

A year after the storm: One farmers reflection after Hurricane Helene



Photo courtesy of Don and Belinda Carringer

By Hope Davis, October 27th, 2025

NEWLAND, NC – Every fall, the often isolated and calm living of southern Appalachia transforms into a vibrant landscape, bringing tourists and travelers alike in with its candy painted trees and small town allure.

For many passing through, it is a look back at a simple life. Old barns lay untouched alongside the roads where gravel meets neglected concrete, reminiscent of memories that can seemingly only be held by those same mountains that surround them.

For Don Carringer, fall means work. There are potatoes to be ploughed, greens to be harvested, and beets to be pulled. Carringer, like many in the area, has been farming as long as he could walk. He and his wife, Belinda, started Carringer Farms in 2008.

“We called it a little hobby, and after about three years, it was clear it was not a hobby anymore,” said Carringer. “It’s been amazing.”

On weekends, the Carringer’s restored red barn nestled towards the back of the property will be filled. Not by livestock or this season’s harvest, but by the laughter and songs of their community. It is a new tradition for the couple, who began hosting farm-to-table dinners at their barn in Newland just this May. The dinners are prepared by a private chef and feature homemade southern-staples like zucchini fritters and heirloom tomato pies, all crafted from the Carringer’s produce.

“In a lot of ways, that little piece is like so many of the other things that have happened with our farming,” said Carringer, who can be often found in the fields on his signature red tractor. “It’s a combination of hard work, producing a good product and just serendipity.”

Under the glow of the barn’s warm string lights, it can be hard to remember that just this time last year, the Carringers were unsure if this peaceful life they had created would ever look the same.

Hurricane Helene made landfall over Western North Carolina on Sept. 27th, 2024. Left in its path was devastation and uncertainty. More than 38 inches of rain fell over Avery County alone, where the Carringer’s farm is located, leaving flooded fields, rotted vegetables and damage to almost all of the natural land surrounding it.

“It was the worst natural disaster I’ve ever lived through,” said Don.



Don looks upon rotted squash pulled from his flooded fields.

Farmers like the Carringers relied on community support after the storm to help clear trees, rebuild fences and

Non-profits such as the North Carolina Community Foundation (NCCF) have allocated almost \$12 million in grants to local charitable organizations from their Disaster Relief Fund as of last month

Contributions from donors to the fund totalled more than \$32.5 million, with the NCCF assuring that more grants will continue to be made over the coming months

and years. The organization is focusing on unmet needs such as job retention, supporting small businesses and legal aid for homeowners who experienced loss during the storm.

Upon arrival at their first farmers’ market since the storm, a once-weekly routine for the Carringers, the couple learned of the loss of a fellow vendor, Brittany Robinson, a 36-year-old farm owner who died in a landslide during the storm. The booth where she once sold fresh produce, pork and eggs from her family farm was now vacant.

“It was stunning and sobering,” said Carringer. “It’s the kind thing that you think about from time to time. When you’re at the market you know exactly where she set up.”



The Carringer’s destroyed bee boxes line the side of the road

Despite the uncertain future, the Carringers knew they had to rebuild. With the assistance of state and federal grants, the couple fixed the fences, cleared the trees and prepped the soil for a new round of seeds.

“Everybody rallied for themselves and for each other,” said Carringer. “It’s just been an effort on everybody’s part, and when that happens, good things happen.”

This October, a little over a year after Hurricane Helene, Carringer says he has for the most part made a full recovery on the farm. However, the lessons learned from last September will be ones he remembers for a lifetime.

“Other than the psychological aspect of it, I think it’s in the past,” said Carringer. “We all have more resilience than we think. We’ve got to learn to tap into that and we’ve got to learn to persist and keep pushing. Then things can happen in a good way for us that we can’t even see.”

The farm-to-table dinners have been a huge success for Don and Belinda. Don says that being able to see people from all over connect with one another whilst learning about farming is the most rewarding part about all of it.

“A lot of it is projected onto us because we’re there and it’s our place,” said Don. “It is a lot of fun and very gratifying.”

“From loss and the ashes of destruction, come new sprouts,” he added.

