



# COMMUNITY FOOD INITIATIVES ANNUAL REPORT

## FISCAL YEAR 2014

*Our Shared Mission: CFI supports a local food system that ensures everyone has equal access to fresh, healthy food. We believe that by naming our assets—soil, seeds and an Appalachian heritage of food production and preservation—everyone in Southeastern Ohio can become a part of the solutions that are strengthening our community.*

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## Highlights of 2014

Dear Friends,

Taking the time to reflect on 2014, I am struck with the powerful engagement and dedication people in SE Ohio show in the efforts to strengthen and enrich our region. Community Food Initiatives (CFI) continues to be a hub for people getting together, learning, growing and making food justice not just a priority but a reality. All of CFI's programs experienced marked success and growth in 2014 with the Community Gardens better equipped for success than before, local seed savers banding together and offering more seed saving education; School Gardens in every Athens County School District, and expanding to Vinton County; the Donation Station distributing a record amount of local fresh food to Athens and now Morgan County.

Among the changes in 2014 was the passing of Greg Broadhurst, CFI Board Member since 2008. Greg brightened our lives and the community with his passion for the environment and his deep commitment to being an engaged citizen. A longtime Westside Community Gardener, Greg shared his expertise as a certified arborist and home gardener to help shape CFI's programming. Greg will be remembered by his friends, family and all of us at CFI.

Looking ahead, CFI is focused on sustainable growth as an organization so that we can expand the reach of our mission to actively include our neighboring counties, ensuring our neighbors have equal access to fresh local food, places to grow it and knowledge to prepare and preserve it. This growth is both due to increased need, especially in Vinton County that is struggling as a rural food desert, and because of immense support from regional foundations and concerned, passionate individuals.

Community Food Initiatives, incorporated as a non-profit twenty two years ago, is a leading local example of a membership-based grassroots organization. It is our members who steer our mission and our programs. It is our members who participate in the gardens, teach the workshops and sit on our Board of Directors. The success of CFI is your success, and we continue to move forward knowing you are behind us. I hope to see you at the Annual CFI Membership Meeting on Saturday, March 21<sup>st</sup>, 2015!

Truly,



Mary Nally  
Executive Director  
January 20, 2015

## Community Garden Programs

The Community Garden Program oversees the Community Gardens, Garden & Culinary Workshops, Seed Sovereignty projects and Community Orchards. It encompasses a multi-directional approach to support local food systems, from seed to plate or pressure canner, and from quick and easy container gardening to future focused fruit and nut trees. Jess Chadwell (Right) is serving her second year in AmeriCorps/COMCorps coordinating these programs and the YEAH Kids programs. CFI is lucky to have such dedicated and multi-talented staff!



**Jess Chadwell, Community Garden Coordinator, harvesting apples for the Donation Station**

### The Gardens

CFI continues to oversee six different gardens: Nelsonville, Glouster, Chauncey, Hope Drive, Southside/Carriage Hill and Eastside as well as provide any needed to support to the independent and vibrant Westside Community Garden. Gardeners were thankful for a year with less turbulent weather, and the Eastside and Southside/Carriage Hill Community Gardens are now fully fenced, though the Eastsiders had a troublesome groundhog family that caused some crop damage. The Chauncey Community Garden reached capacity this year and we're hoping to add more raised beds in 2015 so more people can join. Tools are now provided for gardeners to help aid in their success. We welcome donations of tools, if you have them, to keep the gardeners well supplied!



*"My involvement with the excellent community gardens program in our area has not only given me the opportunity to get fresh air & exercise, flex my problem-solving skills, interact with like-minded people, and enjoy a relaxing respite in a sweet environment, but has also enabled me to give back to my community."*

*—Community Gardener*

Ryan Brune's Eagle Scout Troop #357 gifted the gardens with picnic tables as part of his service project. These tables provide a much needed meeting and gathering space, the groundwork for community building. Organizational partners including the Athens Public Library and Hocking Athens Perry Community Action also made success in the gardens possible with additional programming and resource support.



**Ryan Brune (Left) and others from Eagle Scout Troop #357**



## Garden & Culinary Workshop Series



CFI aims to empower and equip individuals and families to grow their own food, prepare healthy meals for themselves and families and preserve food through canning, freezing, dehydrating and fermentation as part of increasing independence and food security. Local folks with knowledge to share volunteered and taught over 20 workshops in 2014. CFI has begun providing more focused and comprehensive education, such as the Community Orchard Workshop Series and Seed Saving Workshop Series. Partner organizations included Solid Ground Farm, Ohio University Office of Sustainability, Ohio University Environmental and Plant Biology Department, OSU Extension Master Gardeners and the Athens Soil and Water Conservation District.

In 2015, CFI will offer an Organic Garden Basics Workshop Series, partnering with Job & Family Services Workstation and Hocking Athens Perry Community Action. Stay tuned for details!

## Seed Sovereignty

The conversation about our food system is incomplete if we're not discussing seeds. Globally, the majority of seeds are owned by a few corporations and much of what is commercially available are hybrid seeds-ones that will grow plants, but whose seeds are sterile. This is a concern because it limits availability of ownership of seeds and the diversity within the food system. CFI has been working for several years on partnering with regional seed savers to promote and incentivize their efforts by compiling the **SE Ohio Seed Savers Inventory Book**, that lists all locally available heirloom seeds, many that have been cultivated to match our climate, pests, to increase productivity and of course, deliciousness. These seed savers, now calling themselves the Southeast

Ohio Seed Savers (SOSS) in 2014 hosted two **Southeast Ohio Seed Savers Exchanges**, providing a chance for community members to purchase, trade or be gifted seeds and discuss seed saving techniques.

Most exciting is that the Southeast Ohio Seed Savers want to provide further education to the public on seed saving techniques and its importance and will also pilot selling seeds commercially in 2015 in a few retail locations.



Susan Young and Kira Slepchenko taught Seed Saving Workshops at the Paw Paw Festival in 2014

## Community Orchards

There are fruit and nut trees on public property in Athens, including around the Westside Community Gardens, and on the Eastside of town. There is an online map (link available on our website) that shows locations and plant varieties available for public harvest. These trees are maintained in part by CFI's Community Orchard Advisory Committee, a group of committed volunteers that provide expertise and time so that our community may have long term food security through these long living plants.

In 2014, Community Food Initiatives and the City of Athens collaborated on planting a small community orchard at Highland Park. The funding for the project came through the National Wildlife Federation. Planted are paw paw trees, cortland and honeygold apple trees, bartlett and yellow keeper pear trees, as well as honeyberry, jastaberry, and goji berry bushes. The first harvest is expected within three years. This community orchard is intended to increase enjoyment of the park for all visitors. Everyone is invited to harvest from it. CFI will oversee annual pruning and will coordinate harvesting any excess to distribute to area food pantries through our Donation Station program.



**Jess Chadwell and Mike McTernan planting an apple tree at Highland Park**

## Seed Give-Aways

Seeds are the most crucial ingredient for a successful gardener and the simplest way to encourage gardening is to make them accessible. With collaborative planning between staff, in 2014, CFI distributed **35,000** pounds of seed potatoes in less than eight hours, over **3,000** seed packets of nearly 400 varieties and over **4,000** plant starts all for free to the SE Ohio region. Although the seed potato give-away



**Community Volunteers package seeds before a week of seed give-away events**

happens every year at ACEnet, the seed and plant start give-aways went to all corners of the county, to over eight different locations to ensure everyone had the opportunity to get seeds. Furthering this effort, CFI partnered with the Athens Public Library branches and had free seed boxes for people to peruse. It worked so well, we will do it again in 2015!

Jackson Area Ministries, various seed companies, the Athens OSU Extension Master Gardeners and Ohio University's Environmental & Plant Biology Department all helped contribute seeds and plants starts. Community volunteers lent a hand, bagging seeds and hefting seed potato sacks.

Participants in Hocking Athens County Community Action's Learn & Work program were a big help bagging seeds, too!

## School Garden Programs



People of all ages enjoy learning in the garden, but probably few show it better than children. CFI supports school gardens in the region by providing access to garden and classroom resources, consultation and assistance in building, maintaining and harvesting in the gardens. Athens City, Nelsonville, Trimble, Federal-Hocking and Alexander school districts all participate in addition to Hocking Valley Regional Community Residential Center (HVCRC), Athens County Children Services, Sycamore Run, Child Development Center and just recently Vinton County Schools.

CFI works with school teachers, parents and community members to build, maintain and plan the gardens, but the real joy is in using the gardens as a classroom so that young people get the experience of planting



**Young Gardeners helped build a garden at Morrison Elementary for Make a Difference Day with other community volunteers**

seeds, watching them grow, care for them and eat their vegetables with pride. CFI's School Garden Coordinators facilitated **136** lessons in classrooms, reaching over **1,200** young people.

Keith Wilde, our current School Garden Coordinator, has been enjoying his time working with students and teachers alike. At one recent school garden lesson, he reflected that, "students came alive as they dove into their tasks. It was a fun filled exploration for the students. They pounced on newly unearthed potatoes. Weeds were rigorously ripped out and added to a compost pile. Students practiced careful bean picking techniques. Seeds from tall dill plants were sprinkled into jars for future planting. And by far the most popular activity was all about discovery. The students absolutely loved tasting the fine

lacy leaves of the dill. Interest spread like wildfire. After a taste students raced to share their discovery with a friend, who in turn found another friend, and on it went. Some of them even came back for more over recess. The exercise was just as pleasant for the teachers. Every teacher wants an audience of engaged and appreciative learners. On this day student enthusiasm made the teachers feel like rock stars. It was my pleasure to see so many people enjoy themselves as they made discoveries in the garden."



Morrison Elementary teacher Jan McGarry wrote a grant to build a school garden and then reached out to CFI for assistance. Keith Wilde worked with her and decided that building a school garden would make the perfect Make A Difference Day project for the AmeriCorps members serving the area and for community members to pull together. With only a few weeks of planting and a minimal budget, the dream came true, and Morrison Elementary now has several raised beds with good soil ready to plant in Spring. What was really wonderful about the Make A Difference Day project was that people of all ages helped and craft activities and snacks made the day feel festive.



**Jan McGarry, Teacher at Morrison-Gordon Elementary**



**Making garden salsa at Federal Hocking Schools**

Other exciting highlights of 2014 include Athens High School and CFI working together, to increase use of the AHS greenhouse to prepare plant starts for all school gardens for 2015. In the Federal Hocking School District, teacher Keith McCartney, who continues to be at the forefront of school garden curriculum development, is using the garden for year-round lessons for the eighth grade. Casa Nueva Restaurant staff visited the middle school and Amesville Elementary, to guide the students making salsa out of ingredients from their gardens.

Not all of the School Garden Programming takes place at schools. Our focus is on any youth-oriented garden, including Athens County Children Services, who use the garden as part of their family visitation unit. "The family garden at ACCS has been an important part of many family visits this year," explains Autumn Setzler, ACCS COMCorps Service Member. "When I arrived at ACCS in August, the garden was flourishing with many different colors and smells - tomatoes ripening on the vine, parsley and mint growing side by side in a raised bed, and flowers decorating the empty spaces."

Gardens do more than provide food. They offer spaces for healing and learning. Autumn reflects on the garden's many uses, "families would go out to the garden and harvest cucumbers to snack on during their visit. Children would pick flowers to give to their mothers. Children would ask me all about the different herbs and vegetables, curious about how they grew. As the season started to turn into fall, the CFI school garden coordinator, Keith, and I used some recycled materials to put in two more raised beds in the garden. I took some families out to these beds to plant broccoli, spinach, and kale. Kids who had never tried these vegetables became so excited to take part in the process of growing them - from seed to table. Now that it is cold outside, the garden is quiet and much less colorful, but I know that when it starts to get warmer, the families and I are going to have a lot of fun planning the garden for the spring and summer season."



**Autumn Setzler building raised beds at ACCS**

Partner organizations such as Rural Action's Environmental Education and Zero Waste programs, Athens Master Gardeners, and various parent-teacher associations help make these school gardens beautiful and useful for hands-on learning.



# The YEAH Kids

## Youth Entrepreneurs At Hope We Grow. We Learn. We Sell. We Earn.

Athens Metropolitan Housing Authority and CFI work together to provide healthy food access, gardening and kitchen education and entrepreneurial opportunities for people at Hope Drive Apartments. The YEAH Kids program is designed to foster professional and practical skills for youth ages 12-18 at Hope Drive as well as the opportunity to make money during the summer months.



YEAH Kids this year demonstrated an increase in dedication to the garden, providing more consistent maintenance and improved production. Value-added products expanded to include kimchi, baked goods, and new jam varieties. The YEAH Kids took a field trip to the Chesterhill Produce Auction in August to see where we acquire food for their products and for the Donation Station program. They also participated in the Athens Farmers Market Jr Chef program, learning from Avalanche Pizza owner, John Gutekanst. Although three participants moved away with their family, there is a strong bond among participants and several interested youth who will be eligible next year to join. Sales at the Athens Farmers Market and hot pepper sales to Casa Nueva Restaurant led to collective profits of **\$1,070**.



**A happy customer samples products from YEAH Kids**

How it Works: Each YEAH Kid keeps a timesheet and is responsible for tracking all their work hours. At the end of each month, CFI staff tally the total gross profits from sales, and formulate the hourly wage, based on the YEAH Kids total hours and total profits. Each YEAH Kid is then paid for how much time they worked. This keeps it fair, and they learn that ups and downs in the life of entrepreneurs are normal. They become savvy, paying greater attention to the importance of good marketing, noting what products or produce items sell the best and strategize on how to increase their profits and reduce their labor by using more efficient methods.

The Annual Hope Garden party in August offered a showcase of the YEAH Kids market items, garden tours and recognition from AMHA, CFI Board members and local and state officials, celebrating the program with the participants' families, and the Hope community.

This Winter, CFI Staff are offering a revived "Kid Power" program, formally coordinated by Athens County Children Services, where the intent is to provide good mentorship, offer a supportive and creative environment to nurture Hope's youth and increase participation in the YEAH program in 2015.

**In their own words, here is what the YEAH Kids say about the program:**

"I like going to ACEnet and making the food." - Asia

"I like growing food in the garden and helping the new kids that join Y.E.A.H." -Dakota

"I like being a part of the Farmers Market and it gives me the experience of working." -Ishmael



**What do they learn?**

"I learned how to plant crops and how to deal with plants that are dying, how to save them"-Asia

"I learned how to make new things like kimchi"-Dakota

"I learned how to grow plants better and more about selling goods at the market"- Ishmael



**What do they do with their earnings?**

"Bought clothes, Christmas presents for my parents, and some computer games."-Asia

"I spent some of the money on school clothes and a new pair of shoes."-Dakota

"I have been saving a little. I gave some to my mom, some to my brother, and then just saving the rest for when I need to buy something."-Ishmael



**How does it change them?**

"I talk to more people now and feel more confident in my ability to have a conversation with people that I don't really know."-Asia

"I'm not really sure how, but I just feel better." -Dakota

"When I first started Y.E.A.H a couple years ago everything seemed so confusing but now, after being in it for a few years, I know how to do everything. It feels good to just be able to go out and do some work on my own and to teach other people how to do some of the stuff that we do."-Ishmael



## The Donation Station



The Donation Station, started in 2008 by an inspired CFI Board Member, Keith Peterson. He saw a need for healthy fresh food at area food pantries and he noticed farmers hauling unsold produce home after the farmers market. Today, this program is a model “local food solution” to food insecurity. The Donation Station is at the Athens Farmers Market and Chesterhill Produce Auction, soliciting financial donations to purchase local food, collects donations of food from farmers, gardeners and customers who purchase and donate it. The following business day, Donation Station staff distribute the food to food pantries and social service agencies serving those in need. This program supports the local food economy that is providing meaningful and sustainable work in the region, and helping to ensure that everyone has equitable access to fresh, healthy local food, especially those struggling to feed their families.



**Donations weighed in from the Southside/Carriage Hill Community Gardeners**

*“I can attest to the important fact that the Donation Station fills a very vital need in our communities! The folks I get help for truly appreciate every bit of it all year long!”*

-Mike Kubisek, volunteer for Lottridge Food Pantry

In Athens County according to Job and Family Services, 34.7% of individuals live below the poverty line, as compared to 15.1% in Ohio and 14.3% nationally. Food insecurity rates are at 20% in Athens, the highest in Ohio, compared to a 15.9% average nationally. Food security means access by all people at all times to enough food for an active, healthy life. What we know from the data and from talking to local food pantry coordinators, is that people are working jobs but still struggling to make ends meet. Folks might be able to cover a good number of meals themselves, but toward the end of the month, or when a large medical bill comes or a car breaks down, things can quickly go from bad to worse. That’s when they need help, and we as a community want to be here to help.



## The Harvest Hotline

2014 was the second year for the new Harvest Hotline, where Donation Station staff and volunteers collect excess produce directly from local farms or community members. Donation Station staff Andrea Reany and Bekky Hobson have been instrumental in this success. It's exciting for all of us: a call comes in from a farmer, saying they've got around 400 pounds of salad and cooking greens they won't be able to sell in time. If Donation Station staff can get there within the next 48 hours, it can be ours to distribute. It really feels like some kind of local food reality TV show—can we rustle up enough volunteers? How much lettuce can you fit in a compact car? The answer is a lot, and the Harvest Hotline has brought in thousands of pounds more food than we would otherwise have to distribute.



**Vest Berry Farms donated over 3,000 lbs through the Harvest Hotline**

*"The Donation Station at the Athens Farmers Market may well be the most enjoyable part of attending the market. The staff is always on hand to help farmers with produce they have donated as well as give a smile and thank you to all who helped to contribute to this organization. They truly create a win-win situation for the farmers, recipients of the produce and the entire community."*

*-Rick Vest, Vest Berry Farms*

Another part of Donation Station's substantial growth is the partnership with Chesterhill Produce Auction. We were blessed with a substantial financial donation that helped us have a weekly budget throughout the season, infusing good money into the local food system, and bringing back thousands of pounds of food. We are grateful for community members who not only believe in the CFI mission, but dedicate themselves to helping make it happen. Thanks to them, the Donation Station now serves two food pantries in Morgan County.



**CFI staff at the Chesterhill Produce Auction on Opening Day in 2014**

## Discovery Kitchen

Discovery Kitchen offers healthy cooking classes to food pantry patrons and agency clients using local seasonal ingredients. People build confidence to increase their fresh produce consumption if they have a little help and encouragement, so we offer easy how-to's, recipes, and tasty samples to help inspire them! In 2014, Discovery Kitchen went to many food pantries and agencies, including the Salvation Army, The Gathering Place United Campus Ministry, HAPCAP, Good Works' Timothy House, and at Athens Public

Library branches. In total, Discovery Kitchen reached over **200** people at **25** different events.

## The Donation Station in Numbers

Since 2008 when the Donation Station began, over 338,526 pounds of food have been distributed to area food pantries and social service agencies.

**In 2014—**

**\$11,985** was spent at the Athens Farmers Market to purchase food

**\$2,735.45** was spent at the Chesterhill Produce Auction to purchase food

Athens Farmers Market Vendors donated  
**17,717.80 pounds** of local food

**5,521.50 pounds** were collected through the Harvest Hotline

The Donation Station distributed **79,452.50 pounds**  
of locally produced food to **44 pantries and agencies** in Athens and Morgan Counties!  
That's 24,452 more than our original goal and 27,995 more than 2013!

## Our Funding in 2014

True to CFI's roots, 2014 offered reinforcement to grassroots support. The trend continues that nearly half of our budget is raised locally, through memberships, donations and fundraising.

Thanks to regional foundations, in 2014 CFI as embarked on strengthening our programs.

The Sisters of St. Joseph Charitable Foundation and the Sugar Bush Foundation are helping CFI expand the Donation Station to neighboring counties, and offer other communities their own Donation Stations at their farmers markets. Washington County's River City Farmers Market has been the first to develop their own version, and CFI will continue to provide support to ensure their success.

The Sugar Bush Foundation is also funding a community media project, supporting CFI to develop short films about our programs and providing CFI staff and other non-profit agency staff with hands-on education on using multi-media tools so that we can all better tell our stories.

The Osteopathic Heritage Foundation of Neslonville is supporting CFI to provide consultation to other communities to establish more Donation Station programs in the region and work with collaborative partners, ACEnet and Rural Action, on sustainable and strategic planning to increase healthy food access to vulnerable populations in SE Ohio.

The Athens Foundation continues to fund many educational components of CFI by supporting the School Garden Programs and Discovery Kitchen and Garden Workshops.

The Rocky Community Improvement Fund is helping afford the Community Gardens some much needed garden equipment and education on organic weed suppression and management methods for gardeners.

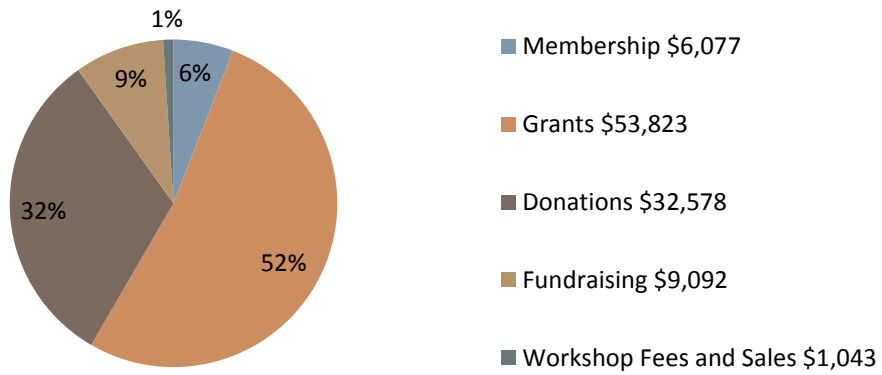
Kleinpenny Educational Fund supported our School Garden programs and for the second year, the Kramer Foundation supported the Donation Station, and the Edward Lamb Foundation supported CFI's seed sovereignty work.

CFI was also the recipient of a \$10,000 award thanks to a partnership between Ohio University Associate Professor Dr. Julia Paxton's Economics of Altruism class and Warren and Doris Buffet's Learning By Giving Foundation. In an effort to foster philanthropy and civic engagement, Dr. Paxton's class evaluated local organizations based on their relevance to local issues, sustainability of the organization, excellence in management and impact of services. The class chose Community Food Initiatives as the recipient of a \$10,000 award, funded by the Learning By Giving Foundation. CFI plans to use the award to expand programs and resources to neighboring counties.

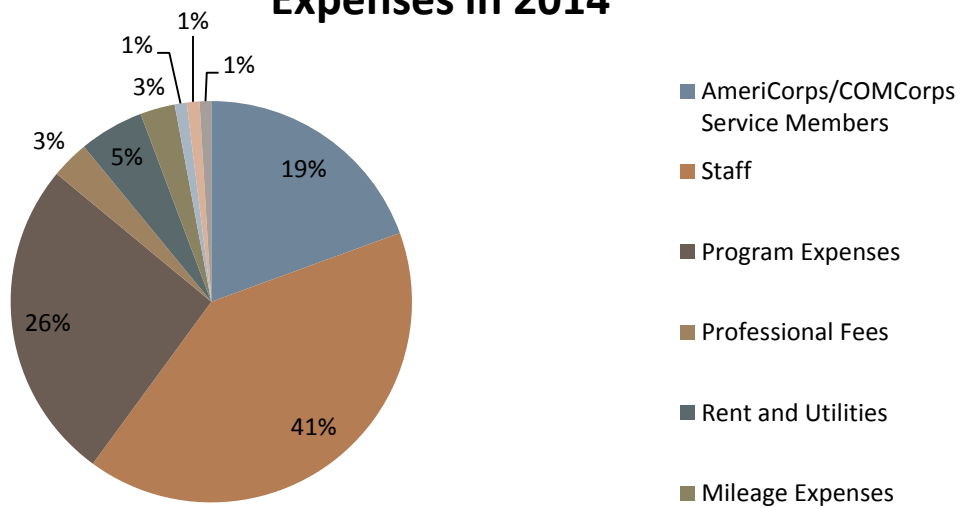
Other major funders include the City of Athens, supporting our AmeriCorps Service Members and the Athens Metropolitan Housing Authority, supporting the YEAH Kids program.



## Income in 2014



## Expenses in 2014



Special Thanks to the 376 volunteers who put in 1,439.25 hours -- equivalent to nearly one hundred and eighty 8-hour work days!



#### **Board of Directors**

Barbara Fisher, President ♦ Sarah Conley-Ballew, Vice-President  
Nancy Pierce, Treasurer ♦ Lori Gromen, Secretary ♦ Tom Redfern ♦ Kira Slepchenko ♦ Lee Gregg  
Don Shamblin ♦ Ruth Dudding ♦ Penny Shelton

#### **Staff**

Mary Nally, Executive Director  
Erik Peterson (through July, 2014) & Andrea Reany, Donation Station Manager  
Jenn Thompson (through June 2014) & Bekky Hobson, Donation Station & Discovery Kitchen Coordinator  
Mike McTernan (through June 2014) & Keith Wilde, School Garden Program Coordinator  
Jess Chadwell, Community Garden Program Coordinator

#### **Ohio University Summer Service Corps, Work Study and Interns**

Katrina Hamilton, Dandelion Duff, Christiana Ampadu, Ike Placke, Janice Brewer,  
Bek Wald, Anna Chleboun, Ehrin Lingeman and Chelsea Ashworth