

Ingle's Markets offers Haywood County produce

It started quietly enough, but it's big news for Haywood County farmers. Thanks to Ingle's Markets, shoppers can once again buy Haywood County produce in Haywood County grocery stores.

Ingle's stores in Waynesville, Hazelwood, and Canton began selling strawberries from Kaleb Rathbone's Fines Creek farm in May. Now Ingle's is stocking romaine lettuce, grown by Bethel Farmer Skipper Russell, at stores in Haywood and Buncombe counties. Plans are in the works for additional 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 Ingle's show such strong support for locally grown produce," he said. "Thanks to the growing 'buy local' movement, gro-

cers are placing more and more emphasis on fresh, local produce. "Ingle's 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."

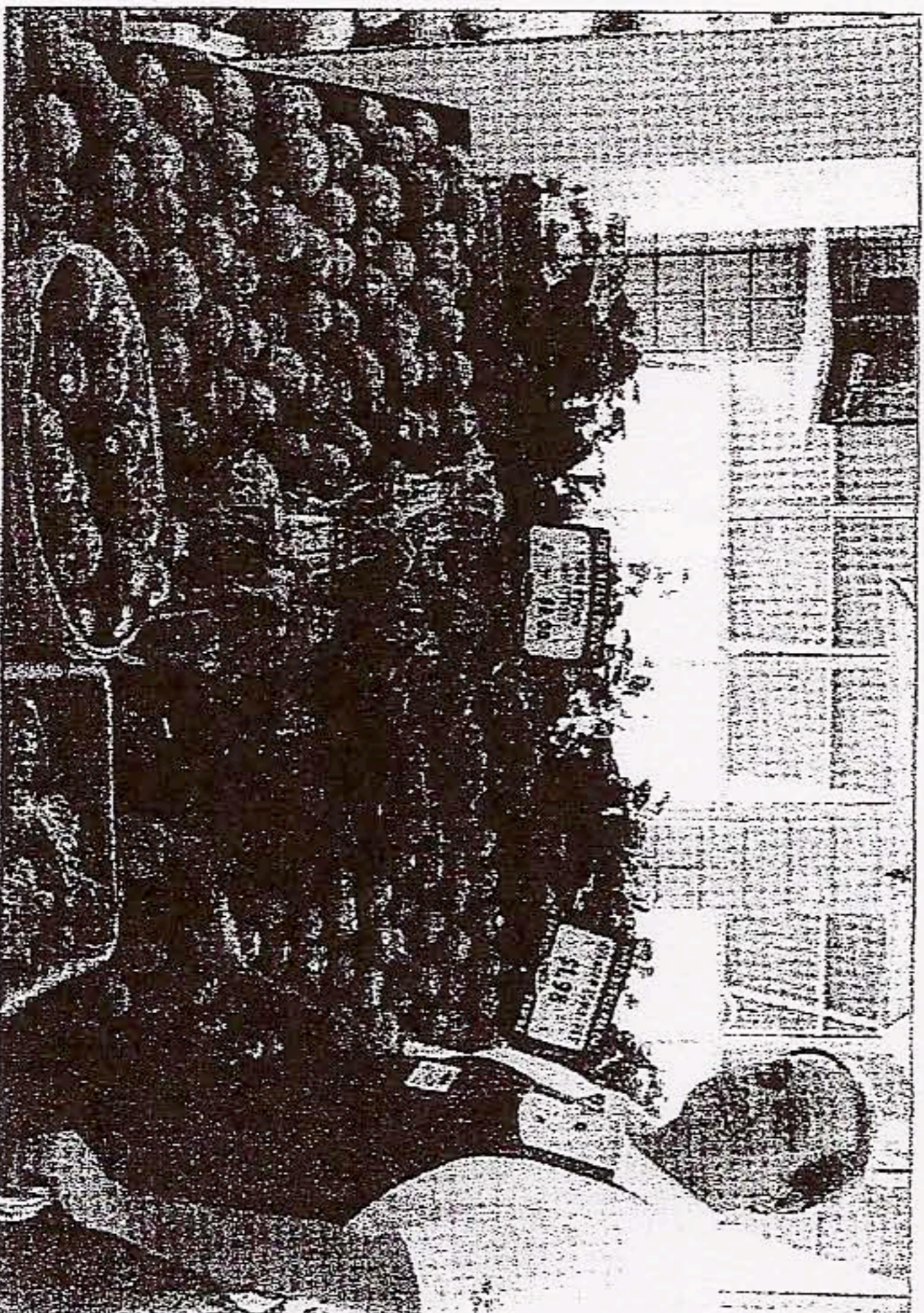
"The local produce is delivered straight to our stores, often the same day it's picked," said Jeff Henderson, manager of the Ingle's store on Russ Avenue in Waynesville. "We're delighted to be able to feature such high quality produce and to support our local farming community, too."

These sales to Ingle's 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-USAs 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 in Western North Carolina 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



Allison Kitchens

LOCAL FOOD — Jerry Graham of Ingle's in Waynesville shows lettuce grown at Seasonal Produce Farm in Waynesville. Ingle's sells locally-grown produce.

Foundation. (www.buyhaywood.com)
The Appalachian Agriculture Project works to keep farmers farming and to reconnect people with their food. (www.asapconnections.org) WNC Agricultural Options builds sustainable farming communities in our mountain region by providing resources directly to farmers who are diversifying and expanding their operations.