



APPALACHIAN ACCESSIBLE FOOD NETWORK (AAFN)

2022 Annual Report



The Appalachian Accessible Food Network (AAFN) is a collaborative project to accelerate the distribution of local foods into Appalachian Ohio communities by strengthening access, production, and consumption components of a local food value chain. The collaboration has received generous funding through the Osteopathic Heritage Foundation, The Sisters Health Foundation, the Athens County Foundation and the Education Foundation of America. The AAFN works to generate regional impact, develop innovative solutions that bolster the local economy, build deep-rooted community connections, and invest in the future of Appalachia.

GENERATING REGIONAL IMPACT

UPLIFTING EASTERN KENTUCKY

The AAFN believes in supporting the Appalachian region through mutual aid and support. In 2022 Rural Action procured over 2,000 pounds of produce from the Chesterhill Produce Auction and delivered it to Hindman, Kentucky for flood victims in Eastern Kentucky.

CENTRAL APPALACHIAN NETWORK

AAFN partners have taken an increased role in regional work through the Central Appalachian Network (CAN), which connects nonprofit organizations in Kentucky, Ohio, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia.

Leslie Schaller, Director of Programs at ACEnet, has spearheaded a series of summits titled “A Fair Food System” through a partnership with the CAN and the USDA. AAFN leaders served as keynote speakers in the first summit and throughout the series. The summits have attracted hundreds of unique attendees with 60+ joining each individual session. Rural Action’s Molly Sowash serves as the co-chair of the Beginning Farmer & Entrepreneurship Training Working Group. In November, Molly represented Rural Action and the Central Appalachian Network at the 2022 Appalachian Regional Commission Annual Conference.

INNOVATIVE SOLUTIONS

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

In 2022, we made strides in workforce development led by ACEnet's Food Enterprise Coordinator, Adam Kody, delivering both Restaurant Ready training and ServSafe Food Handler training to multiple cohorts of STAR residents, virtually and in-person. In total, Adam graduated 20 participants from the program. Eight ACEnet tenants also supported STAR job placements.

Ed McGinnis of Red Barn Chili shared his experience of working with STAR Community Justice residents and scaled up the operation of his business with their assistance. "ACEnet provides work transition experience and I couldn't have had better help making my Zesty Chicken Chili in Athens, OH with help from STAR residents Aaron and Aaron. Both of them are looking to be released soon and both will be working in the food industry. They asked me if I would be a work reference and without hesitation I agreed. They were fantastic! They helped me make 300 bricks of

Zesty Chicken Chili. Aaron 'Country' with the ball cap wants to open a restaurant in his hometown of Norton while Aaron will be in the Athens area working for ACEnet clients."

Our partners, Survivor Advocacy Outreach Program launched New Leaf Justice Enterprises in 2022, opening New Leaf Marketplace in Nelsonville. New Leaf provides a fresh start for survivors of trauma, substance misuse, and incarceration in Southeast Ohio. ACEnet staff worked with participants to provide food service and food safety training.

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WHOLE FARM MENTORING & BUSINESS PLANNING

Rural Action held their second Whole Farm Mentoring & Business Planning series, which matched 12 beginning farmers with 11 mentors in a 10-week program covering key business topics for farms. In 2022, Rural Action coordinated 32 topical farming workshops alongside partners United Plant Savers, Central State University, and ACEnet.

Over 250 participants attended these workshops on beekeeping, mushroom production, forest farming, agritourism, livestock management, seed production, and more.

Beginning farmers from Rural Action's winter mentorship series participants shared the following reflections:

“My mentor was awesome. Because of him I felt very confident that my plan was sound. Also, he connected me with others that helped answer many questions...Having the mentor available to discuss the specifics of my situation and the opportunity with Goldenseal made this course extremely valuable for me. I can't say thank you enough!”

“It gave us some direction and motivation to start a business plan and flesh out our dream into more of a reality.”



“

I FEEL LIKE MY BUSINESS PLAN IS NOW READY TO BE SEEN BY OTHERS AND THAT IT HAS GIVEN ME THE DIRECTION I NEEDED TO TAKE ALL THE FIRST STEPS.

”



12

BEGINNING FARMER PARTICIPANTS

8

BUSINESS PLANS WRITTEN

5

NEW INCOME STREAMS ADDED

4

MARKET OUTLETS EXPANDED

CHESTERHILL PRODUCE AUCTION

The Chesterhill Produce Auction grossed \$458,260 in 2022, a 14% increase in sales from 2021 due to the increased demand from food access projects such as Produce Prescriptions, Farm to School, Buying Club, and the Southeast Ohio Food Bank.

PRODUCE PRESCRIPTIONS

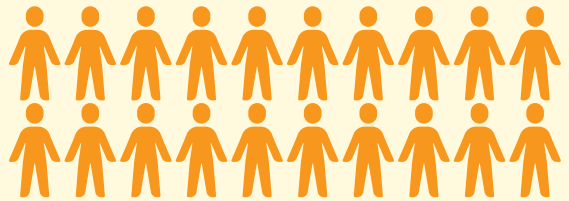
Rural Action purchased, packed, and distributed Produce Prescription shares each week to serve patients experiencing diet-related diseases or food insecurity. This project strengthened our partnerships with Hopewell Health and Coplin Health, leading to an expansion of Produce Prescriptions in the 2022 growing season where we distributed 285 Produce Prescription shares weekly across 9 counties, totaling 30,803 pounds of food.

BUYING CLUB

CFI and Rural Action continued our partnership whereby the Veggie Van served as a pick up site for Buying Club and Produce Prescription bags. 27 weekly produce shares were distributed via Veggie Van, expanding our capacity to reach food insecure individuals.

The "Local Food For All" fundraiser successfully raised \$5,000 to supply 20 households in Coolville and Glouster with a weekly bag of fresh produce. This fundraiser also implemented a pay-it-forward system where individuals purchased Buying Club bags for low-income community members.

\$5,000 RAISED



20 HOUSEHOLDS PROVIDED WITH PRODUCE WEEKLY





ATHENS COUNTY FOOD PANTRY

In 2020, the Athens County Food Pantry saw an influx of funding from the Joe Burrow Hunger Relief Fund. Rural Action and CFI began to partner with the Southeast Ohio Food Bank to distribute food to drop-off locations using Rural Action's vehicles. AAFN partners met early in 2022 with the Athens County Food Pantry to formalize the expanding partnership and explore ideas for collaboration.

As a result of that meeting, CFI started purchasing additional produce from the Chesterhill Produce Auction on the Food Pantry's behalf and distributing it to the Food Pantry in addition to its weekly Donation Station box. This has allowed CFI to pilot a new process where pantries that already participate in Donation Station can work with CFI to expand the amount of local produce they access by directly investing their food dollars with CFI to purchase food from local farmers. Throughout 2022, Rural Action facilitated monthly mobile food distributions with the Athens County Food Pantry.

\$1,500
IN LOCALLY PURCHASED
FOOD DISTRIBUTED TO
100
COMMUNITY MEMBERS

CFI also hosted a community food distribution in conjunction with the Athens County Food Pantry and Athens County Jobs and Family Services. Approximately \$1,500 in locally purchased foods were distributed to almost 100 community members at no cost.

SOUTHEAST OHIO FOOD BANK

The Southeast Ohio Food Bank received additional funding to purchase over \$50,000 in local produce. The Food Bank partnered with Rural Action to purchase produce weekly from the Chesterhill Produce Auction and deliver it to the Food Bank in Logan, Ohio. The produce was then sorted and distributed to partner pantries in the region.



53,585 LBS
OF FOOD DISTRIBUTED
WHICH EQUALS
44,654 MEALS

FARM TO SCHOOL

Rural Action coordinates the procurement and processing of fresh produce for the Farm to school initiative. Rural Action’s Farm to School initiative provided green peppers and butternut squash for Athens City Schools “Harvest of the Month”. They also provided apples for Apple Crunch Day, a nationally recognized Farm to School activity meant to expose children to a locally sourced fruit and establish the connection between the food and the farmer. It was the largest to date with 8,652 apples distributed to 20 schools across 8 districts.

DONATION STATION

The Donation Station uses generous donations from the community to purchase produce from local farmers at the Athens Farmers Market and the Chesterhill Produce Auction. The produce is then donated to local food pantries to share with their clients. In 2022, Donation Station distributed 53,585 lbs. of food which translates to roughly 44,654 meals. CFI and Rural Action also partnered to launch a new Donation Station in Tuscarawas County, through which they distributed 865 lbs. of donated produce, 2065 lbs. of purchased produce, and donated \$2,030.06 to 5 pantries and meal providers.

COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

VEGGIE VAN

Beginning in May 2022, Veggie Van continued weekly stops to Coolville and Glouster, monthly visits to Nelsonville, and new pop-up markets in Albany and in Washington County. Veggie Van had 1,316 customer visits at 6 locations in 2022 resulting in 11,685.25 pounds of local produce getting distributed to rural locations. A University of Buffalo research team visited in July to collect data on community health outcomes related to the Veggie Van as part of the national Veggie Van research study, in which CFI is a participant.

COMMUNITY GARDENS

CFI’s community gardens had 120 garden plots in cultivation across Athens county and held several garden education workshops that served a total of 75 adults in our community. In addition to community gardens, CFI helps manage 3 school gardens in Athens City School District and Federal Hocking Local Schools. In these school gardens the Sprouts program has taught 157 hours of garden lessons, serving 406 first grade students in 20 classrooms in 2022.

FARMERS MARKETS

Rural Action and ACEnet began a three-year project to expand the Shawnee Farmers Market as part of a destination and food access strategy to support redevelopment in this rural town. In the spring, grant partners met with 5 regional farmers market board members to learn best practices, created a website, social media, brochures, radio and TV ads, and a robust marketing campaign to help the market grow, as well as recruiting the first members of the board. We saw a steady increase in the number of vendors and customers at each monthly market, starting with 10 vendors and 44 customers in May and reaching 16 vendors and 160 customers at our busiest market in July. ACEnet staff members also assisted in coordinating efforts with the Athens Farmers Market 50th anniversary celebration throughout the market season.

NEIGHBOR LOAVES & MEALS

Rural Action's Neighbor Loaves & Meals is a project that connects farmers growing staple crops with millers, bakers, and chefs to produce nutritious bread and meals for local food access sites.

Customers purchase these items at participating local businesses to be delivered to food distribution sites by Community Food Initiatives and the Athens County Food Pantry. This pay-it-forward model benefits farmers, local businesses, and neighbors in need.

In 2022, the Neighbor Loaves & Meals project distributed 1,586 meals to Athens County, where approximately 20% of the population faces limited food access and insufficient nutrition. Rural Action also awarded \$1,450 in mini-grants to four local businesses to develop new recipes for the project, with funding from the Ohio Farm Bureau Foundation.

COMMUNITY CONVERSATION SERIES

In the Fall, Ohio State University presented four community engagement events held in Athens, Nelsonville, Glouster, and Amesville. Upon completing a two year study with the AAFN, OSU continued the conversation around food insecurity in southeast Ohio and shared their research findings by sharing a meal with community members.



NOURISHING NETWORKS

Nourishing Networks is a three-part workshop series that brings together diverse community stakeholders to identify barriers & implement strategies to expand community food access. CFI also hosts Nourishing Networks Train the Trainer workshops. This series trains participants to host workshops in their own communities, encouraging facilitators to welcome diverse perspectives to the table for discussions about food justice and community empowerment.

In 2022, CFI's Nourishing Networks community workshop and training sessions brought over 100 people together to discuss challenges and resources for food access.

In August, CFI facilitated a Nourishing Networks workshop at the Hope Drive apartment complex where 14 participants gathered to discuss food access and develop project proposals to improve food security. The workshop also resulted in plans to install additional raised bed gardens at accessible locations within the complex to support more access to residents for growing fresh food.

In November, Nourishing Networks was held in Stewart at the Federal Valley Resource Center, with approximately thirty participants at each session; this marked one of the largest Nourishing Networks events to date.

CFI Partnered with the OU Center for Campus and Community Engagement to train 13 students, COMCorps members, and community members on the Nourishing Networks model in February 2022. In September 2022, CFI partnered with a seminar class at OU focusing on food justice issues to train three additional students, for a total of 16 Nourishing Networks facilitators trained

**IN
2022,
NOURISHING NETWORKS
BROUGHT OVER
100
PEOPLE TOGETHER
TO DISCUSS
COMMUNITY
FOOD ACCESS**



“
I THINK ONE OF MY
TAKEAWAYS FROM
TODAY'S DISCUSSION IS
TO NOT LET THIS TOPIC
GET LOST IN THE DAY
TO DAY.
IT'S IMPORTANT TO
INTEGRATE THESE
QUESTIONS AND
DISCUSSIONS INTO THE
WORK WE'RE DOING
DAILY.
”



LEARN MORE ABOUT AAFN

AAFN PODCAST - ROOT TO SEED: anchor.fm/roottoseed



THE APPALACHIAN
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