



Curtis Branch grows wheat, soybeans and corn on his Murfreesboro, North Carolina farm, a 240-acre property that has been in his family for generations.

Farming can be a risky business. In addition to nature's weather swings, small, independent farmers like Curtis face numerous market challenges. Harvest is usually the worst time to sell grain, for instance, because the high supply drives down prices. To increase profitability and diversify his business, Curtis turned to the The Conservation Fund's Natural Capital Investment Fund (NCIF) and North Carolina Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (NCDACS).

NCIF worked with NCDACS to develop the Farm Storage Facility Project, designed to help small, independent farmers stabilize their farm income and shift to more sustainable production methods. With funding from the North Carolina Agricultural Development and Farmland Preservation Trust Fund, we pair small loans with cost share grants and training in bin operation and hedging strategies to help low-wealth farmers acquire and successfully use on-farm storage capacity. A grain

bin enables a farmer to dry and store grain until the time is right to sell. It also provides a ready source of feed for animal or aquaculture production.

The Farm Storage project is one way NCIF is working to help low-wealth and minority farmers like Curtis earn more from every acre so they can pursue sustainable growing practices. Curtis is converting some of his acreage to pasture for pasture-raised pork production—a sustainable alternative to industrial swine production. We have connected Curtis and one of his neighbors to staff at NC Choices, a project of NC State University's Center for Environmental Farming Systems. NC Choices is linking small growers with independent processors and retail outlets to meet the growing consumer demand for naturally raised, local, pork products in the Triangle region and other urban centers in North Carolina.

At NCIF, we combine financing and technical assistance to help dedicated farmers like Curtis Branch increase profitability while shifting to more environmentally friendly production. We've developed a suite of products and services—specially tailored repayment schedules, reduced collateral requirements, focused training, and connections to markets—to help rebuild healthy local food systems. The result: hard-working farmers like Curtis Branch can keep farming and achieve livelihoods that are environmentally and economically sustainable.