The NC regional coordinators of the multi-state Appalachian Foodshed Project (AFP) held a kickoff meeting on December 5th, 2011 at UNC-Asheville. The purpose of this meeting was to introduce the Appalachian Foodshed Project to stakeholders in Western North Carolina, collectively discuss the dynamics and challenges of the food system, and begin to identify five crucial target areas for addressing food security in the region.

This full-day session was professionally facilitated and included the opportunity for participants to interact in open conversation, to share and build on ideas, and to consider together what the NC Foodshed Project can accomplish in western North Carolina.

Working in small groups, participants collectively discussed the dynamics of the food system in Western North Carolina, focusing on the region’s assets. Each group then created a visual representation of the food system as they understood it. These visuals were then presented and explained to the full group to build a shared understanding between meeting participants of the overall food system in Western North Carolina.

Goals of the Meeting:

- (Re-) Introduce the Appalachian Foodshed Project and review the outcomes from the initial AFP Capacity Building Forum, held on Oct. 28-29 in Blacksburg, VA.
- Collectively discuss the dynamics and challenges of the food system in western North Carolina.
- Identify five crucial target areas for addressing food security in Appalachian North Carolina.
- Begin the formation of a NC Foodshed working groups, through identifying areas of focus and developing team goals.

Meeting brings together stakeholders, community practitioners, extension agents, and academics to engage in dialogue on food security in Western North Carolina.

Michelle Schroeder-Moreno and the facilitator (Logan Couce of Fountainworks) then introduced a NC-specific game plan that gave an overview of resources available, the project’s goal and objectives, and some potential next steps to take on the path towards those goals and objectives. As the AFP is intended to be participatory in nature, the organizers sought to avoid planning all of the work out in isolation, but rather sought to collaboratively develop it with the participants.

Based on the discussion of goals and objectives, participants then worked in small groups to generate ideas that could affect
The Appalachian Foodshed Project is using a foodshed concept to address issues of food security in West Virginia and the Appalachian regions of North Carolina and Virginia. Similar to the concept of a watershed, a foodshed takes into account everything between where food is produced and where it is consumed. This includes the farms and gardens used to raise food, travel routes used to transport products, processing facilities, distribution (farmers markets, brokers, retailers), and the restaurants, institutions, and homes where we all eat.

The Appalachian Foodshed Project is designed to build on the work that is already happening in Appalachia, facilitating and enhancing formal and informal work by creating a network of organizations and individuals who are engaging similar issues related to community development, economic viability, health and nutrition, food access, social justice, and agriculture.

By working collaboratively, the Foodshed Project hopes to build on the human and natural resources in the region to improve access, expand food security, and enhance food economies, especially in communities that have been underserved and are economically vulnerable.

The Foodshed Project will work to cultivate resilient food systems within the region. This means creatively working with communities, farmers, policymakers, non-profits, and institutions to better understand the food system and implement changes that have long term benefits for all people in the region.