

CENTER FOR EDUCATIONAL AND AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT

The Center for Educational and Agricultural Development (CEAD) serves as an economic development and community project and is the future home of PCC's Agribusiness Technology Program. The campus will be located in Pelham, NC and include agricultural education and community resources, incubator farm plots (for emerging and transitioning farm entrepreneurs), an on-site, regional food distribution center (in partnership with 4P Foods), and a community health clinic.

Larry Coleman | Piedmont Community College

ORGANIZATION

Piedmont Community College (PCC) serves the rural populations of Person and Caswell Counties in the northern, central part of North Carolina. We offer traditional curriculum and continuing education programs.

OPPORTUNITY

Caswell County is among the most economically distressed counties in NC, and Pelham is one of the most distressed communities within Caswell in terms of health outcomes, educational attainment, and household wealth. PCC and our collaborators saw this project as an opportunity to assist with all three of these concerns by constructing an agriculture campus in this community. The campus will provide healthy food options, walking trails, a local health clinic, and ADA-compliant emergency shelter, unique educational experiences, and entrepreneurial agricultural opportunities through the incubator farm program.

STRATEGY

Collaboration and a local, assets-based approach are our main strategies. The CEAD project was the brainchild of community leaders who attended a trip to Maine on a "see the possible" trip sponsored by the Danville Regional Foundation. On this trip, we experienced how a rural community like Caswell worked together on an initiative to provide their residents with education and career opportunities. The county had access to over 70 acres of land that could be used to construct something useful and meaningful for the community. From there, we pulled our resources:

- Our local agriculture extension agent's office was willing to partner and help us create an agriculture-focused vision.
- A local Piedmont Progressive Farmers group helped lead the charge within the community.
- Local funders, including the Danville Regional Foundation, afforded a feasibility study on local food systems and distribution hubs through Community Food Labs.

This gave us all the tools we needed for a great start!

OUTCOMES

Despite being in the early stages, our community is already experiencing returns on the time and financial investments of CEAD. Many local farmers are currently supplying 4P Foods with local, Caswell-grown products that are sent all over the region, and many more farmers are working with officials to begin producing for them as well. Currently, farmers are producing and sending eggs, sweet potatoes, flowers, and greens as far away as Washington, DC! Additionally, we have started an afterschool, agriculture-literacy enrichment program for local students in grades K-12 as part of this initiative. The goal behind this program, called BLAST! (Breakthrough Learning in Agriculture Science and Technology) is to create a pipeline of interested students through other local agriculture opportunities and eventually to the Agriscience Technology program at the CEAD site. We want young people in our community to realize that they can have economically viable entrepreneurial endeavors right here at home in agriculture. So far, BLAST has operated for two years and has served over 170 students in two local elementary schools and our local homeschool association.

COMMUNITY

Caswell is a Tier 1 county, indicating that it is one of the 40 most economically distressed counties in North Carolina; it has worse outcomes compared to the state in every known economic indicator. The surrounding urban communities, including the Triad and Triangle in North Carolina, as well as Danville, Virginia, enjoy thriving economies. It is the community's vision that CEAD will help boost the local economy, while also embracing the agricultural roots and culture of its citizens. In fact, community members packed the historic courthouse during a Caswell County Board of Commissioners meeting in overwhelming support of this project and the possibilities it offers the region.

LESSONS LEARNED

We've learned many lessons throughout this process, and we know that there are many more to come. Including:

- Collaboration is key in small, rural communities. We cannot depend on a large company to come into the community and drive economic development. If we want to solidify the future of our county for our residents, we must share our assets and do it ourselves. Our key collaborators include:
 - The Caswell County Board of Commissioners
 - The Caswell County Economic Development Office
 - The Caswell County Cooperative Extension Office
 - The Caswell County Health Department
 - Caswell County Emergency Services
 - 4P Foods
 - The Danville Regional Foundation
 - The NC Tobacco Trust Fund Commission
- Getting community buy-in is important. Many residents did not understand why we chose to locate the CEAD site in the northern part of the county in the most economically distressed community within Caswell. Many wanted the site to be built in the county seat, Yanceyville. This was a strategic decision based on the community impact we wanted to have. Having the local agriculture extension agency and Progressive Farmers Group on board to explain this plan locally was very helpful in getting community support.

NEXT STEPS

We, along with our community, have big dreams for CEAD as it continues to grow. The main goals include the following:

- Raising appropriate funds to support a project that develops community and economic opportunities;
- Providing affordable access to land and infrastructure for beginning farmers, allowing them to experiment with shared resources;
- Providing "next steps" for PCC's Agribusiness Technology students;
- Creating a community of beginning and transition farmers who can support one another;
- Growing opportunities for current and new farmers to engage with an established food hub organization while also supporting food pantries with excess supplies, thus raising awareness of and supporting local food insecurities.

HELPING CEAD
Flourish

Outstanding contributors like Danville Regional Foundation have helped push this dream to fruition, and you can be a part of this dream too.

Use the QR code below to visit Piedmont Community College's website how to get involved.

