

# Sustainable Communities in Appalachia

## Technical Assistance Program



Strengthening  
Community Livability:  
Actions and Strategies for  
Huntington, WV

December 3, 2014



## 1. Community Story

How can the community of Huntington, West Virginia, grow its economy by growing – and eating – local foods? Local residents and officials gathered on August 18 and 19, 2014 to explore answers to this question and to work on a plan to revitalize the region by promoting local foods. Held at the Heritage Farm Museum and Village, the workshop was spearheaded by Unlimited Future, Inc, a local nonprofit business incubator and training center.

Ideas explored by more than 30 workshop participants included organizing a Local Foods Council to connect various efforts to strengthen local foods; increasing local agricultural production and growing the market for local foods; providing entrepreneurship support for value-added producers; increasing sustainable use of rural lands; and promoting related community vitality initiatives.



*“We were excited to have so many local residents willing to volunteer their time and expertise toward creating a strong, workable plan to improve our region’s economy and livability by promoting local foods. This workshop was a first step toward crafting an action plan for helping to revitalize the Huntington region by supporting local food producers and increasing the availability of local foods throughout our community.” - Steering Committee leader Gail Patton, Executive Director of Unlimited Future, Inc.*

*Figure 1 – Parting group photo, day two of the workshop, August 19, 2014*

The workshop, along with several pre-meeting and post-meeting conference calls among local organizers, was supported by a technical assistance award to Unlimited Future, Inc. under the Sustainable Communities in Appalachia program sponsored by the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC), the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Project consultants from Renaissance Planning Group and ICF International, based in Charlottesville, Virginia, facilitated the process.

Huntington was established in 1871 by C&O railroad magnate Collis P. Huntington. Its location along the Ohio River and the nation’s first transcontinental railroad – and later near the confluence of Interstates 64, 77, and 79 - supported a brisk industrial economy for the ensuing hundred years. The city’s population peaked at more than 86,000 in the 1950s, then dropped steadily until stabilizing in the early 2000’s at around the 50,000 mark, within a tri-state region of about 366,000 people. Today, the City’s economy is driven by the healthcare industry with two teaching hospitals (Cabell Huntington and Saint Mary’s) that employ over 5,000 people. Marshall University, home of The Joan C. Edwards Medical School, employs 2,000 people.

Prosperity and good physical health are not, however, ubiquitous through the Huntington region. Cabell County has a poverty rate of 23%, and the tri-state area has an unemployment rate of 30%. More than one third of Cabell County residents are obese, putting them at high risk for a wide array of debilitating illnesses such as diabetes and heart disease. By promoting

affordable access to nutritious foods, the stakeholders involved in the local foods initiative aim to reduce the region's obesity problem while stimulating the growth of local farms and food-related businesses.

Complementing the rapidly growing local foods movement, the City of Huntington has recently embarked on targeted community and economic development initiatives, endeavoring to make Huntington a more livable city with thriving local businesses, increased green spaces, arts and entertainment events, improved alternative transportation pathways, and a serious focus on promoting a more active, sustainable community. Huntington's "Plan 2025" is a city-wide vision for the future of Huntington. The food council will align its work with the Plan's goals and strategies to aid in shaping that future.

The possibility of forming a Tri-State Food Council was explored during this workshop. A food council was envisioned as an opportunity for local stakeholders to create a multidimensional food system focused on rural to urban wealth creation, education, increased access to nutrition, and long-term economic and environmental sustainability. The food council would be built of community stakeholders, including non-profits, private businesses, and governmental organizations. Its work would fulfill goals in Huntington's "Plan 2025" to build a local food system that is more accessible for local farmers and provides low-income individuals with more healthy food options. The goal is to include those who are left out of the conventional food system.

Some of the key issues considered by local community organizers as potential areas of focus for a food council include the following items listed in the initial letter of interest to project sponsors:

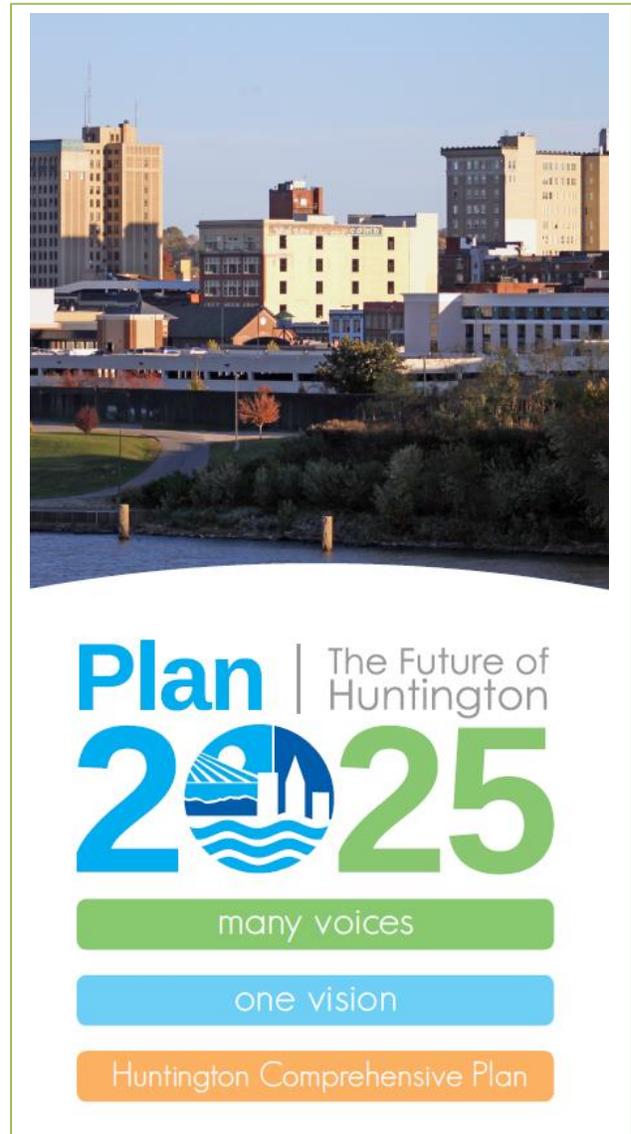


Figure 2 - Cover image of Huntington's Plan 2025  
<http://issuu.com/cityofhuntington/docs/plan2025>

- **Linking Rural Communities to City Commerce Centers:** A challenge for all farm to table and like initiatives is moving products from the rural farm to consumer market. The food council would engage state and regional partners and private businesses to investigate the need and scale of a cold packing facility that would be a center for aggregating farm fresh produce. This would enable area farmers to participate in farm to school programs and increase sales to restaurants and institutions.
- **Micro-Farm Enterprise Education:** As part of the revitalization of the historic “West End” of Huntington, Unlimited Future, Inc. received a Central Appalachian Network grant to fund the development of a high tunnel training facility. The food council would support education for small scale farmers in year-round growing within a high tunnel, as a way to increase their volume of production per year and stabilize their revenue stream. As advocates for urban agriculture development, the food council would seek to address issues with urban agriculture policy, ordinances, and entrepreneurship.
- **Improved Access to Nutrition:** The food council would look to address the need in impoverished neighborhoods to improve access to nutritious fruits and vegetables rather than packaged convenience food. The food council would work with food stores in these neighborhoods to increase the fresh food options.
- **Sustainable and Natural Land Use:** Rural lands in West Virginia are often the focus of extractive industry. The food council would focus on food production. It would also encourage farmers to use natural and organic farming practices to maintain the long term vitality of rural lands. The food council would engage Energy Efficient West Virginia to act as a sponsor of rural renewable energy projects that could include biomass production on agricultural land. The council could also explore the implementation of solar or wind energy to make farm operations more efficient.



*In 2012, Tri-State Local Foods, Inc, with entrepreneurial support from Unlimited Future, Inc., opened an innovative retail store under the direction of Unlimited Future Inc. called The Wild Ramp. A DBA of Tri-State Local Foods (which is a 501(c)3 under the IRS code), The Wild Ramp has 154 producers and continues to grow. During its first year of operation, The Wild Ramp returned more than a quarter of a million dollars to the local economy. By 2014, the market outgrew its initial location and moved to a newly renovated 2,500-square foot building in the city’s burgeoning West End. The Action Plan includes a strategy to complete a small commercial kitchen inside the market that will support cooking demonstrations and nutrition classes for customers and neighborhood residents.*

*Unlimited Future, Inc. is a micro-business incubator and resource center that is available to help food entrepreneurs and worker-owned co-ops get started. Unlimited Future is working with The Wild Ramp producers to help them develop their business and marketing strategies and expand into new markets.*

The Sustainable Communities in Appalachia program, run through a partnership of USDA, EPA, and ARC, supports community planning in small towns and cities throughout the Appalachian region that want to improve community livability and strengthen their local food system. The agencies selected Huntington as one of nine communities to receive technical assistance in

2014, each of which placed a particular emphasis on linking local food systems with revitalization initiatives. Huntington's work to support and locate the Wild Ramp in the 14<sup>th</sup> street corridor is an example of how this effort is supporting downtown revitalization efforts while at the same time growing and empowering the local foods economy.

Livability is a fairly new term for describing several timeless concepts in community planning. Cities and towns that are focused on improving livability, including Huntington, are taking steps to increase transportation choices so that people can walk, bike, or drive to meet their daily needs; add affordable housing close to work, school, and shops; diversify their economies to increase resiliency; and encourage growth and development in existing neighborhoods that already have supporting infrastructure in place. Many cities and towns, including Huntington, have also found that supporting local foods is an effective way to attract investment and bring more people to traditional downtown areas.

Huntington's participation in the program included a two-day workshop that provided the information and ideas on which this action plan is based. The community is also eligible for an implementation award from ARC of up to \$20,000 to help advance one or more of the ideas identified in this plan. The following sections describe the workshop and process leading to the action plan, describe the community's vision and values that are guiding its investments, and lay out a series of initiatives and next steps the community can take to realize its vision of a more livable future.

## 2. Community Engagement

A centerpiece of Huntington's participation in the Program was a two-day workshop that brought together key stakeholders from the city and officials from regional, state, and federal agencies that are in a position to help Huntington achieve its vision. One of the greatest benefits of the workshop was the development of new relationships within the

- *Unlimited Future, Inc.*
- *ACENet*
- *West Virginia Food and Farm Coalition (WVFFC) Aggregation and Distribution Working Group*
- *City of Huntington, including the Office of Planning and Zoning; Land Bank, Huntington's Urban Renewal Authority; and the River to Rail Initiative.*
- *American Institute of Architects West Virginia Chapter*
- *Create Huntington*
- *JL Foods (distributor)*
- *Region 2 Planning & Development*
- *Center for Business and Economic Research at Marshall University*
- *Huntington Regional Chamber of Commerce*
- *Blatt's Bee Farm*
- *Cabell County Farm Bureau*
- *Cabell-Huntington Convention and Visitors Bureau*
- *The Wild Ramp*
- *30 Mile Meal*
- *Savannah's Restaurant*
- *Savor Huntington*
- *Marshall University Sustainability Department*
- *Ohio Valley Environmental Coalition*
- *West Virginia Brownfield Assistance Center*
- *West Virginia Conservation Agency*
- *Cabell County Commission*
- *Bridgemont Sustainability Institute*
- *Coalfield Development Corporation*
- *Heritage Farm and Museum*
- *SCRATCH Project*
- *West Virginia University Extension*
- *Perennial Favorites*
- *Huntington's Kitchen*
- *Facing Hunger Food Bank*
- *Edward Tucker Architects*
- *Cabell County Health Department*
- *Marshall University Dietetics Department*

Figure 4 - Invited Stakeholders

city and between city stakeholders and these regional, state, and federal agencies. “Participating organizations are listed in Figure 4, and contact information is in Appendix C.

Participants identified obstacles and solutions for expanding access to local foods and created an action plan. The workshop started with a tour of key sites in the city including the downtown, the river-to-rail project, the riverfront, Unlimited Future, the Land Bank, the Wild Ramp, and Marshall University’s new art school downtown. A two-day work session involving more than 30 participants followed the tour. This first day included presentations on livability and the importance of local food systems and a discussion about the attendees’ vision for the city’s future. The second day was spent discussing related local initiatives, articulating goals, and identifying potential actions. The steps in the process that resulted in this action plan are described in Figure 5 below.

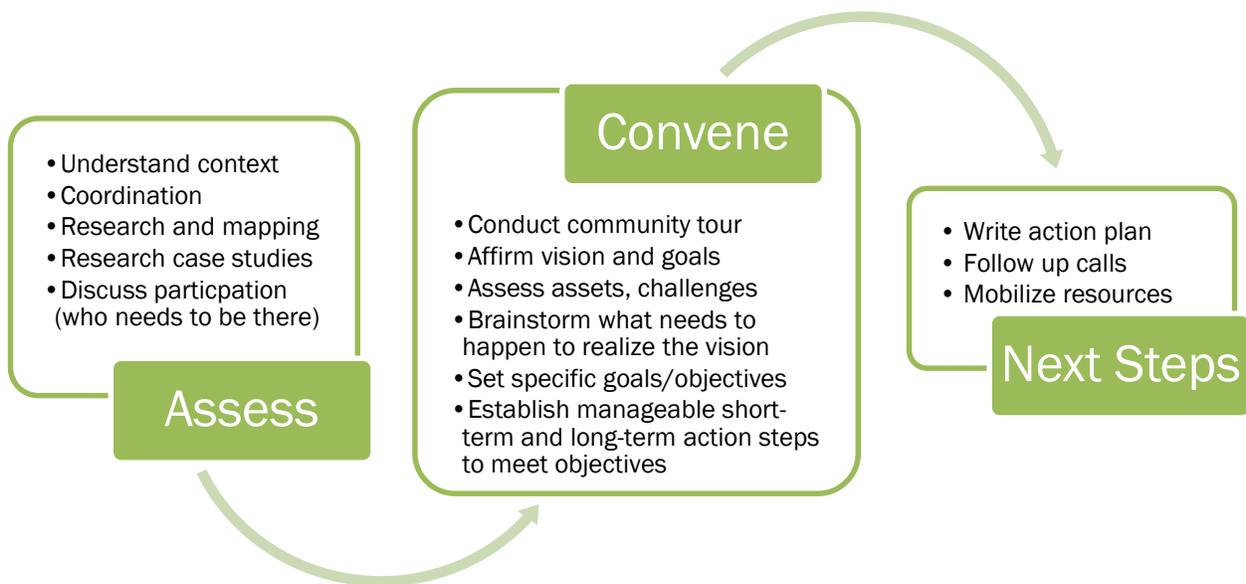


Figure 5 - Technical Assistance Process Diagram

### 3. Huntington’s Local Food System: Issues and Opportunities

Tri-State Local Foods, Inc. and its first project, The Wild Ramp market, are important pillars of the community’s local food system. USDA defines local food as “food produced, processed, and distributed within a particular geographic boundary that consumers associate with their own community.”<sup>1</sup> Essentially, the local food system connects local growers (supply) with local eaters (demand), allowing them to interact face to face.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> USDA ERS. *Local Food Systems: Concepts, Impacts, and Issues*. May 2010.

<sup>2</sup> Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture. Regional and Local Food Systems. Accessed March 3, 2014. [http://www.leopold.iastate.edu/marketing/food\\_systems](http://www.leopold.iastate.edu/marketing/food_systems).

National trends are indicating a growing awareness and consumption of locally produced foods over the past decade.<sup>3</sup> As shown in Table 1, the early 21<sup>st</sup> century ushered in an apparent resurgence of agriculture for Cabell County. In 1997, the number of farms in Cabell County was 305, down 19% from a total of 375 in 1987. By 2007, the number of farms jumped by more than 50% to 462; nearly 100 more farmers than 20 years before. The number of farmers dropped to 383 over the ensuing five years, a figure comparable to the 1987 level. In 2012, about a third of Cabell County’s farmers (121 of 383) listed agriculture as their primary occupation, a ratio similar to that of the 1990s and 1980s. The average age of farmers, however, has increased since the 1980s from the mid-50s to more than 60.

Table 1 - Key Local Agriculture Statistics for Cabell County, West Virginia

Cabell County	2002	2007	2012
<b>Total Farms</b>	438	462	383
<b>Total Farm Acres</b>	42,301	47,625	42,450
<b>Average Farm Size</b>	97	103	111
<b>Market Value of Sales (\$000)</b>	\$2,970	\$1,543	\$1,911 **
<b>Average Sales per Farm ***</b>	\$6,782	\$3,340	\$5,198
<b>Average Expenses per Farm</b>	\$7,436	\$7,510	\$8,421
<b>Average Age of Principal Operator</b>	54.9	56.9	60.6

\* 2012 Cabell County Ranking of Total Ag Sales: 40 of 55 WV Counties; 2,976 of 3,077 US Counties

\*\* In each Census since the 1980s, the vast majority of Cabell County farms made less than \$5,000.

The City’s emphasis on local foods can bring several benefits to public health, the economy and the environment. West Virginia suffers from relatively high rates of obesity, diabetes, and high blood pressure, which are closely linked to diet.<sup>4</sup> Better access to local fresh foods, combined with education on how to prepare them, can help people live healthier lives. Several food-related health statistics are presented in Table 2.

<sup>3</sup> Tropp, Debra. “Why Local Food Matters: The rising importance of locally-grown food in the U.S. food system – A national perspective.” National Association of Counties Legislative Conference, Agriculture and Rural Affairs Steering Committee Subcommittee on Agriculture. March 2, 2014.

<sup>44</sup> Center for Disease Control. Health Indicators Warehouse. Accessed July 25, 2014.

Table 2 – Diet-Related Health Indicators for Cabell County and West Virginia

Health Indicator <sup>5</sup>	Cabell County	West Virginia
<b>Diabetes, 2010</b>	13%	13%
<b>Adult Obesity, 2010</b>	34%	33%
<b>Food Insecurity, 2011 *</b>	16%	15%

\* Food insecurity means lack of access, at times, to enough food for an active, healthy life for all household members and limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate foods. <http://feedingamerica.org/hunger-in-america/hunger-studies/map-the-meal-gap.aspx>

Federal food assistance programs provide an opportunity to improve access to healthy local foods. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (cited by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation), 42% of the County’s school population was eligible in 2011 for the National School Lunch Program and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).<sup>6</sup> Participation in such programs may present opportunities for the school district and families to access more healthy local foods. Farmers’ markets can accept the EBT cards on which SNAP benefits are exchanged, and through the 2014 Farm Bill, SNAP benefits are doubled for the purchase of foods at farmers’ markets, such as The Wild Ramp.

A strong local food system also brings several environmental and economic benefits. On the economic side, strong demand for local foods keeps more food dollars in the local economy. This brings more income to local farmers that sell their produce at the market. The Wild Ramp currently sells products from more than 150 local food producers and artisans, and the number is constantly growing along with the market’s success. In the two years since the Wild Ramp market opened in June 2012, more than \$460,000 has been paid to local producers.<sup>7</sup> The economic benefits are related to the environmental benefits because a financially viable farm is more likely to stay in production rather than be developed for other uses. And farmers that sell local foods typically travel shorter distances to the market, which can reduce emissions related to transportation. All of the Wild Ramp’s producers are located within 250 miles of the market, and more than 75% are within 50 miles.<sup>8</sup>

Strengthening the local food system provides economic benefits for downtowns and the older neighborhoods that surround them. Farmers’ markets are popular attractions nationwide and often include more than just food. The most popular markets incorporate live music, cooking demonstrations, artisan vendors, and other features that attract more people and increase traffic for nearby stores. When the Wild Ramp outgrew the space at its first location, it moved into a new 2,500 square foot building along a historic commercial corridor in the part of town known as Old Central City. This move, subsidized by the city of Huntington, advanced the city’s

<sup>5</sup> Centers for Disease Control (CDC). Health Indicators Warehouse. <http://healthindicators.gov/Indicators/>. Accessed September 29, 2014

<sup>6</sup> Robert Wood Johnson Foundation County Health Rankings <http://www.countyhealthrankings.org/app/west-virginia/2014/overview> Accessed September 29, 2014

<sup>7</sup> The Wild Ramp. “Who We Are.” <http://wildramp.org/about-us/who-we-are/>. Accessed October 2, 2014.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

goals to reduce vacancies, prioritize development in existing commercial corridors, and promote commercial uses that serve residential needs. The presence of the indoor and outdoor market brings new foot traffic to the corridor and helps revitalize the neighborhood while providing much-needed access to fresh, local food for the neighborhood residents. The Wild Ramp, in return, benefits by a new location with additional space for possible cooking classes and other community events.

The Sustainable Communities in Appalachia Program recognizes the potential synergy between the local food system and a community's downtown economy. The remainder of this action plan describes Huntington's approach to enhancing this connection.

#### 4. Action Plan – From Vision to Implementation

Strengthening the local food system is a key component of the City's vision of a vibrant and authentic downtown and unique surrounding neighborhoods, filled with local shops and products that represent Huntington. The workshop facilitators led exercises and discussions that helped participants articulate their underlying values towards community and local, healthy foods. When asked to imagine and share positive stories from 25 years in the future, the discussion produced some consistent value-based themes relating to health, wellness, local agriculture, prosperity, tourism, and going-green. Here are some of the headlines from the future:

- **Local farmer turns 100, still selling tomatoes at the Wild Ramp market chain.**
- **Huntington rises out of ashes again.** The CDC rates Huntington as the healthiest city North America and Jamie Oliver has come back to celebrate.
- **Huntington launches waste water recycling program and power house in renewable energies.** The skate park users lead this program because they were tired of being flooded; 99 % of commercial properties have grey water systems; 90% of res have rain barrels or grey water systems.
- **Huntington named top ten agri-tourism destination attracting visitors worldwide.** It's where people come to learn about sustainability, and it's a vacation destination.
- **Small town solves urban decay.** Huntington solves urban decay with a more diverse economy, higher home values, improved education, lower unemployment, and increased population.

Discussions about the community's goals and vision for the future set an important framework for the action planning that followed. Figure 6 below shows the results of the visioning and values exercises wherein participants were asked to reflect on their beliefs about first community and then local and healthy food. During the second day of the workshop, participants turned their attention to identifying specific actions that will help Huntington achieve its goals. The goals and corresponding actions are outlined in Table 3 below, along with estimated dollar costs and existing resources associated with each strategy. The goals and action steps are presented in Appendix A in their complete form, which includes a time frame, lead role, supporting cast, costs, and potential resources.

### This I believe about Our Community...

- *We want it to be healthier.*
- *We're just starting to realize its potential.*
- *We are a diverse group.*
- *We are hard working. We have and can meet challenges.*
- *Our culture is often celebrated from the outside. We can learn to celebrate it from within.*
- *We are positive people, with kind hearts, working to make us better.*
- *We are way better than any report, statistic, or survey says!*
- *We are the perfect size to make change happen.*
- *We're on the verge of a Renaissance like none have seen.*
- *We can achieve health and planned growth.*
- *We can reshape and redefine ourselves.*
- *We'll keep our young people home and attract back those who left.*

### This I believe about Local and Healthy Food...

- *There is potential to provide enough for our own community.*
- *Once you try it you'll never go back*
- *If you build it they will come.*
- *We have the opportunity now to bring back the good that was here.*
- *It empowers people to grow their own. It heals them and community.*
- *There is potential to retain lost knowledge of previous generations.*
- *We want it to spread, make it cool.*
- *Nothing tastes better than a home-grown tomato.*
- *It reconnects us with our heritage.*
- *It is essential to quality of life.*
- *We haven't yet lost the farming generation, and the generation coming up is willing to learn.*
- *It is important physically and spiritually.*
- *Treat bodies with respect.*
- *Food is a proxy for thinking about all we do.*
- *It can address our two of our biggest problems: poverty and health.*
- *Food creates community. Food brings people together.*

Figure 6 - Results of the values exercise where participants are asked to state "This I believe..." about a) community and b) local and healthy food.

Table 3 - Summary of Action Plan Goals, Actions, and Funding Estimates

Goals and Actions		Funds Needed	Funds Secured	Funding Sources
<b>Goal #1</b>	<b>Organize Tri-State Local Foods Council</b>			
<b>Action 1.1</b>	Define leadership, structure and mission	-	-	
<b>Action 1.2</b>	Develop strategic plan	\$ 25,000	-	
<b>Goal #2</b>	<b>Provide Support for Food Entrepreneurs</b>			
<b>Action 2.1</b>	Create and offer specialized business training	\$ 126,600	\$ 126,600	RBEG; LFPP; CAN; CDBG
<b>Action 2.2</b>	Present GHP/GAP Training	-	-	
<b>Action 2.3</b>	Develop worker-owned coops	\$ 50,000	\$ 50,000	WVFFC; OCDC
<b>Action 2.4</b>	Create a regional brand/tell our stories	\$ 63,000	\$63,000	LFPP; CAN
<b>Goal #3</b>	<b>Promote Local Foods as Community Development</b>			
<b>Action 3.1</b>	Advance land-use policies and ordinances	\$ 150,000	\$ 40,000	City Budget
<b>Action 3.2</b>	Feasibility Study of compost program for urban agriculture	\$ 20,000	-	
<b>Action 3.3</b>	Make local food available to all (Mobile Market Project)	\$ 140,000	\$ 22,340	WVFMA; State of WV
<b>Action 3.4</b>	Community events to revitalize neighborhoods	\$ 25,000	\$ 4,500	RCBI; RBEG
<b>Goal #4</b>	<b>Identify strategies to increase production/meet demand</b>			
<b>Goal 4.1</b>	Investigate opportunities to develop management systems	\$ 53,800	\$ 40,800	LFPP; UFI
<b>Goal 4.2</b>	Launch a Food Hub	\$250,000	-	
<b>Goal 4.3</b>	Implement Refresh Appalachia; an Ag job training program	\$327,625	\$ 65,000	CAN; NE SARE; Art Place
<b>Total</b>		<b>\$ 1,231,025</b>	<b>\$ 412,240</b>	
<b>Total Funds Needed</b>		<b>\$ 818,785</b>		

## 5. Next Steps

ARC is providing a grant of up to \$20,000 to support the implementation of projects or supporting programs identified during the workshop. In addition to the implementation support provided by the ARC, Appendix F lists several other federal and state funding sources. The ARC grant could potentially be bundled with other funds to pursue a project beyond the \$20,000 financial limits. The funding request to ARC is being targeted to respond to actions 2.3 (create a regional brand), 2.4 (develop worker owned coops), and 3.4 (community events) by a project to upgrade the Wild Ramp kitchen to meet restaurant grade standards. This will allow the market to support food entrepreneurs and better tell the stories of our farmers by offering sampling, tastings, cooking and preserving classes that will promote the use of local foods in the community. The Wild Ramp will be working with an intern from the Dietetics Department at Marshall University to offer classes on healthy eating and meal planning. Longer range plans include the development of a worker-owned coop that will use the kitchen to provide the community with prepared foods for take-out.

Progress since the workshop has already been good as evidenced by additional funding from USDA. Unlimited Future was recently awarded a USDA Rural Development Rural Business Enterprise Grant to support the startup of the 30 Mile Meal Huntington (see Figure 7 below). One of the first projects will be a workshop scheduled for November 1, 2014 in which a specialist from ACENET will provide specialized “market-ready” training to food entrepreneurs.



Figure 7 - USDA State Director Bobby Lewis, Mayor Steve Williams, Lauren Kemp and Gail Patton of Unlimited Future (both are also Wild Ramp board members), Market Manager Shelly Keeney, and West Virginia Commissioner of Agriculture Walt Helmick announcing a USDA Rural Business Enterprise Grant of \$50,000 awarded to Unlimited Future to promote the local food economy and support the 30 Mile Meal Huntington, a local food brand and network that connects farmers, restaurants, and high-volume food buyers such as schools and hospitals. (Source, WR Facebook post, August 26, 2014)

### ***Unlimited Future & Wild Ramp Funding for Food Business Support***

#### **The City of Huntington**

2500 square foot Building at \$1/year lease

Five Year Term – January 2014 Start Date

Rental Value: \$15,600 per year. Building and two lots behind. One is covered for use as a farmers' market shed and is sub-leased to the Central City Market Association June – October. The Wild Ramp market occupies the building and manages the property in an effort to promote Community Development. The Wild Ramp was chosen to manage the property as part of the city's River to Rail initiative.

#### **West Virginia Department of Agriculture**

Marketing and Promotion of WV Agriculture

Five Year Term

\$43,000 per year for the marketing and promotion of WV Agriculture using a year-round indoor farmers' market model. Funds support the general operating expenses of the market which showcases WV agricultural products.

#### **USDA Rural Business Enterprise Grant**

Title: Food Enterprise and Jobs Accelerator

One Year Term – August 2014 Start Date

\$50,000 for personnel, marketing for clients, business technical assistance with clients, local food networking events, technical assistance through Leslie Schaller of ACENet in Athens, Ohio including three site visits, three all day training visits, six webinars for staff and partners and curriculum design.

#### **Local Food Promotion Program**

Title: Building Capacity for Distributing Local Foods in the Ohio River Valley

Two Year Term – September 2014 Start Date

\$50,000 per year/ \$100,000 total

Hire a full time staff person to develop a distribution network from Athens, Ohio to Huntington, WV. Technical assistance and training from ACNet, The West Virginia Food and Farm Coalition and The Value Chain Cluster Initiative that will help to create physical connections to our partners around the state.

#### **Central Appalachian Network**

Title: Building and Marketing the Wild Ramp Value Chain

One Year Term – February 2014 Start Date

\$8,000 for 30 Mile Meal licensing and training, Wild Ramp store signage, IPAD & kiosk for videos and marketing, and producer development assistance.

#### **Community Development Block Grant (CDBG)**

Title: Start-Up Huntington

One Year Term – July 2014 Start Date

\$25,000 for business training and support to city residents who want to start food and other businesses.

### *Post Workshop Updates and Activities*

UFI, the City, and other partners have been able to share these additional post-workshop updates:

- UFI is working with the WV Food and Farm Coalition, ACNEt and The Ohio Cooperative Development Center to conduct initial research and meetings with potential members of a worker-owned co-op which would generate prepared foods that people could pick up on their way home from work.
- Six of ten planned videos about Wild Ramp farmers have been produced to “tell the story” of local foods. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O3bgXa9Lmfc>
- Michael Botticelli, Acting Director of National Drug Control Policy paid a visit to Huntington after hearing about their work to reduce drug use in Huntington. “He toured the Healing Place: a program to help recovering addicts get back to work, and several other places of interest including The Wild Ramp. He was very impressed with the work of the City and the Wild Ramp. [http://thehealingplaceofhuntington.org/?page\\_id=544](http://thehealingplaceofhuntington.org/?page_id=544)
- West VA AIA Livable Communities program representatives came to Huntington for a free one-day workshop on October 23, 2014. The group conducted a walking tour of 14<sup>th</sup> St. W and held a design charette at the West End Library. The committee will develop recommendations and a rendering of a design idea to improve livability in the Central City area. This report will be presented to the River to Rail Steering Committee and the City.
- The city had two food-oriented festivals in October, 2014: a Harvest Festival (partnership with Central City farmers market) and an Oktoberfest celebration (partnership with Historical Society).
- The Huntington Urban Renewal Authority’s Land Bank program organized the WV BAD Buildings Summit 2014 (blighted, abandoned and dilapidated properties) with the Center for Community Progress in Washington, DC, the Northern WV Brownfields Assistance Center, WV Community Development HUB and Coalfield Development Corporation. 11 community teams attended from all over the state, with a total of 82 attendees. The Summit explored creative reuse ideas for these properties to align with the needs of the local foods movement.
- 2014 Central Appalachian Network (CAN) was held October 20-21, 2014 and was an opportunity for many of the partnership listed here to discuss collaboration and next steps. One initiative in the works is a plan to develop a distribution network from Athens, Ohio to Abingdon, VA with multiple stops in WV on the way. This network will be developed by Appalachian Sustainable Development (ASD) in Abingdon, VA; ACNEt in Athens, OH; Rural Action in Athens County, OH; The WV Food and Farm Coalition & Members; RCBI and UFI.

- The James Beard Foundation ([www.jamesbeard.org](http://www.jamesbeard.org)) and Food Tank ([www.FoodTank.com](http://www.FoodTank.com)), developed the first annual "Good Food Org Guide." Five organizations from West Virginia were chosen including: The Collaborative for the 21st Century Appalachia, Southern Exposure Seed Exchange, West Virginia Food and Farm Coalition, West Virginia University (WVU) Small Farm Center, and The Wild Ramp <http://www.herald-dispatch.com/news/briefs/x1653505242/Wild-Ramp-chosen-for-the-new-Good-Food-Org-Guide>

## 6. Appendices

- Appendix A: Implementation Action Plan Tables
- Appendix B: Local Food System Diagram
- Appendix C: Invited Stakeholders
- Appendix D: Presentation Slides
- Appendix E: Workshop Photo Album
- Appendix F: Funding Resources
- Appendix G: Additional References and Resources



# LIVABLE COMMUNITIES LOCAL FOOD SYSTEM

2015

*This report will review the progress toward recreating a local food system, since the Livable Communities Action Plan was published in December 2014.*

# OVERVIEW

## Overview

### RECREATING THE FOOD SYSTEM

The Livable Communities in Appalachia Technical Assistance program culminated in a community engagement event hosted at Heritage Farm in Huntington, WV. On August 19<sup>th</sup>, 2014, leaders gathered from thirty community organizations and businesses in the economic development, farming and food, and sustainability sectors. The event focused on creating an action plan to increase food based economic opportunities and sustainability, improve food access, and utilize local foods as a community development strategy. In small groups, a broad goal with several action steps was outlined in each planning area. The small groups considered the partners, resources, funds, and a lead organization needed to implement each action step. These conversations were captured in a report that was published on December 3, 2014. *View online: <http://goo.gl/zd3SFu>*

Since the conclusion of the technical assistance program the work has continued to gain momentum and produce measurable results. This report will review the accomplishments of the past year including leveraged funds, increased organizational capacity, and the lasting impact of the technical assistance program.

### LEVERAGING FUNDS

Throughout the course of the year Unlimited Future, the lead organization, has leveraged over \$1,000,000 of federal, state, and private funding in collaboration with The Wild Ramp, Agriculture Innovations at Robert C Byrd Institute, and Coalfield Development Corporation.

### HIGHLIGHTING SUCCESS

Unlimited Future has grown the 30 Mile Meal regional food branding program, which was able to create a model for food business collaboration with the WV Hot Dog Project. The 30 Mile Meal acts as a single point of information for volume buyers like restaurants, to access local food resources, while also connecting to the community. .

The Wild Ramp has returned over \$1,000,000 to local farmers and food businesses since opening in 2012. The market has grown immensely in sales and organizational capacity. Through a partnership with Robert C Byrd Institute an efficiency assessment was completed to refine the business model and streamline operations.

Refresh Appalachia is a new job training program that will grow farmers and supply food to volume buyers and individual customers. This initiative will drive the supply chain development as it scales to meet its full potential and create opportunities for collaboration with existing farms.

# GOALS AND ACTION STEPS

## Goals and Action Steps

### GOAL #1 ORGANIZE TRI-STATE LOCAL FOOD COUNCIL

- ✓ The Idea of the food council enabled the local food leaders to think about the big picture and the coordination needed to recreate the food system. While the council was not formally created, the discussions helped define each key partners' role in the food system and strengthened relationships.
- ✓ Unlimited Future took on the 30 Mile Meal as a branding and technical assistance program to create networks for collaboration between local food businesses. The Wild Ramp can now focus on being a premiere local food market, while 30 Mile Meal expands opportunities in new markets.

### GOAL #2 PROVIDE SUPPORT FOR FOOD ENTREPRENEURS

- ✓ Unlimited Future has identified the specialized needs of food businesses and defined specialized programs to create strong business and marketing strategies. Unlimited Future engaged local food experts from Appalachian Center for Economic Networks, which has more than 30 years or experience with local food businesses and provides a commercial processing kitchen in Athens, OH. Two USDA grants were secured to support this work; Rural Business Development Program (2014-2016) and Local Food Promotion Program (2014-2016).
- ✓ New Leaf Cooperative will create opportunities for food entrepreneurs and consumers. The cooperative formation has been completed and over \$10,000 of pledges from prospective members have been committed. The cooperative will produce prepared, ready-to-eat or easy to reheat meals with local ingredients. The cooperative will provide farmers with a market for seconds and employ low resource and economically disadvantaged women.
- ✓ 30 Mile Meal Huntington hosted the second Buyer Grower Expo, where farmers and volume buyers participated in a speed dating session. The event generated new partnerships between farmers, restaurants, and institutions. The 30 Mile Meal Huntington program continues to develop its brand, marketing strategies, and resources for participating businesses.
- ✓ The WV Dog, an all locally sourced hot dog, was a collaborative marketing project sponsored by 30 Mile Meal Huntington. The WV Dog combined the efforts of 12 local food businesses to make the hot dog, bun and all the toppings. The project raised \$5,000 on Kickstarter with 15 business sponsors and 53 individual sponsors.



## GOALS AND ACTION STEPS

The hot dog introduced local foods to a new audience at the 11<sup>th</sup> Annual WV Hot Dog Festival. The project was an absolute success from raising community awareness to creating a lasting relationship between a farmer and processor.

### GOAL #3 PROMOTE LOCAL FOODS AS COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

- ✓ Unlimited Future is a key partner in the City of Huntington's River to Rail Committee and Fairfield Development programs. This year the River to Rail Committee created a strong foundation for the America's best Communities Competition sponsored by Frontier Communications. Huntington has made into the second round of a multi-year competition for a three-million dollar investment prize.
- ✓ The Wild Ramp is an anchor organization for the Old Central City business district redevelopment and draws more than 500 people per month to its local food market. The Wild Ramp hosted and cosponsored a variety of events this year; Inaugural Stink Fest (Ramp Festival), Old Central City Days, Salsa Competition, Let's Cook Local (monthly cooking classes), Earth Day, Sustainability Fair, 100 Mile Meal at Marshall, Way Back Weekend, Italian Festival, and backyard gardening classes.
- ✓ The Food Bank CSA is a food access program created about of a partnership between The Wild Ramp and Facing Hunger Food Bank. It enables 240 seniors to access seasonal and fresh local vegetables. This program will begin its 3<sup>rd</sup> year in 2016.
- ✓ Unlimited Future and Marshall Sustainability Department partnered on a grant to study the feasibility of city wide compost. The composting pilot study has yet to be funded, however, we have further developed our concept and built strong relationships with many sectors of the community.
- ✓ The Wild Ramp renovated its building to install a restaurant kitchen, in order to improve marketing and host cooking classes. The Kitchen project was funded by the Implementation Grant of the Livable Communities Program and will be complete by December 2015.

### GOAL #4 IDENTIFY STRATEGIES TO INCREASE PRODUCTION/DEMAND

- ✓ Refresh Appalachia is an agricultural job training and entrepreneurship development program that was established in three counties (Wayne, Mingo and Lincoln) in October 2015. The program was launched by a Beginner Farmer and Rancher (USDA- NIFA) and expanded with POWER Grant. The WV Department of Agriculture is supporting the program with a Specialty Crop Block Grant and technical assistance support. The program has built a high tunnel and will start growing at several locations, including a former strip mine site. Refresh Appalachia will create a network of Learning Farm Incubator Sites,

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which will serve as demonstration sites. The Refresh Appalachia Program has two major elements that support skill development for beginner farmers:

- Social Enterprise Employee Development-(SEED) will model its training program after Coalfield Development Corp.'s successful Quality Jobs Initiative (QJI) construction program, which currently, has over 15 employees. This program is "high touch" having a transformative impact on young lives. SEED will target at risk young adults, ages 18-25, earning less than 50% of the area median income or unemployed living in Lincoln County. SEED participants will work according to the 33-6-3 model: 33 hours a week spent producing food, 6 hours a week devoted to attaining an associate's degree, and 3 hours are committed to life skills coaching.
  - Broad Outreach and Training is geared towards all beginning farmers in surrounding counties looking to enhance business management, sustainability, and improve production. Many of the offered workshops and trainings will take advantage of seasonal opportunities at the working demonstration sites.
- ✓ Developing and connecting Food Hubs has been a focus of the WV Food and Farm Coalition's Hub Club. The group meets monthly via conference call to discuss aggregation and distribution opportunities and challenges. The Hub Club group has also sponsored field experience and networking trips to sites, such as, The Wild Ramp, Alderson Community Food Market, Appalachian Sustainable Development, Heart and Hand Market, and Grow Ohio Valley. These field experiences enable the Hub Club to see each other's operations, ask questions, and problem solve as a group.
- ✓ The Robert C. Byrd Institute sponsored a study of the food distribution capacity and resources that could support a regional distribution network. This report supported the concept that connecting Abingdon, VA and Athens, OH, where two major food hubs are located, would create opportunities in West Virginia. The RCBI Hub Report showed that there are eight active food distribution companies and most were looking for local suppliers. A barrier to accessing these existing systems are lack of Food Safety Certification and lack on farm processing and packaging capacity. Both of these issues are a priority to address with training and technical assistance.

A SPECIAL THANKS TO ALL OF OUR PARTNERS AND FRIENDS WHO SUPPORT OUR WORK AND  
MAKE IT FUN!

Lauren Kemp, Program Director  
30 Mile Meal Huntington



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