



A Report of the Central Appalachian
Network (CAN) Convening

Growing Healthy Food Systems from the Ground Up

2010 Proceedings paper
March 30, 2010
with optional field trip
March 31

The Inn at Hocking College
Nelsonville, Ohio

Supported by the
Ford Foundation

The Organizations of CAN

Appalachian Center for Economic Networks (ACEnet)

Appalachian Sustainable Development (ASD)

Center for Economic Options (CEO)

The Conservation Fund's Natural Capital Investment Fund, Inc. (TCF/NCIF)

Jubilee Project Inc.

Mountain Association for Community Economic Development (MACED)

Rural Action

Central Appalachian Network

The Central Appalachian Network (CAN) is comprised of seven action-oriented nonprofit organizations based in Kentucky, Ohio, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia. CAN formed in 1993 following a convening by the Aspen Institute and the Claude Worthington Benedum Foundation. The meeting brought together practitioners, policy makers and others involved in local economic development issues within this region, many of whom had never met. A major focus of the meeting was to explore how a regional approach could facilitate increasing the effectiveness and scale of local economic development initiatives targeting low-income residents of the region. Due to the tremendous interest in the networking options and possibilities for regional collaboration, the participants formed CAN and began to build capacity and impact through the synergy created by the power of the multi-state network.

Since its inception, CAN has matured and expanded its organizational and collaborative capacity. Although the leadership of most CAN organizations has changed during the past sixteen years, the organizational commitments and participation have remained constant. CAN is built on trust and reciprocity – common values of rural areas. These innovative organizations continue to share strategies, resources and connections to build the foundation for a rural economy that restores and builds upon the ecological and cultural assets of this special but often overlooked and discounted region.

CAN believes strongly that locally rooted, regional sustainable development can take advantage of our abundance of natural resources and human capital to generate wealth for people in need and protect important natural systems. We have a bold vision of a more sustainable Appalachia.

We work for a day when the region can provide for people in need and ensure intact land, clean air, pure water and healthy forests that people hold dear. We envision thousands of locally owned and regionally connected enterprises that create real economic opportunity and contribute to a high quality of life for all. We see a place where people have sufficient economic control of their lives so they don't have to make choices between healthy communities and providing for their families – a place where our natural resources are valued for the long term, where communities are strong, and local and state policies promote healthy local economies and protect natural systems.

CAN views asset-based development as:

- Internally focused in terms of needs, resources, design, investment, and control.
- Relationship driven – building networks that create capacity.
- Participatory

ACEnet  Rural Action  TCF/NCIF 

 CEO

 MACED

 ASD

Jubilee Project Inc. 

From this perspective, CAN has adopted Community Sustainable Development as a model where all development:

- Fits within the ecosystem – restoring sources and sinks
- Adds value to natural and community capital
- Is regionally rooted, enhancing self-reliance
- Is market driven and market shaping
- Utilizes local catalysts and networks to build capacity

Central Appalachia



Prelude:

In April, 2009, CAN, in partnership the Ford Foundation and the Mary Reynolds Babcock Foundation hosted **Growing Healthy Food Systems from the Ground Up**. CAN organized this regional convening as an important first step to identify other actors in the regional sustainable agriculture movement, and to strengthen and expand healthy local food systems by building capacity and enhancing collaborations. In the year that followed, CAN was engaged in helping to grow the plans and ideas that were brought forth in this convening and the broader work of CAN to help build healthy local food systems in Central Appalachia.

Along with offering extensive technical assistance and training, engaging in public awareness and education around policy barriers and opportunities, and continuing to build strong networks and clusters of businesses and stakeholders, CAN also established and implemented a grant process for community-based local food initiatives. Through this initiative, CAN awarded \$100,000 to eight local food projects, most of whom participated in the April 2009 convening. With the growth of local food systems in clusters within CAN's five-state catchment area, CAN found it strategic and timely to plan and coordinate a follow-up convening to our successful event held in April 2009. We chose to keep the title and theme - **Growing Healthy Food Systems from the Ground Up** – and adapted the format to best fit the needs and opportunities that have been emerging and identified during the past year.

Recipients of 2009 CAN Community Local Food System Grants

Appalachian Staple Food Collaborative – Athens, Ohio

Development of a regional system for producing, processing, and marketing grains, beans, and oil seeds. Partnerships have been developed with Rural Action, ACEnet, local farmers, and food buyers including several restaurants, universities, government agencies, and numerous others.

Clinch Appalachian Farmers Enterprise – CAFÉ – Church Hill, Tennessee

Member owned and operated group of growers organized to facilitate access to public schools, restaurants, hospitals and other institutional markets. CAFÉ provides training, coordination, infrastructure and other assistance to its partners. CAFÉ projects a 30% increase in volume of local food provided to local schools.

Community Farm Alliance – CFA – Frankfort, Kentucky

Dual project: 1) Enhancement of Farm to School program linking farmers with institutions resulting in a how-to guide and plans to expand to the remaining 48 Appalachian counties not yet engaged. 2) Fresh Step program coordinating sliding scale CSA programs between local farmers and churches across Appalachian Kentucky.

Fayette County Farmers Market Association – Thurmond, West Virginia

Season extension projects including high tunnel construction, community high tunnel garden spaces

for experiments, and designs and materials for growers to construct tunnels on farms.

Lynchburg Grows – Lynchburg, Virginia

Year 1 of 4 year project to engage new farmers, convert farm land to organic production and develop a distribution hub to enable participation in Appalachian Harvest. Projected outcomes include the engagement of up to 20 producers and conversion of up to 200 acres to organic production at the end of four years.

Monroe Farm Market – Waiteville, West Virginia

Expansion of markets, improvement of processing and distribution systems to those markets. Monroe will provide technical assistance in business and other areas to increase markets in urban areas like Charleston and Beckley as well as other locations within 100 miles.

Rural Resources – Greeneville, Tennessee

Enhance partnerships between institutions and farmers building on experience with a mobile farmers market and accessing institutional markets.

True & Essential Meats – Harrisonburg, Virginia

USDA inspected facility offering custom processing for small-scale regional meat producers. Grant made for infrastructure enhancements to expand existing work and begin work with poultry.

March 30, 2010

Welcome and Introductions by Leslie Schaller and Pam Curry

On March 30, 2010, CAN presented a follow-up to the 2009 convening with the second **Growing Healthy Food Systems from the Ground Up** which was held in at the Inn at Hocking College in Nelsonville, Ohio. The 2010 gathering, attended by 55 people, built on CAN's efforts to accelerate and expand profitable food systems that benefit people and the environment and drilled-down on specific key components of the value-chain including processing, aggregation and distribution, marketing and policy development.

The convening followed last year's successful model of dynamic panel discussions led by entrepreneurs, producers, farmers and service providers discussing their experiences in their local food systems. Following

each panel, there was time for open dialog and networking. Toward the end of the day, time was allotted for state or regional groups to develop their local action plans and report back to the larger group.



Representatives of CAN (From left to right) Robin Robbins, Denise Barrett, Sarah Watling, Leslie Schaller, Elizabeth Malayter, Kristin Stratton, Justin Maxson, Pam Curry, Larry Fisher, Bob Fedyski, Marten Jenkins and Marilyn Wrenn



Leslie Schaller, Pam Curry, and Allen Arnold

Leslie Schaller

March 31st highlighted on-the-ground projects in southeastern Ohio through an optional field trip. Sites and topics covered included season-extension practices and winter marketing of produce, lunch featuring locally-sourced food, a commercial kitchen tour, dialogue with university dining services, and more.

The tour included stops at:
Green Edge Gardens - to explore season extension, winter marketing, employee development, and other best practices.

Ohio University's Food Service Facility - to explore an institution that is buying local food and to hear about other possibilities for institutional buying.

ACEnet's Specialty Food Production Center - to learn about the Appalachian Staple Foods Collaborative and worker owned Casa Nueva restaurant founded by local food pioneers.

Lunch was at Eclipse Company Store and featured local foods.

Growing Healthy Food Systems from the Ground Up



An Introduction

In Central Appalachia, across the country and around the world, interest in healthy food systems is growing. To take advantage of that interest, CAN's major approach is to strengthen the sustainable agriculture value-chain from farm to table. This approach, which aligns with the individual missions of the CAN organizations, ensures that the economic, social and ecological integrity of the region is able to thrive. The core elements of our approach are to:

- Provide outreach, education, training and technical assistance so producers can transition to more ecologically sound production practices, and new crops and products.
- Set up the infrastructure to get farm products to market in the quantity and quality needed.
- Connect local and regional food producers, processors, and distributors to each other to allow the system to become more localized.
- Link to large market partners including local and regionally based grocers and retailers, schools, colleges and universities, food processing facilities and other institutional buyers.

In 2007, CAN made a commitment to focus particularly on strengthening and expanding specific value-added infrastructure for sustainable agriculture. The organizations of CAN viewed sustainable agriculture and development of other sustainable sectors as crucial to Appalachia's ecological and economic health.

The purpose of the 2010 **Growing Healthy Food Systems from the Ground Up** was to bring participants in the Central Appalachian food system together and share best practices in markets, processing, aggregation, distribution, and policy to accelerate and expand successful local food systems

"Great networking opportunities"

"It was important being reminded we are not alone in our mission!"

GOALS:

Growing Healthy Food Systems from the Ground Up

1. Inspire attendees by examples of successful projects in Central Appalachia's local food system.
2. Form and strengthen partnerships among players in the regions' food system.
3. Create action plans to advance local food systems in Central Appalachia.

Healthy Food System Markets

Panel:

Moderator: Denise Barrett
Appalachian Sustainable Development, Virginia

Panel members:

Dale Hawkins – Rock Cave IGA and FishHawk Acres
J.B. King – King Family Farms
Robin Robbins – Appalachian Sustainable Development

Markets are an integral component of any food system. But creating markets, and moving products to markets in rural areas can be a challenge. This session consisted of three people who are using innovative methods to market their products. Each panelist provided a fifteen-minute overview of their operations, which was followed by a question and answer session. The panelists included:

Dale Hawkins

Chef and entrepreneur Dale Hawkins' ultimate mission is to use the freshest, high-quality ingredients for every component on the plate. His philosophy was shaped by growing up on a farm in Rock Cave, West Virginia where he learned cooking, baking and an appreciation for the seasonality of food. After attending Pennsylvania Culinary Institute and working at a variety of restaurants around the nation, he became the head chef at the Stonewall Resort in Roanoke, West Virginia where he often featured local foods and regional flavors.

His mission now is to bring these high-quality, fresh ingredients to people across West Virginia. Recently, Hawkins started Fish Hawk Acres CSA. Fish Hawk Acres is comprised of a network of small family farms that work together to deliver farm-fresh produce each week to people who have purchased either a whole or half share. The CSA is unique in how it delivers the product. The common CSA model involves the grower(s) making a delivery in person at a prescribed location and time. However, after purchasing a "share" of the season's produce up front, Fish Hawk Acres ships the weekly share of produce directly to homes or businesses.

The summer season runs from July 1 to mid August.

In addition to the fresh produce, Hawkins' weekly shipment includes a locally-produced value-added product such as honey, maple syrup, or bread. In order to increase people's familiarity with some of the produce, the CSA also includes recipes with each weekly box.

Robin Robbins

Appalachian Sustainable Development (ASD) has helped local farmers transform their old rows of tobacco, once their signature crop, into thriving organic fruit and vegetable fields. And it has brought these farmers into a new distribution system with major retailers and grocers in the region. ASD's Appalachian Harvest enterprise values action over research and opens new economic opportunities for local farmers. "We are letting



Robin Robbins,
Dale Hawkins and
Denise Barrett

Dale Hawkins

farmers know that their livelihood is still viable and can be very profitable,” says Robbins. Appalachian Harvest, an organic farming cooperative, is searching for new farmers to help meet the growing demand for organic produce. “Right now, we have more demand than supply when you look at what our partners are wanting,”

In terms of market development, Robbins said that over the last 10 years grocery shoppers have increasingly wanted better quality produce and they want to know where the food comes from. She said. “I don’t think there’s an exact science to it, but I think more people think about what they put into the mouths of their children than their own, and with all of the health-related issues that are going on in our society, they want something that does not have all the chemicals or fillers.”

With a pledge to deliver produce from farm to store within 48 hours, developing markets that realize the value of the local produce is important. “We have developed a brand, and have concentrated on in-store marketing so that customers look for our produce. Our job is to make sure they get what they expect.” The higher level marketing allows the product to bring a greater price per pound for the producers. Developing the markets has been a balancing act and ASD relies on farmers dedicating production to fulfill orders. “The opportunity is there, and we have everything the farmer needs to get started. If they are committed, we can help them get to market.”

J.B. King

J.B. King is dedicated to serving a market that wants and respects high-quality, humanely-produced pork and chicken. His hogs are grown in open buildings and lots, where they can enjoy fresh air and sunshine. When hogs are ready for processing they are taken by straw bedded trailer to their processor who is a small family operated facility in southeastern Ohio. The hogs are slaughtered humanly and processed with care. They chose Old Village Meats as their processor because of their care and cleanliness while handling the meat. Old Village is a state inspected facility and is willing to process all of the King Family Farms products the way they want; using their



J.B. King

custom seasonings and cures. King Family Farms want their customers to know that they are receiving good quality nutritious pork, and believe that this market is growing despite a premium price. King says that the market is increasingly concerned about freshness, and believes that the tradition of raising meat and selling it to neighbors is gaining ground.

Q: How do you balance production and supply?

A: Grow both simultaneously. Build credibility with your markets by consistently delivering what they want. Work with suppliers to educate them about what the market wants. Don’t worry about getting all of the market, but concentrate on serving the portion you have very well.

Q: How do you supply farm labor?

A: Family has been the historical answer, but it isn’t always possible. Students can be interested in learning how to farm, and can provide affordable labor. A resource that isn’t used much is prisoners.

Keynote Speaker:
Warren Taylor, Snowville Creamery, Ohio

Introduction: Pam Curry
Center for Economic Options (CEO)

Warren Taylor owns and runs Snowville Creamery and he's trying to make milk the way it was made 40 years ago, when, he insists, it tasted better. "I built Snowville Creamery to prove to the American dairy industry that the reason our children have had a 30-year continuous decline in their consumption of milk is not entirely Coke and Pepsi's fault, but because the dairy industry has been delivering a continuously declining quality of milk, in terms of its freshness and taste," Taylor says.

He gets his milk from 235 brown Jersey cows that graze on a farm owned by his neighbor, Bill Dix. Half of Dix's milk goes to Snowville creamery. Snowville Creamery milk is sold in 100 stores in six states. They employ 18 full-time staff and 24 part-time staff.

Warren Taylor is on a crusade to put cows back on pastures and bring the flavor back to milk. The self-described "Dairy Evangelist" is concerned that corporate dairies are ruining the industry by polluting, delivering an inferior product, and by working to force smaller dairies – like his – out of business. He is distressed by the fact that the current administration has provided no change in national policy to help fix what he sees as critical flaws in the industry. These flaws include no price stability, the fact that the debt held by dairy farmers exceed the value of all dairy cattle combined, and that the USDA is pushing the export and processing of milk products, not liquid milk. Taylor pointed out that while much milk is exported, the U.S. is importing



Warren Taylor



milk protein from countries that may lack standards that keep the product safe. "We have the sickest group of children ever being raised right now. The current food system is a tool of social injustice, and if we don't hold elected officials accountable, we are as guilty as they are." He says they are trying to create a new example, "I want to enable other people to build similar facilities. This has to do with trying to create economic models that reinforce our democracy instead of threatening it."

*Thanks also to Danita Kern
of Inn at Hocking College
and Bob Fredyski of Rural
Action for shopping the
farmers' market and
developing a menu to
utilize local foods*

Lunch and snacks featured local food and beverages from:
Snowville Creamery (all products donated for this event)

- Athen's Own
- Blue Smoke Salsa
- Cherry Orchard
- Green Edge Gardens
- Happy Hollow Farms
- King Family Farm
- Laurel Valley Creamery



Processing in Healthy Food Systems

Option 1

Moderator: Leslie Schaller, ACENet

Panel members:

Robin Hildebrand – Blue Smoke Salsa, West Virginia

Michelle Ajamian- Appalachian Staple Food Collaborative, Ohio

Warren Taylor, Snowville Creamery, Ohio

Robin Hildebrand

Robin G. Hildebrand started Blue Smoke as a part-time enterprise making salsa for her friends and coworkers at Allegheny Power. Encouraged to expand, Robin didn't let the fact that she didn't have use of a commercial kitchen deter her. Working with the West Virginia Department of Agriculture she remodeled her basement, and in 1993, her basement kitchen became the first home-based FDA approved commercial kitchen in the state. Blue Smoke never formally advertised its product, but word-of-mouth soon enabled Robin to become a part-time employee at Allegheny Power and to eventually devote herself full-time to the business. In 1995 Hildebrand moved out of her basement and into a larger building in Ansted, adding a retail outlet. The ten original product outlets soon spread to twenty-five. She slowly began to grow the business, receiving numerous awards in the process. In the fall of 2002, due to increasing product demand and the need for additional production and retail space, Blue Smoke purchased and converted an old office in downtown Ansted into a commercial food processing facility.

Funding from the Natural Capital Investment Fund and the Four-County Economic Development Authority provided working capital and allowed Blue Smoke Inc. to buy automated jar filling equipment that was needed to increase production capacity more than 300% and enter the wholesale market. Much of her processing is still done by hand, but she believes this keeps her and her employees more engaged with the product. This closeness led to the creation of one of her best selling products: Chef Sauce. Cooking salsa generates foam that is not incorporated into the final product. When faced with what to do with this leftover, she developed it into a tomato-based spicy sauce that can be added to many dishes. Innovating product in this manner helps set

Blue Smoke Salsa apart in the market. In order to break into national markets, she attended international specialty food shows in Chicago and New York City where the quality of her product apparently met with the approval of the critics. More recently she has developed distribution agreements with several large grocery store chains including Kroger and Harris Teeter.

Although she could grow more, she has decided to stay in her hometown and employ local people. This sense of community is important to her product and to the level of production she has chosen. Although her location has become an attraction for Southern West Virginia, it makes freight and shipping expensive. For this reason, she has continued to position her products as premium and continues to position them in this market.

Michelle Ajamian

The mission of Appalachian Staple Food Collaborative is to build a regional bean, grain, and seed staple food system which is focused on growing and processing high nutrition crops, while working toward zero dependency on chemical inputs in staple food agriculture and the development of appropriate scale farming and processing equipment.

Staple foods provide the bulk of nutritious calories in most people's diets. Ajamian pointed out that 40 years ago, most towns had mills, and oils and flours were locally



Michelle Ajamian and Robin Hildebrand

produced. Now, the global, corporate food system has led us to purchase grains and oil from China and other countries. In 2008, she and partner Brandon Jaegar received a grant to run trials of amaranth, quinoa, buckwheat, millet, black turtle beans, & heirloom corn on four farms in Appalachian Ohio. These crops were chosen because of their nutrition profile their effect on the soil, and the world heritage they represent. Ajamian believes a local staple seed crops system is key to food & farm security and that food security is key to a green economy.

From the production standpoint, she was receiving calls from local restaurants, bakeries, and buying clubs asking to pre-order the harvest. The collaborative has received funding to do larger market plots and help equip Shagbark Seed and Mill Co, which is a prototype facility being used to assess the structure and scale for the production of regional staple foods. She and her partner are working with Japanese manufacturers to develop harvesting devices that work on small, hilly areas that could be used for staple crop production in Appalachia.

Warren Taylor

Warren Taylor says he had good teachers when it came to learning the milk industry. His father was a dairy technologist and Taylor's first jobs were designing milk-processing plants and negotiating with regulators. Later, he launched his own dairy consulting business, and from there, began Snowville Creamery. In 2006, he entered into a partnership with nearby dairy farmers Bill Dix and Stacy Hall, who had 230 cows on pasture. He mortgaged his farm and home to build the \$1.5 million dairy processing plant of his dreams. The first Snowville milk – grass-fed and unhomogenized, was produced in December 2007.

Taylor is on a mission to convince people that all milk is not created equally. His milk tastes, "the way it used to" when milk was more locally produced and therefore not ultrapasturized. Snowville's solution to 30 years of declining milk consumption is to create premium milk that it controls from cow to carton. Taylor wants his cows to be raised on pasture and to receive no hormones or antibiotics. Snowville Creamery was formed in response to a lack of truly fresh, local dairy products. His concept is to provide particularly wholesome and fresh milk from grass-grazing cows for retail sale in local markets, minimizing the distribution chain. Their milk is bottled on the farm

and delivered within 48 hours to a network of local grocers which includes Whole Foods stores as far away as Pittsburgh and Washington D.C. and Kroger stores in Ohio.

Q: What do you think about the role of value-added products in the dairy industry?

A: In this arena, there is so little competition for fluid milk - it's more strategic than introducing value-added products. But people are interested in cheese. There is a push, and there are lots of models for cheese production. Cheese can be done effectively but it's limited as to the economic-development potential. For fluid milk, all you have to have is cows on grass.

Q: How do you harvest your grains and what other special equipment do you use?

A: Tractor drawn combines are obviously not suited for all of our terrain - but it's what was out there. Our research showed that Japan has the smaller combines, but they don't export this equipment. Fortunately, Ohio University Department of Mechanical Engineering is working with us to have students build models that would be appropriate for our crops. This is a field where there is room for a lot of innovation and for spin-off businesses. We are also working locally for a press that would produce vegetable oils. There's a lot that can be done with veggie oils, and there is no reason it can't be produced here.

Q: Do you use fresh produce for your product?

A: Yes, we use fresh produce, but it is difficult to get sometimes and also a challenge to find the ingredients we need in the quantities we need. We like the idea of local food. We can raise peppers in West Virginia, but the sweet onions end up too small. It's the same thing with the sweet Roma tomatoes. It's hard to encourage bulk farming for one market. It can be risky.



Aggregation and Distribution in Healthy Food System

Option 2

Moderator: Anthony Flaccavento, SCALE, Inc.

Panel members:

Kip Rondy, Green Edge Gardens, Ohio

Joe Cloud, T & E Meats, Virginia

Robin Robbins, Appalachian Harvest, Virginia



Kip Rondy

Green Edge Gardens is a family owned organic farm in rural Amesville, Ohio. Kip and Becky Rondy are long time farmers who are dedicated to producing the best organic produce possible.

Their 120 acres of rolling hills and fertile bottom-land is tended to by hand.

Water comes from a series of spring-fed ponds

on the property. Seven greenhouses ensure a year-round selection of micro greens of many kinds and an abundant supply of other seasonal vegetables and specialty mushrooms.

Rondy has two priorities for his farm: providing a living wage to employees so they can stay at the farm, and making the farm sustainable so the next generation can farm as well.

They view markets in terms of tiers with the primary being CSAs and Farmers Markets. The second tier is comprised of local wholesale opportunities and the third tier being corporations. With each, comes risk. For instance, he noted that big corporations sometimes make you a “deal” and ask you to do things that aren’t economically feasible,

promising to “make it up” to you.” You can get a lot of money tied up in it and then they change their plan and you’re left holding the bag...and the bank note!” he said. In discussing working with large corporations he continued, “If you get in bed with a gorilla and he rolls over on you, whether or not he meant to, you’re dead.”

In terms of distribution, Rondy knows that trucking is expensive so that it is the producer’s best interest to make sure every trip produces as much income as possible. “If you can’t sell a crop for enough to be profitable, don’t grow it!!” he says.

Joe Cloud

Developing an Innovative Food-based Business True and Essential Meats (T&E Meats) of Harrisonsburg, VA is co-owned by Joe Cloud and Joel Salatin of Polyface Farm. T&E Meats is a small USDA-inspected processing facility and purveyor of wholesale and retail meats. Cloud is also part owner of Greenmont Farm in Fishersville, VA and before purchasing T&E Meats in the summer of 2008, was a landscape architect and urban planner for an international planning firm. Long interested in sustainability issues and a life-long cook, he believes availability of quality food to be an essential component of life.

Cloud mentioned that T&E Meats operates under the Talmage Aiken Act. As of 2009, the nine states that cooperatively operate under the authority of the Federal State Cooperative Act (Talmadge-Aiken) are Alabama,



Kip Rondy, Robin Robbins, and Joe Cloud

Georgia, Illinois, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Texas, Utah and Virginia. Since T&E Meats is in Virginia, this Act allows the state to take over inspections. Cloud pointed out that this is better for T&E because the Federal inspectors give more attention to and are more helpful to large producers.

In terms of aggregation and distribution, T&E Meats experiences high overhead. Their machinery is old and parts are hard to find so repairs are expensive. “They’re not making machines for the smaller producers any longer,” he said, “machines are manufactured for large producers like Tyson.” He is also challenged by an aging staff, and the need for additional space. He says it is difficult to find sources of cash needed for business growth. And as with many smaller agricultural enterprises, the changing and emerging regulatory issues are a constant cause for concern.

Despite these challenges Cloud explained T&E Meats is still “the right thing to do” and is three businesses in one: a processor for farmers, a retail store, and a wholesale business. His primary markets are restaurants, institutions and the retail business. He realized it was important for the retail component to provide services bilingually since a lot of the farm workers in the area are Mexican.

As true with many small businesses, as Walmart came in, it had a profound negative impact on his business model. Cloud now concentrates on ways to diversify even further to make up lost business. These ideas include expanding into pet food processing, and processing pork, beef, lamb, and bison.

He has grown the processing aspect of his business by 70% and is still exploring other opportunities for growth.

Robin Robbins

Appalachian Harvest, which is a network of family farmers, has a motto – “produce is less than 48 hours from field to store.” But a lot must happen in those 48 hours. Washing, grading, packaging and the distribution all add cost, and it is important to be able to break that cost out. This cost includes the commitment to training and the cost of retaining quality personnel.

“Logistics must be logical,” she said. “‘Logistics’ is six words down from logical in the dictionary. Logistics must



Kip Rondy, Robin Robbins, and Joe Cloud

make sense!” Sometimes, logistics involves working with others – even competitors. “Sustainability is about ‘we’, not ‘me’,” she explained. Getting produce to the markets under a certain cost is the name of the game. She said that carrying other people’s produce to the market so you can fill your truck is a cooperative strategy that helps everyone. “But don’t harvest below cost,” she said. If you can’t sell it at profit, there is no point in going through the steps to aggregate it.

To survive in the business, Robbins suggested that growth is the key. She pointed to USDA Loans and Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFIs) as a valuable resource for aggregation and distribution operations. Also, today’s regulatory climate is on the top of the list of concerns. Food safety issues are impacting aggregation and distribution facilities and Robbins recommends that HACCP Plans be in place. HACCP is an internationally recognized system for managing risks associated with food and beverage safety. It is primarily designed to provide increased control during the critical stages of food preparation.

HACCP is a systematic method which uses seven principle systems for analyzing and controlling food processing. The seven principles of HACCP are as follows:

1. Conducting hazard analysis
2. Identifying critical control points for each step
3. Establishing critical limits
4. Establishing monitoring requirements
5. Taking corrective action
6. Keeping records
7. Verifying that the HACCP system is working correctly.

Policy for A Healthy Food System

Panel

Moderator: Marten Jenkins

Natural Capital Investment Fund

Panel members:

Don Van Erden, Community Farm Alliance, Kentucky

Amalie Lipstreu, Ohio Food Council and

ODA Sustainable Agriculture

Kate Fitzgerald, National Sustainable Ag Coalition



Marten Jenkins



Don Van Erden

Don Van Erden

The Community Farm Alliance believes that family-scale farming and people working together lay a foundation for community life. Family scale farming has been eroded so significantly that we need to create a new system of

agriculture that keeps people on the land. The Community Farm Alliance seeks to ensure the health and well being of rural communities by advocating rural economic development whose first priority is the protection of family-scale farming.

From a policy perspective, CFA believes that American society is best served by family-scale agriculture, and that corporate control of agriculture endangers our land, food, and communities. Family farmers best protect soil and water resources and are the most reliable producers of nutritious, reasonably priced food; and family farmers sustain thousands of rural communities. We also believe that all laborers and the farmer, too, must be allowed a fair return. Price for farm products need to be adequate for farm families to make a living and care for their farms. Finally CFA believes that all farmers and rural people, regardless of race, gender, age, nationality or economic level, need to work together for better policies and more prosperous communities.

Currently, CFA is working with the Agricultural committee and the Education Committee to improve Farm to School initiatives in Kentucky including a reporting requirement for schools to report the food that has been locally sourced. They have developed interesting relationship with the Partnership for a Fit Kentucky and have pulled together a task force including representatives from education, agriculture, nonprofits, etc. As part of the advocacy for farm to school, CFA is advocating for regional training for food service personnel, parents, cooks, and others who are involved at any level. He believes that farm to school is going to “explode” in Kentucky, but there are challenges. Food safety concerns are paramount, and there needs to be more effort to educate policy makers in the difference between “Big Ag” and “Small Ag”. He believes that only through education will the legislation and policies being put in place lead to a sustainable local food system.

“Talking about local food and food safety...people need to realize that the contaminated spinach and onions didn’t come from local farms...”

Amalie Lipstreu

With a change in Ohio’s Agriculture leadership came an opportunity to establish the office of Sustainable Agriculture. When this occurred, one of the opportunities was to establish the Food Policy Council. The Food Policy Council

provides a mechanism beyond the Farm Bill for there to be proactive measures discussed and undertaken. The Council was established because of both economic opportunity and need. Ohio has 16 Metropolitan Service Areas (MSAs), and they are all growing and devouring farm land. If steps are not taken, this means a loss of production capacity, and the ability for this land to generate sustainable income.

Forty three billion dollars are spent a year in Ohio on food. The Food Policy Council estimates that half of this is spent for food to be consumed at home, and half at restaurants and other establishments. They estimate that only two percent of the \$43 billion went back to Ohio farmers. With the epidemic of obesity (24% of Ohioans are obese) and diabetes, and with high numbers of people seeking food assistance, there seemed to be a significant opportunity to capture part of this market for local farmers.

There are currently 80 people on a task force – a lot of them volunteers. Over the past two years, 15 formal recommendations have been brought forth. The focus throughout is on Ag viability – keeping farmers profitable. Value added processing and building local capacity are two important areas for work. For instance, mobile chicken processing facilities would increase the viability of the poultry industry.

The Food Policy Council is conducting a baseline assessment of local food systems. Through this, they are mapping locations of healthy food access with the goal of reducing food deserts. From this, they are looking at what the best tools would be for communities to have in order to have neighborhood harvests.

Also, the Food Policy Council recently hired a farm to school coordinator and have developed five pilot schools to demonstrate best practices and success. Through this position, they also manage the specialty crop block grant. The Market connection task force is another effort underway. Through it, distributors are being surveyed to see if they are interested and have the capacity to bring work with additional local produce. The most important need, however, is for increased capacity to meet this demand.

Kate Fitzgerald

The National Sustainable Ag Coalition (NSAC) is a national alliance of family farm, food, conservation, rural and urban organizations that together take common



Amalie Lipstreu

positions on federal agriculture and food policies, and engage and support the broad and vital grassroots efforts across the country to win long-term policy change. The NSAC is the leading voice for sustainable agriculture in the federal policy arena, joining together the voices of grassroots farm, food, conservation, and rural organizations from all regions of the country to advocate for federal policies and programs supporting the long-term economic, social, and environmental sustainability of agriculture, natural resources, and rural communities.

Currently, the NSAC is watching two pieces of legislation closely: Food Safety bills and the Childhood Nutrition bills. With public sentiment the way it is, there will be a food safety bill, and the leadership is desperate for bi-partisan legislation. NSAC is engaged in the work of making sure that 2008 farm bill programs that support conservation, organic production and research, beginning farmers, and local and regional food systems are properly implemented by the U.S. Department of Agriculture and funded. Specifically, NSAC is working with the FDA to better define what a “facility” is in terms of the food safety language. They are pushing for the FDA to take a “risk” based approach. This would entail policy makers accounting for the fact that some agricultural practices carry a higher level of risk than others. For instance, leafy greens from a corporate farm are one thing, but a five acre

farm selling to a local store is much less risky in terms of the scope and scale of potential contamination. In this context, how a “facility” is defined is a keystone of the bill.



Kate Fitzgerald, Amalie Lipstreu, and Don Van Erden

Fitzgerald pointed out that when it comes to federal policy, what is often taken as malevolence toward small farmers is really misunderstanding. The agencies really don't want to have to inspect 100,000 farms, and only through “relentless explanation” can people be educated. Part of their campaign is to try to get certification farm wide, not commodity by commodity. They are aiming for whole farm plans to be acceptable. She says that the FDA is in a learning mode, and that they are trying. FDA and the USDA are working together but food security is a very complicated issue.

The Child Nutrition work is progressing. As a fundamentally important program, the Senate voted it out of committee and appropriated 40 million dollars for farm to school. Fitzgerald believes there will be child nutrition grant programs for farm to school grants. She suggests watching what's going on in USDA Rural Development. She's seeing a lot of emphasis on planning regional efforts, and the direction is promising.

Q: Are your food service people for or against local food?

A: Training is important when you're talking to food service directors and cooks. Education is key. And PTA's are important, too.

Q: How do we get engaged with NSAC?

A: The NSAC website is a good resource for sustainable ag groups. She reminded us that we, the grassroots organizations, when organized and speaking with one voice, are more powerful than the policy makers in D.C.

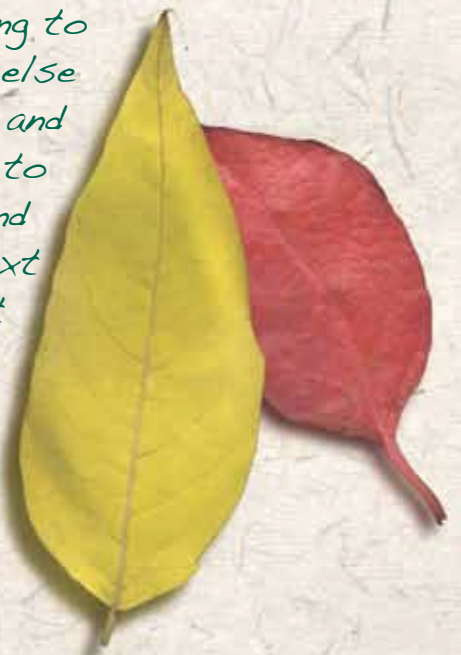
Q: What is a food desert and where do you find them?

A: A food desert is an isolated geographic areas where mainstream grocery stores are absent or difficult to get to – especially if you lack transportation. People living in food deserts are typically of poorer health, and suffer disproportionately from nutrition-related health problems such as obesity, cancer, diabetes and hypertension.

Q: . In terms of the new food safety regulations, what are some of the major issues?

A: One important issue is around farm receipts. There is debate about what constitutes a “large” or “small” farm. For instance policy makers may not understand that a farm operation grossing \$750,000 should probably be considered small and might be barely netting enough to support a family after expenses. This type of farm operation should not have the same thresholds as a truly large operation.

“It is exciting to know what else is going on and important to understand the context of what we're doing.”



Sub-regional Planning Sessions

The last session of the gathering before adjournment brought participants from each of the five states together to develop next steps for their state's local food system. This process enabled attendees to narrow their discussions and actively engage in dialogue and planning that pertained specifically to their local needs and opportunities. Reports on these sessions were then presented to the larger group as the final convening activity. Subsequent to the convening, additional planning, collaboration and implementation steps have been underway. We have attempted to capture as much of this information as possible during the development of this publication. The following is an overview of some of the discussions in the regional sessions and/or an update on initiatives that are being created and activated.



West Virginia

Session opened with CEO and NCIF providing overviews of the local food system in West Virginia. CEO provided a statewide overview, and NCIF provided information based on two local farmers markets groups to get the conversation started. The group conversation quickly turned to looking at challenges and opportunities.

The group agreed to the following:

- Involving more producers – and improving production - is key to moving the local food system forward.

Comments related to this include:

- Train more farmers, with special emphasis on young farmers, and use a team of VISTA volunteers to lead this effort.
- Develop seed banks
- Find ways to reduce risk for farmers by developing “patient” markets and making connections on their behalf
- Incorporate sustainable farming methods in teaching and technical assistance offerings

- Policy makers need to be educated and help support local food initiatives.

Comments related to this include:

- Figure out how to frame local food discussion in dollars and cents. Start with \$5k assessment with Food Council then expand
- Bring together financial and technical assistance to support network of producers to reach institutional markets
- Develop gubernatorial task force through the emerging West Virginia Food Council
- There is limited institutional support for farmers from West Virginia Department of Agriculture
- Cooperative Extension needs to broaden its focus from commodity agriculture
- Resources and infrastructure needs support.

(continued on page 16)

West Virginia (continued)

Comments related to this include:

- Most market managers are volunteer and need training
- Develop tool kit for farmers market or make the tool kits that exist more available
- Develop pilot projects to make TANF recipients more aware of how to purchase, plan, prepare fresh local food
- Encourage and develop produce auctions to provide additional market outlets.
- Involve more processors by offering value-added products on consignment at farmers markets
- Develop year round farmers markets that offer a full range of products
- Provide support to intermediaries, such as non profits, which play an important role in helping to build local food and support people's efforts to operate farm businesses.

Other comments related to efforts underway:

Monroe County Farmers Market: Janet McDaniel, Executive Director of Monroe County Farmers Market reports that they now have 80 members. They are developing markets in Charleston and are developing a strategic plan with the financial assistance of CAN. They are also the recipient of a community-based local food project system grant awarded by CAN in 2009. They are finding broad support for their effort, but local markets still struggle.

People in Pocahontas County are collaborating together and have developed 5 VISTA positions. Jim Cooper reported the goal is now to identify producers and to bring like minded folks together to build the local food system. Pocahontas County Extension is providing office space, and the County Commission is providing financial support.

According to Jo-Claire Corcoran, director of Big Creek People in Action, McDowell County's local food system is in its infancy stage. They need financial support to build greenhouses and for outreach. The county faces severe diabetes and obesity issues. She hopes to provide space for a farmers market this summer.

Fayette County Farmers Market board member Savannah Lyons reported that the Market now has 25 producers; 10-12 attended the Local Foods forum along with 55 people from the community. Local restaurant owners are increasingly engaged. The FCFM has four market locations, but doesn't see a lot of value added products. They received a CAN Grant in 2009 to underwrite their efforts. Part of this was used to build high tunnels at the Southern Appalachian Labor School to showcase season extension growing techniques.

Robin Wilson, VISTA volunteer with Step by Step said there needs to be a farmers market for every 8000 people. He remarked that the Calhoun County farmers market is doing well and growing steadily.

Bob Gregory is operating Berea Gardens, a faith-based demonstration and education farm in Calhoun County. He is offering a series of sustainable agriculture hand-on training sessions and is recruiting nationally.

Bill Reebel is a farmer in Mason County who has been involved in developing the Point Pleasant Farmers Market in Mason County. He stressed the need to take food to where people are, such as the new produce auction being developed in his region.

Tennessee/Southwest Virginia

Where does it make sense to work across state lines? Education about organic and sustainable Production – develop capacity – AU and extension education for the consumer about local products, availability, where the farms/farmers are, and local food guides (AU)

Development of farmers markets into TN (like 58 corridor in VA) (ASD/Jubilee/RR)

Tamara (Johnson County) and Denise / ASD – work to develop relationship that includes developing organics/ASD's capacity (Johnson Co./ASD)

(continued on page 17)

"Another excellent conference."

Tennessee/Southwest Virginia (continued)

Sally (RR) wants training and input from ASD/AH about produce price negotiations/farmer buy-in (RR/ASD)

National Policy – especially food safety is a priority

Farm 2 School in TN – Jubilee with Cassie Johnson at Food Security Partners of Middle TN with Obesity Initiative

ASD-grass fed/pastured beef in institutions (colleges-higher ed)

- Bath and Jackson Counties have large agricultural centers which include commercial prep kitchens, washing stations and a space for the farmers market.
- Farm-to-School projects are operating in some locations and the state has hired a full-time staff person to support this work. The same challenges experienced in other area are occurring here. Seasonality issues, infrastructure problems and processing are all factors to address.

Ohio

Distribution (Chaito Backhauling)

Appropriate scale for P.A.D.

Aggregation Site for central distribution

Build capacity for a shared use facility serving local markets (Nelsonville-ACEnet)

Prepare for the “drop”

Assume demand is infinite

Build the system together by creating co-operative systems – wrap arms around producers

Brand strategy

Think/work across region policy

- In Appalachian Kentucky, there are 10 state parks and 15 colleges and universities. Some universities are providing local foods but there is an opportunity to reach more of them. A bill was passed that encourages state-funded universities to buy local food. State parks have been mandated to publish their pricing of food purchases. This helps the farmers know how to price and if they can compete with the corporate produce providers or not.
- The Ag Development Board has a lot of money from the tobacco settlement, but very little of it is going to Appalachia. Perhaps more of it could be directed to sustainable ag in the mountains. Some of the smaller amounts of money have gone to various farmers and farmer markets in Appalachia, but only a handful of larger projects have been funded there.
- Kentucky is lacking an infrastructure of knowledge regarding local food systems. A mapping project needs to begin to link together the various projects that are already on the ground and the support groups that can help them. Unfortunately, there aren't enough intermediary organizations. But the resources that are there need to become a stronger network.

Kentucky

The Kentucky participants agreed that although there are several examples of positive ag projects in the Appalachian area of the state, there is much to be done. Some of the current projects were represented by participants including the Community Farm Alliance, Grow Appalachia, Heifer International, Laurel County African American Heritage Center and Pine Mountain Settlement School. Examples of other existing projects, gaps in the system and needs that we identified for moving forward include the following.

- Farmers markets are growing but there are many counties without any access. The distribution portion of the chain is a great need in all markets, from retail to wholesale to institutions. This problem ties in with the lack of communication connecting supply and demand.

CAN
Central Appalachian Network

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