Horticulture Entrepreneur Leadership Project (H.E.L.P.)

- **Origin:**
  - Partnership between NC Cooperative Extension and Onslow County Farmers Market

- **Need:**
  - Unmet demand for fresh local produce
  - Large commercial farmers not participating in local food production
  - Highly transient population not familiar with local growing conditions
  - Land ownership moving to large rural lots – loss of farmland

- **Objective:**
  - Increase the number of full time produce vendors at Onslow County Farmers Market
  - Provide fruit and vegetable production education for eastern NC
  - Strengthen the local food and farming systems
  - Promote and expand vendor base at the Onslow County Farmers Market (OCFM)
  - Assist OCFM with educational programs to maintain 501c(3) status
  - Conduct customer surveys to gather information about local food demand

- **Program:**
  - Host spring & fall education programs
    - 2 hours per week, 16 weeks per session
    - Plan, plant, manage, harvest, display, sell produce
  - Teach
    - Basic fruit & vegetable crop production techniques
    - Integrated Pest Management (IPM) strategies
    - Food safety & sanitation practices
    - Food safety guidelines for farmers markets
    - Marketing strategy to farmers markets & direct marketers

- **Impacts:**
  - Three sessions (two spring, one fall) = 26 participants
  - > $1,000 in produce sales from 0.01 acre plot & high-tunnel
  - > 1,000 student/teacher contact hours
    - hands-on production and marketing training
  - Three new full time produce vendors at OCFM
  - Six new or reinvigorated home gardeners
  - Greater knowledge of local growing season challenges
  - Six multiple session participants

- **Future Opportunities:**
  - Develop permanent training site and production location
  - Expand program statewide to other farmers markets
  - Partner with community groups to build local food network
  - Deliver unsold produce to community food banks

- **Crops Planted & Harvested:**
  - Bok choi
  - Squash
  - Strawberry
  - Potato, Irish
  - Cucumber
  - Green beans
  - Lettuce
  - Beets
  - Carrots
  - Watermelon
  - Garden peas
  - Cabbage
  - Broccoli
  - Sunflower
  - Tomato
  - Pepper
  - Onion
  - Cauliflower
  - Okra
  - Lima beans

- **Onslow County Demographics:**
  - US Census (2007 est.) 162,745
  - Military Pop. (2007 est.) 133,569
  - Male (54%) Female (46%)
  - Median Age 26.4
  - Home ownership duration > 5 yrs.
    - 35.8% Onslow Co.
    - 53.0% North Carolina
    - 54.1% USA

- **Customer Survey Results (81 surveys):**
  - Small farmers struggle to make a profit. Are you willing to pay more for local produce to help make local farmers profitable?
    - Yes (94%) No (6%)
  - How much extra above a fair price are willing to pay for local produce?
    - 0%-3% 4%-6% 7%-12% >13%
    - 21% 45% 29% 5%
  - Demand for organic produce is rising. Are you willing to pay more for organic produce to make organic production profitable?
    - Yes (74%) No (26%)
  - Are you willing to pay more for organic produce?
    - 0%-3% 4%-6% 7%-12% >13%
    - 6% 48% 24% 21%