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PHOTO COURTESY OF ASAP

Community supported agriculture offers a direct farm-to-consumer approach to purchasing produce and other options. This approach is often more beneficial to the local community than larger retail grocers.

CSA Fair connects farmers and

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The eighth annual Community Supported Agriculture Fair kicked off earlier this month with more than 14 participating farms, indicating a growing interest in direct-to-consumer farming practices in and around Asheville.

Robin Lenner, events coordinator at Appalachian Sustainable Agriculture Project, said community-supported agriculture provides residents with a way to purchase directly from local and regional farmers, while supplying the initial capital to farmers to kickstart the growing season.

"It's a pretty wonderful way to engage with a farm," Lenner said. "Unlike shopping at a farmer's market, which is still a fantastic way to directly purchase from a farm, community-supported agriculture is a membership where you basically buy a share of the farm at the beginning of a season and receive a box of produce or other products every week."

Farmers lined up in farmer's market style booths to discuss CSA options, such as share size and pickup locations, while answering questions from potential buyers. In addition to vegetables,

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— Robin Lenner

eggs and meats, fresh-cut flowers were among some of the many options provided by participating farms.

"It's just so exciting to see how many new farms have joined the fair. Because there's more and more farms that are offering CSA, farms are figuring out ways to differentiate themselves," Lenner said.

According to a report released last year by the Department of Agriculture, more than 160,000 farms nationwide utilize CSAs and other direct marketing practices, such as farmer's markets,

in 2015.

The USDA said locally produced and marketed food also helps to strengthen the rural economy and provide greater food access.

Despite an overall decrease in designated farmland throughout the country, Lenner said the local food market specifically has experienced some growth.

"On a whole, even though we've seen a decline in farmland for things like development, we're also starting to see some growth in some areas, such as increased sales of products that are marketed in direct ways," Lenner said. "There's more acres in production than there were in the last AG Census and that shows that despite the decreases in overall farm acreage, there's an increase in acres in production."

Lenner said the agricultural heritage of Western North Carolina centers around tobacco farming.

As demand for tobacco waned, many farmers scrambled to find a more sustainable farming industry.

Lenner said her work with ASAP includes programs to educate farmers on marketing, distribution and connecting local growers and buyers.

Asheville experiences heroin resurgence

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Asheville police say the once popular and idolized drug, heroin, is making a deadly national resurgence with Asheville in its tyrannical clutches.

"We've been dealing with heroin a pretty good bit here. The resurgence started a little bit over a year ago," said Sgt. Brandon Moore of the Asheville Police Department's Drug Suppression Unit. "It was something we haven't dealt with in a very long time. Heroin itself had kind of died out, so to speak. It wasn't really a drug that anyone was messing with."

The Centers of Disease Control and Prevention reports opiate overdose deaths nationwide have nearly tripled since 1999.

"Heroin is a nationwide epidemic and it stems from opioids, people being prescribed prescription pain medicine and it could be for an injury they sustained from playing a sport or in an accident," said Eric Boyce, assistant vice chancellor for public safety at UNC Asheville.

The American Society of Addiction Medicine classifies heroin, oxycodone, hydrocodone, codeine, morphine and fentanyl as opiates. According to the U.S. Department of Justice, 1.4 million people abused a prescription pain medication for the first time in 2014.

Moore said the problem is not so much the prescription of opiate-based drugs, but the overprescription of opiate-based drugs, specifically, in the Asheville area.

"The DEA came in and did a pretty big crack-down on some of those, maybe reckless, prescribers," Moore said. "Folks who were taking opiates prescribed to them

CONTINUED ON PAGE 16

CONTINUED ON PAGE 14