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DIRT WORKS, FIRST INCUBATOR FARM IN THE STATE LAUNCHES

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Charleston, SC (April, 2013) – Lowcountry Local First, the non-profit organization that advocates for building a strong sustainable local economy by supporting local independent businesses and farmers has launched Dirt Works Farm on Johns Island.

Dirt Works Farm is now supporting 6 new farmers on a 10 acre plot leased for a \$1 per year from Jack and Andrea Limehouse. The farmers that are building their businesses at the farm have access to a tractor, packing shed, tools, equipment and mentor farmer Rita Bachman.

"We know that the entry to farming is often cost prohibitive, when you consider the price of land, equipment, irrigation, a well and the overall risk involved in dealing with nature. That is why developing this incubator farm was so critical to our plan to grow more farmers." states executive director, Jamee Haley. The incubator farm is the second stage of the Growing New Farmers Program, which was established in 2010 and has been pairing aspiring farmers and food system leaders with mentor farmers, as well as offering classes in sustainable agriculture and farm business planning with Clemson University. To date LLF has put 70 apprentices through the Growing New Farmers program. "The goal of the program is to make sure we have farmers to grow food in the future, and with the average age of a South Carolina farmer at 60 this is an issue that needs to be addressed now not in 10 years." states Haley.

The farmers that are participating at Dirt Works have come through the LLF Growing New Farmers program or a similar program elsewhere and went through an application process for being considered for a 1 to 2 acre plot. There is a three year window for the farmers to build their market and develop their skills and then LLF will work to match them with land opportunities.

Dirt Works has had the support of many individuals, foundations, local professionals, volunteers as well as the USDA's Rural Development program. "The Dirt Works Incubator Farm started as an innovative approach to addressing the challenges facing new farmers and has quickly become a community effort in ensuring the future of our local food system," explains Nikki Seibert, LLF's director of sustainable agriculture.

Today at 4:00 p.m. LLF hosted a press event with local media, chefs, farmers, SCDA, USDA, and other local stakeholders introducing the farm and concept followed by a tour of the farm and a reception at the Limehouse barn.

ABOUT LOWCOUNTRY LOCAL FIRST:

Lowcountry Local First (LLF), headquartered in North Charleston, SC, is the 44th member organization in a national network of non-profits dedicated to strengthening their local economies, called the Business Alliance for Local Living Economies. LLF is committed to uniting local businesses with the mission to promote and preserve the Lowcountry economy through the promotion of local goods and services. LLF also manages the program, "Eat Local," a sustainable agriculture initiative that focuses on strengthening local farms and producers by creating partnerships with local restaurants, institutions and the community as well as training new growers. To find out more, visit: <http://www.lowcountrylocalfirst.org>.

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