

COMMUNITY FOOD INITIATIVES

2021
Annual
Report



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Our Mission

Community Food Initiatives fosters communities where all residents have equitable access to healthy, local food. We accomplish this through a variety of programs and events, from school and community gardens to food distributions to local markets.

We believe that by naming our assets—soil, seeds, and an Appalachian heritage of food production and preservation—everyone in Southeastern Ohio can be part of the solutions that strengthen our community. Our work is guided by these values:



Culture and
Community



Education and
Empowerment



Justice



Collaboration

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 of ACEnet, CFI quickly evolved into its own organization with a new direction and mission. Since then, CFI has worked diligently to teach residents of the region how 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.

Community Food Initiatives is celebrating its 30th birthday in 2022, and it would not be possible without 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 fresh, local food for residents of this region. As we look toward the future, it is more important than ever to reflect on how far we've come together.



From the Executive Director

2021 was a year of growth and resiliency for CFI. Veggie Van more than tripled customers from its first season. Nourishing Networks adapted to an online format for successful community discussions and facilitator training programs. Sprouts expanded to all first graders in Athens City Schools and Amesville. At the same time, the established core programs of CFI—Donation Station, community and school gardens, Discovery Kitchen, and educational partnerships—also thrived.

*"As we approach
CFI's 30th
anniversary, we
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the impact of this
work and to take a
moment to dream for
the future."*

This year has also brought challenges. The ongoing pandemic restricted in-person programming, impacted volunteer engagement, and once again canceled our annual fundraiser. Our small size and flexibility were key in responding quickly to changing food access needs and adapting to limited storage and transportation capacity. Despite a variety of factors that impacted our financial bottom line, we kept our focus on meeting our mission and staying true to our values. The CFI team had the added challenge of onboarding a new Executive Director during the busy growing season, and I am deeply grateful for the welcome, wisdom, and support of this amazing community!

As we approach CFI's 30th anniversary, we invite you to celebrate the impact of this work and to take a moment to dream for the future. We are ready to move together with you into 2022 with renewed energy to grow and share the harvest, and to build a sustainable foundation for an equitable, inclusive, and thriving local food system.

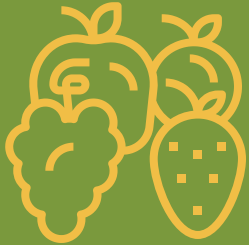
With Gratitude,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Maribeth Saleem-Tanner'.

Maribeth Saleem-Tanner



Donation Station



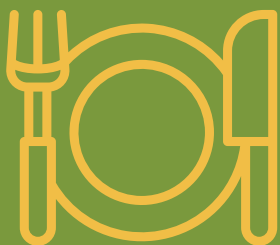
82,000+ pounds of food distributed



40+ pantry partners across SE Ohio



\$12,000 invested in our local food economy



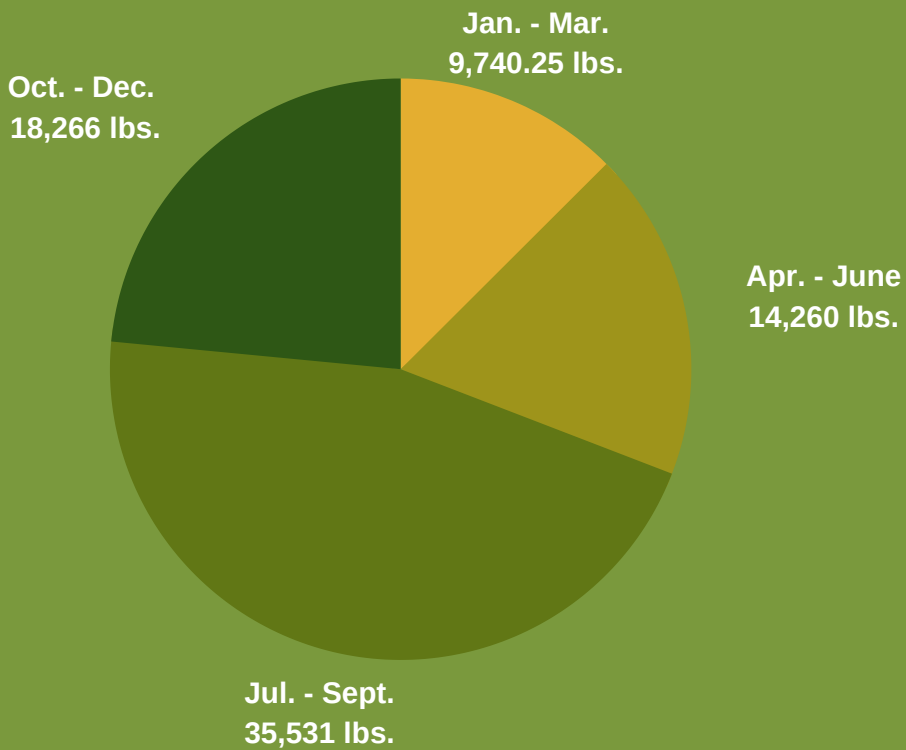
5,000+ people reached through Discovery Kitchen



Over the past decade, the Donation Station has become one of CFI's primary and most vital programs to address food insecurity challenges. We do this by "providing food that's nourishing for the people who receive it, while ... also supporting our local economy and reducing our impact on the environment. Our work enables the systems-level change that is necessary for building resilience in any community," according to CFI's Donation Station and Communications Director Susie Huser.

In 2021, we distributed more than 82,000 pounds of food, invested \$12,000 in our local food economy, taught hundreds of residents how to utilize local, seasonal produce, and found strength in our amazing partnerships with farmers and other organizations that support our mission.

"Most of the food [at the pantry] is shelf stable box food. And so just to have that option of fresh, nutritious, local produce is lovely. [P]eople connect and are grateful when they have that option. It's just really special that it's southeastern Ohio feeding southeastern Ohio." - Donation Station Pantry Partner



Pounds of Food Distributed

The Donation Station team diligently sources the **freshest produce** from the Athens Farmers Market, local gardeners, and the Chesterhill Produce Auction to distribute to dozens of organizations each week, from pantries to local churches. We attend every market and produce auction to ensure **no food goes to waste** . These local food aggregate sites and other organizations are vital in realizing CFI's mission to ensure everyone has access to fresh, healthy produce in southeast Ohio.

During the peak 2021 growing season, we relied on the **resiliency and grit** of our diligent volunteers, staff, partners, and AmeriCorps members in order to efficiently and appropriately distribute tens of thousands of pounds of tomatoes, potatoes, squash, zucchinis, and a host of other produce while coping with the second year of a pandemic. As we enter 2022, our team is excited to go above and beyond once again to grow and share the harvest as we **address food insecurity at its roots** .

Sprouts and Gardens

At the heart of CFI's mission to grow and share the harvest are our Community and School Gardens. With **four Community Gardens** in Athens and Nelsonville and numerous School Gardens across the county paired with our School Garden education program **Sprouts**, Community Food Initiatives sows seeds of **food resiliency and prosperity** in the region. Thanks to community support, we've been able to grow the number of plots in our gardens to over 100 in the past two years as we work toward creating self-sufficient and

and autonomous community gardens. Our Hope Drive Garden Club, a six-week gardening camp for children and families, celebrated a successful gardening season; while our Sprouts staff adapted to the challenges of **hybrid education** throughout 2021. In July, CFI was able to build a **new shed** to house our tools for gardeners at the Eastside Garden thanks to a host of volunteers from the community. We understand the importance of **diverse and multi-faceted gardening strategies** that strengthen our communities at their roots.

*"The garden has been such a **huge benefit** during this pandemic — an opportunity to get outside and work and see a few other people safely and just be with nature."*

- Katherine Ziff
Eastside Community Gardener





101 garden plots
farmed by community
members



36,355 pounds of
seed potatoes
distributed



100+ in-person and
virtual lessons
taught



3,271 seed
packets and plant
starts distributed

Sprouts also experienced a successful return to in-person lessons at multiple local schools. While we relied largely on virtual lessons and activities in the early part of 2021, the latter half of the year brought a **rejuvenated approach** to garden lessons as we were one of the few external organizations granted permission to operate within Athens City School District

elementary schools. Students worked with their hands on projects meant to **spark their curiosity** in the natural world and recognize the beauty that exists all around us. At Amesville Elementary, students were able to experience the wonder of witnessing seeds they had planted grow into radishes that eventually ended up on their plates in the cafeteria. Sprouts is on a **mission to strengthen** the relationship students have with local food and the natural environment, ultimately encouraging students to value this relationship as they move through life.

In 2022, we're looking forward to finding new ways to **inspire future and current generations** of gardeners in the region.



Veggie Van

With the success of the Glouster Veggie Van in 2020, Community Food Initiatives expanded its operations to Nelsonville, Coolville, and other locations in 2021 in partnership with other regional organizations.



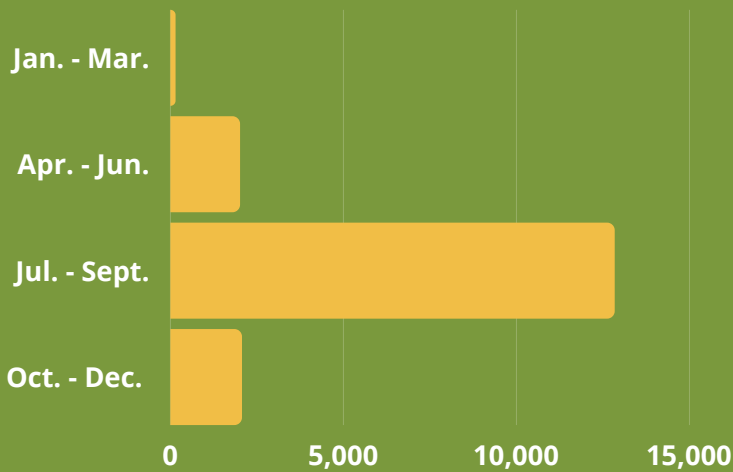
The donation-based market carries locally-grown fruits and vegetables to southeastern Ohio communities 10 months out of the year thanks in part to funding from the University of Buffalo. Key collaborators include the Creating Healthy Communities Coalition, Rural Action, ACEnet, HAPCAP, and the Athens County Public Library system.

In order to provide equitable access to the fresh, local, food Veggie Van carries, customers pay whatever they're able. Firmly based in our vision for a **thriving and just local food system**, the Veggie Van offers locally-grown produce in exchange for any level of donation. All unsold produce is distributed to our food pantry partners, and all donations support food purchase and distribution. This model **supports our local farmers** while also ensuring that **fresh, local fruits and veggies** are accessible for all.

Before the Veggie Van's bell had even rung to signal the opening of the first market across from the Coolville Public Library in July 2021, residents had already begun

lining up to purchase produce from the donation-based market. One resident was particularly enthusiastic because her means of transportation prevented her from traveling to grocery stores a town or two away, so the Veggie Van meant she was finally able to have consistent access to fresh produce in the summer months.

In 2021, the Veggie Van served over **1,600 customers** and distributed **17,000+** pounds of produce.



Pounds of Food Distributed



1,634 customers served



17,027 pounds of food distributed

Nourishing Networks

In CFI's Nourishing Networks program, trained facilitators host workshops that provide data on food security, introduce food justice concepts, discuss barriers to and strategies for food access, and support community-led follow up projects.

The workshops are built on curriculum from the West Virginia University Food Justice Lab and tailored to the specific context of our Ohio host communities. Nourishing Networks programs create powerful collaborative spaces that engage diverse stakeholders and build a strong community-based network of food justice advocates.

Our 2021 workshops attracted 50 registrants and generated strong engagement. Even with the challenges of hosting online workshops, 100% of participants felt prepared to talk about hunger and food insecurity with fellow community members; 83% said that they know how to connect with others to create a more food secure community; and 100% said that as a result of participating in Nourishing Networks, they plan to become more involved in actions to increase food security.

All participating communities launched locally-led food access projects, including the continuation of a 2020 beekeeping project in Nelsonville, the distribution of 60 garden boxes to Glouster residents to grow their own produce, and a Coolville educational series on budgeting, preserving techniques, and cooking with fresh, local ingredients.



**50 registered
participants**



**60 garden boxes
distributed**



**100% effective at
activating participants**

Inspired by the power of these conversations in our communities, CFI is beginning to partner with interested organizations to train others on how to host their own Nourishing Networks workshops and discuss food insecurity wherever they are. We held our first series of Train the Trainer workshops in November with state program staff from OSU Extension SNAP-Ed.

Partnerships

Striving for a resilient and flourishing local food system where everyone has access to healthy, fresh produce is work that can't be done alone. We're thankful for our 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 for all of our neighbors across Appalachia Ohio.

ACEnet	Coolville Elementary	OHIO Student Farm
ACS Food Pantry	Cowdery Farms	OUECOM Community
Alexander Lions Club	Cutler Community Center	Health Programs
AmeriCorps COMCorps	First United Methodist	Rural Action
AmeriCorps VISTA	Church	Rural Women's Recovery
Athens Catholic Community	Good Works	Salvation Army
Food Pantry	HAPCAP	Sheltering Arms
Athens City-County Health	Hunger Prevention	Sojourners
Department	Coalition	St. Francis Evangelization
Athens County Children	Integrated Services for	Center
Services	Behavioral Health	The Hive
Athens County Creating	Kilvert Community Center	Radical Times Nelsonville
Healthy Communities	Kindred Market	Trimble Local Schools
Coalition	Live Healthy Appalachia	United Campus Ministry
Athens County Food Pantry	Lottridge Community	University of Buffalo
Athens County Jobs and	Center	Vest Berries
Family Services	Master Gardeners	Village Bakery
Athens County Public	Mineral Feed My Sheep	WIC Office
Libraries	Pantry	
Athens Farmers Market	Morgan County United	
Athens Food Rescue	Ministry	
Athens Photo Project	My Sisters Place	
Bishopville Food Pantry	Nelsonville Food Cupboard	
Buckeye Health Plan	O'Bleness	
Care Closet	Ohio CDC Association	

Sponsors

The work done by Community Food Initiatives would not be possible without the financial support we receive from grants, donations, and other sources. Our business sponsors are **particularly vital** when it comes to growing and sharing the harvest. Without them, we would be unable to purchase and distribute produce, create and implement lessons for students, operate our Veggie Van, maintain our beautiful Community Gardens, and implement new strategies to **strengthen Southeast Ohio's local food system**. Thank you to our sponsors that supported us in 2021. We look forward to growing with our supporters as we mark our **30th anniversary in 2022**.

Platinum Harvest Sponsors

Integrated Services for Behavioral Health
Ohio Health O'Bleness Hospital
Sirius Systems Consulting

Gold Harvest Sponsors

Jackie O's Pub and Brewery
Modern Woodmen
Shagbark Seed & Mill

Bronze Harvest Sponsors

Bodhi Tree Studio	Linscott Trucking
Cool Digs	Precision Imprint
Hocking Valley Bank	Unified Bank

Foundations and Supporting Organizations

Amesville Elementary PTO	Kramer Family Foundation	Osteopathic Heritage Foundation
Athens County Foundation	Martha Holden Jennings Foundation	Sisters Health Foundation
Athens Metropolitan Housing Authority	North Central SARE	Sugar Bush Foundation
Edward Lamb Foundation	OhioHealth Community Giving Fund	Rocky Community Improvement Fund
Kleinpenny Educational Fund		Whole Kids Foundation

Thank you!

Staff, Board, and Volunteers

None of the work accomplished by Community Food Initiatives would be possible without the continued support and person-power of our staff, volunteers, AmeriCorps members, and our Board of Directors. In 2021, we hosted a total of **2358 volunteer hours**.

Staff

Maribeth Saleem-Tanner, Executive Director

Susie Huser, Communications and Donation Station Director

Molly Gassaway, Director of Garden Programs

Reggie Morrow, Donation Station Coordinator

Ivan Orquera, Veggie Van Coordinator

Thank you to staff members who concluded their time with CFI in 2021:

Paige Klunk, MaryAnn Martinez, Ashley Prenatt

Board of Directors

Joe Barbaree, President

Sierra Faris, Vice President

Adam Kody, Co-Treasurer

Alexandria Polanosky, Co-Treasurer

Linda Parsons, Secretary

Members: Ruth Dudding, Patrick Tegge, Ginny Stack, Tiffany Arnold

AmeriCorps Members and Full Time Interns

2020-2021 Cohort: Raya Abner, COMCorps Community Gardens Coordinator; Alex Armstrong, COMCorps Food Access Coordinator; Sonya Ferrier, COMCorps Education Coordinator.

2021-2022 Cohort: Raya Abner, COMCorps Community Gardens Coordinator; Ravi Harley, COMCorps Food Access Coordinator; Abby Hearne, COMCorps Education Coordinator; Merilee Meyer, Summer Food Justice VISTA; Zach Perie, Local Food Access Community Relations VISTA

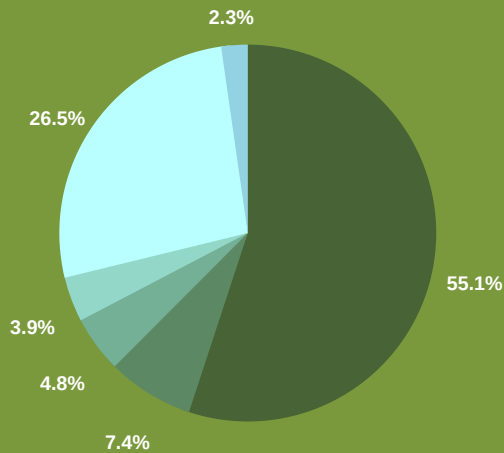
Full Time Interns: Sam Alexander, Dan Trolli

Golden Trowel Winners

Taylor Starke, Michelle Ajamian, Vest Berries, Katherine Ziff, Mike Kubisek, Milo's Whole World Gourmet, Emily Guesman, Irene Jabu Abon, Allyssa Leaton, Katie Mosher, Kara Osborne, Becky Clark, Richard Jones

Financials

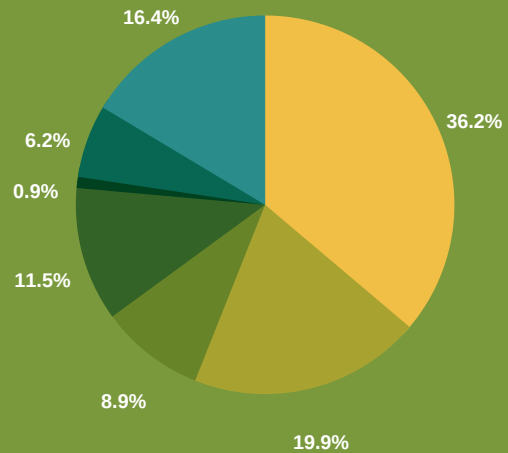
FY 2021 Income



● GRANTS	\$126,617
● DONATIONS	\$61,054
● FUNDRAISING	\$17,098
● DS PARTNERSHIPS	\$11,143
● OTHER	\$8,867
● PROGRAM INCOME	\$5,209

TOTAL: \$229,999*

FY 2021 Expenses



● DS & VEGGIE VAN	\$115,918
● GARDENS	\$63,647
● COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT	\$52,573
● ACCOUNTING, TAX, INSURANCE	\$36,760
● FOOD PURCHASES	\$28,569
● FACILITIES, EQUIPMENT, TECH	\$19,974
● OTHER	\$3,032

TOTAL: \$320,473

*The difference between 2021 income and expenses was covered by CFI's financial reserve (2020 carryover funds).

Get Involved

Community Food Initiatives is always looking for community members and Ohio University students interested in food justice to volunteer or intern with us! Scan the QR code to learn more about CFI by signing up for our newsletter, connecting with us on social media, and reaching out to us about available opportunities.



www.communityfoodinitiaves.org