

# COMMUNITY FOOD INITIATIVES

ANNUAL REPORT  
2023



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# Mission & Values

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Community Food Initiatives fosters communities where everyone has equitable access to healthy, local food. Our vision is a resilient and sustainable region where everyone is nourished by a just, inclusive, and thriving local food system.



**Culture and Community:** We value building on our assets -- natural resources, diverse community knowledge, and an Appalachian heritage of cooperation, persistence, and creativity -- and supporting everyone to see their contribution in strengthening our community.



**Education and Empowerment:** We believe that by sharing the knowledge to grow and prepare wholesome foods, people become empowered to feed their families, improve their health, and strengthen their community.



**Justice:** We are rooted in the belief that equitable access to fresh and nutritious local food leads to a safe and clean environment, supports meaningful work with livable wages, and fulfills the needs and rights of all people.



**Collaboration:** We believe in the strength of collaboration, mutually beneficial partnerships, and in doing better together.

## Our History

Community Food Initiatives began in 1992 as a program of Appalachian Center for Economic Networks (ACEnet). While its original vision was to be a producer's association, CFI quickly evolved into its own organization with a distinct mission focused on access and equity. Since then, CFI has worked diligently to support residents of the region to grow their own food and preserve their bounty, as well as to distribute produce directly from local farmers and gardeners to community members, local pantries, and other organizations.

We celebrated our 30th birthday in 2022, and these three decades of impact were only possible thanks to the heartfelt work of our staff, volunteers, community members, partner organizations, business sponsors, board members, and so many others. We have grown as an organization, but our original purpose remains: to increase access to healthy, local food for everyone.

# From the Executive Director

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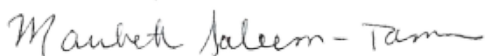
In 2023 CFI faced both challenges and opportunities, adapting to the ebb and flow of the seasons, the demands of our mission, and the ever-evolving landscape of food access. The impact numbers highlighted throughout this report tell a compelling story. Statistics, however, only scratch the surface of the impact we have collectively made.

Within these pages, the stories of farmers, partners, team members, volunteers, supporters, and friends of CFI illustrate the power of our combined dedication to fostering a healthier, more sustainable, more equitable community through food.

Major program milestones this year included reestablishing a weekly Veggie Van market in Nelsonville, hiring an experienced CFI Community Gardener into a newly established Community Garden Coordinator position, and adding fall field trips to the Ohio University Student Farm for more than 200 Sprouts students in Athens City and Amesville Schools. CFI maintained our strong, long-term partnership with the Athens Farmers Market while also expanding the Donation Station purchasing network to include vendors from farmers markets in Meigs County, Beverly-Waterford, and Marietta, and establishing a monthly Donation Station presence at Marietta's River City Farmer's Market. Nourishing Networks co-hosted Washington County workshops in Harmar and Newport, and CFI's Discovery Kitchen returned to full in-person programming with more than 50 community-based events.

I invite you to delve into the report not just as a reflection on the past year, but also as a celebration of our shared journey and as a source of inspiration and sense of shared purpose moving forward into the future. This document is a testament to the collective vision, hard work, and hope of our communities.

With gratitude,



**Maribeth Saleem-Tanner**

Executive Director

# 2023 Snapshot & Financials

January 1, 2023 -  
December 31, 2023



Donation Station distributed 68,690 pounds of healthy, local food



Food Access Programs purchased more than \$30,000 from local farmers



The Veggie Van distributed 16,680 pounds of food



Garden Giveaways provided 4,900 plant starts & 40,000 pounds of seed potatoes



Volunteers donated 3000+ hours with CFI programs



Youth Garden Education Programs reached 969 students



Discovery Kitchen shared recipe samples with 2138 individuals

CFI 2023 Income	
Grants (73%)	\$250,831
Fundraisers and Individual Donations (12%)	\$40,968
Program Income & Funded Partnerships (11%)	\$34,857
Business and Organizational Supporters (4%)	\$19,125
<b>Total Income</b>	<b>\$345,781</b>
CFI 2023 Expenses	
Direct Food Access Programs (31%)	\$98,181
Community Gardens and Garden Education Programs (25%)	\$81,479
Community Engagement Programs (17%)	\$55,990
Local Food Purchases (9%)	\$30,726
Admin, Tax, Insurance, Accounting, Legal (6%)	\$19,103
Capacity: Memberships, Fees, Fundraising (4%)	\$14,510
Facilities and Operations (4%)	\$13,382
Fuel, Auto Insurance, Vehicle Repair (3%)	\$8,869
Training & Professional Development (1%)	\$2,027
<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>\$324,267</b>

# Donation Station

In 2023 CFI's Donation Station invested over \$30,000 in our local food system, working with farmers markets, small farms, and local food businesses to provide over 68,690 lbs of fresh, healthy, local food to approximately 5,000 people through a network of 50 pantries, hot meal programs, and other partners.

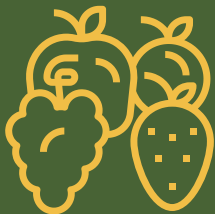
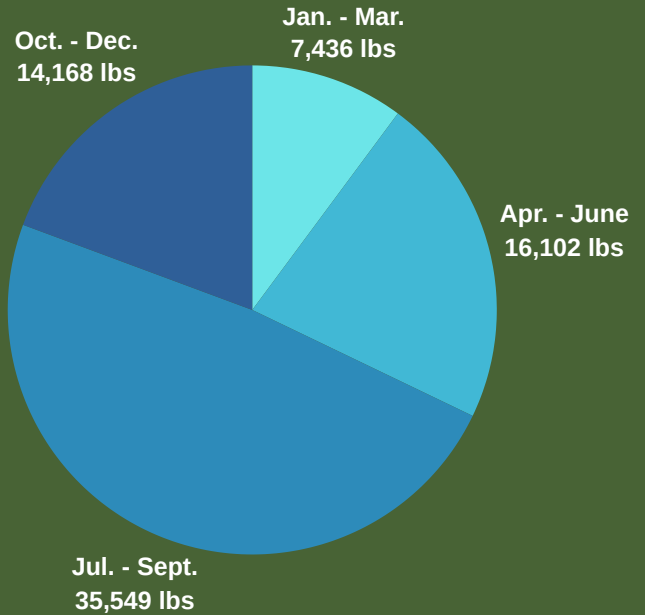
In addition to piloting a farm-to-pantry program in partnership with Rural Action and the Southeast Ohio Food Bank, this year Donation Station also organized a community distribution and health event, providing healthy food directly to 150 people, as well as involving partners offering health-related services such as free hygiene products and vaccinations.



# Donation Station

*"BEING ABLE TO BE A FARM THAT'S SUPPORTED BY A LOCAL ORGANIZATION THAT GETS OUR FOOD INTO THE HANDS OF PEOPLE WHO NEED IT IS A WONDERFUL THING FOR US."*

- Adam, local farmer and Donation Station contract partner



68,690 pounds of local food distributed



50 pantry partners and 5,000 individuals served across Southeast Ohio



\$30,000+ invested with local farmers



80,000 pounds of seed and baking potatoes distributed through our annual Seed Potato Giveaway



# Veggie Van

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With the midseason relaunch of a weekly market site in Nelsonville in July, CFI's Veggie Van served three communities each week. There were 1,519 customer visits to the Veggie Van and we partnered with Rural Action once again to distribute produce bags through the Local Food for All Campaign, for a total distribution of 16,680 pounds of fresh produce by Veggie Van in 2023.

In an end-of-season survey, 64% of Veggie Van customers said they are eating more fruits and vegetables overall as a result of the Veggie Van. According to one customer, "The veggie bag program really helped our family. It enabled us to eat healthier. On a very tight budget we cannot afford the amount of veggies we ate last summer."



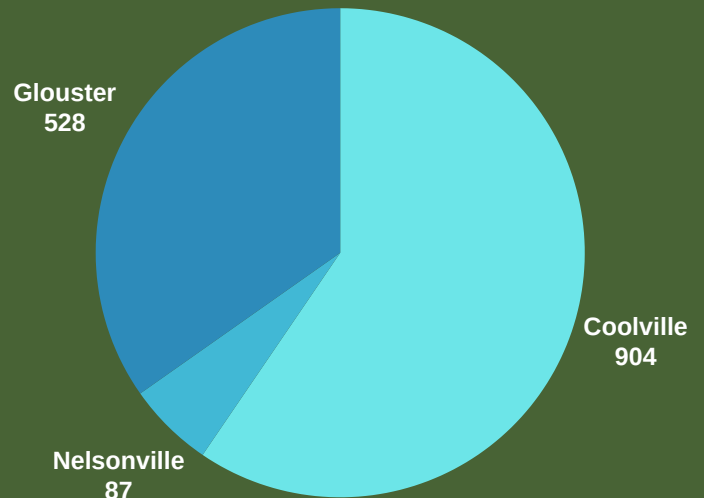


# Veggie Van

## Customer Visits

*"There is this perfect storm of highly complicated issues separating many people from the basic human right of nutritious food. I love CFI's elegantly efficient approach: buy food from sustainable farms, find avenues for this food to make it to tables that might not have access, teach people to grow their own food, spread excitement and information in grassroots, personal ways."*

- Peg, CFI volunteer



**16,680 pounds of local, healthy food distributed**



**More than 1,500 customer visits**



**3 communities served weekly during 2023 VV season**



**\$2,700 invested with local farmers**



# Community Gardens

One of the biggest changes for our Community Gardens program in 2023 was the transition of our Community Gardens Coordinator position from an annually renewed AmeriCorps service position to a part-time professional staff member. Community Gardens Coordinator Amy Fugikawa brings 30-year community roots, a decade of community garden lead volunteer experience, and extensive gardening knowledge.

CFI managed four community gardens as communal spaces for over 60 local gardeners to grow their own food and other beneficial plants. Annual Garden Giveaways were once again wonderful community-wide spring events, and included distribution of over 40,000lbs of seed potatoes, over 1,500 packets of free garden seeds (in partnership with Athens County Public Libraries), and 4,900 plant starts.

*"I LOVE THE GARDEN SO MUCH. THE SENSE OF SATISFACTION AND RELAXATION I GET FROM IT IS UNPARALLELED.*

- CFI community gardener



*Planting an apple tree and tree guild at the Nelsonville Community Garden (left), and planting a small fruit tree orchard at the Eastside Community Garden with the Athens Arbor Day Committee (above).*

# Community Gardens

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"THE COMMUNITY GARDENS ARE A VERY SPECIAL THING. IT BRINGS COMMUNITY MEMBERS TOGETHER, AND IT PROMOTES HEALTH AND WELLNESS. I HOPE THAT EVERY MEMBER OF OUR COMMUNITY CAN EXPERIENCE AND APPRECIATE WHAT THEY HAVE TO OFFER."

- CFI community gardener



Over 1500 seed packets and 4900 plant starts distributed through annual Garden Giveaways



Over 100 plots under cultivation by over 60 community members



Supported the creation of 1 new community garden with a partner site



# Garden Education

We had great success working with our community's youngest gardeners this year! In the 2023-2024 school year CFI's Sprouts school gardening program worked with 427 first grade students, providing 144 hours of Sprouts classroom programming, and the CFI team also provided gardening activities to 542 additional youth through other school and community programs.

The response to Sprouts in 2023 was outstanding. 100% of teachers surveyed in May 2023 would like this programming to continue, and parents sent rave reviews. One parent reported: "My child loves Sprouts so much, and I love that he has the opportunity to be involved in such a wonderful program. I can tell it gave him a deeper understanding of where food comes from and how humans and the environment come together to create food that nourishes us."



# Garden Education

*"THIS PROGRAM HAS BEEN SO VERY VALUABLE TO OUR KIDDOS. THEY ALWAYS FIND PRODUCTIVE THINGS TO DO IN THE GARDEN AND I ENVISION MANY OF THEM FEELING LIKE THEY CAN GROW THEIR OWN THINGS BECAUSE OF THIS EXPERIENCE. I'M SO GRATEFUL THAT WE HAVE THIS PROGRAM*

- Sprouts partner classroom teacher



**427 first graders reached through Sprouts school garden education**



**144 Sprouts classroom hours sharing garden education**



**542 youth served through community-based Garden Education in addition to Sprouts**

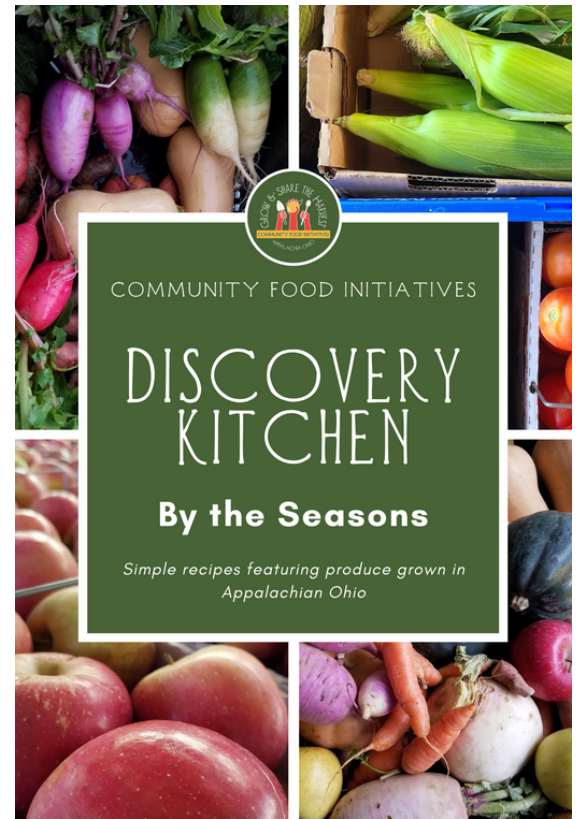


# Discovery Kitchen

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2023 was a big year for CFI's Discovery Kitchen! We worked with community partners, including the Athens Farmers Market and Donation Station distribution sites, to host over 50 events providing recipes, samples, cooking and food preservation workshops, and other resources empowering individuals to prepare delicious and nutritious meals using locally accessible produce.

Our biggest year for in-person events since 2019, in 2023 2,138 community members sampled recipes or participated in workshops. We also published our first cookbook, *Discovery Kitchen By the Seasons*, a collection of over 100 recipes developed and tested over the past several years, all organized according to the seasons and adapted to make cooking with seasonal produce as accessible as possible.



*"The Discovery Kitchen workshop we held last month was fun and informative from start to finish. The hands-on lessons and learning along with camaraderie and laughter are a true gift to our program as we encourage healthy and fun activities to support the recovery journey."*

- Betsy, Donation Station partner and local nonprofit leader



# Nourishing Networks

*"I AM THRILLED TO HAVE A PARTNERSHIP WITH CFI. ... A BRAND NEW THING THAT WE DID THIS YEAR WITH THE RESOURCE CENTER IS TO HAVE OUR OWN COMMUNITY GARDEN ... THE SUPPORT AND THE GUIDANCE FROM CFI WAS KEY, OR WE NEVER WOULD HAVE BEEN ABLE TO DO IT."*

- Therese, Nourishing Networks participant

In 2023, CFI worked in partnership with the Washington County Creating Healthy Communities Coalition to host 4 Nourishing Networks sessions which engaged 43 community members in facilitated discussions of barriers and strategies for food access, and supported planning community-led food access projects.

Food access challenges named by community members included: reductions in SNAP and other benefits; high costs of food, fuel, and medical care; limited availability of public transportation; challenges accessing information and services; and limited access to fresh food. Community members also named strong assets that help cope with these ongoing challenges, including strong local networks and organizations, living in an area where gardening is possible, and people's ability to work together and be creative in figuring out how to prepare, store, and preserve food. In December 2023, the Washington County Commission approved a Nourishing Networks Proclamation "supporting opportunities to improve our local food systems, strengthening policies and programs, and working toward stronger and healthier communities."



*Facilitating a NN meeting (top), and a new community garden developed this year as a result of a 2022 NN workshop (bottom).*

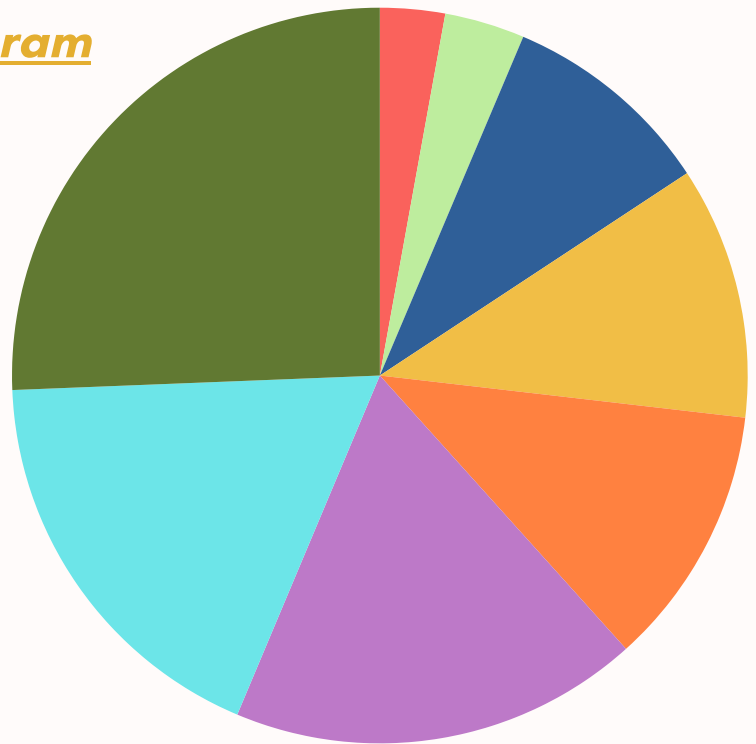
# Community Engagement

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94 individuals volunteered over 3000 hours with CFI in 2023! In addition to recurring weekly events like our booth at the Athens Farmers Market, Veggie Van farm stands, and attending the Chesterhill Produce Auction, CFI also shared information about cooking, gardening, and volunteer opportunities at more than 48 additional events. We promoted student engagement with the local food system by presenting at 6 college classes, partnering with 10 student organizations, and hosting 4 student interns. CFI also presented a workshop on Community Gardening to a national audience at the 2023 Appalachian Studies Association Conference, as well as presenting workshops on Donation Station replication at the annual Ohio Ecological Food and Farm Association conference, and the Ohio Farmers Market Network conference.

## Volunteer Hours Per CFI Program

- **Community Gardens: 800**
- **Donation Station at AFM: 563**
- **General: 562**
- **Distribution: 359**
- **Garden Education: 346.5**
- **Veggie Van: 292**
- **Chesterhill Produce Auction: 110**
- **Discovery Kitchen: 90**



*"I get more from CFI than I give. I love being around the folks who work there and feeling a sense of teamwork, caring and also having fun. When I go home from whatever the event, I always just feel better and more hopeful."*



# 2023 Partnerships

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We're thankful for our program partnerships with organizations across the region, from businesses, to schools, to farmers, to other non-profits. Together, we're working toward a more equitable, just, and environmentally friendly future across Appalachian Ohio.

ACEnet  
Alexander Lions Club  
AmeriCorps COMCorps  
Athens Catholic Community Food Pantry  
Athens City-County Health Department  
Athens City School District  
Athens County Children's Services  
Athens Co. Creating Healthy Communities Coalition  
Athens County Food Pantry  
Athens County Job and Family Services  
Athens County Master Gardeners  
Athens County Public Libraries  
Athens County Visitors Bureau (Visit Athens County)  
Athens Farmers Market  
Athens Food Rescue  
Athens Metropolitan Housing Authority  
Athens Photo Project  
Bishopville Food Pantry  
Blackberry Sage Farm  
Blooming View Montessori School  
Cat's Cupboard  
Chesterhill Produce Auction  
City of Athens  
City of Athens Arts, Parks and Rec. Department  
Federal Hocking School District  
Federal Valley Resource Center  
First Presbyterian Church of Athens  
First United Methodist Church  
Good Works  
HAPCAP  
Hocking College Agroecology  
Hopewell Health Centers  
Hunger Prevention Coalition  
Integrated Services for Behavioral Health  
Live Healthy Kids  
Little Fish Brewing Company  
Marietta College  
Methodist Theological School in Ohio  
Nelsonville Food Cupboard  
Ohio CDC Association AmeriCorps VISTA project  
Ohio Ecological Food and Farm Association  
Ohio Farm to School Network  
OhioHealth  
OHIO Student Farm & Farm to Ohio Working Group  
Ohio University Center for Community Engagement  
Ohio University Student Senate Environmental Affairs Coalition  
Ohio Valley Museum of Discovery  
OSU Extension  
OUHCOM Community Health Programs  
Rural Action  
Rural Women's Recovery  
Salvation Army  
Serenity Grove  
Shagbark Seed & Mill  
Snowville Creamery  
Sojourners  
Tavolinos  
The Hive of Nelsonville  
The Ohio State University College of Food, Agricultural, and Environmental Sciences  
Trimble Local Schools  
United Campus Ministry  
United Plant Savers  
University of Buffalo  
Vest Farm  
Washington County Creating Healthy Communities Coalition

# Sponsors & Funders



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The work we do at Community Food Initiatives is possible thanks to the financial support we receive from grants, donations, and sponsors. As a grassroots community organization, CFI depends on the investment of those who support our mission. Thank you to all those that supported us in 2023!

## **2023 Platinum Sponsors**

Sirius Systems Consulting

## **2023 Gold Sponsors**

OhioHealth

ISBH

Modern Woodmen

Shagbark Seed & Mill

## **2023 Silver Sponsors**

LCDM Corp

Kokosing Solar

Athens Eye Care

## **2023 Bronze Sponsors**

Precision Imprint

Beads n Things

Susan Roth Art and Design

West End Cider House

Binford Electric Company, Inc

Gerig and Gerig Ltd

# Sponsors & Funders

## 2023 Foundations and Supporting Organizations

Elizabeth G K Hess Trust  
First Presbyterian Church Athens  
East Elementary PTO  
Athens Farmers Market  
Nelsonville First Presbyterian Church  
Research Foundation for State University of  
New York (University of Buffalo)  
Education Foundation of America  
Rural Action  
Athens County Foundation  
Athens County Foundation Women's Fund  
Athens County Food Pantry  
Osteopathic Heritage Foundations  
David O. McCoy and Christine B. Knisely Fund  
The Blackbaud Giving Fund (Bosch)  
Kleinpenny Educational Fund  
Serve Ohio  
West Elementary PTO/West Arts Council for  
Children  
Hunger Solutions Mid Ohio Valley  
Foundation for Appalachian Ohio  
Kroger Community Rewards  
Visit Athens County  
Kidsgardening.org  
Athens Sunrise Rotary  
Progressive Insurance Foundation/  
Progressive Employees  
Athens Garden Club  
Marietta Community Foundation  
Kramer Family Foundation  
Athens Metropolitan Housing Authority

Martha Holden Jennings Foundation  
Holroyd/Brown Family Fund  
City of Athens Parks and Recreation  
Clif Bar Family Foundation  
Sisters Health Foundation  
City of Chauncey  
Rising Appalachia  
Beacon School - Athens County Board of  
Developmental Disabilities  
Methodist Theological School in Ohio  
Athens City School District  
Ohio Health Corporation - Parade of the Hills  
The Sugar Bush Foundation  
Morrison Gordon Elementary PTO  
Federal Valley Resource Center - Living  
Traditions Program  
Athens County Public Libraries  
Washington County Creating Healthy  
Communities Coalition  
Federal Hocking Local School District  
Philanthropy West Virginia  
Merchants National Bank Community Grant  
Program  
United Campus Ministry  
Ohio University Student Senate  
Rocky Community Improvement Fund  
Appalachian Center for Economic Networks  
(ACEnet)  
USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture  
Church World Service, Inc.- Athens CROP Walk  
East Bay Community Foundation

# Members & Donors

## 2023 Members and Community Donors

CFI is a membership organization, supported by over 150 active members who donated to support our mission in 2023. These members, along with many additional individuals who contributed to Donation Station at the Athens Farmers Market, participated in social media fundraisers, or donated at Veggie Van, are the heart of CFI. We also rely on the growers, gardeners, and businesses that partner with us to grow and share their harvest. In addition to dozens of individual gardeners, the following business and organizations provided food to Donation Station in 2023:

Blaney Family Farm  
Cowdery Farms  
Jackie O's Farm (Barrel Ridge)  
Sassafras Farm  
Shade River Farm  
Shagbark Seed & Mill  
Stacy Family Farm  
Veggie Vision Farms  
9N Farm  
Crane's Crazy Corn  
Willow River Culinary – Chef Katie Mosher  
Cherry Orchard  
Crumbs Bakery  
Gibson Ridge Farm  
Jackie O's Bakeshop  
Laurel Valley Creamery  
Milo's Whole World Gourmet  
Minefire Farm  
Mushbloom Gardens  
Never Never Fruit Farm  
Snowville Creamery  
Monserat Ridge Farm, LLC  
Witten Farms  
Athens Local Food Buying Club  
Symmes Creek Ranch

Attican Farms  
Blackberry Sage Farm  
CFI Community Gardens  
Greenlees Greens  
Lonewolf Lavender  
Master Gardener's Children's Garden  
Chesterhill Produce Auction  
Olive Branch Catering  
Rich Gardens Organic Farm  
Root 56 Farm  
Rural Action  
Amesville School Garden  
East Elementary and Morrison Gordon School  
Gardens  
Shews Grassfed Beef  
Toadally Awesome Garden  
Vest Farm  
Wagner Fruit Farm  
Westside Community Garden  
Kindred Market  
Alfonso's Italian Bakery & Kitchen  
Avalanche Pizza  
Village Bakery  
Casa Nueva

# Staff, Board & Volunteers

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We are able to accomplish all of the work that we do thanks to the continued support and person-power of our staff, volunteers, AmeriCorps members, and our Board of Directors.

## **2023 Staff**

Maribeth Saleem-Tanner, Executive Director

Susie Huser, Director of Outreach

Molly Gassaway, Director of Garden Education

Reggie Morrow, Director of Food Sourcing and Distribution

Ivan Orquera, Veggie Van Program Manager

Amy Fugikawa, Community Gardens Coordinator

## **Board of Directors**

Adam Kody, President

Mat Roberts, Vice President

Sierra Faris, Treasurer

Pat Tegge, Secretary

2023 Members:

Ruth Dudding, Ginny Stack, Tiffany Arnold, Becky Clark, Heather Fuston, Caitlyn McDaniel, Olivia Degitz, Jennifer Sartwell

## **AmeriCorps Service Members and Full-Year Interns**

**2022-2023 Cohort:** Lucy Peloso, Garden Education Coordinator, Raya Abner, Community Gardens Coordinator, Sam Alexander, Food Access Coordinator, Jessica Hough, AmeriCorps VISTA

**2023-2024 Cohort:** Lucy Peloso, Garden Education Coordinator, Anthony Warner, Food Access Coordinator, Drew Ogg, AmeriCorps VISTA

**Full year intern, 2022-2023:** Sarah Stonerock

**Full year interns, 2023-2024:** Rebecca Ferguson, Dominic Straquadine

# Get Involved

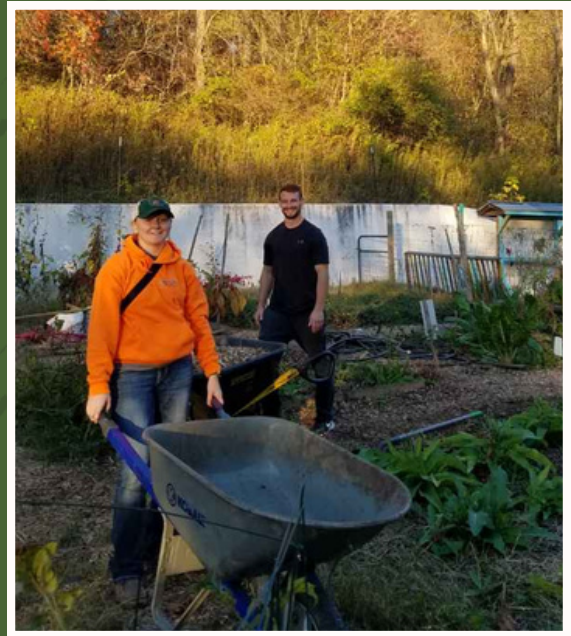
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*"Being part of a community effort to eradicate food insecurity is important to me. Working elbow to elbow with folks that get as excited as I do about local produce is such a joy! I am so proud to be part of a community that connects wholesome food with its people - especially those that might have access challenges."*  
- Deb, CFI volunteer

Community Food Initiatives is always looking for community members and students to volunteer or intern with us! There are many ways you can get involved with CFI. We host volunteers, interns, and AmeriCorps service members. Scan the QR code to sign up for our newsletter, connect with us on social media, or reach out to us about available opportunities.

## Programs

- Community Gardens
- School Gardens
- Garden Education
- Food Distribution
- Donation Station
- Veggie Van
- Discovery Kitchen
- Nourishing Networks



***Learn More!***

