

Alleghany Agricultural Coalition
Food Hub Project - June 2013

“Connecting Growers to Buyers”
What is, and what we want it to be.

5/31/2013

Colette Nester

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Food Hub Project

May 26, 2013

Executive Summary

Alleghany Agricultural Coalition (AAC) acting as Project Management Team and Grayson LandCare as Fiduciary Agent and resource sponsor with funding provided by Heifer International, Seeds of Change and oversight provided by Blue Ridge Women in Agriculture, conducted a six month Appalachian Food Hub Project. The purpose of the project was threefold: First to assess the current regional food system in our secluded, yet geographically and visually vibrant region of Northwest North Carolina and Southwest Virginia (Counties include; Ashe and Alleghany County NC and Grayson and Carroll County VA.), second to build collaboration and communication between the participants in the local food system and third, to construct a blueprint of the needs of the regional food system to provide local residents with a reliable, secure supply of food grown in a way the sustains the regions resources and provides a reasonable wage for the farmer and others the engage in food production, aggregation, delivery, and distribution. The project management team outlined three phases to the project and conducted them concurrently throughout the duration of the project. Before getting to the details of the project, I'd ask readers to consider the following article published by Dr. Jerry Moles, Ph.D. Stanford University, Facilitator, Grayson LandCare; Founding Board Member, SustainFloyd; Advisor, Virginia Tech College of Natural Resources & Environment; Member, Virginia Tech Beginning Farmer & Rancher Coalition; Advisor, Appalachian Foodshed Project

FOOD SECURITY FOR THE SOUTHERN APPALACHIANS BY CREATING A PROFITABLE AND SUSTAINABLE REGIONAL AGRICULTURE

A central question that must be answered as we plan and determine where investments are to be made to accomplish a region food system mission is what are the production and distribution activities at the moment? Once this is known, we can then ask what is required to increase productivity and to deliver affordable healthy food to the people living in the region. Finally we must ask how the development of a food production and distribution system fits into a plan of economic development providing fair returns and living wages for all involved?

Agriculture is complex: the relationship of people to their landscapes and watersheds and to processing and distribution systems that delivers consumable materials from the field to the mouths of consumers, ourselves included. There are three fundamental energies involved. The first is solar energy and we as residents of the mountains must decide how an array of plants and trees, solar collectors all, must be arranged on our landscapes to provide for food, fiber, forage and fuel. The second comes in the form of capital or currency, the capacity to command goods and services, and decisions must be made as to how, where, and with whom investments are to be made to achieve our mission and where might the capital be acquired.¹ The third is human energy, how we need to deploy ourselves in getting on with the mission? What information, expertise and skills are required to make us effective players in determining our food future?

We must enlarge our understanding of our natural resource endowments viewed through the lenses of

¹ While it has been suggested that I've neglected to include the use of fossil and other energies, I've chosen to consider them as part of capital investments covered in the capacity to command goods and services.

meeting our own needs and from demands by people beyond our region for products for which we have a competitive advantage. What is being imported that can be produced here and what can we export that matches or exceeds the quality and prices of items in surrounding regions? We must think of increasing the wealth in our communities by the exchanges of goods and services among ourselves and gaining fair value for all that is shipped away. As part of our strategy, we must think in terms of local ownership of enterprises that produce, process, and distribute natural resource dependent products and new opportunities for fair returns for local capital now invested elsewhere.

We must think geographically because we live in a mountainous region with ridges and valleys that offer different resource endowment opportunities and constraints from north to south and from higher elevations to lower elevations. Growing seasons, soil types, and water availability make possible the production of different crops at different times and, through carefully planning, mutually supportive trade among our communities become possible. Further, we must consider transportation networks, existing and needed, as we plan for bulking centers, least cost local distribution, and access to external markets.

We must think of scale, the size of enterprises and cooperative ventures required to meet competitive costs per unit produced. In short, certain efficiencies in terms of production, processing, and distribution costs must be met to be effective players in the various marketplaces. Efficient or profitable scale or size of enterprise is dependent upon relationships to buyers. Smaller producers who reach consumers through direct sales, farmers markets, and community supported agriculture (CSAs) can capture more of the final buyers' payments than can the producers who sell to distributors, processors, and regional stores and chains. As scale is increased – a larger number of people served -- greater costs in infrastructure and technology are incurred and the distribution of the payments by the final consumer is shared with more people including those who provide and service the technology and others who process and deliver goods to larger markets. Efficiencies are technologically dependent which, in turn, are dependent upon capital investment. So in consideration of efficiency to meet market requirements, investment opportunities must be identified that will allow profitable enterprises that serve different types of markets.

We must think of synergies, taking best advantage of all that living along the ridge tops and down the valleys offers. The first set of synergies will be discovered through working together, discovering our strengths by combining our talents, skills, land, labor, and capital into effective organizations. This means we must share with everyone our mission and what we're learning and inviting them to find their places to contribute and benefit.

Beyond organizing ourselves, we must take best advantage of all of our resource whether to see that they are sustainably used or determine if the waste for one is a treasure for the second. For example, the cattle farmers produce sweet corn and use the fodder that remains to feed their animals. By adding pumpkins, the demand for labor continues between the vegetable season and the cutting and shipping of Christmas trees making life more secure for many. By improving forage and banking grass, herd size can be reduced and profits increased. Compost is now being made taking "waste" and improving soils. We're just getting started. We see opportunities unfolding as we continue along this path.

Above all, food production must be predictable and reliable and yet climatic and economic conditions are variable and often unpredictable from week to week in growing seasons and over longer periods due to drought, severe storms, under and over supply of produce, market manipulations, changes in capital

availability, etc. Reduction of risk in food supply must be part of the planning. Enterprises must be protected through insurance to compensate when the unforeseen occurs. The banking of capital resources and food supplies is required to compensate when crops fail and reductions in available supplies increase costs and reduce the availability of food.

We're dealing with complexities beyond our comprehension and imagination, a mosaic of flows of solar energy, water, capital, food, machines, and people and the growth of plants and animals upon which our very existence depends. In order to choose next steps, we must know what is on the ground at the moment, who is doing what that makes possible the production, processing, and distribution of our food and how these activities can become more efficient and expanded to meet our needs both in the present and future. Given we know what is present, we can be more specific in what is needed. And this is the reason for this report to initiate the sharing of information to facilitate collaboration and cooperation. We're all in this together, we must eat every day.

*Jerry Moles
April 12, 2013*

As Dr. Moles so eloquently states, “*What is on the ground at the moment*”, was our shared concern. In reviewing current data assembled by extension office and other regional census information, we found a large gap in the recording of food production in the region. So our first step was to record our food system “as is” with current data on food production, sales, demands and supply. We assembled a project team in mid-January 2013 that included professional growers, business owners, entrepreneurs, a graduate student, farmers’ market managers, and our facilitator, a former professor, Dr. Jerry Moles. We created surveys and questionnaires to identify and capture important information; and also interviewed key players in the food system in our area. Some surveys were made available online, or mailed to participants, and others were interviewed. This data was used to justify additional resources, assist with collaborations and give us a basis for farmer, consumer and food buyer needs in our region.

Not willing or to just conduct another study, the project team initiated an immediate collaboration and communication strategy. Each member was given responsibilities to interview regional food participants, extension service agents, policy and government officials and engage in workshops and farm tours to meet the producers and consumers and more importantly to begin building a network of food participants. Included in our goals was to create social networks such as a Facebook pages, websites, and email listservs.

The project team realized that a sustainable project will require resources, a plan, and the strategy to build the region’s long term regional food “blueprint”. That blueprint includes the identification of the current situation, addresses the needs to resolve the challenges, and estimates the resources required to achieve a sustainable regional food system.

Ultimately we envision a return of the region’s vibrant agricultural heritage, the reduction of obesity in our residents, an increase in the economic stability of the region through food and the fair wage of its producers, and finally a prideful and increasingly beneficial feeling of well-being that motivates other entrepreneurs, tourist, and young adults to live, work, visit and engage in life activities in our special corner of the Appalachians.

It was also exciting to not simply “ask” participants what their needs were, but to offer a glimpse of a

project whose added goal was to “Connect Growers to Farmers”, and by utilizing their answers, finding ways to tackle barriers to expansion; and finding ways to collaborate with other agricultural entities to share these grower concerns with. At each request for information, our website offered resources including workshop presenters, upcoming regional workshops in Virginia and North Carolina, and farm tours that would give growers ideas and concrete examples of success stories. Within the first month of the Appalachian Food Hub Project, we held a workshop that revealed a large number of beginning or transitioning farmers that have moved into our micro-region had desires to farm, but needed support. Our blueprint shows those results. Analyzing the data and telling a story is critical to where we want to go from here. And, the continuing gathering of grower and buyer needs will ensure future generations of farmers and food artisans have a voice in agricultural policies and economic development.

We cannot do what is needed alone. To help with the collection of data, established agencies such as the Cooperative Extension, Soil and Water Division, Farm Bureau and others will need to share information about production, labor, and other critical components to drive collaboration for a sustainable agricultural system. These collaborations will also allow us to leverage resources, including funding and infrastructure to ensure small scale agricultural producers are part of the long term planning of our micro-regions. Agriculture produces millions of dollars of revenue in our area, but few of those dollars are coming from locally grown and consumed foods. We’ll need to shift the balance to encouraging farmers to “feed ourselves first”, and that goes against conventional thinking. Efforts to educate and advocate this message are critical for the success of the Local Food Hub Project in the long term.

The Appalachian Food Hub Project Plan

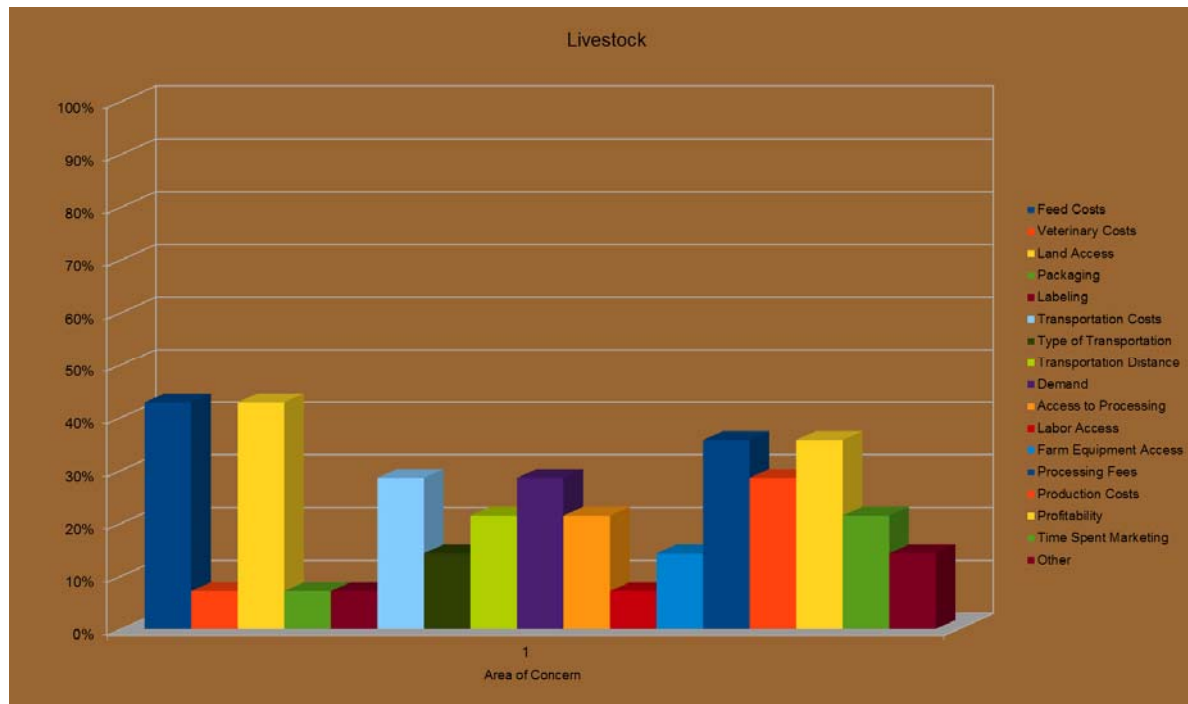
PHASE I – ASSESSING THE LOCAL FOOD NEEDS AND ASSETS OF OUR REGION

The Appalachian Food Hub Project created, distributed and compiled data from assessments for the following:

1. Farmers, growers, food artisans:

- Assessing the current production levels of food products grown, raised, or made in our area. These questionnaires were available online – and mailed to producers. This information was also made available to the Lansing & Ashe Farmers Market Managers. Approximately 27 were returned or completed. Data collected included:
 - Demographics: farm size, acreage in production, products grown & sold
 - Production numbers/types under the following three categories:
 - Livestock
 - Fruits & Vegetables
 - Value Added Products
 - Sales on products annually, locations of product sales
 - Acreage, certifications, methods of production
 - Infrastructure utilized (trailers, refrigeration, processing types/location)
 - Risk management & technology utilized (cell phone, internet)
 - Barriers to expansion (*self-identified*)

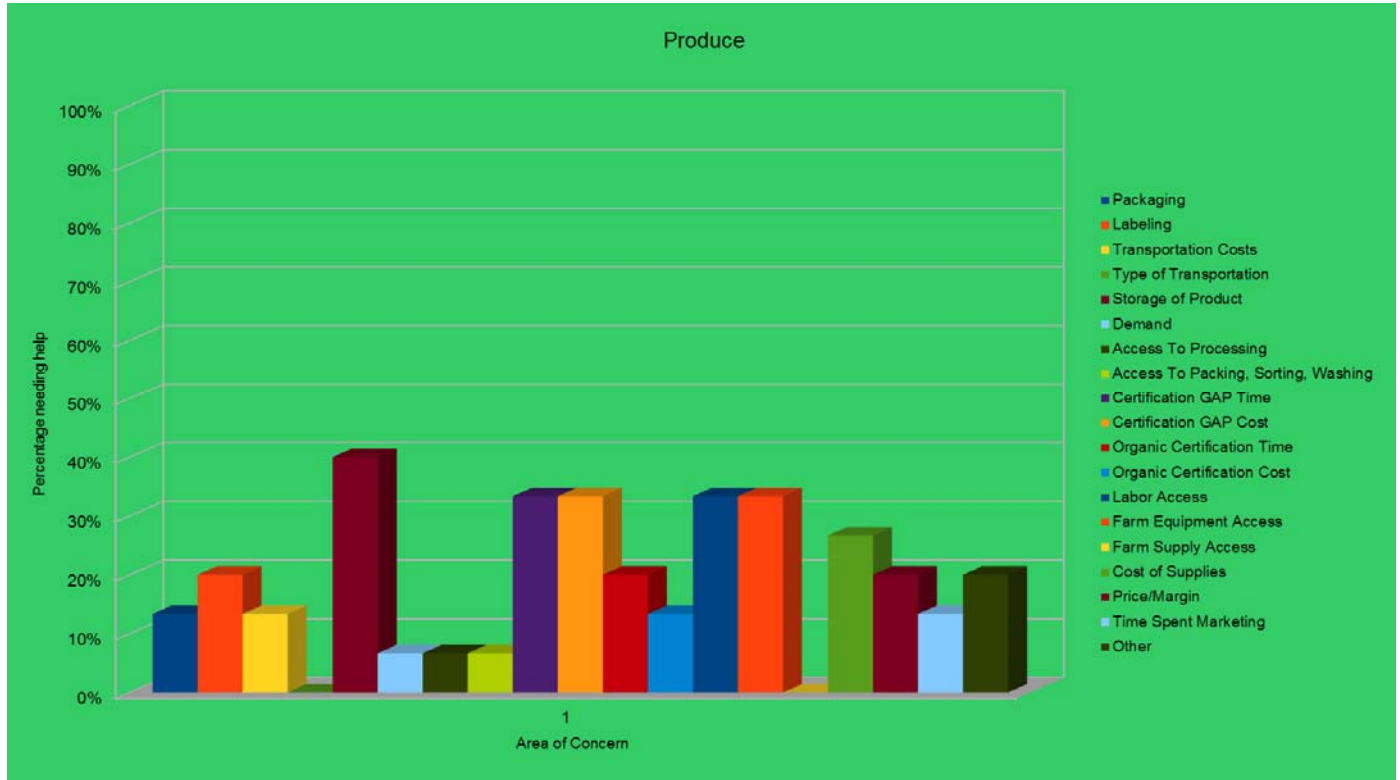
The survey results were collected and charted to visually quantify the top concerns or challenges that face our regions producers. A list of the top three in each area include:



Top Concerns for Livestock Producers: Feed costs, profitability, land access

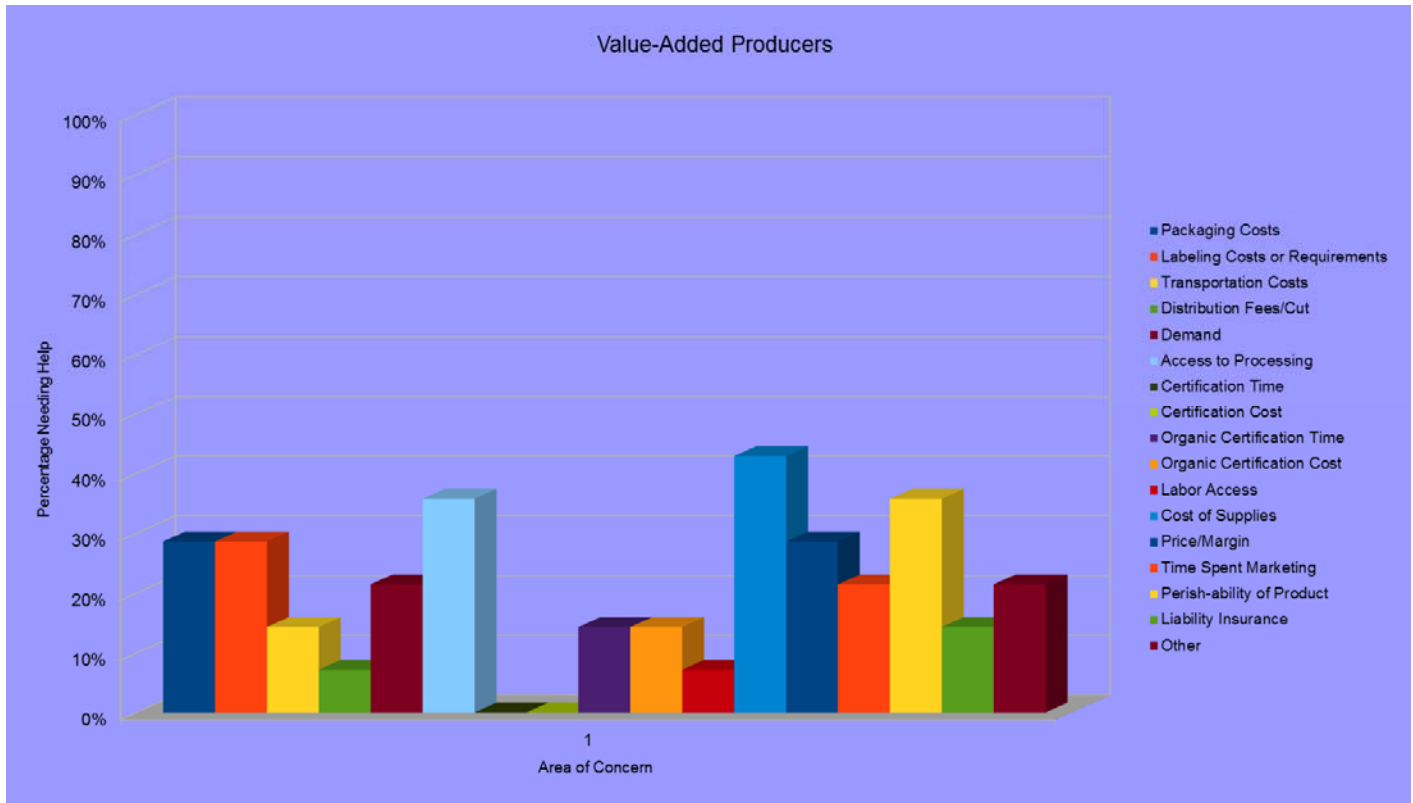
We compiled results from 15 respondents, all of which are livestock producers that sell their meats in the local food system. We didn't assess the needs of cattle producers, or dairies; whose livestock or products leave the region – and may not return as food sources. For livestock (food) producers, the majority indicated high feed costs, low profit margins on meat products, and the lack of sufficient grazing or hay

fields to sustain a profitable livestock model are the top three barriers to expansion of their operations. Several other common barriers to expansion include access to farm equipment, marketing time, processing fees and production costs. The top barriers to expansion may be addressed through the introduction or support of cooperatives, agricultural entity resources or partnerships to increase buying power, form regional marketing branding, increase locations of local food products, and match retiring land owners to beginning farmers for land utilization. Other survey responses indicated more specific needs, such as inexperience with direct marketing of meat products, having large acreage without plans for production, and these needs would be addressed through individualized counseling by a food hub coordinator, or referral to an agricultural mentor.



Top Concerns for Produce Growers: Storage of products, organic certification cost & time

Fruit and vegetable producers indicated the need for sufficient cooling and storage capacity for their products, to extend the shelf life and improve product quality. Many products become perishable quickly without proper temperature holding, and growers have indicated a desire for processing, aggregation and distribution facility needs. Also, higher prices can be realized with certain certifications such as USDA Organic or GAP (Good Agricultural Practices), however, record keeping, fees, and the extra effort can often offset any increased profits. Through workshops and field trips, we’ve also discovered that many fruit and vegetable producers have a great hunger for information, particularly season extension, succession planting, and “ideas” on how to fully utilize small tracts of land, but aren’t able to navigate the vast amounts of information available online, and want hands on experience.

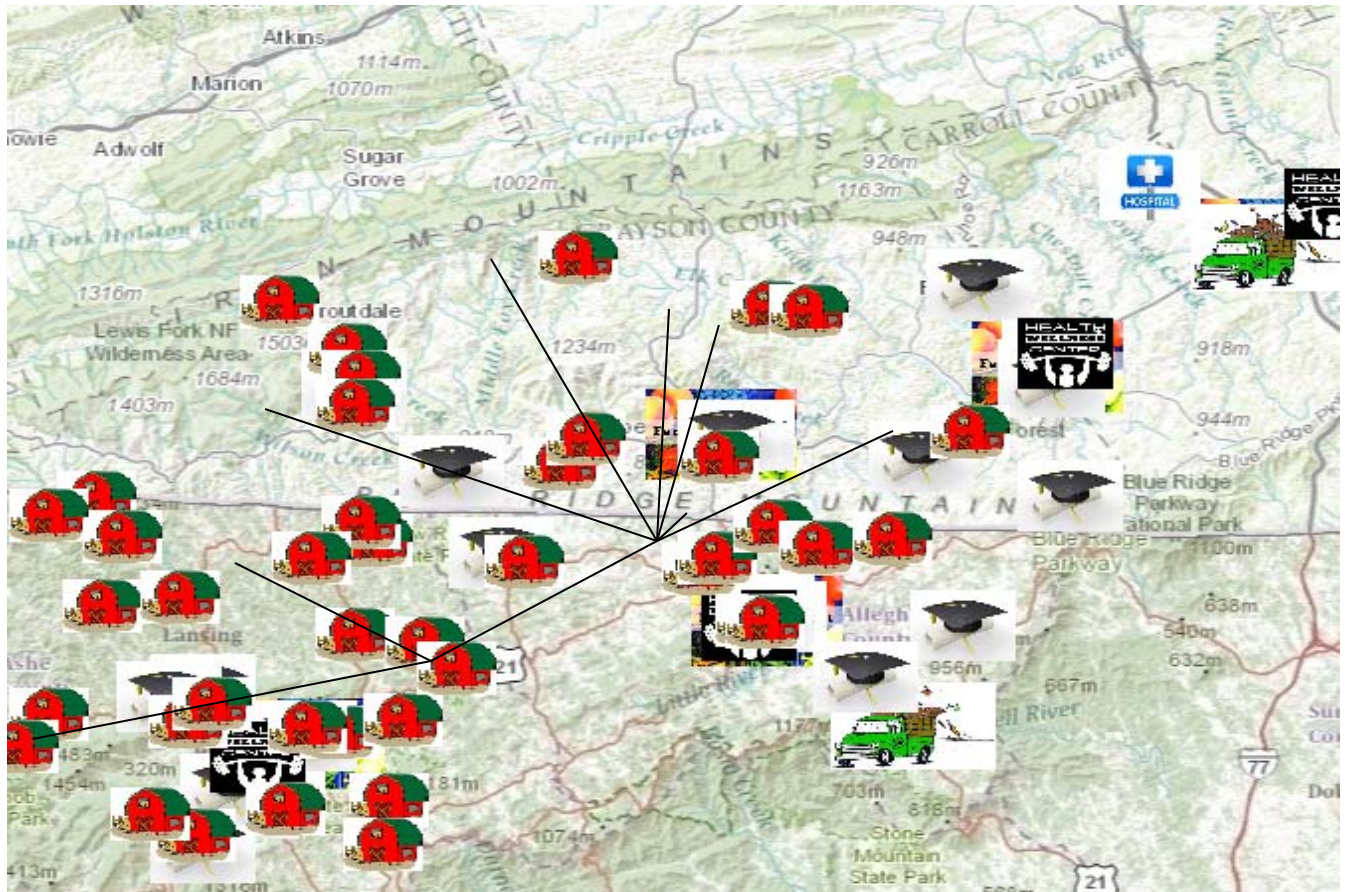


Top Concerns for Value Added Producers/Artisans: Cost of supplies, perishability, access to processing

Again, the top needs for value added producers or food artisans would benefit from the formation of a cooperative to increase purchase power. The availability of a P.A.D. facility nearby would allow products to be staged in a temperature controlled environment, creating efficiency for distribution, and allow for branding and marketing opportunities. And while this region has several commercial kitchen operations, several are underutilized or cost prohibitive for small producers. A need to simultaneously build the regional branding and entrepreneurship capacity in the region, while ensuring affordable fees for budding food artisans will increase economic opportunities as well as meet growing demands for “all things local”.

Mapping these growers/artisans and routes on a GIS system.

This will allow us to see where farms and artisans are, where distributors travel to pick up and deliver foods, and ultimately – to assist us in identifying inefficient & efficient models to guide us in the future. The mapping is critical in looking at routes food travels from the grower/producer to the buyer. Fuel, transportation & storage (truck, trailer, refrigeration, etc.) issues affect profitability and more importantly the amount of time a farmer/artisan is away from their production site to ensure their products get to their final destination. As the demands for local food increases, so too does the need for improved and efficient delivery systems that benefit the grower and buyer alike.



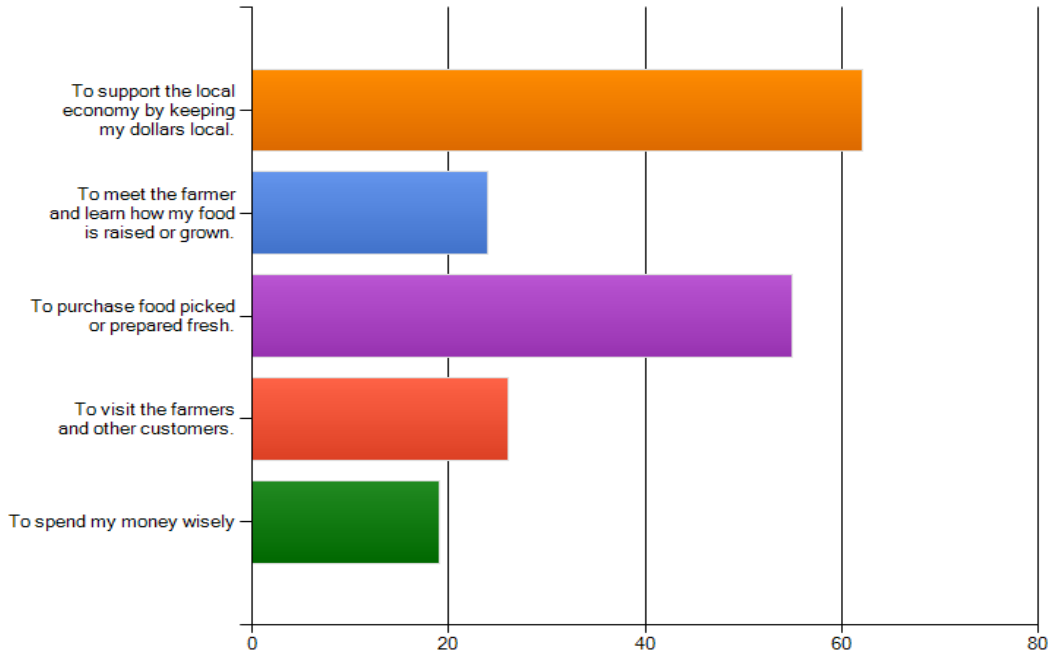
The black lines show where food currently moves from farms to New River Organic Growers staging facility in Fleetwood; as a result of the food hub project. Several more farms are currently scaling up their production to meet the demands NROG has from restaurants and institutions and are expected to become members this summer.

2. Consumers, particularly Farmers Market Customers:

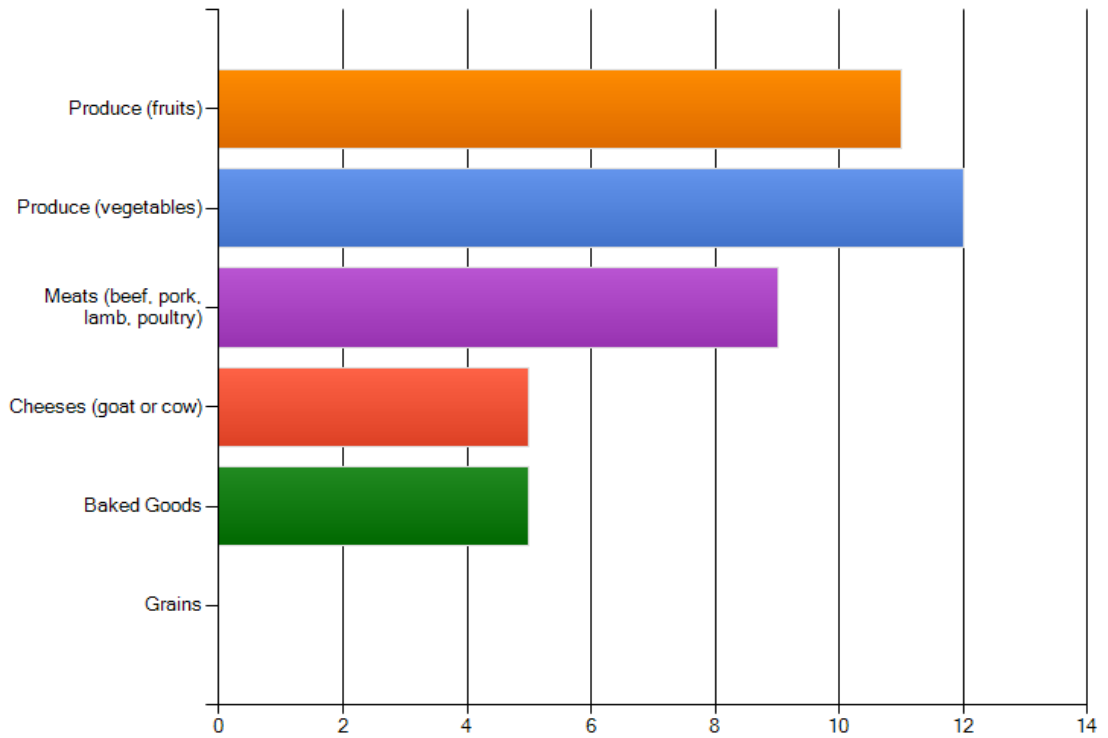
Assessments created to identify purchasing patterns for local food products, locations & hours, “wants & needs” of customers for this season were used to assist area farmers market managers, vendors and consumers. This information was also made available to the Lansing & Ashe Farmers Market Managers. These surveys were offered online, and as paper copies on our website, social media sites, and at grower and artisan workshops. Approximately 110 Consumer Surveys were completed. The surveys assembled data including purchasing habits, shopping locations, products purchased, and events desired to make the experience more enjoyable.

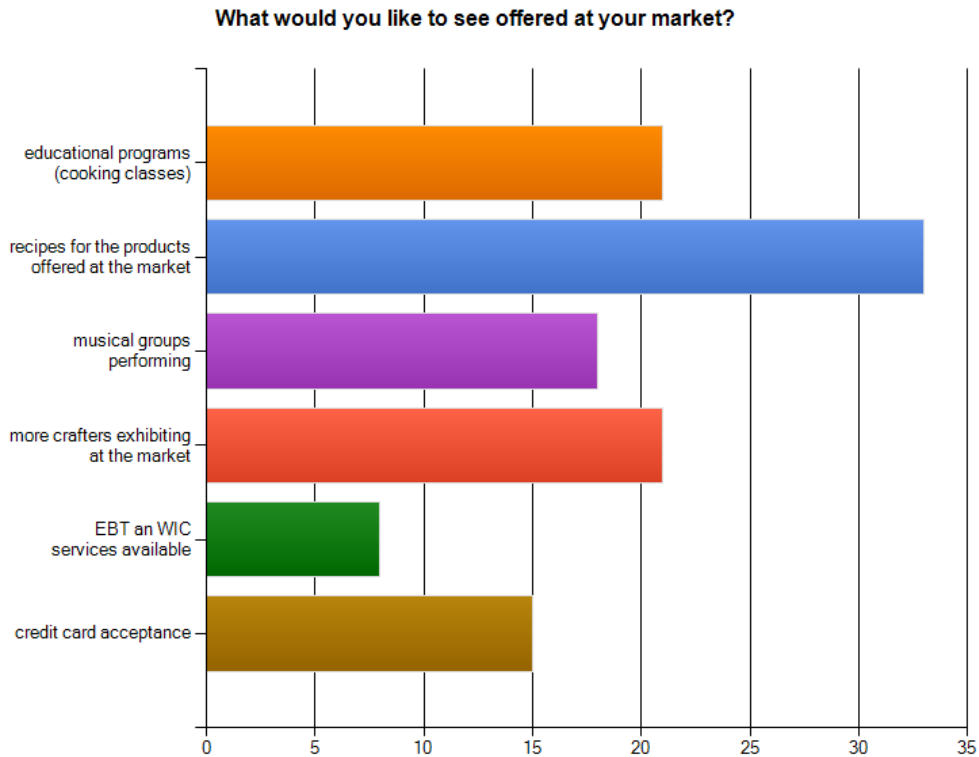
See the following slides from our online surveys. It captured important information that will provide justifications for upcoming projects or programs in the future.

Why do you shop at the Farmers Market?



Which local food products do you currently purchase?





Use of Data: This information has been shared with Farmers Market Managers – to pass onto vendors, and for event or market planning. Currently the Alleghany Farmers Market (AFM) is participating in board development/market training through ASAP (Appalachian Sustainable Agriculture Project) – and creating events, event coordinators, kids programs and cooking demonstrations. The AFM is currently working on:

- Alleghany Wellness Center has committed to sponsoring & implementing a “kids event” that features exercise monthly – at the AFM weekly market
- Cooking demonstrations from local restaurant/chef’s will be used to incorporate local foods into recipes for families using local foods
- Local NGO’s will showcase their entities services to farmer’s market customers.
- Local foods will be featured monthly w/recipes, give-a-ways, and promotions
- Promoting eating healthy & local through flyers to area school children – partnered with fruit tree plantings, our “Orchards of Hope” project.

3. Distributors - NROG, TVP, SWVAFM (New River Organic Growers, True Vine Produce, Southwestern Virginia Farmers Market):

- Assessments were created to document the current purchasing and delivery system for food products in our area (both locally grown and from large distribution systems). These surveys were done via interview (on-site) to fully explain the Appalachian Food Hub Project – and in order share our objectives with distributors. The interviews identified:

- Products currently carried: fruits & vegetables, meats & cheeses, specialty herbs, and “value added” products.
- Products in high demand and needing to be scaled up in our region (primarily for restaurants & institutions)
- Routes of delivery (beginning, drop off points, return sites)
- Infrastructure assets and needs
- Capacity to work with farmers, farmer groups and cooperatives

Interviews were conducted to three area food distributors, with summaries below:

- **Caleb Crowell** – New River Organic Growers: A non-profit local food grower cooperative, marketer Caleb currently sells to restaurants in Jefferson, Boone, Blowing Rock and Asheville. NROG’s plans to add institutions including Appalachian State University in the future. He works with over 60 farmers, one-on-one, including crop/production planning, delivery schedules, specialty products, etc. NROG doesn’t currently recruit farmers from the Alleghany or Grayson area, (due to a lack of pick up sites in that region), but Caleb has increased demands for local foods and welcomes new members. New River Organic Growers has primarily carried organically grown fruits and vegetables, and antibiotic free meats, but have recently expanded their offering to include conventional fruits and vegetables, especially for institutional sales. He was very excited about the workshops AFHP planned to recruit growers for NROG, and our desire to create a single delivery system from our region. We’ve recruited approximately 10 new members for NROG.
- **Daren Bottomley**, True Vine Produce: Daren currently sells to Alleghany County and Grayson County Schools, Alleghany Memorial Hospital, and several restaurants in different cities not being serviced by NROG. He currently picks up conventionally grown fruits and vegetables from packing houses in Winston Salem NC, and Hillsville VA, and distributes to restaurants and institutions in Alleghany & Surry Counties in NC, and Grayson & Carroll Counties in VA. He has a need for P.A.D (Processing, Aggregation, & Distribution) space to maintain larger inventory and increase delivery routes. Since he is currently selling to institutions, he’s interested in substituting locally raised foods for regionally raised foods where possible, and sharing space at an aggregation facility. He also has interest in adding locally raised meats and dairy products to his customers, and needs refrigeration/freezer capacity to carry those products. He has no desire to work with individual farmers, but desires an “agent” to represent multiple products from several farms.
- **Kevin Semones**, Southwest Virginia Farmers Market. Kevin, a state employee, is charged with moving local foods from a P.A.D. site, for sale to groceries, institutions and smaller food distributors. His facility is large scale and moves millions of dollars of fruit and vegetables annually. He reiterates the need to scale up production to meet current food demands. He doesn’t currently move organic fruits and vegetables, but sees the market for those products growing.

4. Schools & Hospitals (Institutional Food Buyers):

- Assessments were created to document the current purchasing methods for food products by our schools and institutions. These surveys were done in person, to gain a better understanding about the following:
 - Current purchases (food products, forms: frozen, chopped, fresh)
 - Delivery system & schedule, distributors utilized
 - Payment method & contractual obligations
 - Certification Needs (GAP, insurance, etc.)
 - Desire for local food products
 - Participation in Farm to School, Farm to Hospital Program
 - Challenges for local food acquisition (certification, single contact, etc.)

Interviews conducted from Alleghany & Grayson County school's institutional food buyers, Blue Ridge Christian School, Alleghany Memorial Hospital, and Oak Hill Academy – to gauge interest in purchasing or increasing consumption of locally raised foods. All have a definite interest, but several are bound by cost issues – and the need to work with conventional large scale produce growers is evident. All wish to purchase local meats – but are not able to do so due to the higher costs for non-factory farmed products. *The need to “feature” pastured meats annually in the USDA Farm to School Initiative is critical.*

The data will be compiled in mini-reports on each institution, but for brevity, the following summary of relevant findings are noted:

Alleghany County Schools – Margaret Dalton, (retired as of 5/1/2013). Alleghany County Schools currently participates in the USDA Farm to School program, and purchases some of its food from Daren Bottomley, of True Vine Produce.

- Salad Bar has been discontinued due to federal regulations requiring vegetable percentages on each plate – and a self-serve salad bar no longer meets the criteria.
- 2 bids required for local food purchases, w/GAP Certification required
- Difficulty working with multiple farmers – need for single point of contact
- Since retiring – replacement nutrition director may have other interests

Grayson County Schools – Stephanie Muncee, food service coordinator also currently uses Daren Bottomley, and does not currently participate in the USDA Farm to School Program

- Interested in participating, but “cost” & “quality” are concerns
- Putting into place a new procedure/policy for local foods including certifications
- Not interested in working with farmers, but desire chefs in the school, and a connection with obtaining local foods from existing distributors

Oak Ridge Academy – A private school, Oak Ridge Academy has more flexibility with funding and purchasing power. They're interested in purchasing a reliable source of local fruits and vegetables, and featuring locally raised meats and cheeses. They prefer a single contact point, to ensure delivery and quality of products that doesn't require extra demands on their staff.

Alleghany Memorial Hospital – Debbie Smith, Director of Food Services & Nutrition. AMH currently purchases from Daren Bottomley for staff, and CISCO for the facility.

- Interested in purchasing pre-packaged local mix for salad bar
 - Interested in posters showing benefits of eating local, flyers, newsletters for staff
 - Already collaborates with health department for specialty meals (diabetes)
 - Currently using a chef for monthly cooking for staff – interested in getting more local foods onto menu, introducing staff to unusual vegetables or cooking methods
 - Employees/staff interested in purchasing locally raised foods – increased participation in farmers market
- *NOTE: The Appalachian Food Hub submitted a grant proposal through the USDA Farm to School Initiative as a Support Agency – to address the needs of institutional food buyers, and students/staff.*

5. Local Food Infrastructure in our region

Assessments were created to document the infrastructure in our micro-region that is available for growers & food artisans. Interviews were done in person, and assets were photographed and listed on our Appalachian Food Hub website or Facebook.

- canneries, commercial kitchens, meat processing, and P.A.D. (processing, aggregation & distribution,) sites
- Rates, hours, availability to public
 - SWVAFM – A large aggregation & distribution center in Hillsville, VA – where local products are bought and sold (similar to Pilot Mtn. Pride), with refrigeration and storage capacity. Kevin Semones, manager could buy all the organic products we can produce.
 - Hillsville Cannery – a facility to enable entrepreneurs to “add value” to raw products, canning, bottling, etc. A business resource for a large single batch production.
 - Ashe Commercial Kitchen – has a facility manager, but the organization is in possible transition to be transferred to a non-profit agency, and does not currently have an effective marketing or management strategy.
 - Crossroads Institute Commercial Kitchen – is currently being rented by two caterers and not available to the public.
 - Alleghany Wellness Center’s Commercial Kitchen – is available for entrepreneurs or home use w/o clearly designated rates for rental.

These facilities will be listed as community resources on our website – so that growers and food artisans are aware of the infrastructure in place, rates, etc. for utilization. Some are in transition. Both the Cooperative Extension and Alleghany Public Schools are currently hiring key staff (agent or nutrition director), and it will be our goal to meet with them, and build a relationship to ensure success with our agencies.

PHASE II – COMMUNICATION & COLLABORATION W/AGRICULTURAL AGENCIES

We know that many wonderful agricultural entities are in our region. We also know that in order to avoid duplication, redundancy and concerns about our objectives; we would have to share with other agencies our project and our goals. We've done this in several ways:

COMMUNICATION:

1. Social Media Presence:

- Creation of a website: <http://appalachianfoodhub.com/> offering the following:
 - An overview of the project, including our 3 phases
 - The online version of the Grower & Food Artisan Survey & Consumer Surveys
 - A constantly updated page of workshops & events in NC & VA
 - An Events History Page with a report, videotaping or re-capping of:
 - GAP (Good Agricultural Practices) Training
 - Grower Resources and Opportunities Luncheon and Workshop
 - Independence Farmers Market Workshop Series Winter 2012-2013
 - Seed Swap and Growers School
 - ServSafe Training
 - Local Food Supporters (SOC, BRWIA, GLC, AAC, etc.)
 - Grower Resources (contact information for past presenters at workshops)
- Facebook Pages for the Appalachian Food Hub and Alleghany Farmers Market – in order to capture data, and to inform those who use social media as their methods of obtaining news and current events.

2. Team Meetings, Grower Support Workshops & Field Trips:

- Our team members were assembled, and included farmers, business owners, students, entrepreneurs and consultants. Team members provided feedback on surveys, interviews, and project successes and weaknesses.
- At team meetings, surveys were reviewed, data assembled, and data forwarded for mapping on a GIS or survey monkey results shown as data charts. Surveys were edited as needed.
- Teams met 2 – 3 times monthly, and power point presentations were used to update team members about social media, workshops or speakers, and field trips.

GROWER SUPPORT WORKSHOPS

Saturday, January 26th – 43 participants attended our event at the Alleghany Inn, which included local lunch, and the following speakers and subjects:

Colette Nester – an overview of the Appalachian Food Hub Project, our goals, our 3 phases.

Tenley Weaver – Organic fruit and vegetable farming, CSA operations and a retail store on site of their Floyd VA Farm. Provided ideas for new & beginning farmers – keeping it simple and low cost.

Caleb Crowell – Marketer for New River Organic Growers talked to workshop participants about organic product opportunities, products in high demand, and the benefits of NROG membership.

Hollis Wild – ASAP – introducing Appalachian Grown marketing opportunities, marketing resources (signs, stickers, bags, etc.) and the rest of ASAP’s program initiatives.

Kevin Spurlin – Virginia Cooperative Extension Agent – gave history of cooperative extension, services, online & print resources for the region.

Saturday, April 6th – 31 participants attended our Grower Support Workshop at the Sparta United Methodist Church Fellowship Hall which included a local lunch, and featured several team members from the AFHP, and the following subjects:

Colette Nester - an overview of the Appalachian Food Hub Project, including our assessment data graphs on grower barriers (livestock, produce & value added), and our 3 phases.

Sara Fennel – a mid-sized organic grower explained high tunnel production systems, pro’s and con’s, and the EQIP program which could enable growers to purchase the high tunnels at low or no cost. Her farm has several high tunnels in production, and she is very knowledgeable about high tunnel & EQIP systems.

Michelle Pridgen – the Independence & Alleghany Farmers Market manager gave an overview of each market’s dates, fees, and rules. She also did training on booths, marketing resources and recruited growers for both markets. She shared our assessment data from farmer’s market customers (products in demand). Vendor applications were offered.

Bridget Kennedy – ASAP – gave a comprehensive training of wholesale and retail marketing opportunities for growers. Great knowledge and resources to let beginning or existing farmers and food artisans try several options to ensure success.

Rick Cavey – Wagon Wheel Farm – gave in-depth training on farm & crop planning. From creating a business plan, designing schematics for crop outlines, and various “high demand” products that can easily be grown by small farmers, he gave tools to ensure success.

Afterwards, both Rick & Sara met with growers interested in selling to NROG (New River Organic Growers), to help them plan for the crops in demand, and explain our transportation system. The Appalachian Food Hub Project is working on distributing area producers products to NROG’s staging site, w/o adding costs to the farmer (reducing profit), nor tacking on fees to NROG. New River Organic Grower has never recruited farmers in Alleghany & Grayson County. As a result of our workshops (including 2 in Independence), about 10 new growers have committed to growing for NROG. Our workshops & support services have been instrumental in making that happen.

The **Independence Farmers Market** also held 2 workshops with similar topics and presenters. The AFHP advertised the training events on our website, Facebook sites, and attended the events. The IFM’s 2 workshops had approximately 28 participants at each venue.

3. ON FARM FIELD TRIPS (Getting out of the conference room – and seeing examples of successful models.

April 25th – **Ashe Commercial Kitchen & Heritage Homestead Dairy, Jefferson/Crumpler, NC**

We've taken a group of 20 participants and team members on a tour of the Ashe Commercial Kitchen, and Heritage Homestead, a goat dairy. This increased the educational and entrepreneurial opportunities for those attending any of our 4 workshops (Including 2 in Independence from the IFM – Independence Farmers Market), in an on-farm, on facility venue. The Appalachian Food Hub Project designed an informative sheet on the products that could be made with the Ashe Commercial Kitchen equipment – to give them an idea of what types of entrepreneurial food artisan businesses could be operated. Participants were also given rate sheets, and contact information about the kitchen. The participants also visited a working goat dairy, learning about business planning and the capital investment it takes to grow a new business. The activity included lunch using locally grown, raised or made foods.

April 30th – **Bright Farm & Good Food Good People, Floyd VA**

Our field trip to Floyd, Virginia had 17 participants and team members, travelling to a working pastured livestock farm, and organic farm, a multi-farm CSA, and an on-site retail store. This field trip offered beginning or small scale growers several ideas for expansion, including wholesale or retail opportunities. It also showcased a large scale poultry processing operation which had customers driving from 100 miles to stock up on pastured poultry and pastured pork.

4. SUPPORT Mini-Workshops:

April 22nd – EARTH DAY – Grower Mini-Workshop at Alleghany Public Library (7 participants)

April 29th – VENDOR TRAINING – Cooperative Extension Office – Sparta (12 participants)

COLLABORATIONS: We are working with the following agencies, with notes/needs in italics:

NC & VA Cooperative Extension – Amy Lucas (Alleghany) and Kevin Spurlin (Grayson) will be distributing our Grower Binders – a resource for beginning or transitioning farmers to begin, expand or change to organic production. The binders contain farm & business planning, produce, livestock, agritourism opportunities, marketing guidelines, liability, and capital handouts. The NC Coop. Ext. has donated copying of the binders at their office. We intend to make the Grower & Artisan Resources Manual/Binder available online, on memory sticks and on CD as well. These cooperative extension agents have steered beginning farmers in our direction for mentoring and support. The Alleghany Cooperative Extension has recently lost its livestock agent, and is searching for a replacement. *Many wonderful programs started by the previous livestock agent (Farmers Market Board, community gardens, etc.) may close without continued support. The Cooperative Extension is a wonderful resource for growers and consumers alike, but requires full staffing and an enthusiastic agent for success. The Cooperative Extension is currently hiring an agent. The Local Food Coordinator & Local Food Agent will brief the incoming cooperative extension agent on our objectives and look at collaborations to realize our shared needs.*

Alleghany Farmland Preservation Program – Bob Edwards collecting data on landowners, and compiled data from farmers to determine those who are aging out or retiring soon, to assist them in developing plans for their lands usage. He advised me that the AFPP's future needs included having a

“clearing house” for available land in our region (for potential leases or sales), the collaboration with area conservation easement programs to enroll farmers to save land from development, and the need for alternative agriculture training & support for farmers & food artisans in this area – to impart knowledge for viable agriculture business opportunities. We will be sharing our data with Bob Edwards, to ensure a comprehensive support system of connecting landowners to potential growers takes place. *This program received funding for the assessment & report stage only; and will need a dedicated agent or representative to implement the recommendations. The data from the Appalachian Food Hub Project and the Alleghany Farmland Preservation Program will be shared.*

Alleghany Wellness Center – is hosting fruit trees for the Orchard of Hope, and providing kids’ activities at the Alleghany Farmers Market this season. They are also the host site for a continuing community garden, which will be run by the local Master Gardeners Group. We hope to offer ACW staff and members an opportunity for a CSA, and encourage farmers market support. *The Alleghany Wellness Center staff and board must have an invested stake in our community and requires collaboration and communication via an agent. None of these projects will succeed without a dedicated local food coordinator.*

Appalachian Sustainable Development (ASD) – is currently conducting assessments in SW Virginia – to improve their services to agricultural producers. Jenny Lamb, an ASD “fellow” shared with us their template – which was altered to fit our needs for the assessment for growers & food artisans. We will share data with them, that may help with liability issues, wireless and technology tools (smart phones, tablets, etc.) and sharing our data showing ASD which barriers to production and expansion our growers are facing. *The Appalachian Food Hub Project will share our assessments with ASD.*

Grayson Landcare is our grass-roots fiduciary agent, a board driven non-profit with emphasis on agricultural and economic opportunities in the region. Grayson Landcare donated \$1,500 towards the Appalachian Food Hub Project, to ensure that Grayson County was included in assessments and tools for these two important phases. *Grayson Landcare will continue to be the fiduciary agent for important agricultural projects while the Appalachian Agricultural Coalition (AAC) seeks its 501c3 status, and gains grant management experience. Grayson Landcare’s Board of Directors have vast knowledge and experience in agriculture and business ventures and also serves in an advisory role for AAC projects.*

New River Soil & Water (USDA Equip Program) – David Tucker & Greg Wagoner are agents with the NRCS and have provided us information and enrollment packets for farmers/grower to increase their positive environmental impact (fencing livestock out of waterways, streambed restoration), as well as increasing economic opportunity for growers obtaining organic certification for agricultural products (high tunnel initiative, pollinator project), and we have passed out information on and trained new/transitioning growers on the benefits of enrolling in these programs. *Using the assessments to identify grower & food artisan needs, we are aware that educational workshops and training are in great demand in our region. We will continue to encourage growers to utilize EQIP program funding and support, as good stewards of our environment.*

Appalachian Agricultural Coalition – formerly the Alleghany Farmers Market is receiving training from ASAP (Appalachian Sustainable Agricultural Project) to train the board and volunteers way to increase customers, purchases and returning supporters to the AFM. The AAC has board members

working on the USDA Farm to School Grant – to ensure our local school systems receive education, and local foods in its cafeteria, and to staff, parents, and “stake holders”. *The AAC is an important group, whose volunteers board and supporters can make the difference of having a “so so” farmers market season and an “outstanding” season. Their support is invaluable for this project.*

Appalachian Sustainable Agriculture Project – Hollis Wild, our regional representative; has been a workshop presenter on ASAP’s farm & farmers market program for marketing assistance, and also offers the many ASAP business resources for farmers and food artisans. They also have a successful “Growing Minds” program – which includes assistance on securing Farm to School programs and support. *ASAP’s expertise, training materials and staff will ensure a successful “Farm to School” program, and benefit growers and food artisans with its myriad programs designed to support growers.*

Alleghany Public Schools – Dr. Jeff Cox is the superintendent of Alleghany Public Schools and enthusiastically supports the Appalachian Food Hub’s projects and programs, and desires more agricultural programs and projects in the school system. He supports local and healthy foods, healthy eating and is coordinating with the Alleghany Farmers Market and Local Food Initiative to provide the following:

- Staff & student education about the health benefits of consuming local foods
- Connecting students to real life farms & agricultural occupations to encourage farming occupations
- Coordinating with Agriscience Teachers for fuller utilization of school greenhouses
- Utilizing school cafeteria facilities for instruction of food preservation (canning), teaching healthy cooking to students, staff and parents
- Obtaining local foods in school system food buying program
- Securing a permanent site for the Alleghany Farmers Market (offered school property)

NOTE: The Local Food Coordinator will be able to work with School Nutrition Director (when hired) to implement “Farm to School” program including Ag in the Class, Chef’s in the cafeteria, and agricultural programs to students. As of the time of this report the position was vacant.

PHASE 3 - DESIGNING THE BLUEPRINT

This final phase and started in mid-April. It was created by reviewing the assessment data, the recommendations from our collaborations, and observations from our team members during the workshops and collaboration events and delivers a plan to create a healthy regional food system. The following identifies our assets, including infrastructure “assets” and “needs”, and provides a three year plan with goals and potential partnerships.

Three year plan for Local Food Initiative 2013-2016

IDENTITY: (2013)

The confusion often associated with the term “Food Hub” (media & meetings) makes it apparent that a common and clearer term is needed. Although the Appalachian Food Hub Project currently operates a website and a Facebook site, we need to make the language clear for the public, media outlets, and farmers alike. Changing the project title to the “Local Food Initiative” would clearly identify the role this project will have in the community. Herein the recommendations will reflect that term, as well as the Local Food Coordinator, instead of the Food Hub Coordinator.

PHYSICALITY: (2013)

The need for a physical presence in the community is vital. In order to continue a campaign for the Local Food Initiative, office space for the Local Food Coordinator and Local Food Agent will be critical for communication, collaborations and community awareness. Currently, operations for the Local Food Initiative have been at the 1908 Courthouse in Independence, Virginia. This office and meeting room space has been provided by Grayson Landcare, the fiduciary agent of this project. The need for an office, in a central location, with telephone communications and the capacity to host meetings will ensure this project gains the support of the community, including the town and county government. This office should be located in Alleghany County, and can be part of the physical location of any town, county or government building.

POSITIONS & ROLES: (2013-2016)

The need for two part-time year round positions are defined below. A Local Food Coordinator and Local Food Agent for the duration of this three year project are critical. Although there are many wonderful agricultural entities in our region; none are charged with the duties we’ve assigned to the Local Food Coordinator, or Local Food Agent. And, currently our region doesn’t have a reliable distribution system to get local food products to buyers in Southwestern VA & Northeastern North Carolina, and this role is best served by hiring a part-time delivery driver and marketer.

Local Food Coordinator - Primary responsibilities:

Educating and Advocating for the **GROWING, MARKETING & CONSUMPTION** of local foods in our region. Creating and nurturing innovative ways to:

- Recruit and sustain beginning or transitional farmers for local food production through single point contact, educational workshops, on-farm demonstrations, and training resources – The need for Farmer recruitment became very apparent early on in our study. It was apparent that

the needs of the community cannot be met by the current farms operating in the region. Additionally, these farms reported no concerns with selling product. In fact, they sold all they could produce under their current scale of operations.

- Secure infrastructure (facilities and equipment) for the increased production of local foods through assessments of “assets” and “needs” from growers, buyers and distributors in our region

The Local Food Coordinator (LFC) should be attached to the county – with frequent updates provided to town council and county commissioners during their joint sessions; and charged with creating agricultural policy within the economic development plans. The Local Food Coordinator will provide quarterly reports to the town & county managers – with needs and recommendations. The LFC will also initiate and nurture relationships with the following entities:

- Alleghany Public Schools
 - Nutrition Director – obtaining & maintaining local food purchases, chef demonstrations
 - Agriscience Teachers – utilization of greenhouse⁶
- Alleghany Wellness Center
- Alleghany Memorial Hospital
- Cooperative Extension
- Blue Ridge Business Development
- Alleghany County Public Library

Local Food Agent (Driver & Marketer)

This agent would coordinate the aggregation, pick-up and delivery of local food products to one of our three area distributors: New River Growers, True Vine Produce, or the Southwestern Virginia Farmers Market, or directly to buyers. Of critical importance is creating an efficient system, both for the environment (less diesel, lower carbon foot-print), and for growers & artisans so they can spend more time growing, making or baking their products. The Local Food Agent would be required to develop an efficient route for farmers and buyers, reducing costs for farmers, buyers and consumers.

STAFFING, OFFICE, SUPPLIES & ADMINISTRATIVE NEEDS:

\$107,884 total for 3 year period - or \$35,961 per year (2 part-timers w/admin. support)

Office Space: A centrally located physical location within an established business; wireless & telephone capacity, in the downtown Sparta area. **EST. COST: \$7,200** (36 months x \$200 per mo.)

Local Food Coordinator (LFC) a part-time worker that can educate, advocate and coordinate the needs for a local food system with a comprehensive job description that includes measurable gains over the 3 year period, and whose position should be supplanted through town/county funds, and grant funding. (48 wks. x 20 hrs. x \$15 hr. x 3 years) \$43,200 + plus \$3,554 (8,462 miles @ .42)
EST. COST: \$46,754

Local Food Agent (LFA) would be responsible for recruiting & nurturing new or transitioning growers & food artisans; for designing an efficient routing system with enrolled farmers (in the Local Food Initiative) in order to maintain maximum profitability, freshness and safety of food

products. (48 wks x 15 hrs x \$15 per hr x 3 years) \$32,400 plus mileage: \$3,554 (8,462 miles @ .42) **COST: \$35,954**

Administrative Support: This funding ensures LFC and FLA have the tools needed to carry out their assigned duties. Support includes a Project Manager, accounting support, supplies and marketing materials. Project Manager: \$7,776 (48 wks x 3 hrs x \$18 hr x 3 years), Accounting Support \$2,100 (\$175 x 4 quarters x 3 years) supplies & marketing materials \$4,500 (\$1,500 x 3 years) and workshop/software/training materials: \$3,600 (\$1,200 x 3 years) **TOTAL COST: \$17,976**

PROGRAM/PROJECT NEEDS (2013-2016)

According to Heifer Funding Focus Areas for FY14 – there are 5 areas that need to be grown or expanded to create a vibrant agricultural economy in the region the Seeds of Change Initiative is covering. We agree with these focus areas. **Unfortunately, there is not ONE AGENCY in our region charged with ANY of these responsibilities.** That is one of the reasons farmer/food artisan driven cooperatives or programs must be put into place with long-term support to strengthen our agricultural system. The Local Food Initiative (Appalachian Food Hub Project) created small scale projects and programs to address some of these concerns, and realizes through continued support, we can produce sustainable business models that benefit both the agricultural and consumer sectors. The five focus areas **Heifer** is focusing on are:

1. Farmer Recruitment & Organization
2. Season Extension and Market Production Planning
3. Developing Early Infrastructure
4. Developing Anchor Institution Demand & Markets
5. Developing the Entrepreneurial Support Network & Access to Capital

The Local Food Initiative believes the following objectives are essential:

A. Reducing or Eliminating Barriers for Expansion or Entrepreneurship

Having identified barriers for area growers & food artisans, we'll need to address the available resources or the need to create programs or projects for the following:

1. **Livestock Producers Barriers:** Feed costs, profitability, land access. Explore needs to create an association or cooperative, or at minimum maintain a current list of area local livestock producers. (*Creating & nurturing partnerships w/Cooperative Extension, Upper Mountain Research Station, Alleghany Farmland Preservation Program, ASAP (Appalachian Sustainable Agriculture Project) and Blue Ridge Business Development*)to:
 - Increasing the production or growing of our feeds locally or cooperatively – using our pastures for corn, soybean production, hays and fodder – to lower prices and become more self sufficient
 - Using shared buying power for purchases including feed, agricultural supplies, veterinary supplies, etc. to save on shipping fees and for better prices
 - Encouraging Upper Mountain Research Station to create trials for alternative feedstock's in our region – feed stocks that will thrive in our climate, and reduce our dependence on commodities (i.e. corn)

- Manage the purchase/sharing of equipment that enables small scale producers to work more efficiently and increase economic opportunities (tractor implements, livestock facilities, mobile processing equipment)
- Utilizing cooperative movement for processing until we are capable of having livestock processing facilities located closer (poultry: 84 miles, beef/hogs: 76 miles away), including transportation, crates, delivery, etc.
- Increasing mentoring & farmer education for business planning, crop planning, season extension, succession planting, animal husbandry, grant writing (producer), and marketing opportunities (wholesale & retail) on an ongoing basis. And archive projects including workshops and farm tours via video for on-demand needs.
- Utilize RMI's (Regional Marketing Initiatives) like ASAP's Appalachian Grown, Virginia Grown, and AWA, Animal Welfare Approved to increase livestock producers income and exposure
- Create and maintain a "clearing house" for farmland parcels, including lease & rent to own options for beginning farmers – through the Alleghany Farmland Preservation Program, and local conservation easement entities.
- Locate and encourage utilization of unused town or county lands for agricultural use, community gardens, etc.

Solution: The Local Food Coordinator will be responsible for coordinating with partnership agencies listed, designing programs or projects that will deliver the above objectives, and documenting and utilizing the resources (infrastructure and equipment) available to. Local Food Coordinator will also seek grant funding to obtain or sustain equipment, programs or personnel to implement the above objectives.

- 2. Produce:** Storage of products, organic certification cost & time. Explore needs to create an association or cooperative, or at minimum maintain a current list of area local fruit & vegetable producers. *(Creating & nurturing partnerships w/Cooperative Extension, USDA Program, Ashe Commercial Kitchen, ASAP, C.A.N. - Central Appalachian Network)*
- Secure central site(s) for P.A.D. sites (processing, aggregation & distribution) to create efficiency for farmers and distributors/food buyers
 - Locate or purchase refrigeration, freezer or cold storage equipment at a central site for the storage of locally produced foods
 - Form a cooperative/association to increase purchase power for packaging materials, including washing, and value added processing equipment
 - Utilize RMI's (Regional Marketing Initiatives) like ASAP's Appalachian Grown, Virginia Grown, USDA Organic and GAP Certifications to increase producers income and exposure
 - Increasing mentoring & farmer education – from business planning, crop planning, season extension, and marketing opportunities (wholesale & retail) on an annual basis & archived for on-demand needs
 - Train or obtain an organic certification agent for use in our region, secure an organic auditing agency or share as a cooperative for audit savings
 - Purchase & disseminate organic certification templates or software to assist growers in compliance
 - Locate and utilize interns from area universities to assist growers with organic certification needs

Solution: Local Food Coordinator will be responsible for coordinating with above partnership agencies, creating programs or projects that will deliver the above objectives, and obtaining/utilizing infrastructure and equipment needed. Local Food Coordinator will also seek grant funding to obtain or sustain equipment, programs or personnel to implement the above objectives.

3. Value Added: Cost of supplies, perishability, access to processing (*Create and nurture partnerships w/Cooperative Extension, Blue Ridge Business Development, Ashe Commercial Kitchen, Alleghany Wellness Center, Alleghany Public Schools, ASAP*)

- Consider need to form a cooperative/association to increase purchase power of needed equipment or supplies purchased in bulk, similar to the Arts & Craft Council.
- Coordinate food artisans utilization of commercial facilities to reduce costs of production, and to share in entrepreneurial skills
- Secure refrigeration, freezer equipment to increase shelf and storage of products, as well as processing or value added equipment in central locations
- Work with commercial kitchen entities to bring costs down for food artisans
- Host agripreneur workshops, and training for business support. Ensure marketing opportunities, to assist artisans with feasibility studies and mentors – capital and liabilities needs.
- Obtain support from ASAP, or other regional food branding initiatives

Local Food Coordinator will be responsible for coordinating with partnership agencies, creating programs or projects that will deliver the above objectives, and obtaining or utilizing the resources (infrastructure and equipment) needed. Local Food Coordinator will also seek grant funding to obtain or sustain equipment, programs or personnel to implement the above objectives.

NOTES: The Local Food Coordinator will be responsible with prioritizing the issue above, and along with the Project Manager, Local Food Agent and members of the Appalachian Agricultural Coalition – who will assign status for which period (1st year, 2nd year, ongoing) the objective will be undertaken.

In addition to our assessment data which shows consumers, distributors and other food buyers needs, the following programs/projects will be began and fostered as staff and funding are available.

B. Increasing Access & Consumption of Local Foods

4. Consumers (Farmers Market Customers, School Staff & Parents) *Creating & Nurturing Partnerships with Appalachian Health Department, Cooperative Extension, Ashe Commercial Kitchen, Alleghany Wellness Center, Sparta Revitalization Committee, Alleghany Chamber of Commerce, Dept. of Social Services*

Utilizing the data obtained from assessments, create a program designed to address the following:

Increasing production of the top 5 Products that customers want to see at area farmers markets:

- Berries, asparagus, mushrooms, breads, chicken
 - Provide grower recruitment and support for alternative agricultural products, and new grower support.

- Recruit farmland for the scaling up of production of fruits and vegetables that can be frozen and sold year round.
- Utilize commercial kitchen or value added processing facilities.
- Obtain a mobile poultry processing facility to enable scaling up of poultry production & processing in region.
- Add programs customers want to have at their market
 - Educational Classes (cooking demonstrations)
 - Seek educational opportunities for healthy cooking opportunities and demonstrations
 - Utilize local food products and recipes to encourage healthy cooking
 - Musical Groups performing or music
 - Recipes for raw food cooking, niche vegetables & meats
 - Utilize recipes from ASAP, USDA, etc. to encourage the purchase of local foods and the cooking of raw & healthy foods
 - Coordinate vendor products to create “complete” meals or themes

Increase offerings of local foods at retail, online, CSA or specialty store locations to increase access for consumers to local food products

- Partnerships with local retail outlets to add local foods into system
- Create an online store with pick up sites at area farmers markets or retail locations

Solution: Local Food Coordinator will work with area Farmers Market Manager to recruit new vendors, provide training & support to growers, utilize social media for customers, increase customers and access to local foods. Obtain partnerships with area NGO’s to ensure program successes.

5. **Distributors (Local food & Regional Foods) Partnerships** with *New River Organic Growers, True Vine Produce, Southwest Virginia Farmers Market, ASAP, Cooperative Extension, and Ashe Commercial Kitchen*

- Compile data of products currently carried – products in demand (restaurants & institutions)
 - Scale up production of “in demand” products for sale to distributors
 - Offer training & support (workshops & on-farm demonstrations) to increase alternative agricultural products
 - Increase opportunities for value added products (flash freezing, dicing, shredding, etc.
 - Increase opportunities for canned value added specialty products (acidified, chow chows, salsas, vegetables, chutneys, etc.)
 - routes of delivery (beginning, drop off points, return sites)
 - Creation of aggregation (or P.A.D.) site(s) for satellite storage and delivery of products to current distributors.
 - Ensure training of GAP, USDA Organic, or other standards for food system – traceability, handling, and packing

- Utilize routes to create efficient systems of obtaining, holding and delivering local foods into institutions, restaurants and retail sites
- infrastructure assets and needs
 - Create and/or utilize refrigeration, freezer, cold or dry storage equipment or facilities to ensure food safety, reduced transportation costs, and farmer/grower efficiency in production
 - Utilize software to track food production, product projections, and to ensure freshest product for maximum sales

Solution: Local Food Agent will serve as an “connector” for growers – coordinating with buyers including distributors, to address aggregation, or delivery of food products. Regional food hub aggregation, buying clubs, or distribution plans should be studied, and a suitable plan for sustainability utilizing membership fees, cost-share funds, or town/county supplements would be created to reduce the need to shave profits from growers or pad costs for buyers. Working with area or regional branding initiatives (Appalachian Grown, Virginia Grown), would be utilized to assist in sales and marketing objectives.

6. **Institutional Food Buyers** *Partnerships with Alleghany & Grayson County Schools, ASAP (Appalachian Sustainable Agriculture Project), USDA Farm to School, New River Organic Growers, True Vine Produce, SWVAFM, and Ashe Commercial Kitchen*

In order to increase the supply of local food into institutions, several objectives need to be in place:

- Scaling up production of conventional fruits and vegetables
 - Recruiting new or transition growers to convert land into fruit & vegetable production
 - Recruit cattle, Christmas tree, or pumpkin farmers to convert land into F & V production
 - Purchase conventionally grown foods from large scale vegetable & fruit growers for sales to institutions
- Coordination with area distributors to “insert” local food products into deliveries – or single point of contact for local food purchases (agent)
- Have an agent trained in Farm to School Program guidelines to meet coordination, bidding and delivery issues
- Coordinate programs into schools & hospitals – education & advocacy of local food purchases
- Staff & student education (flyers, postcards, coupons)
- Bringing students to real farms to connect to their foods & encourage farming occupations
- Coordinate with Agriscience Teachers for utilization of greenhouse or livestock production – to carry into end processing & marketing (versus sale barn livestock)
- Mount a public educational program on economic & health benefits of purchasing local foods

Solution: Local Food Agent will coordinate with local growers, food artisans and packing houses, to move their products in the markets above; and to coordinate staging, and delivery with distributors and aggregation facility. This agent’s position would not be adding a cost to the grower/food artisan, nor reducing the product price and income for the buyer or distributor. This position would facilitate the movement of locally raised or made foods from growers to buyers.

NOTE: The Local Food Agent will be responsible with prioritizing the issue above, and along with the Project Manager, Local Food Coordinator and members of the Appalachian Agricultural Coalition – who will assign status for which period (1st year, 2nd year, ongoing) the objective will be undertaken.

CLOSING NOTES:

A few observations about real challenges we face (some which may not have been addressed in this blue print):

- Farming & Food Artistry can be very demanding work. Currently our traditional large scale factory & conventional farming system relies on the work of migrant labor, which is why conventionally grown food costs remain low compared to organic or pasture based foods. For our region to provide food for itself, and scale up to meet future demands for product:
 - labor concerns will need to address whether immigration is the route for economic opportunity, or
 - whether our local and future workforce can be convinced to try labor intensive, physically demanding work as a means of financial independence and land ownership. And too,
 - whether we can successfully educate our consumers to attribute the added costs of locally raised foods to the factors that affect small scale food production.An educated consumer is our best customer. Education & advocacy are tools for success – and starts with school children, in order to create consumption and purchasing habits that will extend into adulthood
- People are so far out of touch with where food comes from, and how it is grown, it's important to explore ways to insert teachable moments and examples, samples and apples to consumers/our youth:
 - from giving away seeds, plants, or healthy locally raised & gleaned foods,
 - sharing the goodness in our schools, hospitals and farmers markets and
 - taking people to farms to connect consumers to farmers
 - offering cooking demonstrations to get back to basics
 - promoting healthy eating habits
 - re-teaching food preservation and self- sufficiency to our communityOur community must make it a priority to reverse the obesity and diabetes trends that are predicted. "Local" has a strong selling label, and we must add "Healthy" to the label – and catch consumers doing the right thing and rewarding it – for successes.
- While we all may agree our region faces multiple challenges, too much talk is about the problems without offering concrete and immediate solutions. Let's get on the ground with staff, follow the blue print, make adjustments as needed and make the solutions a reality. For 2 part-time staff, full administrative support and supplies, at \$36,000 per year – that's a bargain (or for us foodies – a VALUE)!