

Come to the Table: People of Faith Relieving Hunger and Supporting Local Farms in North Carolina

Come to the Table works with people of faith in North Carolina to create a food system that provides food to those who need it most while supporting local farmers. Come to the Table's leaders include leaders from North Carolina congregations, nonprofits, and government agencies. Come to the Table is a project of the Rural Life Committee of the North Carolina Council of Churches with support from the Duke Endowment.

Why Hunger and Farms?

Discussions about getting nutritious food to those who need it often center on price. So do discussions about helping farms survive. If the only thing that consumers and farmers have in common is the price at the grocery store, then consumers and farmers must always be at odds. Consumers want low food prices; farmers want high food prices. Thus goes the logic of an industrial food system.

But the truth is it takes more to produce food than the purchase price. That extra cost is paid in low wages, disappearing communities, and environmental degradation. We pay this price with every inch of topsoil that erodes, never to be replaced, with every garden that is paved into a parking lot, with every family farm that is auctioned off, and with every local crop which has fallen out of production because we would rather buy it from halfway around the world than from our neighbor's backyard.

Asking low income people to simply buy inexpensive food has its own price. We pay this price with every person in our community who must choose between food and medicine, with every child who develops diabetes because of a lack of fresh, healthy food, with every farmworker who proudly used to harvest a crop from his own farm but now must reap, with aching back and broken pride, the fruit of a strange land for poverty wages.

As people of faith, we are called to create a different reality, one based in compassion, respect, reverence and thankfulness. We are called to realize that food comes from God, and is created by two of God's greatest gifts: the natural world and our human community. In this faithful food system, we nurture both the earth and the community. In return, we receive all that we need.

In congregations all around the country, this vision is becoming a reality.

In church gardens, fellowship halls and parking lots, people are feeding each other and connecting to the land and the labor that provides their food. Communities are being revitalized, hungry people are eating fresh food, and friendships are being forged – between those with resources and those without, between those who grow food and those who eat it, between neighbors who have never before stopped to get to know one another.

Some of these congregational projects are complex, requiring thousands of dollars of grants, full-time employees, and multiple community partners. Some are as simple as a group of friends gathering for a meal and a conversation. Come to the Table works to inspire and nurture this kind of faithful action.

How We Work

Come to the Table works through a combination of education, fellowship and technical support. We encourage faith communities to find creative solutions that fit their resources and meet the particular needs of their communities.

In 2007, its first year, Come to the Table developed a Web-based network and resource center at www.cometothetablenc.org. In October, the program hosted its first workshop, Cultivating Community. By December, two of the eight congregations that attended were making plans to plant a garden to share with their neighbors.

2008 projects include workshops and the publication of a guide for congregations that provides education and resources for action around food, faith and farming. We are also partnering with other organizations and gardens to found the Piedmont Interfaith Network of Gardens, a group of gardens in central North Carolina that share workdays, hold workshops, and provide advice and training for new church community gardeners. In June, we will begin offering an interactive workshop called Faithful Eating for All people, which will encourage communities to assess the barriers to access to fresh, local food. Throughout the year, we will offer support, education and resources to individual congregations. In 2009, we will host our second bi-annual Come to the Table conference.

From on-the-ground projects with individual congregations to resources for state-wide change and national action, Come to the Table continues to work with people of faith to create a food system that supports family farmers and feeds us all.

For more information, visit www.cometothetablenc.org or call Claire at (919) 542-1396.

