1400 square foot tunnels. Using the hoop houses allow them to keep planting and harvesting despite the weather. They provide lettuce year-round to restaurants in Winston-Salem and Charlotte. In 2017 they grossed \$185,000 and \$220,000 in 2018.

Receiving the NC AgVentures grant of \$10,000 helped to fund the rollout of the second phase of a three-year enterprise expansion. They added ten more caterpillar tunnels doubling their production space.

### Hickory Meadows Organics (Nash County)

*Seeds for the Southeast*



The McDaniel family has been farming since the mid 1700's when they were granted a parcel of land from the King of England. On that same land, Peyton, his brother Billy and Cousin Phillip formed Hickory Meadows Organics in 2012. They started out growing organic tobacco, soybeans, corn and sweet potatoes. With the downward trend of tobacco they decided to replace the tobacco acreage with soybean and corn.

Four years ago, Hickory Meadows Organics started working on a project with NCSU and RAFI-USA doing on-farm research to help identify varieties of soybeans and corn that not only worked well in the Southeast but also performed well in organic conditions. This led to the release of three new non-GMO varieties of soybeans and a farmer bred double-cross corn variety by NCSU. In order to be certified organic seed, it needs to be cleaned at a certified organic facility. With the grant funds of \$8750 Hickory Meadows Organics purchased a seed cleaner and new cleaning screens to produce these lines of corn and soybean seed for other farmers in the Southeast.

## NC AgVentures Community Grants

### Community Grant: (Forsyth, Davidson, Davie, Stokes, Surry, Wilkes and Yadkin Counties)

*Two row corn planter helps farmers transition from tobacco to corn and soybean crops (Agent Tim Hambrick is the project manager)*



Agriculture in this 7 county region has deeply depended on tobacco dollars for many years. As tobacco declines, many growers move to grain, yet they are often not prepared for all that grain demands. The project goal is to purchase a small corn planter which will help Agent Tim Hambrick install multiple tests in multiple counties. Not only will farmers get to see the positive effects of an up-to-date piece of equipment, but he and the participating Agents from the seven counties can also quickly build a regional database of information to help expedite the learning curve(s).

Tim received a grant of \$4500 which was added to another grant he had secured to purchase a 2 row corn planter from Pequea Planter. Test plots have been initiated in Yadkin, Surry, Stokes and Forsyth with 5 former tobacco farmers, looking at seed nematicide treatments in soybean. The planter will be featured at one or both of Corn Field Days scheduled for August 13 in Surry County and Soybean Field Day scheduled for September 5 in Yadkin County.

### Community Grant (Pitt County)

*Leroy James Farmers Market (Extension County Director Leigh Guth is the project manager)*



The Leroy James Farmers Market is operated by Pitt County Government. In the past 4 years, it has experienced a renewal with upgrades to the building including an expansion funded through county government and a local foundation grants. With a new manager in place, the market serves vendors and the public from April through December, 4 mornings a week during the peak season. During the 2017 market season, 826 vendors participated. The market accepts SNAP/EBT and many vendors accept WIC vouchers.

The manager and vendors are seeing more opportunities to expand into a market box subscription service for customers. This service would appeal to customers who want local produce but need the convenience of a pre-order, drive through, pick up service. The market neighbors the senior center, an elementary and middle school, and a large public park with ball fields. The market aims to meet the needs of those consumers.

They are currently working on the electronic payment and computer capacity to enable online orders and payment. With the grant award of \$3000 the market will purchase coolers to hold the market boxes which will be assembled with products from multiple market vendors. The cooler space will also be used to store individual produce from one market day to another.

*To learn more about the NC Tobacco Trust Fund Commission (NCTTFC) please visit: <http://tobacotrustfund.org/>*