

COMMUNITY FOOD INITIATIVES

ANNUAL REPORT
2024



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Mission & Values

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 the Appalachian Center for Economic Networks (ACEnet). While the original vision was for CFI to be a producer's association, it 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 as they grow 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.

From the Executive Director

Reflections on 2024: Strength Through Community and Collaboration

2024 was a year of significant transition for Community Food Initiatives, especially in staffing. With deep gratitude for their years of service, we bid farewell to Reggie, Susie, and Maribeth. Their dedication strengthened CFI and we continue to build on the work that they did and the community bonds they established.

Through the steady guidance of our Board and the amazing commitment of Board President Olivia Degitz, CFI persisted during this period of change. New team members, myself included, joined with energy and commitment to carry the mission forward.

The data throughout this report describes the impact of our work. The images capture our “why.” Within these pages, we’ve shared the stories of our year. Stories of working and connecting with partner organizations, volunteers, farmers, community members, and friends—each one a reflection of our collective effort to create a healthier, more sustainable, and more equitable community through food.

Some of this year’s program highlights include:

- Holding the first-ever Sprouts Summer Garden Camp
- Seeing the data to support what we already knew – that students in the Sprouts Program are learning the connection between healthy food and healthy bodies and about gardening as a source of healthy food
- Creating and growing the Discovery Garden through our partnership with ACEnet
- Welcoming gardeners to more than twenty educational workshops
- Providing the Rooting For Wellness workshop series
- Distributing thousands of seeds and plants to individuals and community partners
- Teaming up with Rural Action and the Southeast Ohio Regional Food Bank for the Farm-to-Pantry program
- Offering Discovery Kitchen events for local seniors through the UpBEAT program

This report is more than a review—it’s a celebration of shared purpose. It stands as a testament to the vision, resilience, and collaboration that drive our work forward. Thank you for being part of this journey.



Sarah Grace
Executive Director

2024 Snapshot & Financials

January 1, 2024 -
December 31, 2024



Donation Station distributed over 75,000 pounds of healthy, local food



Food Access Programs purchased more than \$16,131 from local farmers



The Veggie Van distributed 10,830 pounds of food



Annual Garden Giveaways provided 6,000+ seed packets, over 6,400 plant starts & 80,000+ lbs of seed potatoes



Volunteers donated 3,500+ hours with CFI programs



Youth Garden Education Programs reached 1,023 students



\$23,784 of in-kind food received and distributed

CFI 2024 Income

Grants (72%)	\$216,083
Fundraisers and Individual Donations (12%)	\$35,770
Program Income & Funded Partnerships (11%)	\$32,039
Business and Organizational Supporters (5%)	\$16,494
Total Income	\$300,386

CFI 2024 Expenses

Direct Food Access Programs (32.5%)	\$100,262
Community Gardens and Garden Education Programs (28%)	\$86,356
Community Engagement Programs (15%)	\$46,069
Local Food Purchases (6%)	\$17,386
Admin, Tax, Insurance, Accounting, Legal (7%)	\$21,904
Capacity: Memberships, Fees, Fundraising (5%)	\$15,751
Facilities and Operations (4%)	\$13,711
Fuel, Auto Insurance, Vehicle Repair (2%)	\$5,998
Training & Professional Development (0.5%)	\$1,587
Total Expenses	\$309,024

Garden Education

We had great success working with our community's youngest gardeners this year! In the 2024-2025 school year CFI's Sprouts school gardening program worked with 394 first-grade students, providing 145 hours of Sprouts classroom programming. The CFI team also provided 629 pre-k through third-grade students with assisted gardening opportunities and other school and community programs.

For the first time ever, Sprouts kids and alumni came together to take a deep dive into food, fun, and creativity at our Sprouts Summer Garden Camp. Campers learned from local farmers about how bees operate, made herbal salves, planted, harvested and more! The week was a fun one of garden immersion, creative lessons, and awesome people. The response to Sprouts in 2024 was outstanding. 100% of teachers surveyed in May 2024 would like this programming to continue, and parents sent rave reviews.



Garden Education

*"IT'S SO GREAT TO HAVE OUR KIDS LEARNING
IN A HANDS-ON WAY INTERACTING WITH
NATURE AND FOOD IN A POSITIVE WAY!"*

- SPROUTS CLASSROOM TEACHER

*"I'M THRILLED THAT SHE IS LEARNING THIS AT
SCHOOL. IT REMINDS US TO BE MINDFUL OF
THE FOOD WE ARE CONSUMING AS A FAMILY"*

-SPROUTS PARENT



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



**145 Sprouts
classroom hours
sharing garden
education**



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



Community Gardens

In 2024 Community Food Initiatives managed five gardens, totaling 18,720+ square feet of growing spaces. More than 30 community members gardened in 55 individual garden plots in our two community gardens growing their own food and other beneficial plants with their families and friends. CFI also managed three sharing gardens that provided open access for any community member to grow, harvest, and share. These gardens include fruit trees, native plants, and pollinator support.

CFI hosted over 20 gardening events facilitating nearly 2,000 hours of engagement including seed swaps, garden workshops and giveaways, and weekly opportunities for community members to engage in the gardens. The Eastside Garden was 1 of the 7 featured in the Athens County Humane Society Annual Garden Tour fundraiser.

With the help of participants in ACEnet's Food Industry Ready cohort, CFI installed the Discovery Garden on Columbus Road. This has become a place where ACEnet clients, tenants, and staff can be immersed in nature and grow and harvest food. The installation of this garden has also increased CFI's capacity to provide gardening and food preparation/preservation workshops. In April, in collaboration with the annual Athens Beautification Month, CFI expanded the number of growing spaces at Eastside Gardens and decreased the garden plot waitlist.



Community Gardens



**55 garden beds
were leased by
30 community
members**



**18,720+ square
feet of growing
space in Athens
County**



**Hosted over 20
community
events**



**1991 hours of
community
engagement**



Garden Giveaways

Each year the garden giveaway events work to increase regional food security by providing community members with resources they need to grow their own food. The giveaways are open to all, with much of our distribution taking place through community gardens, libraries, and food pantries. In 2024, Community Food Initiatives distributed over 80,000 pounds of seed potatoes, more than 6,000 seed packets, and over 6,400 plant starts through our garden giveaways.



Companion Plants, Ohio University Student Farm, Master Gardeners of Athens Ohio, Jackson Area Ministries, and individual volunteer plant parents all supported the plant-start give away and 6,400+ plant-starts were provided to local gardeners



CFI provided 6,000+ seed packets that were available at all branches of the Athens County Public Libraries



In March, CFI distributed over 80,000 pounds of seed potatoes provided by Jackson Area Ministries to individual community members local farmers and community partner organizations.

Donation Station

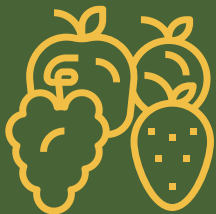
During the summer of 2024, we officially welcomed Drew Ogg as our new full-time Manager of Food Sourcing and Distribution! Drew, an Athens-County native, was already a familiar face to many, having previously served as a volunteer and an AmeriCorps VISTA at CFI.

In 2024 CFI's Donation Station invested over \$16,000 in our local food system, working with farmers markets, small farms, and local food businesses. These efforts provided more than 77,342 lbs of fresh, healthy, local food to approximately 5,000 people through a network of 43 pantries, hot meal programs, and other partners.



Donation Station

"CFI HAS BEEN AROUND A LONG TIME. THEY SUPPLY FOOD TO A LOT OF PEOPLE THAT ARE GREATLY IN NEED OF IT THROUGHOUT THE SURROUNDING COMMUNITIES. THEY'RE WONDERFUL PEOPLE. THEY COME OUT TO THE FARM AND HELP ME, HELP GROW THINGS. I DON'T KNOW WHAT WE'D DO WITHOUT THEM. I REMEMBER BEFORE CFI WAS HERE, AND THERE WAS A VOID HERE." - RICK VEST, FARMER & COMMUNITY PARTNER



**77,342 pounds of
local food distributed**



**43 pantry partners
and 5,000 individuals
served across
Southeast Ohio**



**\$16,000+ invested
with local farmers**



Veggie Van

During the 2024 growing season, CFI's Veggie Van set up its mobile farmers market in three communities each week: Nelsonville, Coolville, and Glouster, welcoming a total of 1,497 visits to Veggie Van. In partnership with Rural Action, the Veggie Van distributed produce bags for the Local Food for All Campaign. In 2024, this program included the distribution of 10,830 pounds of fresh produce delivered to rural communities.

The Veggie Van also traveled to participate in two new special events in 2024. During the spring and summer months, the Veggie Van provided a series of 9 workshops in the Rooting for Wellness, Holistic Healthy Food Access for Older Adults program. On August 14, 2024, the Veggie Van was a part of the Parade of the Hills Ohio Health Heritage Health Fair in The Plains, Ohio.

In April Kristen Wiedmann joined CFI as our Veggie Van Marketing Specialist, a new position that will help expand community awareness and farm connections over the next two seasons.



Veggie Van

"I'm able to get vegetables to eat that I couldn't afford to buy before because of the cost of everything nowadays. It makes my life a lot easier and a lot better to be able to eat fresh fruits and produce." — Veggie Van Visitor



10,830 pounds of local, healthy food distributed



More than 1,400 visits to the Veggie Van

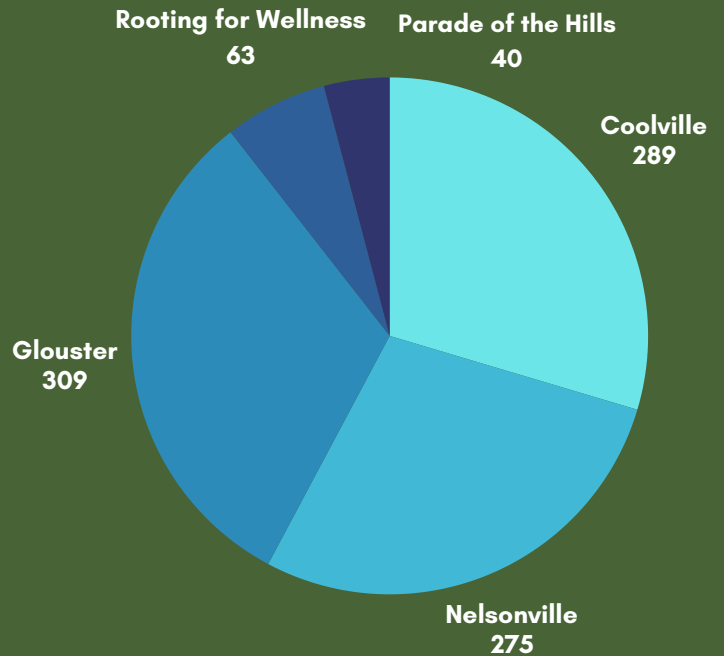


3 communities served weekly during 2024 VV season



\$5,600 invested with local farmers

Veggie Van Visits

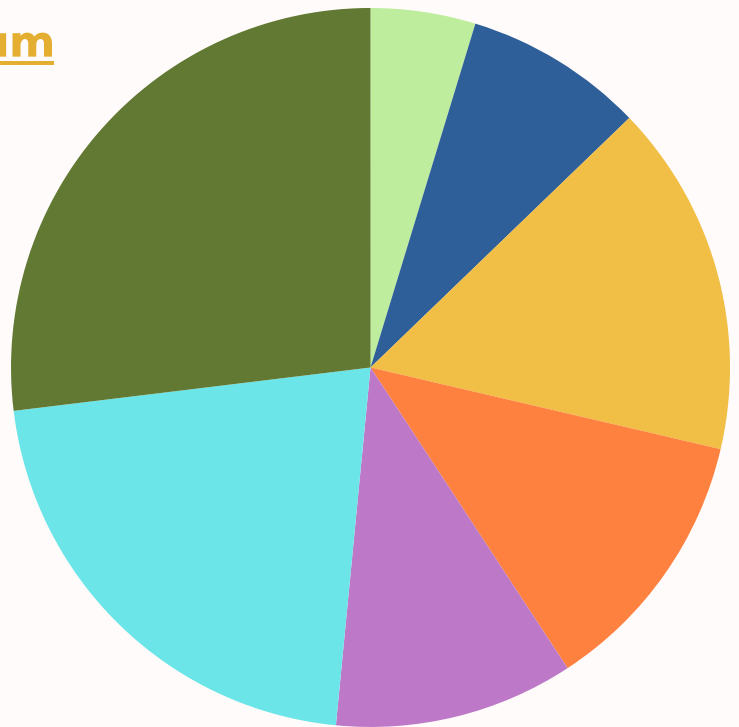


Community Engagement

The work we do at Community Food Initiatives is possible because of our dedicated team of volunteers, who are the heart of our organization. In 2024, these mighty volunteers provided over 3,500 hours of their time to support equitable food access in Appalachia. 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 shared information about cooking, gardening, and volunteer opportunities at more than 30 community events. We also promoted student engagement with the local food system by presenting at college classes, partnering with student organizations, and hosting student interns.

Volunteer Hours Per CFI Program

- Community Gardens — 1,000
- Donation Station — 800
- General — 415
- Distribution — 450
- Garden Education — 589
- Veggie Van — 300
- Chesterhill Produce Auction — 175



Community Partners

As a grassroots community organization, CFI depends on the investment of those who support our mission. In 2024, that support came from more than 150 individuals and organizations in the form of grants, donations, sponsors, and project collaboration. We are exceedingly thankful for our partnerships with organizations from across the region including businesses, schools, farmers, and other non-profits. Together, we're working toward a more equitable, just, and environmentally friendly future in Appalachia. Thank you!

Appalachian Center for Economic Networks (ACEnet)
Americorps COMCorps
Athens Catholic Community Food Pantry
Athens City-County Health Department
Athens City School District
Athens County Creating Healthy Communities Coalition
Athens County Food Pantry
Athens County Foundation
Athens County Job and Family Services
Athens County Master Gardener Volunteers
Athens County Public Libraries
Athens Farmers Market
Athens Food Rescue
Athens Garden Club
Athens Metropolitan Housing Authority
Athens Photographic Project
Beacon School - Athens County Board of Developmental Disabilities
Blooming View Montessori School
Chesterhill Produce Auction
Christ Lutheran Church
Church World Service, Inc.- Athens
CROP Walk

City of Athens Parks and Recreation Department
David O. McCoy and Christine B. Knisely Fund
East Bay Community Foundation
East Elementary PTO
Federal Hocking Local School District
Federal Valley Resource Center
First Presbyterian Church Athens
First United Methodist Church
Foundation for Appalachian Ohio
Goldman Sachs Gives
Good Works
Hocking - Athens - Perry Community Action (HAPCAP)
Hocking College Agroecology
Holroyd/Brown Family Fund
Hopewell Health
Hunger Prevention Coalition
Integrated Services for Behavioral Health
Jackie O's
Kindred Market
Kleinpenny Educational Fund
Kramer Family Foundation
Kroger Community Rewards
Live Healthy Kids

Community Partners

Little Fish Brewing Company
Marietta Welfare League
Martha Holden Jennings Foundation
Memorial Health System
Modern Woodmen of America
Morrison Gordon Elementary PTO
Nelsonville Food Cupboard
Ohio Ecological Food and Farm Association (OEFFA)
Ohio Farm to School Network
OhioHealth
OHIO Student Farm
Ohio University Cats Cupboard
Marietta Welfare League
Martha Holden Jennings Foundation
Memorial Health System
Modern Woodmen of America
Morrison Gordon Elementary PTO
Nelsonville Food Cupboard
Ohio Ecological Food and Farm Association (OEFFA)
Ohio Farm to School Network
OhioHealth
OHIO Student Farm
Ohio University Cats Cupboard
Ohio University Center for Community Engagement
Ohio Valley Museum of Discovery
Osteopathic Heritage Foundation
OSU Extension
OUHCOM Community Health Programs
Purple Chopstix

Research Foundation for State University of New York (University of Buffalo)
Rising Appalachia
Rocky Community Improvement Fund
Rural Action
Serenety Grove
Serve Ohio
Sirius Systems Consulting
Sojourners
Sisters Health Foundation
The Hive of Nelsonville
The Ohio State University College of Food, Agricultural, and Environmental Sciences
The Sugar Bush Foundation
The Wildflower Legacy Foundation
Trimble Local Schools
United Campus Ministry
United Plant Savers
University of Minnesota (SARE)
USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture

Community Food Initiatives would like to extend a special thank you to the following individuals for their generous support of our mission:

Leona Cibrowski
Berry Dilley
Brent and Sara Hartman
Katie Hutchison-Ulloa
Annett Porter
Andrew Price

We have done our best to acknowledge all of our partner organizations from 2024. If we have inadvertently left one off, please let us know so that we can update our records and the electronic report. Email cfi@communityfoodinitiatives.org.

Donation Station Partners

Along with the many community members who contributed to the Donation Station at the Athens Farmers Market, participated in fundraisers, shared CFI events on social media, or donated at Veggie Van, CFI relies on the growers, gardeners, and businesses that partner with us to grow and share their harvest. In addition to dozens of individuals, the following business and organizations provided food to Donation Station in 2024:

Amesville School Garden
Arnold Farms
Athens Local Food Buying Club
Attican Farms
Avalanche Pizza
Blackberry Sage Farm
Blaney Family Farm
Casa Nueva
CFI Community Gardens
Cherry Orchard
Chesterhill Produce Auction
Cowdery Farms
Crane's Crazy Corn
Crumbs Bakery
East Elementary and Morrison Gordon School
Gardens
Gibson Ridge Farm
Greenlees Greens
Jackie O's Farm (Barrel Ridge)
Kindred Market
Kip Parker
La Soupe
Laurel Valley Creamery
Linda Parsons
Lonewolf Lavender

Master Gardener's Children's Garden
Milo's Whole World Gourmet
Minefire Farm
Monserat Ridge Farm, LLC
Never Never Fruit Farm
Olive Branch Catering
Roll Run Farms
Root 56 Farm
Rural Action
Sassafras Farm
Shade River Farm
Shagbark Seed & Mill
Shews Grassfed Beef
Snowville Creamery
Stacy Family Farm
Symmes Creek Ranch
Tiffany Arnold
Toadally Awesome Garden
Veggie Vision Farms
Vest Farm
Village Bakery
Wagner Fruit Farm
Westside Community Garden
Willow River Culinary – Chef Katie Mosher
Witten Farm Market & Greenhouse

Staff, Board & Service Members

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.

Staff

Sarah Grace, Executive Director

Molly Gassaway, Director of Garden Education

Rebekah Korenowsky Woods (Reb), Outreach Manager

Drew Ogg, Food Sourcing and Distribution Manager

Ivan Orquera, Veggie Van Program Manager

Amy Fugikawa, Community Gardens Manager

Kristen Weidmann, Veggie Van Specialist

And a huge thank you to Maribeth Saleem-Tanner, Susie Huser, Reggie Morrow, and Dominic Straquadine for their contributions as staff members in 2024 — you will be missed!

Board of Directors

Olivia Degitz, President; Caitlyn McDaniels, Vice President; Patrick Tegge, secretary;

Sierra Ferris, treasurer; Tiffany Arnold, at Large rep

Members: Mat Roberts, Adam Kody, Heather Fuston, Becky Clark, Jen Sartwell,

Carrie Carson

AmeriCorps & COMCorps Members

2023-2024: Lucy Peloso, Garden Education Coordinator; Anthony Warner, Food

Access Coordinator; Drew Ogg, AmeriCorps VISTA

2024-2025: Zoe Chase, Garden Education Coordinator; Maya Djalali-Gomez, Food Access Coordinator

Get Involved

Community Food Initiatives loves to welcome community members and students to volunteer, serve, or intern with us! There are frequent opportunities for involvement with CFI. Scan the QR codes below to sign up for our newsletter, connect with us on social media, or find out how you can be a part of our team. Thank you!

Volunteer



Events



Donate



Instagram



@communityfoodinitiatives

Newsletter



Facebook



facebook.com/community
foodinitiatives

www.communityfoodinitiatives.org