COMMUNITY FARM ALLIANCE
2014-2015 BREAKING BEANS:
THE APPALACHIAN FOOD STORY PROJECT
FINAL REPORT

“My claim to fame is winning a blue ribbon at the fair for crocheting and cattle. Yes, I’m a woman, but I don’t flaunt that, I don’t use that, and I just try to work with all of the other farmers. I like farming and I have to say I’m proud of the fact that I can do it. I want to be an example for other women who want to try to do it too, because they can.”

Anne Boyce
Moonlight Farm LLC
Whitley County, KY

“There are things that amaze me with farming. One is that you have this seed, this minuscule thing, that is so small you can barely see it, and then it grows into this beautiful life-giving object. It is an amazing feeling. When you save a seed you are not only preserving your family’s way of life, but you are preserving history. That is the beautiful thing about heirlooms; there is such a variety.”

- Kris Hubbard, Wild Wood Farms & Heirloom Seed Company in Knox County, KY
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*Photos in report taken by:*
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September 10, 2015

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Storytelling is a fundamental part of being human; even before we could talk, we were telling stories. It has always been the best tool to communicate ideas and persuade others, and get what you want. It remains the most powerful and effective tool people have in creating change.

For 30 years, the core of CFA’s work has been to create leaders, first in their communities and on their issues, and then before policy makers. First and foremost, CFA listens to people, their problems and their ideas for solutions. CFA helps leaders to craft their stories into succinct, powerful messages, provides opportunities to tell their stories in supportive settings, and then in increasingly conflicted arenas.

Member and community stories are the focus of Breaking Beans: The Appalachian Food Story Project, an initiative of the Community Farm Alliance to tell the story of how local food and farming in Eastern Kentucky can contribute to a bright future in the mountains.

The momentum of local food system development, and “economic transition” in general, has reached the “tipping point.” With the emergence of federal, state and local political leadership, what has been largely a grassroots movement supported by private philanthropy is at a moment where these efforts can either result a series of projects over the short-term or a long-term process based on creating systemic change.

Eastern Kentucky is at the point where it can build a food system that is equitable and accessible to all, provides fresh nutritious food, and is an economic generator that builds community wealth. Eastern Kentuckians can have a bright future, and agriculture can be an important part of it, but to do so we must educate everyone about the economic, health and social impacts of local food systems to build demand and to support public policy and the career viability of farming and food entrepreneurship by:

- Telling the story of compelling, diverse examples of how local food and farming in Eastern Kentucky can contribute to an economic transition.
- Getting the message out and create a movement that local food and farming have a vital role in economic transition in a way that inspires people and communities into action, and regional collaboration.
- Moving to action the general public and political leadership to adopt a process, policies and programs that support an equitable economic transition for Eastern Kentucky.

Breaking Beans develops leaders in both the storyteller and the story collector by creating space for:

- Breaking Beans Fellows to expand their networks and engage people around local food system development
- Mutual recognition between the storyteller and the story collector that both are part of the same work and can use their new connection in the future
- Wider community recognition of the story subject as a leader upon their story’s release
- Strategic alliances with media sources to shape the way food and farming is talked about, and how it is incorporated into the transition dialogue
For Kristin Smith of The Wrigley Taproom and Brewery, starting a restaurant is about using the whole hog and engaging the entire community. Not only is Kristin the mastermind behind the creative and delicious dishes coming out of the Wrigley kitchen, she is also the main producer of the meat served in the restaurant.

Her dedication to eating locally means that the restaurant strives to utilize every cut of meat and adjusts the menu nightly. Kristin explains, “To use the whole hog, and that’s what we’re getting, you have to change the menu. We have limited local food, so we have to use the whole hog; we have to use the whole beef. Like today, we used the ham hock in the soup beans.” Not only does this mean that the Wrigley’s menu is over 50% local even in the dead of winter, it also means that the menu options are always fresh and exciting.

Kristin was living in California when her family considered selling their 120 acre farm. She had nightmares for three nights thinking the farm would end with her generation. Kristin moved back home and her family’s farming legacy now continues with beef cattle and heritage hogs. Over the past few years, she has directly marketed her animal welfare approved meats to consumers through the Whitley County Farmers Market, and began using her meat to offer ready-to-eat meals to shoppers. [continued on next page]
Cooking for the Farmers Market allowed Kristin to use her culinary creativity and to experiment with potential restaurant menu options.

For Kristin and her business partners, Andy Salmons and John Baker, the urge to create a new business and a new vision for their hometown is nothing new.

The Whitley County Farmers Market served as a business incubator for their respective food businesses, Andy’s You & Me Coffee & Tea, John’s Oui Creperie, and Kristin’s Faulkner Bent Farm. After selling alongside each other at the market, their dream of opening a taproom with a full farm-to-table menu became a reality in late 2014.

After moving back to the farm Kristin “started eating completely locally. That is the way I live my life, and so I said that if we are going to do a restaurant, we are going to do it locally. Hopefully we can support other businesses and work to improve the area. I’ve invited all of the farmers in the area to show them the amount of food we order, to tell them that could be money in their pockets, and I want it in their pockets!”

Even though they’ve only recently opened, The Wrigley boasts an impressive local purveyor list for honey, sorghum, jams, chow chow, eggs, meat, veggies, and even ice cream. In addition, of their twenty four taps, ten of them can fill your glass with craft brews made right here in the Commonwealth.

If that isn’t impressive enough, Kristin, John, and Andy didn’t stop at food and drink when deciding to spend their money locally; even their beautiful salad plates and beer flight boards were made by local artisans. The tables are made from reclaimed wood from Kristin’s barn, and community members donated all of the chairs. The Wrigley Taproom and Brewery truly is a Kentucky Proud kind of place.

Remember Kristin’s heritage hogs? They are currently dining on the leftover veggie peelings she hauls home from the restaurant. You can’t get a more complete farm-to-table experience than that.

*The Wrigley Taproom and Brewery is located at 207 S. Main Street in downtown Corbin. The restaurant and taproom are open Wednesday through Saturday.*

By Maggie Bowling
February 16, 2015
The summer of 2014 saw a great opportunity for low-income residents of Floyd County, Kentucky when Appalachian Roots became a SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) agent for the Floyd County Farmers’ Market. Due to a grant from Community Farm Alliance and matching funds donated by individuals and local businesses, families who received SNAP benefits were able to leverage their benefits with the Double Dollars program to buy fresh food.

James and Jennifer Lowe were the first Floyd County Farmers’ Market customers to take advantage of this opportunity. I talked to them recently while they were visiting the monastery to celebrate their 14th wedding anniversary.

The Lowes live in a housing authority development in Prestonsburg. James worked full time delivering pizzas until he was diagnosed with LUPUS. When able, he does odd jobs to supplement his disability check. Jennifer is scheduled to start training as a housekeeper with vocational rehab in the spring. Already farmers’ market customers, they were very excited to be able to use their SNAP card and get a bonus. “It helps a lot.”

Using SNAP at the Market was easy James said. “I scanned my card for what I wanted to spend and they gave me double. When I would spend $10 they would give me another $10 to make $20.” His favorite items were corn and white half-runner beans but he also liked getting tomatoes and zucchini bread.

I asked them if they grew anything at home and was told they couldn’t have a garden in their complex. James said that working a garden was hard work and he didn’t know that he could do it anymore, which was why he really liked going to the farmers market.

While talking with them, I realized the need for more public education. James said one time he went to the market to get “fresh lettuce to make some kilt lettuce and onions but they didn’t have any”. I explained how the farmers market was a vendors market selling produce that was grown locally and that lettuce didn’t grow well in our area in August. That led into a very [continued on next page]
good conversation about what the phrase “locally grown” meant and how some large companies have a different idea when they say it in their advertising.

James and Jennifer only used their SNAP benefits at the Floyd County Farmers’ Market this year but more than 146 families redeemed WIC vouchers they received from the health department at the Market, which were doubled as well. SNAP and WIC sales represented $3585 worth of income that went directly to vendors from clients that would not normally buy from a farmers market. And in the words of James Lowe, “It helps a lot.” Programs like Double Dollars help low-income families purchase healthier meal options, which in turn provide for a healthier populace. In a region where diabetes and obesity are epidemic, fresh, whole food not only tastes better, it can be life saving.

By Sister Kathy Curtis
December 8, 2014

CREATING BREAKING BEANS

People know their problems. They also know what their local assets are but typically don’t know where to begin to create change. Stories and the simple act of telling them can reveal not only the problems but also solutions already being built. At its core, CFA’s mission is one built on personal stories. Breaking Beans is a pilot project to intentionally develop, collect, and distribute those personal stories. For the six-months of the pilot project, with support from the Chorus Foundation and blue moon fund, CFA hired five “community communications fellows” from around the Eastern Kentucky region to collect and communicate stories around local food system development and its greater effects on the community.

Project strategy

Breaking Beans stories are generated in the form of articles, interviews, videos, photos, memes, and audio clips. The communications objective is to share these stories with members of the Eastern Kentucky communities, the members of CFA, and CFA’s partner organizations in order to raise awareness of local food system development as economic development. The organizing objective is to develop the stories of existing and emerging local food system leaders both in the form of a communications Fellowship and as subjects of regionally-collected and distributed stories.

“Every time we tell a farmer’s story, we have the potential to boost that farmer’s work and also the potential to inspire others to grow something.”

–Angela Hatton Mullins, Breaking Beans Fellow
**Breaking Beans Fellows**

5 Fellows were selected based on their presence in their community, their prior engagement with local food system work, and their communications experience. Fellows represented a range of skill sets and perspectives, and came from across the region.

**Maggie Bowling** grew up on an organic vegetable and livestock farm in rural Ohio. After college she spent four growing seasons as the Grow Appalachia site coordinator in Harlan County, KY before transitioning to become a beginning farmer herself. Maggie currently farms with her husband and in-laws in Clay County, KY, raising pastured poultry, beef, pork, lamb, and vegetables.

**Sister Kathy Curtis** is a member of the Dwelling Place Monastery, an ecumenical community of women in Floyd County Kentucky. She has been the Grow Appalachia program director at St. Vincent Mission for three years and is a board member of Appalachian Roots Inc. where her work with the Floyd County Farmers’ Market and the Local Food System Assessment have led her to see the possibilities for a healthier, more economically viable eastern Kentucky.

**Angela Hatton Mullins** is a mom and an attorney in Whitesburg, Kentucky. She earned a B.A. in Journalism at Eastern Kentucky University in 1994 and worked as a reporter in Lexington and Frankfort before returning to college to earn a Juris Doctorate at the University of Kentucky College of Law in 1999. After practicing at a large firm in Lexington for a couple of years, she returned to work in her hometown of Whitesburg and joined the Board of Directors of several non-profit agencies including, most recently, the Appal-TREE Project. She grows a small garden at the head of Little Dry Fork hollow with the help of her children, Sam and Ellie, and has been active with Grow Appalachia at the Cowan Community Center for the past three years.

**Mark Kidd** lives at the base of Pine Mountain in Whitesburg and on his family farm at Little Mud. Mark facilitates community workshops and residencies throughout the United States that incorporate theater, low-cost media, and cultural organizing. He is a voting member of the Central Appalachian Regional Network and is a member of the Appalachian Studies Association and the Rural Arts and Culture Policy Group. Mark presently serves on the boards of Appalshop and Alternate ROOTS, and is a member of the Whitesburg Trail Commission.

**Karyn Knecht** lives in Hazard, Kentucky and works as the Farm to School Coordinator for Perry County Schools, bringing locally grown food to school kitchens and providing food and nutrition education to students. She graduated from the University of Notre Dame in 2012 with a B.S. in Environmental Sciences and International Peace Studies. Originally from Tennessee, she wanted to get back to the mountains after college and moved to Eastern Kentucky as an AmeriCorps VISTA for the Appalachian Coal Country Team. Karyn is passionate about environmental justice, education, and food access issues.
Training

As the start of their Fellowships, the Fellows attended the three-day Community Media Organizing Project (CMOP) training held in Tennessee alongside other community organizing partners. Fellows participated in workshops including using media technology, framing stories, ensuring the inclusion of minority voices, and using stories on social media.

Fellows also attended a training with Appalshop and WMMT radio in Whitesburg, Kentucky. Appalshop staff hosted an afternoon workshop around conducting interviews. Appalshop extended an offer for radio airtime for any Fellow interested in discussing Breaking Beans or the Fellowship, or conducting an interview with a story subject. One fellow took advantage of this opportunity and paired the radio story with a written article.

“It's rewarding to have someone trust you with their story. I would be reminded of workshops at CMOP on how best to frame those stories, which helped me keep perspective when you've got an hour-long interview that needs to become a 400-word article. I'm grateful for that CMOP experience.”

–Karyn Knecht, Breaking Beans Fellow

FEATURED IN BREAKING BEANS

Breaking Beans stories came from all along the food value chain, from producer to restaurant owner to farmers’ market manager. By sharing the stories of people on the ground, doing the work, and living in the communities, Breaking Beans stories connected to readers.

Individuals featured in Breaking Beans included:

Vegetable farmers
Livestock farmers
Women farmers
Teachers
Extension agents
SNAP recipients
Farmers’ market managers
Grow Appalachia site coordinators
Community garden coordinators
Seed collectors
Restaurant owners
Hydroponics storeowner
Nurses
Cooks
Zack and Chris own Steele Farm and Mill, a small sawmill and vegetable garden on Bee Fork in Prestonsburg, Kentucky. While sawmills have been in Zack’s family for generations, growing food to sell at the Floyd County Farmers’ Market is a fairly new enterprise for the couple.

Chris first heard about the farmers’ market from her daughter. “Kari said that some people were putting together a ‘friends’ group for the farmers’ market and she thought I might be interested.” It was at that meeting that Chris first thought about selling eggs.

Chris, who is from England, has always had a garden. “I have been gardening since I was big enough to hold a trowel,” she says. She raised chickens a couple times while raising her three children and one day her youngest suggested that she get some more. When he went off to college, Chris and Zack found themselves with an over abundance of chickens.

“That first year I just took the eggs. I would sell them all in a couple hours and then go home,” says Chris. One of her regular customers asked her if she would still sell them after the market closed in October and soon Chris found herself delivering eggs once a week to the local college.

When asked why she thought her eggs sold so well, she remarked that besides the fresher taste her eggs were actually cheaper than the grocery store. “I use feed that has no hormones or antibiotics in it. A couple of my customers buy them because of that. And some people just like brown eggs better than white.”

The winter before her second market season, the Steeles started thinking about what else they could sell at the market. Items from the sawmill like firewood and garden stakes were a new addition, as well as baked goods. [continued on next page]
The State of Kentucky has a little-known process in place for small farmers to add value to their crops through micro-processing. Chris went through the process to become a certified home-based processor and was then able to sell zucchini and pumpkin breads and tomato basil sourdough bread. “You have to use something you grow as a main ingredient, so I grew tomatoes, basil, zucchini and pumpkins and made my breads. Everybody seems to like them,” Chris reports.

For Chris the Floyd County Farmers’ Market is more than an income generator. “It’s good to have that money coming in, especially when Zack’s job at the mines slow down. But there is more to it than that. It is social with the vendors and customers and all. And it is really neat to bake something that so many people absolutely love.”

Chris Steele believes in the Floyd County Farmers’ Market so much that she has accepted the leadership role for 2015. As Executive Committee chairperson she hopes to grow both the vendor and customer bases as well as bring in more community partners. “We have been chosen to participate in Community Farm Alliance’s Farmers’ Market Support Program again this year. Our goal as a market is to become a legal entity and work toward getting a permanent structure for the market.”

Last year the new thing Chris tried was growing ground cherries and fava beans. This year she plans on growing the market. She knows that she can’t do it alone but she’s willing to tell her story. “Who knows? There might be someone out there that is so pleased with the market they might be willing to help.”

By Sister Kathy Curtis
April 16, 2015
REACH
The 5 Fellows created a total of 41 pieces from 9 counties, 25 of which have been released. These pieces were in the form of 18 articles, 6 memes, and numerous accompanying photos as well as 1 radio/article piece created in partnership with WMMT¹.

Fellows collected stories from the counties of:
Bell, Clay, Floyd, Knott, Knox, Letcher, Perry, Pike, and Whitley.

They were released to organizational partners, on the CFA blog, via social media, and to newspapers.

The following newspapers ran at least one Breaking Beans Story:
Appalachian Advocate
Appalachian News-Express
Floyd County Times
Harlan Daily Enterprise
Hazard Herald
Manchester Enterprise
Mountain Eagle
Pikeville Medical Leader

Stories collected and released came from the counties highlighted in green. Stars represent newspapers that ran at least one story.

¹ http://www.makingconnectionsnews.org/2015/03/growing-at-school-pikeville-elementary/ March 20, 2015
Shane Lucas has found what he loves to do. Now he hopes to make a living at it.

When he was laid off from the coal mine after 17 years and had to take a lower-paying highway construction job, he turned to farming his 29-acre piece of land to supplement his income.

Lucas, 40, who lives in the Cowan area of Letcher County, was recently called back to work at a coal mine in Harlan County, though he hadn’t started yet as of late October. While he is glad for the money and knows he can’t turn it down, he knows it’s not what he wants to do.

“If I could do anything in the world, this is what I’d be doing,” he said, gesturing toward his garden on a brilliant late fall afternoon.

He is proud that he was able to supplement his income this year through his farming. He says he made over $580 one particular Saturday morning at the Whitesburg Farmers’ Market. He sold around 1,600 pounds of tomatoes this season. If not for blight, it would have been at least 4,500 pounds, he believes. He sold potatoes, onions, greens, kale, cabbage, corn and beans too.

When asked what the other miners did to make ends meet after the massive layoffs that rocked the Eastern Kentucky coalfields in 2013 and 2014, Lucas replied, “They left.” Unwilling to join the outmigration that took so many of his co-workers hundreds of miles away to find work, Lucas dug in his heels and kept planting crops.

“It’s a lot harder work than running a piece of equipment on a mine,” he said. “But I love it.”

He was disappointed, though, that he rarely saw coal miners at the Farmers Market buying the healthy food and supporting the local farmers.

“It bothered me,” he said. “They think we’re ‘tree huggers’.”

He even dressed in his mining uniform when he rode through the Mountain Heritage Festival Parade in Whitesburg on a parade float with Grow Appalachia and Farmers Market volunteers. He says he did this to show miners and farmers they “don’t have to be against each other.”

For now, Lucas knows that he must accept the call to go back to the mines to support his wife and extended family that live with him on Lucas Farm, as his new sign calls his home. However, he says he will miss spending so much time in his garden. Perhaps this is because more than just economic stress pushed him to expand his small garden from a hobby into a business.

He was taught to raise a garden by his dad, Richard Lucas, who died in January, 2014. Since his dad died, he’s put in many more hours than ever before in the garden. [continued on next page]
“He’s out here with me,” Lucas said. He even bought back his dad’s first tractor, a grey 1948 Ford, from a neighbor who had bought it from Lucas’s dad years ago. He found the right parts and has it running again, working the land his dad once helped him farm.

Lucas has a five-year plan to try to make a living farming. He has a small produce stand near his house that he wants to expand. He has considered getting his micro-processing license and Certified Market license to expand his offerings. He’s installed an efficient drip irrigation and fertilization system.

He expanded his growing season by using a high tunnel type of greenhouse he built with help from a grant he was awarded through the Natural Resources Conservation Service. There are still rows upon rows of tomatoes in the high tunnel not yet ripe in late October. Lucas expects to keep growing through December and he is working on a contract to supply vegetables such as broccoli to the local school system.

“I’ll just keep trying, “ he said.

By Angela Hatton Mullins
November 11, 2014

REACH (cont’d)

According to Facebook insights, over the course of 6 months, the average engagement with Breaking Beans pieces was 2000, with an average of 75 likes per piece.

Breaking Beans also garnered outside attention in its short 6 month pilot. Mullins’ piece on Lucas was picked up by Morning Ag Clips and Catherine Moore with High Plains News, who featured Shane in a half-hour radio story about Coal in America and in a Living on Earth Public Radio International segment.

Ivy Brashear with Mountain Association for Community Economic Development (MACED) called Breaking Beans “a big catalyst” to the storytelling of eastern Kentucky’s food traditions in her piece, “Traditional Appalachian Foodways can carry us into the future.”

Kentucky Highlands Promise Zone also shared Breaking Beans stories on their blog dedicated to notable things happening in the region.

The Breaking Beans Coordinator was also asked to write a piece about Breaking Beans for Virginia Tech’s Appalachian Foodshed Project blog which was then shared on the Appalachian Transition Fellows blog.
FELLOW IMPACT

In addition to the story collecting, a major component of Breaking Beans was developing the networks and leadership skills of the Fellows. The 5 Fellows reported gaining an average of 40 new contacts through the Fellowship.

The following are Fellows own reflections on network development:

“I have become friendly acquaintances or even actual friends with most of the people I interviewed and have made plans to visit again to see their different farm activities during other times of the year. Some of folks I interviewed have made plans to come and visit my farm as well. Many of them have started following all of the Breaking Beans stories and have contacted me about the stories they are reading. I’ve been able to connect a few of the producers to workshops or events that I thought they would be interested in.” –Maggie Bowling

“I’ve developed trust with local growers and business owners... I believe the interviews and conversations I had created new relationships and increased my credibility in the region as a person committed to working for healthy food access.” –Karyn Knecht

Fellows also developed skills in communications:

“As an introvert, I dislike cold calling strangers and asking them to do something for me. I was nervous about asking people to be interviewed for the project and I was nervous about asking the correct questions. After a few interviews, I realized what a wonderful project this is and how easy it is to talk with folks about a subject you both care about... This fellowship showed me how much I want to be involved in agriculture issues beyond my own farm.” –Maggie Bowling

“This was a great experience and helped me see how storytelling from a grassroots level can be both intimate and rewarding.” –Karyn Knecht

Fellows reported that overall the experience was rewarding:

“My favorite part of the fellowship was the opportunity and time to meet with people from a number of EKY counties, to talk to them about what is going on with food and agriculture in the region. I believe our area needs positive and practical storytelling to move forward, and this fellowship gave me the chance to learn some of those stories and to carry them out to people in a number of communities.” –Mark Kidd

“[It was rewarding to have] Affirmation that the work I am doing in helping to build a healthier, stable EKY through the local foods movement here is what I am called to do and am passionate about.” –Kathy Curtis
“We always had a garden.”

According to two women from Prestonsburg, Kentucky, that was one of the benefits of growing up in the mountains of eastern Kentucky. Becky DeRossett and Bonnie Hale are board members of Appalachian Roots Inc., a local non-profit dedicated to “making healthy foods available to communities throughout Eastern Kentucky.” During a recent interview they shared why they are involved in the local foods movement through their volunteer work with Appalachian Roots’ Friends of the Floyd County Farmers’ Market group.

DeRossett can trace her Appalachian roots back to the 1700’s. She says mountain people were always self-reliant and put great value on the land. Growing up, her family had a garden, a cow, and chickens. They also owned a small country grocery that had “brought-on food”. She remembers as a child getting three eggs from the chicken coop and taking them into the store to trade for a candy bar. The problem now, she believes, is that people have abandoned that self-sufficient way of life and chase after more and more “brought-on” things.

Hale, whose family left eastern Kentucky when she was five for better opportunities in Estill County, including a college education, returned to the mountains with her husband Durward to raise their family. “We traveled a lot when our kids were growing up so they could have different experiences,” Hale says. Although her adult children both live outside of Kentucky, Hale makes sure that her grandsons know about their Kentucky heritage. She wants them to know “the world is big. It’s a great big wonderful place. But what we have here is a great big wonderful place too.” [continued on next page]
Both Hale and DeRossett say their work in the local foods movement is built on their sense of place. “We need to quit looking elsewhere for our help and realize what we have already,” says DeRossett. As Friends of the Market, they help run Double Dollars, a program that helps food stamp and WIC families by doubling the amount of fresh food they can buy with their benefits. The majority of funding for Double Dollars comes from donations from the community itself.

As board members of Appalachian Roots, both women are concerned about the health, wellness, and economic challenges of our region. To address the extremely high incidence of obesity, diabetes, and heart disease in eastern Kentucky, they believe a viable food system is crucial. Research has proven fresh whole food available at farmers’ markets and in home gardens provides proper nutrition, which can help diminish these health problems. Plus, food that is grown and sold locally retains its nutritional value but shipping costs are not an issue since the food is being shipped less than 100 miles in most instances. Recently Hale found onions in a local store that were grown in Peru. “What, we don’t grow onions in Kentucky?” she asks.

DeRossett and Hale agree that eastern Kentucky needs to be competitive if they want to keep young people in the region. “If my grandsons wanted to move here,” Hale says, “they should have the same opportunities in Kentucky as in Seattle: access to fresh food, jobs in chosen field of interest and better infrastructure for technology.” For her, working on food access issues is a start. They are also dedicated to exploring agriculture – food production, processing and marketing – as an economic development strategy.

DeRossett asks, “Wouldn’t it be exciting to have a small scale food hub here in Floyd County?”

DeRossett and Hale both look forward to the Floyd County Farmers’ Market opening day. “It’s a social outlet for us,” they explain. They have found a fun and flavorful way to help grow the market too; they plan on applying for a sampling permit so they can offer samples of vendor’s goods to customers once a month.

These women show that even non-farmers can help grow a local food system. And have fun doing it.

By Kathy Curtis
September 4, 2015
BREAKING BEANS STORY: BREAKING BEANS STORY: NEW YEARS RESOLUTION BECOMES REALITY FOR COMMUNITY GARDENS IN HAZARD, KENTUCKY

For two women in Hazard, Kentucky, creating community gardens started as a New Years resolution. Jenny Williams, an English professor, was hosting a New Years party when she voiced her desire for community gardens in Hazard.

That’s when Aly Cooper, a VISTA for the Kentucky Mountain Health Alliance, said, “Let’s just do it.” And they did.

Two years later, they’ve harvested about 750 pounds of food. That produce has been donated to several local organizations. A local non-profit, Pathfinders of Perry County, funds the project. As the Chair of the Board, Williams believes gardening and nutrition education are crucial to improving the region.

“I’ve tried to be a food advocate, an advocate for people growing their own food, for money or health. And I fell into that, that’s not why I started. I just like food. I like to cook. As I became more aware of what was going on in our region, I felt more strongly about it,” said Williams.

“The whole time I’ve been teaching at the college – for 21 years now – I have always had my students write about food, talk about food, and read about food.”

During class discussions, Williams noticed a trend among her students. “I’ll ask them, who here knows where your food came from? Who has a garden? And at first, more than half the students would raise their hands and say, ‘Well, my Granny has a garden, or my Papaw has a garden.’” Over the years, those numbers started to drop.

Now, Williams’ students are growing food out of necessity. And more of them wish they knew how. Education has become a major piece of the community gardens project in Hazard. Williams and Cooper work with students at STARLand Academy, an afterschool program for children who are academically at-risk, to get hands on experience growing and cooking their own food. Caring for the community gardens has become a service project for the kids.

“One day we did ‘Random Acts of Weeding’ where we went downtown and weeded the beds. They’re really invested in the garden. They have fun out there,” said Williams.

“To see the pride that ensues from them being able to see how something can go from in the ground, into the kitchen, on to the plate, to see this is how food is actually created. That is a full-circle experience for them. That’s where change takes place is seeing: this is how we are meant to eat,” added Cooper.

Williams had always read that children who grow their own food are more willing to experiment with new flavors. It wasn’t until she witnessed it herself that she understood how powerful that relationship could be. [continued on next page]
“Until you see some picky child put a leaf of spicy mustard in his or her mouth and chew it up, because they planted the seeds themselves – it’s very humbling and it’s really inspirational and it’s worth every single thing. It’s worth every blown off student paper that I don’t grade or night that I stay awake or all the money that I spend on my own to do a cooking class. It’s completely worth it if one of those kids grows up with a better attitude about food.”

What’s the next project for these women? Tackling food access issues.

“If you live downtown, or if you live anywhere, you can’t get food. Even if you can afford to buy fresh produce, you can’t get it here. My aim is to figure out a way to have gardens in every public housing project,” said Williams.

Cooper added, “I think the main issue is convenience food right now. If we could connect people more to their food source, and help them understand what’s going on with food processing, it could directly affect heart disease. It’s all about getting people back in the kitchen.”

By Karyn Knecht
January 9, 2015

CHALLENGES
As a 6 month pilot project, there was a lot of room for learning and limited time for improving.

Project goals: Breaking Beans is unique in how it partners community organizing, leadership development, and communications. However, each of these particular focuses have different priorities: communications rely on deadlines and consistent production while organizing takes unpredictable amounts of time to develop relationships and leadership development is a balance of management and encouraging independence. It was thus challenging to identify submission schedules for each Fellow ensuring both a quality product for communications purposes and adequate time for relationship building.

“It was challenging for me to manage my time well. I had such a good time during the interviews that I would end up at an interview anywhere from one to four hours. By the time I got home, transcribed the interview from my recorder and edited the pictures, and contacted new people the person I interviewed recommended, my eight hours a week would be up. I fell way behind on actually writing the articles. I wish I could say that I overcame this obstacle, but I am still struggling to finish the writing.” –Maggie Bowling

Solutions: Develop individualized workplans for each Fellow, establish and maintain frequent and consistent check-ins, evaluate performance and Fellow needs regularly
Workplans: Due to lack of capacity or a suitable model, the Breaking Beans project began without a workplan for each Fellow. CFA staff drafted up a list of expectations of the Fellows but the guidelines either lacked the flexibility needed for adequate relationship building or was too general in the requirements.

“A big challenge was the ‘squishy-ness’ of expectations. I don’t know that I overcame the challenge. I feel like I didn't do enough but I wasn’t clear on expectations.”

–Kathy Curtis

Solutions: Identify Fellowship goals from beginning, have group meeting to decide group workplan, conduct one-on-one workplan development meetings with each Fellow, create schedule with each Fellow for duration of Fellowship to follow

Management needs: Related to workplans, each Fellow had different management needs. Some wanted specific deadlines and others needed flexible timelines to account for the process of interviewing particular people. Some Fellows preferred to communicate face-to-face while others worked well with email communications. This variety of needs and preferences made communications challenging.

Solutions: Identify management needs of each Fellow in very beginning, create schedule with each Fellow for duration of Fellowship to follow

Distance: Contributing to and compounding almost every challenge was the physical geographic distance between each of the Fellows and CFA staff. For example, one round trip between the cities of Hazard and Prestonsburg, the locations of two Fellows, is 112 miles. Limited travel funds were prioritized for Fellow travel for interviews, so face-to-face interactions both among Fellows and between Fellows and CFA staff were infrequent.

Solutions: Devote more funding to travel, ensure all Fellows understand or are willing to learn how to best communicate over email, schedule more frequent in-person check-ins

Accountability: Due to prohibitive distance, workplan weaknesses, and communications preferences, Fellows were accountable to varying degrees. One Fellow only contributed two pieces while others contributed a dozen.

Solutions: Set minimum performance standard for compensation, track all story submissions for each Fellow and follow up on missed deadlines, communicate requirements clearly from beginning

Technology: As Fellows came from a variety of backgrounds, technology mastery levels ranged. This factor in conjunction with the variety of piece formats contributed to confusion in how Fellows could submit their stories to CFA staff. Several times Fellows submitted a piece through the wrong pathway, which resulted in a delay in its release. Some Fellows also were uncomfortable taking photos or recording voices, limiting their use of these formats.

Solutions: Identify or create and commit to single submission pathway for all formats, provide focused training on recording technology, survey Fellow training needs and
ensure from beginning all Fellows receive needed training to adequately use recording technology and comfortably interview storytellers

**Timing:** Breaking Beans ran from September 2014 to March 2015, which meant Fellows were collecting stories about food production during the season of lowest productivity. This limited photo opportunities and in-person experiences with the markets or products that were the foundation of many stories.

However, as one Fellow noted: “The Breaking Beans project shot a dose of enthusiasm into the local ag movement in EKY during a time of the year when agriculture is often forgotten. Breaking Beans kept the momentum of the summer going all year long and I think helped keep up the spirits of the farmers interviewed as they prepared for the next season to know that there are other people working on these issues all year long as well, not just when there are ripe tomatoes.” –Maggie Bowling

Solutions: Extend the Fellowship to cover the entire year, ensure photographs of all seasons are included in Fellow workplans, highlight season extension stories

**Engaging partners and collaborators:** A written goal of Breaking Beans was to work with other community partners to train fellows, distribute stories, and generally build the discourse of local food system development as economic development. However, a short timeline, limited CFA capacity, and busy schedules of community partners made partnering challenging. Only one story was release via radio, the training hosted by a community partner happened halfway through the Fellowship, and other media groups and partners did not consistently share stories.

Solutions: Identify one person to communicate with all media partners, reach out to community partners and media groups before Fellowship, create and share training and communications calendar created with input from Fellows and partners, require Fellows to create pieces in variety of formats

**Fellow skills:** Each Fellow came into the project with a set of skills and weaknesses. Due to factors around timing, distance, and communications, capitalizing on Fellows’ skills to train their peers was limited and training opportunities were not responsive to needs of Fellows.

“So some of the people I came into this project really wanting to interview weren’t responsive to the idea. So, I had to get over that and work with people who were keen on it.” –Breaking Beans Fellow

Solutions: Survey Fellow skills and desired skills, plan regular skill sharing trainings, identify opportunities to develop skills, require each Fellow to try new piece format

**Tracking and data:** Once released to media groups, it became difficult to track which paper was running which story, when, and in what format. The Breaking Beans Coordinator also did not have access to traffic insights on the CFA blog. Facebook insights were the main tool for data tracking.

Solutions: Ensure Coordinator can monitor blog traffic, dedicate time to researching media group releases, track all numbers from beginning
BREAKING BEANS STORY: PIKEVILLE ELEMENTARY’S “LOW TUNNEL” GARDEN SURVIVES UNHEATED AND UNDAUNTED

As snow from the latest winter storm began to melt away from the Pikeville Elementary grounds and classes resumed, students involved in the school’s garden program already had an idea what conditions they would find at their project. As part of the Student Technology Leadership Program curriculum this year, students had installed an automated reporting system that tweets the low temperature forecast at the garden every day.

The news for returning students was good. Despite temperatures as low as -20 degrees and a 15-inch load of snow and ice that damaged roofs in some areas, the kale garden and “salad bar” garden survived intact within unheated low tunnels.

Low tunnels are built with curved lengths of inexpensive PVC conduit — usually available in the electrical section of hardware stores — that serve as hoops. These hoops are then covered with plastic sheeting in order to protect and insulate the garden beds underneath.

Pikeville Elementary’s low tunnels provide opportunities for hundreds of students to help grow and eat fresh foods including kale, turnips, and pak choi throughout the school year. Testing and improving low-cost winter garden techniques has provided an opportunity to introduce students, faculty, and staff throughout the school to the kinds of produce that can be grown outdoors in winter.

Traci Tackett, the teacher whose classes have taken responsibility for the garden, noted one immediate benefit: “Our cafeteria staff has found that the salads that we grow in the school garden are always more popular than salads made with produce that is trucked in.” [continued on next page]
The school garden is creating a demand for vegetables that many students had not ever encountered in fresh form before. Sarah Belcher, a 6th grade student who has been working with the garden for the last 2 years, explains how this works: “If you want students to eat vegetables, give them the chance to help grow the food.”

“Turnips have become the most popular here. I wouldn’t have tried many of these vegetables if it wasn’t for being able to plant them. This is something I’ll be able to remember my whole life.”

The fact that low tunnel garden beds have survived through record cold temperatures is more evidence of how useful this simple approach to gardening can be for integrating food and agriculture with the curriculum during the academic year. The students and faculty at Pikeville Elementary hope that other schools and individual families will also be able to build their own low tunnels and begin growing winter gardens.

“A lot of people imagine that it is difficult to grow produce outdoors during the winter in the mountains,” says Cathy Rehmeyer, a gardener and professor at the Kentucky College of Osteopathic Medicine who has been working with the school to establish the program. “The truth is that my home in Pikeville is at a lower elevation than Lexington, and because we are in the mountains we are sheltered from the worst of the cold winter winds that affect flatter areas of the state.” She added that another benefit to winter gardens is that they require very little weeding compared to gardening in the warm months.

Because they believe in the value of low tunnel gardening in the coalfields, Pikeville Elementary students helped lead a free workshop on April 30th to help other schools and community members learn what it takes to build and maintain low tunnels.

By Mark W. Kidd
March 11, 2015
BREAKING BEANS STORY: DON MAGGARD'S GARDEN

Don Maggard raises a garden. Lately, though, he realized his garden has raised him up too.

Maggard, 63, worked underground in the coal mines for 37 years. After a lifetime of hard work, his back gave out and he had surgery five years ago. He hasn’t been able to work in mining ever since so he felt he had no choice but to apply for disability benefits. He was forced to retire at 58 years old, something the active and motivated man would never have dreamed he’d do.

“The hardest part,” he said, “was having nothing to do.” Boredom led to depression. His life had lost its meaning. He had a loving family, church, and good friends, but he was sad because he felt useless. Out of long habit, he continued to get up at 4:30 AM every day with nowhere to go.

Then, after a year or so, he decided to expand his family garden. He joined the Grow Appalachia at Cowan Community Center organization and began to explore new options. Now, he is a regular seller at the farmer’s market, makes a good supplemental income, and has found a new lease on life.

“I’d do it if I didn’t make a dime,” he said.

He found plenty of things to do to occupy his time too. He attended canning classes, and has taken field trips to other farming operations where he learned about organic fertilization, pest control and cover crops.

He earned a Micro-processing certification to enable him to sell canned goods and a certification for home-based processing for candies and breads and other such home-made products. He will sell his canned goods under the brand, “Sweet Don’s Corn”.

Now, he is working on expanding his Farmers Market offerings with about 40 fruit trees that should bear fruit in the next 2-3 years, and is interested in trying some nut trees.

Even his health is better. He walks to his garden, which is about a half mile from his house on Big Branch in Perry County, twice a day. He believes the exercise keeps him healthy and that his back pain would be much worse if he didn’t keep moving. His back hurts worse in the winter when he can’t walk or tend his garden. He still sometimes needs help from his three grandsons, or his daughter, who is a co-manager of the Letcher County Farmers Market. He enjoys that part: showing the next generations how to reap food from their own land with their own hands.

Besides the financial and health benefits, gardening and selling at the Farmers Market brought him other benefits such as friendship with the other farmers, boosting the local economy, and teaching the kids about a healthy way of life.

“They can buy straight from the garden, not straight from a can,” Maggard said. “We need to show them that.” Perhaps most would agree, that with everything he has overcome, there is plenty that Don Maggard could teach.

By Angela Hatton Mullins
January 5, 2015
MOVING FORWARD

Despite these challenges, after 6 months Breaking Beans had made significant ripples in local discourse around what’s happening in the local food economy. As a pilot project, Breaking Beans successfully met its goals: lift up the stories of people working in the Eastern Kentucky food value chain, foster the network of food and farm leaders, and develop the leadership and skills of 5 Fellows in the region.

Breaking Beans can easily serve as a model for similar communications and community organizing efforts. CFA is seeking funding to continue the Breaking Beans project on a smaller scale and implement the model statewide with a policy focus. To do so requires dedicated capacity to address the challenges met in Breaking Beans, but the impact on the Fellows, the storytellers, and the public is worth it.

Not only did Breaking Beans get food and farm stories out into the public eye, but it also challenged the Fellows themselves to think about their role and the role of storytelling in the bigger picture of the future:

“It would be good to see stories of other avenues of transition in coal country. Who is getting the stories of tourism, art and forestry to mention a few? How do we, as eastern Kentuckians identify ourselves beyond coal? And how can we support other ‘small scale’ enterprises which alone will never replace coal but when combined...who knows?”

—Kathy Curtis

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS
Sometimes an idea is so good and so simple, you wonder why we didn’t think of it a long time ago.

The FARMACY program in Letcher County is one of those ideas.

Through this joint initiative of Community Farm Alliance, University of Kentucky, Appal-TREE Project and Mountain Comprehensive Health Corporation (MCHC) in Whitesburg, doctors can now write prescriptions for vegetables to their clients with diet-related health conditions.

For example, if a patient suffers from diabetes or high blood pressure and obesity, her doctor can literally prescribe zucchini. The doctor would write out a prescription that can be filled at the Whitesburg Farmers’ Market.

The patient, who must also meet certain income guidelines in order to be eligible, then takes the prescription to the farmers market and trades it in for fresh, locally grown vegetables and fruit, free of charge to the patient.

Millette McCray of Whitesburg said she had heard about the program and asked her doctor if she might qualify. As a type 2 diabetic with high blood pressure, she was an ideal participant.

Her doctor prescribed her $21 per week in vouchers, which she trades in for wooden Farmers Market Dollar coins and then spends them at the market. She has two adult sons with health issues as well. They benefit from the program when she cooks healthy meals for them. Her son enjoys coming to the market to help pick out the produce, which also gets him involved in making healthier food choices.

Of course, free food is great, but McCray also likes it that she knows some of the farmers. She prefers buying local when she can.

“It’s not canned food, which already has salt and everything in it,” McCray said. “I like that. Plus you’re helping your friends.”

MCHC will now be monitoring her and the other participants’ blood pressure, weight, and other health markers to see what impact the program might have.

Michael Caudill, Chief Executive Officer of MCHC, said this is his company’s second year co-sponsoring the Summer Feeding Program for kids at the Whitesburg Farmer’s Market. When they were offered the opportunity to do FARMACY, he was interested in sponsoring the program for several reasons.

“The healthcare industry is very well aware that Kentucky leads the nation in bad health and that Eastern Kentucky leads Kentucky in worse health,” Caudill said. “It’s a really good program that can make a difference in life and quality of life here.” [continued on next page]
Caudill said he’s pleased that the program also allows his company to help the local economy by supporting local farmers and helping his patients afford healthy food.

“It’s a win-win-win situation”, he said. “It helps our people stretch a dollar at a time when they really need it. It helps them get nutritional food that will help their health, helps local farmers, and helps us meet our health measures that are becoming part of the new trend for ‘fee for performance’ rather than a straight-up fee program.”

Caudill said there has been an overwhelming interest in the FARMACY program from many different fronts.

“People are asking for it. We have well over 100 signed up,” he said. “Our funds are limited since this is 100% from our own funds, not grants. There is more need and more interest than what we can afford, but we hope to have some help. We have had other people express interest like some managed care organizations and some financial companies.” Additional funding was contributed by Passport Health Plan, WellCare, Delta Dental, and BB&T.

Valerie Horn, Director of the Appal-TREE Project which is jointly administered by the Community Farm Alliance and the University of Kentucky, echoed Caudill’s opinions.

“Thanks to MCHC for recognizing the value in this program. In Eastern Kentucky we would like to see more support come this way. The problems are here, but most likely so are the solutions,” Horn said. “The success of FARMACY is an example of what can happen when everyone works together for the good of the community. We’re so grateful to all who see the value in what’s happening here and are stepping up to support a healthier community.”

Rick Brashears is a farmer from the Blackey area of Letcher County, who sells his vegetables at the Market. He says the FARMACY program has been a “big help” to him.

“I think it’s the greatest thing ever,” Brashears said. “It’s healthy for the people who use the FARMACY prescriptions, it helps the farmers, and then the farmers’ money goes back into this community, so it helps everybody.”

Brashears said he has one customer who is pregnant and he loves to see her come with her FARMACY prescription to get fresh veggies and fruit every time the market is open.

Patients who are pregnant or suffering from juvenile diabetes can participate without meeting income guidelines.

Mary Jo Radosevich is another patient at MCHC and FARMACY program participant. She is grateful to be participating for the benefit of her daughter who is a type I diabetic.

“I love the variety of fresh produce, eggs and honey. A healthy diet is important for our entire family including our daughter. Fresh fruits and vegetables help her to stay in good control of her diabetes and enjoy good health.”

By Angela Hatton Mullins
July 22, 2015
“I really do believe that the Breaking Beans project... will help ‘put a face on food’ in EKY. One of the people I interviewed from Knox County stated that most people don’t think that there are farms in EKY and don’t think that we can create our own businesses, but he knew that wasn’t true. I believe that Breaking Beans is showing what wonderful agricultural related businesses they already are in EKY, and the project is helping people get excited about it!

I think it was a wonderful sign that newspapers all over the region were willing and excited to publish our articles, even though the subjects were not always in the county the paper was published in, or even in a neighboring county!

Showing how much energy there already is surrounding agriculture in the mountains will help strengthen the projects that are already happening and will educate those who aren’t aware of the local food movement yet. One of the people I interviewed in Whitley County, Cortney, told me that it has taken a lot longer for the local food movement to reach the mountains, but it is taking hold now. Someone (from a city) recently told her the local food movement was winding down, but Cortney thinks it will stick here. She thinks that ideas come here more slowly, but they become more ingrained and lasting here.”

—Maggie Bowling, Breaking Beans Fellow