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## Ingles offering farm fresh local produce

*Andre A. Rodriguez*

Ingles Markets is turning into a local farmer's market of sorts.

The Asheville-based grocery store chain last month began carrying strawberries from Kaleb Rathbone's Fines Creek farm in its Waynesville, Canton and Hazelwood stores. Ingles stores in Haywood and Buncombe counties also recently began carrying romaine lettuce from the Bethel fields of farmer Skipper Russell.

Plans are in the works for sales of other Haywood County farm products later in the year, said George Ivey, coordinator of the Buy Haywood Market Development Project, which works to promote Haywood County farm products.

"We're very excited to see Ingles show such strong support for locally grown produce," he said.

The growing trend of buying local is leading grocers to stock more fresh, local produce.

"Ingles has shown real leadership in featuring local farm products," said Charlie Jackson of the Appalachian Sustainable Agriculture Project. "They have really made a commitment to support a greater number of farmers throughout our region."

"The local produce is delivered straight to our stores, often the same day it's picked," said Jeff Henderson, manager of the Ingles store on Russ Avenue in Waynesville. "We're delighted to be able to feature such high quality produce and to support our local farming community, too."

These sales to Ingles are in part due to the farmers' participation in WNC Agricultural Options, a North Carolina Cooperative Extension program that provides awards to farmers who demonstrate alternative farm income to transitioning tobacco growers. The North Carolina Tobacco Trust Fund Commission funds the program, in partnership with RAFI-USA's Tobacco Communities Reinvestment Fund.

Both Rathbone and Russell have received WNC AgOptions awards, including funding for an irrigation system for Rathbone's strawberry farm and a refrigerated truck to haul and deliver Russell's lettuce. The refrigeration ensures that the lettuce doesn't wilt while traveling to the stores.

"The grant has made what I'm doing possible," Russell said. "It opened up new marketing possibilities for all of us by enhancing food safety and shelf life."

Buy Haywood supports farmers in Haywood County by promoting high-quality farm products to community-minded consumers. The project is managed by the Haywood County Economic Development Commission, and it receives support from the Golden LEAF Foundation.

## Additional Facts

Find out more

Buy Haywood: [www.buyhaywood.com](http://www.buyhaywood.com).  
Appalachian Sustainable Agriculture Project: [www.asapconnections.org](http://www.asapconnections.org).

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