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Media Contacts: Phyllis Beaver, marketing director, Castle & Cooke, 704-250-5435; Leah Chester-Davis, coordinator of communications and community outreach, N.C. State's Program for Value-Added & Alternative Agriculture, (704) 617-0502.

Research Campus Farmers Market Opening with Reinforced LOCAL Brand

KANNAPOLIS, N.C. – When the N.C. Research Campus Farmers Market opens for its second year May 7, new rules will ensure a LOCAL brand on all the strawberries, broccoli, lettuce, onions and other produce sold there.

The Piedmont Farmers Market governing board, which manages the Research Campus Market, approved new rules this year requiring that all produce sold there must be grown within 100 miles of Kannapolis. Vendors also must display a card telling customers the farm where each type of produce is grown.

“We know that agriculture plays such an important role in our health,” says Phyllis Beaver, marketing director for Castle & Cooke, the company that manages the N.C. Research Campus. “The goal of much of our research here is to prevent disease – or treat it -- by what we eat. It makes us more determined to provide fresh fruits and vegetables to local residents and to support local growers.”

The Research Campus Farmers Market is a joint effort of Castle & Cooke; Piedmont Farmers Market, an organization of local farmers who sponsor several Cabarrus County farmers markets; and the staff of N.C. State University at the Research Campus.

The 2009 Research Campus Farmers Market will operate from 4 to 7 p.m. every Thursday from May 7 through Oct. 29 in the block of West Avenue between the former Cabarrus Bank building and Transit Damage Furniture.

Last year, vendors set up booths in the parking area between those buildings, but because of increasing

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interest in the Farmers Market, Atlantic American Properties has decided to close that block of West Avenue during market hours this year. Atlantic American Properties is a subsidiary of Castle & Cooke that owns most of the Village commercial district adjacent to the Research Campus.

Unlike last year, Beaver said, the Farmers Market committee also has decided not to limit the number of vendors. The market will be open to anyone who abides by the rules governing locally grown produce and goods.

“Nationally, we’re seeing a big trend in the popularity of local foods,” says Leah Chester-Davis, with N.C. State University and the Research Campus’s liaison to the Piedmont Farmers Market Board. “The biggest issue might very well be taste and nutrition. A tomato that was picked, packed and shipped thousands of miles just can’t compare with a vine-ripened luscious fruit that was picked just this morning by your local grower. The local tomato will be fresher, tastier and more nutritious.”

The Research Campus Farmers Market also offers shoppers weekly educational opportunities as they shop for fresh fruits, vegetables and other items. North Carolina Cooperative Extension staff from Cabarrus and Rowan counties will host food demonstrations, taste tests with local produce, a 4-H jump rope exhibition and other fun-to-learn activities. Cooperative Extension is an educational outreach of N.C. State and N.C. A&T State universities.

The Produce Lady also will make three appearances through the season. Chester-Davis, with N.C. State University, recruited Brenda Sutton, Cooperative Extension family and consumer sciences agent in Rockingham County, to serve as the Produce Lady, who offers growers and consumers easy, healthy ways to prepare fresh produce found in the state’s many farmers markets. The Produce Lady can be seen on the Almanac Gardener TV Show on the UNC-TV network, and her videos, recipes and other materials are available online at www.theproducelady.org. Chester-Davis, with N.C. State’s Program for Value-Added & Alternative Agriculture and Plants for Human Health Institute at the Research Campus, serves as producer for “The Produce Lady.”

“Many of our consumers are thirsting for more knowledge and ways that they can bring these healthy initiatives into their homes,” says Tara L. Vogeliën, director for business and research administration for

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N.C. State's Plants for Human Health Institute, and a supporter of the Campus Market. "By promoting consumer education, for all ages, we can positively impact not only the farmers but also the community knowledge base and, hopefully, in many cases, long-term health goals for consumers. We've worked very hard to make this season's Campus Market a showcase for education, locally grown products, dedicated farmers and a stronger community."

Jeff Williams, Piedmont Farmers Market Board president, says the new rules guaranteeing local products and promoting local farms is sure to draw more customers – and more farmers. Market planners expect the 2009 market will open with about 20 vendors.

Lisa Wacheldorf, a local farmer returning to the Campus Market this year, says she will provide specialty items, from heirloom tomatoes to herbs. She also will be selling dairy products from Castleberry Farms, owned by local farmer Randy Fisher.

Brent Barbee, the 22-year-old entrepreneur behind Barbee Farms, who will sell produce at the Campus Market, adds: "The fresher I can get produce to a market, the more satisfied are my customers. They tell us that over and over again. ... We pride ourselves on quality, not quantity. We don't buy and resell because I've never been satisfied with what's been on a truck for a week ... Even coming from the eastern part of the state, it's been on a truck for one or two days."

Barbee picks his produce fresh for each market, and if he doesn't sell everything, it goes on his family's table or in the freezer. "We want to have fresh produce, too," he says.

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