



Jared Cates

Carolina Farm Stewardship Association



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

By Casey Jean Roe

As a child, gardening felt like a chore for Jared Cates. His parents would send him out into the large garden they kept at their home in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. Cates was tasked with removing Japanese beetles from the plants and they paid him a quarter for each full jar that he gathered.

Despite dreading garden chores, Cates also learned in childhood that eating could be a special experience. His father was a chef at Pyewacket, one of the first all-vegetarian restaurants in the area. He would try out new recipes on the family at home and once a week they ate for free together at the restaurant. This was a treat that they would not have otherwise been able to afford.

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In college, Cates studied political science. It wasn't until after graduating, when he started working at community gardens with teenagers completing court ordered community service, that he began thinking about the importance of food.

"The kids did not know that French fries come from potatoes and potatoes come from the ground," Cates remembers. It impacted him deeply to see kids without a connection to their food.

Cates began thinking and reading about food systems and returned to school for a Master of Social Work degree. He became passionate about the idea of bringing more equity to the complex food system.

"Food is a pathway to change and a vehicle for having conversations around social equity," says Cates.

For Cates, increasing equity across the food system means "the elimination of policies, practices, attitudes and cultural messages that reinforce differential outcomes by categories like race, cultural group, sexual orientation and class."

Currently, Cates has two roles in his job with the Carolina Farm Stewardship Association (CFSA) in Pittsboro, NC. The first is community organizing and grassroots advocacy for issues that matter to CFSA's members. In this role, he supports CFSA's efforts to build relationships with lawmakers and influence state and federal level policy.

Cates's second role is supporting local food councils across the state as a member of the Community Food Strategies

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project team. Local food councils are cross-sector, community organizations that help promote more resilient food systems. Cates shares methods and frameworks with the local food councils, giving them the tools to be their own advocates.

Local food councils are important, Cates believes, because they create community connection by focusing on universal issues like health and economic development. Cates is encouraged to see food councils beginning to convene and collaborate on issues like farm to school, land use and food recovery.

Through many years of community organizing, Cates gained a piece of wisdom that he shares with local food councils. “Don’t be afraid to try,” he says, “even if you don’t see a clear path to winning.” Cates has learned that engaging in an issue and “failing” can be a success. The complex work of changing the food system requires lots of attempts and sustained effort.

These days Cates feels differently about gardening and he loves to cook, including some of his father’s recipes. “I can’t wait to go outside and harvest something at the end of the day,” he muses. Cates knows that his goal of changing the food system is the work of a lifetime and gardening reminds him to stay grounded and practice patience.

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

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Jared's Favorite Winter Pie

Ingredients:

- 3 tbsp olive oil, plus more for brushing
- 2 red onions, chopped
- 2 carrots, chopped
- 5 cloves garlic, chopped
- 2 tsp chopped thyme
- 1 tsp red pepper flakes
- 1 small butternut squash, peeled and cut into small chunks
- 1/2 bunch kale, ribs removed and thinly sliced
- 1/2 bunch chard, thinly sliced
- 1/2 bunch large collard leaves, ribs removed and thinly sliced
- 1/2 tbsp apple cider vinegar
- 3 large eggs, beaten
- 4 oz grated parmesan
- 1 tbsp grated lemon zest
- Half pound package of thawed frozen phyllo pastry
- 4-6 oz goat cheese or feta
- Salt, pepper

Winter gardening is my favorite time, but I always struggle to eat all of the greens that proliferate over those months. I love this as an easy way to get a lot of greens out of my fridge and it's a nutrient packed meal.

Preheat oven to 400 degrees. Heat olive oil in large cast iron skillet over medium, and cook onions and carrots around 7 minutes until softened. Add squash, thyme and red pepper flakes, and cook for another 8-10 minutes until the squash starts to soften.

Remove into a bowl to cool and wipe out the skillet. Add sliced kale, chard, collards, eggs, parmesan, and lemon zest to squash mixture and season with salt and pepper.

Layer phyllo sheets in skillet.

Use a spoon to place greens and squash mix into the dough and spread evenly. Scatter cheese over top of the greens mix and then brush the phyllo with oil. Start folding the dough over the filling. The phyllo should overlap as you move around the skillet, and the center will be exposed.

Cook the pie over medium heat on the stove for 3-5 minutes, just long enough to crisp up the bottom phyllo. Then put into the oven and cook for 20-25 minutes until the cheese is melted and the phyllo is starting to brown. Let it cool and then slice into wedges.

