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SPOTLIGHT ON LOCAL WORKFORCE INNOVATIONS

Building the Next Generation of Local Food and Agricultural Leaders

Native American students and youth in North Carolina are extremely under-represented in agricultural careers, even though agriculture is North Carolina's number one industry, contributing \$75 billion to the state's economy and providing 17% of all jobs. Additionally, 1 in 4 Native Americans experience food insecurity, compared to 1 in 8 of all Americans. This largely stems from a scarcity of both jobs and food in areas with high populations of Native Americans. These factors prompted a recently launched initiative in North Carolina, the [Native American Sustainable Agriculture & Food Systems Apprenticeship](#). This program aims to boost youth involvement in agriculture, increase diversity and inclusion, and promote agriculture and agricultural sciences as a viable career path.

Growing up in agriculture and having worked on the farm with my grandparents alongside a host of relatives and community members, I am delighted to see the investment of time, resources, and money towards building the next generation of agricultural leaders on native lands.

PRESIDENT MELISSA SINGLER
Robeson Community College

To build the next generation of local food and agricultural leaders in Robeson County, the Native American Agriculture Fund (NAAF) awarded \$200,587 to the [Center for Environmental Farming Systems](#) (CEFS) to provide economic opportunities and career mobility for Lumbee youth while also building capacity in the local agricultural community. CEFS has been a leader in creating, promoting, and managing apprenticeships in North Carolina for 20 years and with this latest funding CEFS was able to develop this initiative. The Native American Sustainable Agriculture & Food Systems Apprenticeship program connects Lumbee producers, agricultural businesses, and food system nonprofits with Lumbee youth in a year-long paid mentorship program.

CEFS has partnered with Robeson Community College (RCC) and the University of North Carolina at Pembroke (UNCP) in this new project aimed at developing specific food and agricultural career pathways for Lumbee youth. RCC and UNCP recruit interested participants to the program, both youth and farmers, while CEFS works to connect the dots and provides technical training and professional development for apprentices. This unique partnership leverages each institution's specific expertise. CEFS brings 25 years of sustainable agriculture and education experience; RCC has been a community institution in Robeson County for over 50 years and has a student body that is 46% Native American; and UNCP is the nation's only four-year public institution founded by American Indians for American Indians.

As part of its 'Developing Food and Agricultural Career Pathways for Lumbee Youth' project, CEFS, in partnership with RCC and UNCP, seeks motivated students and/or young adults interested in pursuing careers in agriculture, agribusiness, or food systems to participate in this hands-on apprenticeship program.



PROGRAM REVIEW:

What is required of program participants?

Apprenticeship Overview

The first cohort of this apprenticeship starts in May of 2021 and will last for approximately one year. Apprentices will be paid \$12/hour for approximately 20 hours/week. During this program, the apprentices will be paired with experienced mentors from Lumbee-owned food and agricultural businesses in Robeson County and can:

- Receive hands-on training and education in sustainable food production.
- Participate in monthly professional development trainings related to food systems and farming work.
- Network with other apprentices and food and farm businesses within the field of sustainable food production.
- Partake in a 4-day farm tour across North Carolina.
- Assist Lumbee-owned businesses with supporting local food systems in Robeson County.
- Gain work experience in food production, website assistance, social media, business, or logistics planning, depending on the applicant's interest and the needs of the business.

Examples of Host Sites and Mentors

- Multi-acre row crop production sites
- Small scale sustainable vegetable farms
- Hydroponic production facilities

Requirements for Apprentices

- Must be current college students or recent college graduates living in and around Robeson County, NC.
- Must display enthusiasm for local food production and respect for farmers and producers from diverse rural communities.
- Must hold a driver's license and have access to transportation to the host site.
- Must have high school degree or equivalent.

COVID-19 Pandemic Impact

The COVID-19 pandemic has shown us that local food systems can be a more viable, resilient, and quick to adapt option, given the increased strain on major food suppliers. There is more demand than ever for local foods, and reliable labor is a huge challenge for this sector. Additionally, the average age of farmers is 58 years old. During the pandemic, CEFS and the North Carolina Local Food Council developed a new virtual internship program, where college students gained experience working with local farmers in a virtual capacity - from website development to promote contactless payment, to social media assistance to increase online and in-person sales. Learn more about it here. The pandemic presented unprecedented challenges, but with innovative ideas and technology, local farmers were able to pivot quickly with the help of program participants. Experiences like this internship program can equip youth with the knowledge of local food production while meeting the needs of their community.

Program Contact

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► About the Series

Brought to you by the NCWorks Commission, the Spotlight on Local Workforce Innovations series showcases local innovations in collaborative, employer-led workforce development partnerships across our state. The series will highlight promising practices that can be replicated across North Carolina.

The NCWorks Commission is the state's Workforce Development Board. Led by a private sector chair, the 33-member, Governor-appointed commission includes representatives from the business community, heads of state workforce agencies, educators, and community leaders.

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