



Leigh Guth

Pitt County Cooperative Extension Director



One of the Local Food Champions of 2019 by the NC Local Food Council.

By Casey Jean Roe

When Leigh Guth talks about local food she focuses on people. She speaks about the family members who shaped her relationship with food, the way eating impacts people, and her local food project partners.

“One of the things that excited me early on in this work was that you can talk to almost anybody and connect local food systems to almost any issue,” Guth says.

She draws connections between food and many important topics: economic development, community building, history, culture, healthy communities, and environmental sustainability.

Guth grew up in Martin County, North Carolina, where her mother kept a garden and preserved food for the family. Her father was a county extension agent and a part owner of a farm.

In 2005, Guth began work as an extension agent in Lincoln County and was assigned the emerging topic of local food. She collaborated with partners to expand the Lincoln County Farmers Market by adding two satellite locations and making it more accessible for low income customers.

Beyond her professional involvement, farmers’ markets also brought Guth personal joy. When her twin daughters were two years old she took them each Saturday to the farmers’ market near their house. The family formed relationships with their farmers. As the girls grew up they learned the names of vegetables, how to select them, and how to count cash to pay for them.

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“It was really exciting for me as a young parent to teach my children about healthy food and make it fun for them,” Guth reminisces.

In 2015, Guth became the Director of the Pitt County Cooperative Extension. As she describes her involvement in local food projects in this role, Guth consistently highlights her partners, recognizing that her strength is in communication and emphasizing that she is only one piece of the story.

In Pitt County, Guth has been challenged to think on a higher level about food systems. Pitt County is among the top commodity producing counties in North Carolina, yet food insecurity is a significant concern for some residents.

Guth’s priority is to give more people access to healthy food. She is a member of the Pitt County Farm and Food Council, which was established in 2017. Farmers, restaurateurs, health services, county

planning and a food bank are among the diverse stakeholders on the council.

The council developed the Pitt County Food Finder app, inspired by a project of the Greater High Point Food Alliance. This technology tool provides users with ways to find food, volunteer opportunities, and educational resources near them. Users can connect with free and reduced cost prepared meals, food pantries, community gardens, agritourism, farming and nutrition classes, and farmers' markets.

Guth is a champion of the NC Farm School, which was held in Pitt County and enrolled 30 entrepreneurs each year in 2018 and 2019. The program focuses on farming as a business and teaches participants to evaluate the economics of a new farming venture.

Continuing her focus on healthy food and family, Guth has turned her attention to piloting a new idea for the farmers' market: a drive-up service for busy families. While Guth knows the joy of leisurely shopping the farmers' market, her fundamental belief is in creating easy access to healthy food.

Learn more about NC Local Food Councils' champions and their work at nclocalfoodcouncil.org.

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Sauteed Squash and Onions

Serves 8

Serving Size: 1 cup

Prep Time: 15 minutes

Cook Time: 15 minutes

Total Time: 30 minutes

Ingredients:

- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 large bunch green onions, chopped
- 1 pound yellow squash, cut in medium dice
- 1 pound zucchini, cut in medium dice
- Salt and pepper to taste

Recipe credit: Med Instead of Meds

One of Leigh Guth's favorite summer vegetable dishes is squash cooked with onion.

Heat a large skillet or stir fry pan.

Add the olive oil and heat slightly.

Add the onions and sauté 3-4 minutes.

Add the yellow squash and zucchini and cook, stirring frequently until the vegetables softens.

Add salt and pepper, start with ½ teaspoon of each.

Cook until desired doneness.

Adjust salt and pepper to taste (go heavy on the pepper).

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