



Tour highlights Polk County farms, wineries

By Maddy Arrowood, For the Herald-Journal

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Farms in Polk County, N.C., are opening their barn doors to the public this Saturday for the annual Polk Fresh Farm Tour.

Eight farms, three wineries and four stores make up the stops on the tour, showcasing a variety of agriculture. In addition to traditional farms with produce and livestock, the tour also features a creamery, a bee farm, a buffalo farm and a farm that only grows garlic.

The Polk County Agricultural Economic Development Office began working with the Growing Rural Opportunities organization seven years ago to create the event. Growing Rural Opportunities founder Patrick McLendon said it provides a way for farmers and the community to interact in ways they normally cannot.

“People can come get to know the farmer,” he said. “Usually the only interaction customers have is driving by and seeing the crops and the field. Education is inherent as folks travel and tour the different farms and learn a rich part of Polk County’s history.”

Polk County Agricultural Economic Development Director Dawn Jordan said that the tour gives people the chance to reconnect with the origins of their food.

“The local food movement is really strong right now,” she said. “We lost maybe **SUBSCRIBE TODAY** on those connections that really know how food is produced, how it’s grown. This is an opportunity to regain that understanding.”

Choose the plan that’s right for you. Digital access or digital and print delivery. Farmer Jerry Nelson will host one of the more unique stops on the tour, showcasing his herd of more than 100 buffalo – a venture that started with a spontaneous purchase of 11 buffalo about 15 years ago. **(HTTP://SUBSCRIBE.GOUPSTATE.COM/)**

Nelson will also invite visitors into his recently renovated barn. He updated the space to host his company of fellow Vietnam veterans during their yearly reunions. Saturday, however, the barn will host a hub of local farmers ready to connect with the community.

“Everything here has got a story behind it,” he said.

McLendon said that farmers often join to tour to show off all the hard work that goes into owning a small farm.

“I think they’re very proud of what they do,” he said. “They toil and work hard all year long, and on the tour the community can come see the fruits of their labor, literally and figuratively.”

Tour passes are \$25 per vehicle and grant admission to all stops on the tour. The farm tours will be from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. and winery tours from 1 p.m. to 6 p.m.

Tickets are available at growrural.org and at the Columbus Farmers Market, Manna Cabanna Organic Market, Meanwhile Back In Saluda, Mill Spring Farm Store and Overmountain Vineyards.

Proceeds will go toward the Polk Tool Share Cooperative, which rents or lends farm equipment to farmers who need to diversify their tool supply.

Jordan said she hopes visitors will learn about both the wide range of agriculture in the county, as well as realize the impact they have on these farmers as consumers.

“That is a key piece right there,” she said. “When you buy local, you’re affecting not only that farmer’s livelihood, but also the local economy. Therefore, you’re really actually affecting yourself.”

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