

## Agricultural Coop Handed Off to WAMY

Written by Submitted  
Tuesday, 15 April 2014 11:47

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High Country Community Supported Agriculture, a multi-farm cooperative food-system project linking consumers to locally grown organic produce, has moved to a new home. After founding the project and supplying years of volunteer labor and management, Valle Crucis-based Maverick Farms has handed the initiative off to WAMY Community Action, a Boone-based non-profit dedicated to promoting economic justice and sustainability in the High Country. HCCSA launched in 2009, grew out of Maverick Farms' original single-farm CSA. In its five years under the umbrella of Maverick Farms, High Country CSA became the area's first multi-farm CSA, offering organic vegetables, meat, fruit and value-added farm goods supplied by a variety of local producers. From its inception, HC-CSA was dedicated to helping create a food system that works for all community members, fundamentally for those with the least economic resources. The HCCSA became the first rural-based CSA in the nation to accept EBT/SNAP benefits (food stamps) as payment. HCCSA has offers discounted shares to community members with need through its Cost-Share program, funded by community donations and grants. In 2012, the US Department of Agriculture listed the HCCSA in its national database of "food hubs."

Melissa Soto, Executive Director of WAMY Community Action states, "We felt like the CSA would be a perfect addition to the services we currently offer. They support local small farms and also make fresh, organic produce available to the lower income." WAMY's mission statement is about creating opportunities and building sustainability in our local communities. They have been assisting the people of Watauga, Avery, Mitchell and Yancey Counties for almost 50 years.

"We see the HCCSA as a model of community-based economic development," says Alice Brooke Wilson, a founder of the HCCSA and Maverick Farms. "It delivers healthy, high-quality food in a way that's accessible to people of all income levels, and it provides a stable source of income to farmers, who are under constant economic pressure."

The CSA model offers community members an opportunity to purchase a share in the farmers' harvest, receiving weekly shares of locally grown, fresh organic produce. Farmers receive income up-front at a time of year when little revenue is coming in, and consumers can rely on fresh, in-season crops on a regular basis. In addition to a weekly box of produce from June through October, members contribute to the local economy, keeping their money local, and ensuring farmland preservation in our community. Farmland is being rapidly lost to development, especially in the High Country, and high land prices often exclude small and beginning farmers. The Farmer Incubator and Grower (FIG) Farm in Valle Crucis, also a Maverick Farms initiative, aims to provide access to land so that new farmers can sell into the HCCSA. The multi-farm CSA model developed by HCCSA ensures that farmland can remain in sustainable production, and HCCSA commits to partnering specifically with small and beginning farmers, offering an accessible starting market.

"In order to create a sustainable future, we must build relationships between the farmers who grow our food and the people who eat our food," says Elliot Rhodes, HCCSA coordinator. "Our model works when members purchase shares early in the season, ensuring strong income for farmers, and when we are accessible to low-income community members. If we are going to take the best care of ourselves by eating fresh organic and local, we must ensure that everyone has access to the same opportunity." HCCSA is still signing up members for the 2014 season, and is raising funds to continue the Cost-Share program.

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Through partnership with WAMY Community Action, HCCSA hopes to grow in size this year, increasing the number of shares available to the High Country community and solidifying our Cost-Share program through nutrition education programs and expanded share options. To learn more about HCCSA and how you can help ensure a sustainable future for the High Country, visit [www.highcountrycsa.org](http://www.highcountrycsa.org) and contact Elliot a [highcountrycsa@gmail.com](mailto:highcountrycsa@gmail.com).