

Local campus farms and gardens help feed students, community

By Robert Lopez | Posted: Friday, July 31, 2015 12:15 am

After a day in the fields, students at the Guilford College Farm are covered in grime, their clothes sweat-soaked.

But the fruits of their labor are beautiful.

Tomatoes the size of softballs. Carrots with yellow and purple marbling. And crates of psychedelically colored leaves.

“Rainbow chard,” David Petree exclaims, peeking into a crate. “That’s a favorite for a lot of grocery stores, because it’s so pretty on the shelf.”

Petree is director of Environmental Sustainability at Guilford College, one of several local schools literally nurturing their students and the community through campus farms and gardens.

Elsewhere in Greensboro, N.C. A&T has an extensive community agriculture program. Produce from the GTCC garden is donated to the school’s food pantry and set out in the cafeteria. The culinary arts program there also has an herb garden and is experimenting with microgreens.

And UNC-Greensboro has a garden with plots used by students, faculty and clubs.

“It’s nice having fresh produce, knowing exactly where it came from, exactly how it was grown,” UNCG junior Seth Rumbley said.

At Guilford College, much of the produce winds up in the school’s dining hall.

“The mission is to provide ridiculously local food,” Petree said. “It’s sustainable, you don’t have transportation costs. It tastes better. We get a lot of students who haven’t been exposed to an operation like this, and they’re like, ‘Wow.’”



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Guilford College farm manager Nick Mangili.

The farm has a community supported agriculture program, in which about 30 people receive a bundle of fresh produce weekly. It also sells to Bestway Grocery and Lucky 32.

N.C. A&T has by far the biggest agriculture program of any area college, with a nearly 500-acre farm that includes beef and poultry operations.

It also includes several plots worked by women from the Montagnard community.

“They have a banana plant here, because they use the leaves to cook with,” N.C. A&T soil scientist Charles Raczkowski said. “You have yucca here, and papaya.”

On a June morning, a group of women were filling bags with amaranth leaves, and a 5-gallon bucket with squash.

“Their main occupation in Vietnam was farming rice, vegetables,” said Vung Ksor, a liason. “A lot of them live in apartments, have no place to grow vegetables, so this is nice. It brings food to the family. When they saw all (the squash) they were like ‘Yes!’ They were pretty excited.”

Robert Lopez is a freelance writer based in High Point.