



David Allen Tranquility Farm

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

By Casey Jean Roe

In between pruning in the vineyard and the beginning of this year's honey flow, farmer David Allen is preparing for the opening of the new farm store at Tranquility Farm in Mooresville, North Carolina. Allen's impact in local food is rooted in selling farm products directly to customers.

Managing a retail produce store is a familiar role for Allen. "I've always loved working in a grocery store," he says. Allen's father managed grocery stores. When Allen was 15 years old, he began working in a produce mart in Graham, North Carolina. He continued to work in grocery stores on and off for 20 years, including while paying for college.

After college, Allen joined the police force in Burlington, North Carolina where he remained for 11 years. He served as the police chief in Cleveland, North Carolina before retiring in 2017.

David Allen and his wife, Crystal Allen, prepared for retirement by planting a muscadine vineyard on the land she inherited from her grandparents. "We wanted to do something that would make her grandparents proud and that's how the vineyard started," David Allen recalls.

On the farm, Allen's year has taken on a new rhythm and the shape of his day depends on the season. "We tried to pick enterprises that were different seasons of the year so that not everything comes in at the same time," he explains.



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Early spring days include caring for the farm's bees, fertilizing, and maintenance pruning in the vineyard. June brings honey collection and blackberry harvest. Cucumbers will be ready to pick and process in July and extended family will help with the muscadine harvest in mid-August.

Tranquility Farm sells products year-round at the China Grove Farmers' Market and the Winecoff School Road Farmers' Market in Concord, North Carolina. Allen values farmers' markets because they provide connection to the community.

"I'm a big believer in the farmers' market programs that we have because it is a way for our local growers to interact with the customer base," Allen says. He joined the Board of Directors of the Piedmont Farmers' Market Association in 2014 and serves as the treasurer.

"We're on a first name basis with the vast majority of our customers," Allen says, "establishing and maintaining a customer base is hugely important. If we didn't have that, there would be no way for us to grow."

Allen is an avid learner and actively seeks educational resources when he tries something new. To learn about operating a farm business he attended the North Carolina Farm School in 2016.

“It was tremendously helpful,” Allen says of the Farm School, “the most profound thing that stuck out to me was to farm for profit, not for production.”

Allen has applied this measured approach to expanding Tranquility Farm’s product offerings. For the first time this summer, he is growing a crop of cucumbers. Allen will use old-fashioned recipes “to make pickles like my grandmother used to make.”

Once there is an established customer base at Tranquility Farm’s new farm store, Allen would like to expand the farm’s fresh produce offerings. He is using conversations with customers at the farmers’ market to spread the word. The farm’s top selling item, a muscadine cider slushy, is the perfect way to draw a crowd.

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North Carolina Muscadine “Dump Cake”

Ingredients:

- ½ stick margarine
- ½ cup milk
- ½ cup sugar
- 1 cup prepared NC muscadines
- ¾ cup self-rise flour



Recipe credit: North Carolina Muscadine Grape Association

To prepare muscadines, remove pulp; cook pulp until seeds loosen, then press through sieve to remove seeds. Add pulp to skins and cook until tender.

Add sugar to taste, some grated lemon peel and a sprinkle of apple pie spice.

Melt butter in glass pie plate. Mix flour, sugar and milk in another bowl.

Pour flour mixture over butter. Carefully pour prepared muscadines over the top.

Bake at 350 degrees for 30 minutes. Do not open oven until baking time is up.

Cake should be brown on top.

Yield: 8 servings.

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