

# Nourishing Networks Workshop

Wayne County - April 21, 2017

**Workshop Reflections and Report  
Draft**

# **Nourishing Networks Wayne County: Workshop Reflections and Report**

## **Author:**

Dr. Bradley R. Wilson, Director, Food Justice Lab

## **Facilitators:**

Thomson Gross, Food Justice Fellow

Joshua Lohnes, Food Justice Fellow

Tyler Cannon, Research Assistant

Heidi Gum, Research Assistant

## **Participants:**

Lisa Bell – WVU-Extension Wayne, Adult Education

Julie Tritz – WVU Extension Service, Wayne County

Joy Ferguson – Wayne County DHHR

Kelsey Laubach – WVU Extension Family Nutrition Program, Fayette County

Seth DiStefano – West Virginia Center on Budget and Policy

Ed Davis – United Way, Financial Stability Partnership Director

Mary Nally – Community Food Initiatives

Lacey Davidson – Access WV

Courtney Boyd – Appalachian Transition Fellow, Highlander Center

Cathy Davis – Valley Health Wayne, 5 other counties

Kristin McCartney – WVU-Extension, SNAP Education

Brandon Nida – WV Food & Farm Coalition

Lynn Ferguson - Wayne Co. BOE -

Cathy Smith - WVU Wayne County Extension

Evelyn Hartman - WV Food & Farm Coalition

Cynthia Kirkhart - Facing Hunger Food Bank

Barbara Trogdon - WVU Extension

Park Ferguson – Wayne County EDA

Gail Patton – Unlimited Future

Andrea Roy– United Way

Savanna Lyons – Refresh Appalachia

## Introduction

Each year we witness a widening gap in the U.S. between those who can access high quality, affordable, nutritious foods and those who cannot. Across West Virginia, where disparities in food access are particularly acute, many intrepid advocates are working hard to close that gap. How can we bring these diverse food access initiatives together around one table to advance community health and well-being for all West Virginians?

On April 21, 2017 the Wayne County Nourishing Networks Workshop brought together folks from different backgrounds, expertise, and experience to explore food access barriers and the effectiveness of healthy food access strategies in Wayne County. We had some fun, learned together, and used shared tools to deepen our understanding of what limits access to healthy food and what we can do about it. Our workshop advanced through three stages.

1. First we formed teams of 5 participants to conduct **a rapid assessment of healthy food access barriers** in Wayne County. Participants worked together to identify access barriers.
2. Second the teams worked to **identify community assets and food resources** which could be mobilized to improve access to healthy food for all.
3. Third, reflecting on the key barriers to healthy food access in Wayne and the major assets that could be mobilized our teams **developed strategies to improve access to healthy food**.

Over the course of a mere 6 hours (10am-4pm), our 21 participants collectively identified:

**75+ Healthy Food Access Barriers**  
**90+ Community Assets to Support Healthy Food Initiatives**  
**6 New Healthy Food Access Strategies**

In this brief reflection on the workshop we present the results of these discussions, collective analyses and strategic planning exercises. The intention of the document is to inform the next phase of consultation among those who wish to continue working together to advance a healthy food access plan for Wayne County. Here we aim to document and represent the findings our collective experiment in its most raw format. In the conclusion your facilitators offer their reflections on the process and potential next steps.

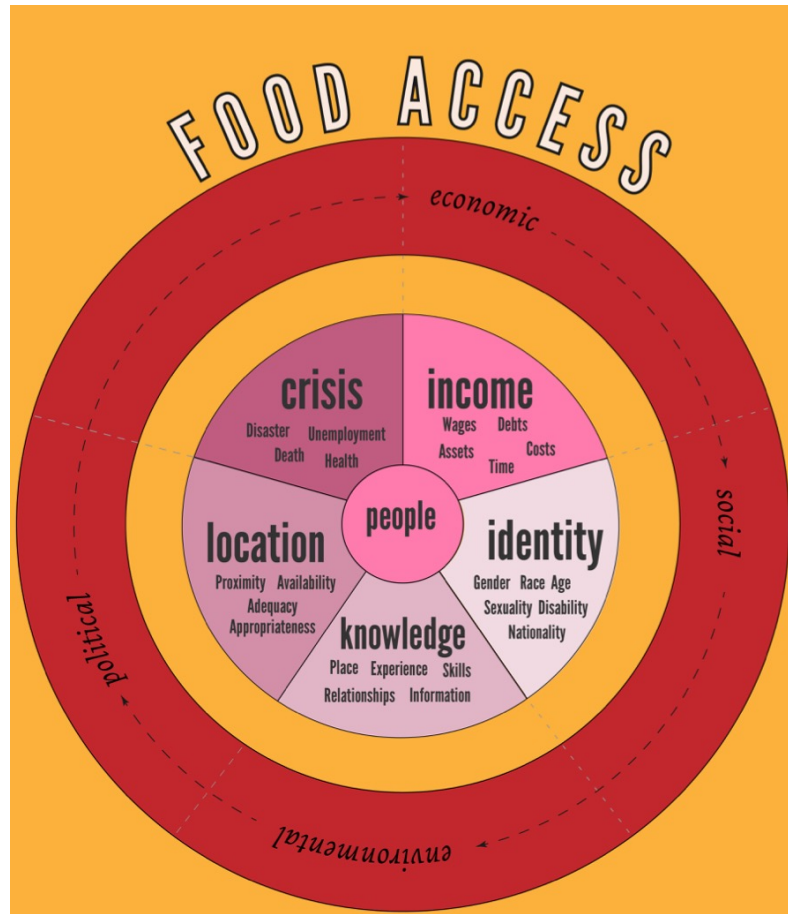
Overall, we found the Wayne County Nourishing Networks Workshop to be a tremendous success and look forward to accompanying you in a process of planning and action that enhances the amazing work you are doing to improve access to healthy food in Wayne County and beyond.

## Access Barriers: What limits people's access to healthy food?

At the center of our concern about healthy food access is people. Across West Virginia many people confront significant barriers to accessing affordable, adequate, nutritious foods. Some of the forces that affect people's ability to access healthy food are represented in our food access barriers wheel (represented to the right).

The inner circle is composed of a series of social constraints that have the most direct impact on the ability of an individual, a household, or a community to access food.

Income refers to the affect of someone's resources in wages or assets as well as the costs of food, debts carried, and the time limits placed on those who work rather than growing food for themselves. As a majority of people in the U.S. work to earn money to buy food, this is the largest constraint on food access. Identity refers to the way someone's gender, race, disability, sexuality, nationality or age affects their ability to access food. Knowledge refers to what people know, what experience or skills they have, their place-based understanding, and the relationships they have with others. Location refers to people's proximity to healthy food outlets, the availability of particular foods, as well as the ability to grow food. And last, Crisis refers to disasters, unemployment, health issue or death that can undermine food access for an individual, household or community.



At any one time, people may confront one or more of these social constraints to accessing healthy food. Furthermore, there are a range of indirect forces that also shape access. We characterize these as broad structural forces such as economic change (financial crisis, mine closures), political change (budget cuts, program elimination), environmental change (flooding, pollution), or social change (expansion or reduction in civil rights). These indirect structural forces are also constantly changing and thereby shaping the direct forces that shape people's access to healthy food. Environmental change in the form of a flood disaster. Economic change in the form of layoffs or wage reductions. Social change in the form of challenging racism and marginalization. Political change in the form of cutting nutritional program budgets. In conjunction we understand people's ability to navigate these barriers to be harrowing at best. It is for this reason that there are various healthy food access initiatives that approach these barriers and help people to overcome them.



- Lack of broadband access and functional internet
- Limited walkability/bike-ability
- Long distance to healthy retailers
- Long distance between farmers and markets

#### Policy/Engagement Barriers

- Lack of communication across agencies and initiatives
- Need greater school board to buy in/to maximize potential of school programs
- Border county limits use of nutritional assistance in other states (WIC)
- Children's access to food during summer months
- Low percentage of eligible student population utilizing
- U.S. farm policy does not support small farmers
- No agricultural extension agent in county
- Limited organizational capacity to get funding
- Lack of food processing facilities
- Lack of insurance (liability, farm insurance)
- Lack of record keeping
- Government regulations (food safety etc.)
- Backpack food quality can be nutritionally poor
- Food bank food quality can be nutritionally poor

#### Agricultural Barriers

- Limited access to arable land
- Agriculture start-ups have little support
- No agriculture extension agent
- Competition with heavily subsidized agribusiness
- Subsistence farming seen as food insecure
- Limited transportation impacting consumers and distributors
- Perishability and time to market affects inventory/quality management
- Losing skills and knowledge of food production and processing

#### Community Participation Barriers

- Lack of community engagement
- Good leadership not always present
- Ignorance and intolerance
- Racism, classism, perceptions
- Stigma, Poor shaming and judgmental attitude
- Lack of volunteers
- Lack of interest in helping the needy
- Political climate
- Apathy outlook, low self-esteem
- Poor emotional wellbeing and mental health of community
- Poor physical health
- Hopelessness and depression
- Single parent (women) households
- Age and disability

## Community Assets for Healthy Food Initiatives

Central to any plan to overcome healthy food access barriers is assessing the assets within a given community. In this phase of the workshop participants identified many different assets in Wayne County that contribute to community well-being and specifically healthy food access initiatives. We have categorized these assets into six asset types.

- Human Qualities
- Physical/Built/Infrastructure Assets
- Organizational Assets
- Government Assets
- Individual Assets
- Asset-based Activities / Projects

### Human Qualities

- Momentum from the People
- Good Values
- Community Connections
- Knowledgeable food growers
- Common cultural practices like hunting, fishing, and other self-provisioning

### Physical/Built/Infrastructure Assets

- Access to Affordable, arable land
- Tradition of Forest Farming
- Long growing season
- Route 52, Route 152, and Route 10
- Proximity to Huntington
- Pullman Square
- Lots of school buildings
- School based health clinics
- school-based food pantries
- School gardens
- Schools Bus system
- Wayne Express. Public transit runs through Kenova
- Access to river, rail, airport
- Vacant buildings—can be repurposed
- Westside Huntington, Westmoreland
- Heartland Intermodal Gateway Facility
- Lakes, state parks, state forest
- Mount. West
- Corbin, West Edge Factory
- Mill Creek Garden Center
- Airport
- River
- Rail
- Land

### Organizational Assets

- Family Resource Network
- United Way of River Cities
- Meals on Wheels
- Senior Citizen Centers
- Wayne Methodist Church Food Pantry
- Dunlow/Cabwaylingo Presbyterian Church Food Pantry
- Fort Gay Food Pantry
- Silver Creek Church
- Dunlow Food Pantry
- Facing Hunger Foodbank
- Access WV
- Nourish Appalachia
- Valley Healthy Wayne Co. Farmers Co-op
- Wayne County Farm Bureau
- FFA
- Wayne County Cattleman's Association
- WV Food and Farm Coalition
- Unlimited Future
- Refresh Appalachia
- Wild Ramp
- Coalfield Development
- Central Appalachian Network
- Nature Conservancy
- Highlander - Appalachian Transition Fellowship
- Kenny Queen Hardware
- Locally owned grocery stores
- WV FOODLINK

### Government Assets

- DHHR
- WIC
- Agriculture Commission
- USDA
- NRCS
- Wayne County Housing Authority
- Wayne Co. BoE
- Extension (Ag, 4H, Energy Express)
- AmeriCorps VISTA
- Economic Development Authority
- State Park Service

### Individual Assets

- Cyndi Kirkhart - Facing Hunger Foodbank
- Robert Thompson
- Lacy Davidson
- Bill and Dorothy Stewart
- Barbara Trogdon
- Lisa Bell
- Bill and Addie Lycans
- Julie Tritts
- Cathy Smith
- Debbie Rowe
- Nutritionists
- Church families

### Asset-based Activities / Projects

- Agriculture programs in every highschool
- Agriculture programs in some grade schools
- Energy Express
- Cornerstone Project
- Food Hub Corridor Project
- NRCS High Tunnel Grants
- Valley Health – Youth Gardens/walking
- Former Coalfields—Reclamation Projects
- Wayne County Fair
- State provided breakfast and lunch - CEP Program
- Backpack “Ministry”
- Farm 2 Foodbank legislation
- 4H
- County/Personal farms
- School gardens

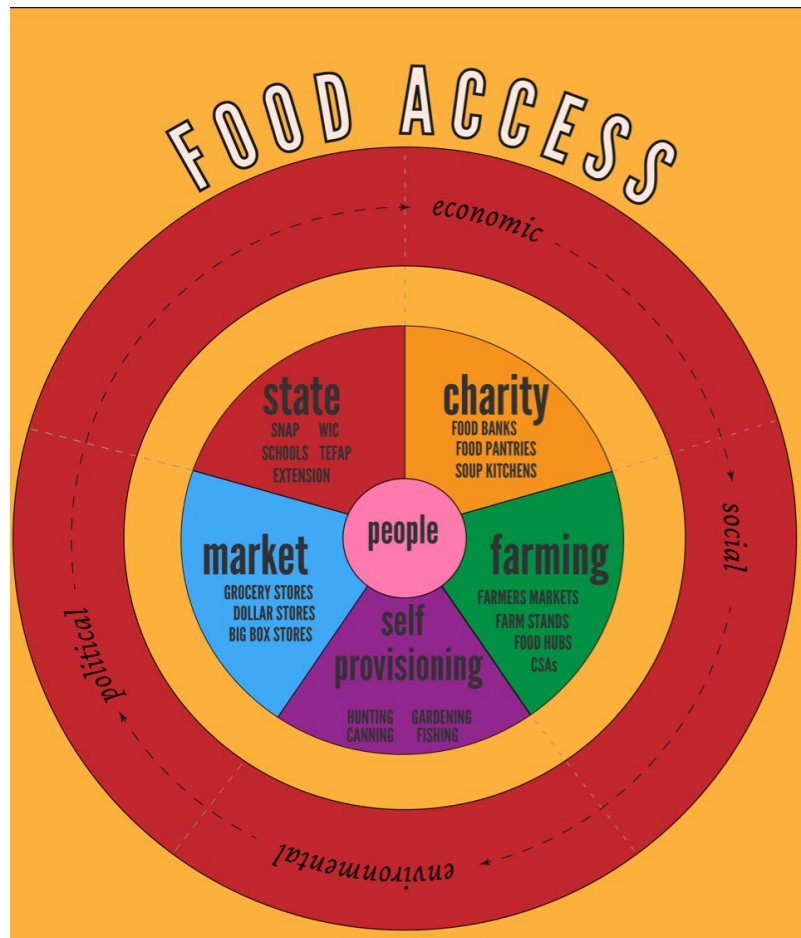


- Backpack Program (Ms. Mary's)
- Tourism: Heritage Farm, Camden Park, Beech Fork, East Lynn, Ceredo/Kenova Fall Festival, Heartland Intermodal Gateway
- Foraging-Hunting-Fishing on unoccupied land (unowned)
- Livestock production

## What strategies enable people to access healthy food?

People access healthy food through various mechanisms. While many people who might be reading this report primarily access healthy food by spending their wages in a market (grocery store) or through the farming sector (local farmers market) many other individuals, households and communities cannot afford to access food only in this way. Some of the strategies and initiatives to improve people's access to healthy food are represented in the food access strategy wheel (represented to the right).

The inner circle is composed of the primary mechanisms that people access healthy food. Market refers to grocery stores, convenience stores, restaurants, dollar stores and the like where people exchange wages for food. State refers to government programs such as SNAP, WIC and School programs that provide direct subsidies to offset the cost of food for individuals and households (especially children) who lack the money to access food in the market. Charity refers to free food rations provided by food banks, food pantries, and soup kitchens that is funded by donation. Farming refers to grower-based initiatives to sell produce through farmers markets and other mechanisms. And lastly, Self-provisioning refers to practices of hunting, foraging, fishing or growing your own food. Taken together these strategies represent the dominant and divergent ways that people access food.



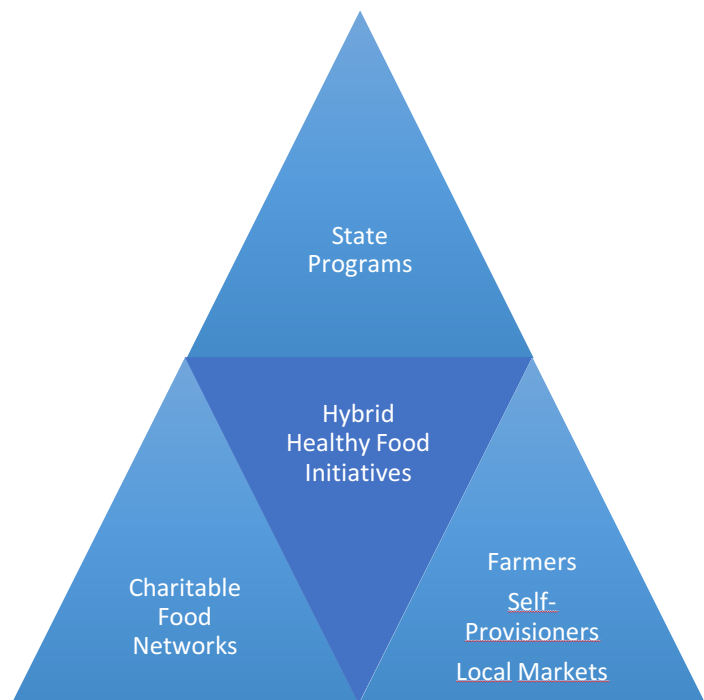
At any one time an individual, household or community may utilize a combination of these strategies to gain or maintain access to food. Furthermore, as this wheel demonstrates, the retail marketplace is not the only way in which people access food. Government programs play a

major role in supporting low-income families and those confronting crises. Charitable assistance agencies also play a supplementary role. Farmers make important local contributions to food access and hunters put away a lot of protein for the winter. However, surrounding the inner ring again are the broader structural forces that shape these various strategies. In conjunction with the barriers described earlier these can indirectly impact people's ability to exercise these food access strategies. Economic change can lead retailers to close up shop or raise prices. Political changes can cause the loss of vital government nutrition programs. Charities may become overwhelmed by the growing need or fail to raise enough money to meet demand. Farmers may confront environmental changes like social degradation or drought. Self-provisioners might confront disease in their gardens, declining game habitat or access to fishing areas. It is for this reason that healthy food initiatives work with people to develop creative strategies and protect vital programming that enables people to sustain themselves, their households and their communities.

## How can we promote innovative action to support healthy food access?

Through four years of research we have observed and assessed a range of strategies to improve access to health food for all in West Virginia. Most commonly, these strategies operate in distinctive programming associated with the State, Charitable or Farming/Self-Provisioning mechanisms described above.

However, there are also some very interesting innovations that we describe as Hybrid Healthy Food Initiatives that bring together strange bedfellows and mix together various strategies to close food gaps and promote community well-being. Many of these hybrid healthy food initiatives are project-based and represent outside-the-box thinking. Mobile farmers markets, Hunters for the Hungry, Food pantry CSA programs, Double Bucks Farmer's Markets, and much more. Furthermore, in some cases, these hybrid healthy food initiatives are leading to new policy innovations that link people across these differences. For instance, the recent Farm to Food Bank bill in WV brought charitable agencies, farmers and state officials together to create an innovative law providing farmers tax breaks for farm food donations.



We believe there is much to learn from the creative thinking that comes from bringing many people with different expertise and experience to the table. Hybrid healthy food initiatives are just one example of how we can work together to imagine and enact a different food future.

## **Thinking Outside the Box: Beyond Program-Thinking**

One of our goals with our workshop in Wayne was to invite participants to break away from existing program thinking. We all work within programs of some sort or another. Programs are structured interventions that are often funded on an annual basis, have staff, clearly defined goals to promote change and assess effectiveness. Government agencies have programs. Non-profits have programs. Corporations have programs. Schools have programs. There are numerous existing state-based, charitable and educational programs focused on improving access to healthy food. Many of these programs are funded, operate effectively, and are successful according to their own measures and forms of assessment. Programs work. Yet, programs can also be limited in scope, ineffective or they can stagnate in their efficacy.

**Reinvigorating Strategic Thinking.** One of the reasons that programs stagnate is that we forget that they are the result of strategic thinking, strategic projects and strategic policies that have come before. Programs have a history, a set of logics, assumptions, and parameters that are rooted in past processes of strategic planning and design by individuals and groups. These folks developed these programs based on a particular framing of the problem. Today those problems may have changed or opportunities may have arisen. To get past existing program-thinking we need to reinvigorate the kind of energy that comes from strategic thinking, collective inquiry, and innovative actions.

### **How do we get beyond program-thinking?**

To get beyond program-thinking we think it is important to begin by fostering conversations among folks who are engaged in various forms of programming, policy work, and projects that address healthy food access in our communities. Second, we mobilize information on limits and barriers to healthy food access to serve as a basis for collective problem identification. Third we invite participants in diverse teams to consider new strategies (not programs) to mobilize community assets to address these collectively defined problems. And fourth, we invite participants to work together to come up with creative campaigns that advance policies and projects that address healthy food access barriers. Using a series of exercises, the teams participate in a strategy planning process that moves us beyond program thinking and toward new kinds of collective action that addresses pernicious problems.

### **What are healthy food access strategies?**

We define healthy food access strategies along two essential axes of innovation: the development of healthy food access policies and projects. These two strategic approaches are very different from programs. Indeed, as stated earlier, policies and projects result in programs; not the other way around.

**Policy-focused strategies** target local, state and national laws, rules, public assets, activities or budget allocations to improve healthy food access. Policy strategies can reform the way schools, universities, corporations, and government operate. These strategies employ research, communication, networking, canvassing, organizing and lobbying efforts to create

change. Usually the goal is to persuade a decision-maker to adopt a given set of practices, rules or adjust their goals to benefit your constituency. The tactics include new policy proposals, defending existing programs, consciousness raising, and coalition building. These strategies may in some cases have longer timeframes to implement, but not always. Indeed with the right organizing, conditions and constituency (as a result of organizing efforts) policy change can happen quickly (even faster than projects). Because policy-focused strategies affect existing institutions they can have far reaching impacts from on the direction of programs that affect many people.

**Project-focused strategies** pilot and test out our new ideas and bring together novel resources and people to create a model, case study, or example. Projects tend to advance on more restricted timeframes that reflect their experimental nature. Projects have a beginning and an end. To evolve into a permanent activity or program that improves access to healthy food, projects must either result in volunteer-driven ownership or sustained financial support from private foundations, state, charitable or market-based efforts. Unlike policy strategies, projects can often take shape independently and autonomously from any particular constituency. This gives projects a nimble and entrepreneurial feel and can result in quick learning to be adapted to various future circumstances.

## **Wayne County Healthy Food Access Strategies**

The strategies below were developed in consultation among participants in the Nourishing Networks Wayne Workshop to improve healthy food access. These strategies are a result of group consultation following a collective assessment of the barriers to healthy food access in the county and the community assets that could be mobilized to address the problems identified. Each team arrived at their strategy through a different process whereby members evaluated potentials and set priorities. While these strategies were developed rapidly, they nevertheless represent several promising avenues for near term collective action which could be carried forward in Wayne.

- Expanding WIC's Borders Campaign
- Wayne County Activities Campaign
- Food Banks and Youth Farming Futures Campaign
- Way Out Wayne Supported Agriculture (WOWSA)
- Additional Initiatives For Development

### **Policy: Expanding WIC's Borders Campaign**

- Explanation of Strategy:
  - Get Senators Capito, Jenkins, and McKinley to grant an exception to federal WIC guidelines, allowing Wayne County WIC recipients to use their WIC benefits across the state line in Kentucky, namely in Louisa. This is intended to alleviate stress of food insecurity for mothers receiving WIC who reside in the highly food insecure areas around Fort Gay by giving them access to more WIC retailers.
- Barriers addressed:
  - Transportation
  - Limited opportunity for female heads of households
  - Access to healthy retailer
- Dream Team:
  - Wayne County DHHR worker(s)
  - Local WIC recipients
  - Legislative advocate

### **Policy: Wayne County Activities Campaign**

- Explanation of Strategy: Schools as hubs for food, health, and community development (Churches, Childcare).
- Barriers addressed: Improving Participation in School Meals, Reducing child hunger, promoting agri-culture, bringing people together
- Approach:
  - Start with county-wide school assessment (participatory research)
    - Find number and locations of summer feeding sites—expansion of Energy Express
    - Identify decision-makers @ BoE
    - Who are the leaders/decision makers?—parents and teachers?
    - Assess functionality of PTO's and who is not represented
    - Identify infrastructural assets
      - Commercial kitchens/school gardens
      - Programmatic Assets
      - After/Before school programs
      - School social workers
      - Health care (physical, mental, chemical dependency programs)
      - Present results to stakeholders, cultivate leadership in schools, daycares, and churches. Press for policy change @ BoE to allow agriculture production and education on-site.
- Initial Result: Bring partners together to promote county-level BOE policy change in schools and bring financial and human resources to bear on making agriculture, food and health a greater part of school activities.

- Dream Team:
  - Church Leaders
  - Courtney Boyd
  - Kristin McCartney
  - Keys 4 Healthy Kids
  - Janet Barker
  - Daycare facilities
  - Schools
  - Park Ferguson
  - Brenda A.
  - Nutrition Ed. Program
  - Julie Tritz
  - Try This
  - WV FOODLINK
  - Access WV
  - SNAP Ed.
  - Highlander Center
  - Unlimited Future

**Policy/Project: Food Banks and Youth Farming Futures**

- Explanation of Strategy:
  - In partnership with the vocational school train high school aged students through in agriculture from March through November. Students will become “certified farmers,” through both classroom and hands-on training. The students would grow food for the food bank, utilizing the Farm 2 Foodbank law.
- Barriers addressed:
  - Decline of high wage labor
  - Difficulties for agriculture start-ups
  - Links between Emergency Food System and local agriculture
  - Loss of skills and knowledge related to food production and processing
  - Summertime food access for school aged children
- Dream Team: Food Bank, donors, consumers, USDA, SNAP, DHHR, WV Extension services, school board, commercial kitchen suppliers, small businesses locally, people to help provide education/training for: gardening, nutrition, cooking, canning, butchering, etc., Department of Agriculture, Health Department, producers, Wayne Co Co-op, Farm Bureau, Cattleman, Housing Authority, EDA, County Commissioners, the mayor, Master Gardeners, beekeepers, 4-H, CEOS

**Project: Way Out Wayne Supported Agriculture (WOWSA)**

- *Explanation of Strategy:*  
WOWSA, utilizes charities and donors to make their CSA shares affordable. Through reduced cost SNAP purchases, combined with charitable food money, farmers receive a fair price for contributing to the CSA shares. The CSA shares will be distributed by Refresh Appalachia to Valley Health sites at Kermit, Wayne, and Huntington.
- *Barriers addressed:*
  - The primary barrier addressed is the lack of disposable income among vulnerable households to access local produce

- The secondary barrier addressed is expanding market opportunities for local growers
- The third barrier addressed is intervening in health related outcomes through partnership with health centers.
- *Dream Team:*
  - Cornerstone/Wayne County Farmers Co-op.
  - Refresh Appalachia
  - Valley Health
  - Charitable orgs

**Additional Initiatives which could be developed or integrated:**

- 
- Community food hub (“Wayne County Hub: Harvesting a New Beginning”).
  - This location would have a physical address AND phone number. It would be a center for information, packaged food, training, cannery, business incubation, shares owned by the community, education, and used to promote and encourage self-provisioning. The idea is that if the community has a say in operations at the Wayne County Hub, they inevitably become more interested and invested in food access and hunger issues in Wayne.
- Commercial Kitchen
  - The establishment of a commercial kitchen (USDA approved) in the county. People could come in to can goods. Farmer’s markets could now function year-round, selling canned goods during the fall and winter months when fresh fruits/vegetables are out of season.
- Church Gardening Project:
  - Promote and support the establishment of community gardens at local churches throughout county. The churches are already pillars/ one of the last vestiges of community in area. Can help bridge generational gap by having seniors teach children how to garden.
- Community Land Trusts for access to farmland (farming/self-provisioning)
  - Mobilize the community to establish a land trust for beginning farmers to produce food
- Community farms network – training site (farming/self-provisioning)
  - Mobilizing a network of existing farmers (aka Wayne Co-op) to promote peer-to-peer learning and/or mentor folks to support viable farm and subsistence operations.
- Pop-up markets – alternative markets – time banking, consignment, “Fresh Stop Markets”
  - Create a network of consignment based markets, or time banking exchanges where people can sell their small scale produce or earn access to fresh foods from putting in community work.

- Urban growers Coop – breaking farmer/gardener distinction
  - Supporting the growth of urban food production by expanding what it means to be a gardener.
- Farmer infrastructure – vacant buildings (farming/state)
  - Searching for and requesting access to vacant structures that could be used for projects.
- Witness to hunger & witness to farming, empowering people, from farmers— what are their barriers?
  - Storytelling and recording testimonies – from food insecure families and farmers – that helps build a wider network of people who participate in food system change in Wayne. This is especially important for policy change work and developing ways of communicating ideas and learning from one another.
- Senior citizen's van: makes trips 2X a month to Wayne Co-op.
- Pop up markets in front of the Senior Center and at Pre-K locations
- Double bucks Vouchers and Pharmacy Prescriptions given out to those in need to use at Co-op, farmer's markets, etc.
- Facing Hunger Food Bank to give out food boxes for those specifically suffering from diabetes and renal failure. Volunteers could help in the distribution of these boxes. Food pantries could also have these boxes on hand.
- Mobile Rail Market and Transit