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Healthy Communities is a Focus of 2015 Local Food Conference

Wilmington, NC – **Feast Down East (FDE) and UNCW** bring all the partners together as they aim to establish a healthy local food community. The **Feast Down East 5^h Annual Regional Conference** is scheduled for **Friday, February 6th** from 8 am – 4 pm at **UNC Wilmington, Burney Center**.

Feast Down East, also known as the Southeastern NC Food Systems Program, has been helping Southeastern North Carolina step to the forefront of the local food movement since 2006. No longer considered a movement, but rather an accepted way of life for many, Feast Down East continues to campaign for community involvement in the building of a fully-integrated, vibrant, healthy local food system. Food is essential to life, so ensuring that the supply is healthy and accessible is paramount. The conference, in its 5th year, has created a solid venue where all the partners involved can come together and support the local food effort. The conference will include an array of workshops for farmers, fishers, chefs, food buyers and sellers, consumers, foodies, educators, local food advocates, gardeners, public health professionals, urban and regional planners, non-profits and government leaders. “It is important that we bring everyone to the table. A strong local food system positively impacts the health and well-being of our communities, in addition to boosting the local economy,” explains Dr. Leslie Hossfeld, Co-Founder and Executive Director of Feast Down East.

The conference will kick-off in the morning with inspirational words from Jennifer MacDougall, Healthy Active Communities Program Officer for Blue Cross Blue Shield of NC Foundation, as we “Set the Table for Health”. USDA State Director for NC Rural Development, Randy Gore, will be keynote speaker during the Local Food Feast at 1:00 pm. Director Gore has been the leading force behind the recent “NC Strikeforce Initiative”. The initiative has created a network of support and resources for small-scale farms.

Conference attendees can again look forward to one of the highlights of the conference, the **Feast Down East Agrarian Stewardship Award** presentation. Previous year’s winners Margaret Shelton of Shelton Herb Farm, Stefan Hartmann of Black River Organic Farm, Chef Tripp Engel of Brasserie du Soleil and Chef James Doss of Rx/Pembrokes Restaurants will “pass the torch” to the next farmer and chef who have been voted in as those in their craft who support, in an **exceptional** way, the work of Feast Down East and our local farm communities.

Director of Feast Down East, Jane Steigerwald encourages all community members to attend, “Whether you grow, produce, cook, eat, sell or advocate for fresh local farm food - this conference is for you!” Join the move toward a healthier local food community.

For more information on the amazing workshops and to register visit www.feastdowneast.org. *All registrants are encouraged to bring at least one non-perishable food item to be donated to the Food Bank of Central and Eastern NC.* Sincere gratitude to the major conference sponsors: Farm Bureau of New Hanover County, Farm Bureau of Pender County, Whole Foods, NC Department of Agriculture and the Wilmington Box Company.

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Feast Down East, also known as the Southeastern North Carolina Food Systems Program (SENCFS), was established in early 2006 in order to join public and private agencies together to create a local and regional food system that supports local farmers; increases the sales of local farm products; educates consumers and the public on the importance of ‘buying local’; and sustains and expands farm employment, profit, and ownership, particularly among limited-resource farmers. UNCW is the lead agent for SENCFS. The Feast Down East Processing and Distribution Center is a USDA designated Food Hub. For more information on how to get involved, visit their website www.feastdowneast.org