

WEST VIRGINIA FOOD DESERT SUMMIT 2019

COLLECTIVE ACTION TO ADDRESS
FOOD DESERTS IN WEST VIRGINIA

BRIDGEPORT CONFERENCE CENTER
DECEMBER 10, 2019



EVENT SUMMARY

 **USDA** United States
Department of
Agriculture
Natural Resources Conservation Service

 **West Virginia University**
EXTENSION SERVICE

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Fourth Economy is a national community and economic development consulting firm. Powered by a vision for an economy that serves the people, our approach is centered on principles of competitiveness, equity, and resilience. We partner with communities and organizations, public and private, who are ready for change to equip them with tools and innovative solutions to build better communities and stronger economies.

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Introduction/Background

West Virginia University (WVU) Davis College of Agriculture and School of Public Health, with assistance from the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), have been working to identify the structural factors that create food deserts or serve as barriers to food security in West Virginia. This group has hosted a [series of meetings since 2018](#) that have brought together key players and existing committed groups with a perspective on food deserts to 1) identify factors limiting access and opportunities to attain nutritious, affordable, and acceptable food, and 2) generate a prioritized list of strategies that actors in the state can consider to address its food security problems.

A third convening on December 10, 2019 (“the Summit”) was held with the aim of developing a community-driven plan of action that builds on the assets and activities already underway in the region. The goals of this convening were to:

1. Identify the interests of key stakeholder groups that play a role in addressing food deserts.
2. Have groups understand and catalog the roles and programmatic activities of groups that could address part of a food desert plan.
3. Develop proposals that merge the issues and perspectives of several sectors and can formulate a blueprint to address food deserts in West Virginia. These might include solutions related to:
 - the production of local produce;
 - affordability for low-income populations;
 - geographic access;
 - sustaining local farming practices;
 - addressing issues with the food supply chain;
 - ensuring the availability of healthy food options;
 - accommodation or the willingness of food retailers to meet the needs of the population;
 - the transportation system; or
 - how well the food and shopping retail experience satisfies the population.

The December 2019 event brought together over 60 stakeholders with various perspectives, core principles, and programmatic activities that at times have tended to diverge, harmonize, supplement, overlap, and/or compete with one another. Using the 2019 Summit to clarify the interests, goals, values, and vision of each group, a key outcome was to lift up the obligatory and ethical imperatives that groups recognize and take account of each other’s interests and actions in

addressing food deserts, as well as acknowledge what is missing from an institutional perspective and what anchors might do to help fill the gaps.

Methodology

The December 2019 event was grounded by the following Vision Statement and Lenses of Food Desert Conversations, developed by Dr. Lauri Andress over the course of her research categorizing the claims, narratives, images, and ideas used by food systems experts and advocates in West Virginia. Handouts provided at the event to familiarize attendees with this framework and to help guide their thinking during the small group table breakouts can be found in the Appendix.

The expectation was that the introduction of the food desert conversational lenses and goals statement would help participants 1) assess how current policy and programmatic initiatives integrate or fail to integrate less frequent conversational lenses, or 2) stimulate new initiatives that include these conversational lenses and goals.

Vision Statement

Any action taken to address food deserts in West Virginia should take into consideration the goal that appears in Figure 1.

The Six Lenses of Food Desert Conversations

Dr. Andress’s work (described in more detail on page 11) investigating food deserts in West Virginia revealed conversational lenses that were by and large rooted in the following frames:

1. Production, Distribution, and Infrastructure - This lens considers how food is grown, processed, moved and transported (logistics), and generates a profit.
2. Healthy, Organic, Local Food - Promoting locally grown, fresh, healthy, or organic produce.
3. Health, Diet, Behavior, and Healthcare - This is a medicalized view on food as nutrition, diet, and individual behavior that tends to exclude the non-medical determinants of health.
4. Natural Environment and Sustainability - Environmental aspects of food (i.e., food, soil, water, and climate change). The natural environment as a basis for what we grow and threats to farming.

FIGURE 1

GOAL

Provide a full retail experience that accommodates the preferences of everyone in West Virginia, especially its low wealth communities, with (healthy) food options that are affordable, available, acceptable, and accessible.

5. Finance and Investment - This encompasses economic development and the financing of entrepreneurial activities that span the continuum from farming to retail solutions.
6. Underserved Communities' Preferences - This concerns the “Five A’s”:
 - Accommodating - Are vendors and retailers aware of consumers’ needs?
 - Acceptable - Does the food fit the taste and culture of consumers (e.g. seniors may eat smaller portions)?
 - Available - Is the food present?
 - Accessible - Can consumers get to it?
 - Affordable - Can consumers afford it?

Dr. Andress’s research characterized the frequency of the use of these lenses as depicted in Figure 2 below. Findings indicated that the two food desert conversational lenses used the most frequently were *Production, Distribution, and Infrastructure* and *Healthy, Organic, Local Food*. In comparison, the two conversational food desert lenses used least frequently were *Underserved Communities’ Preferences* and *Finance and Investment*.

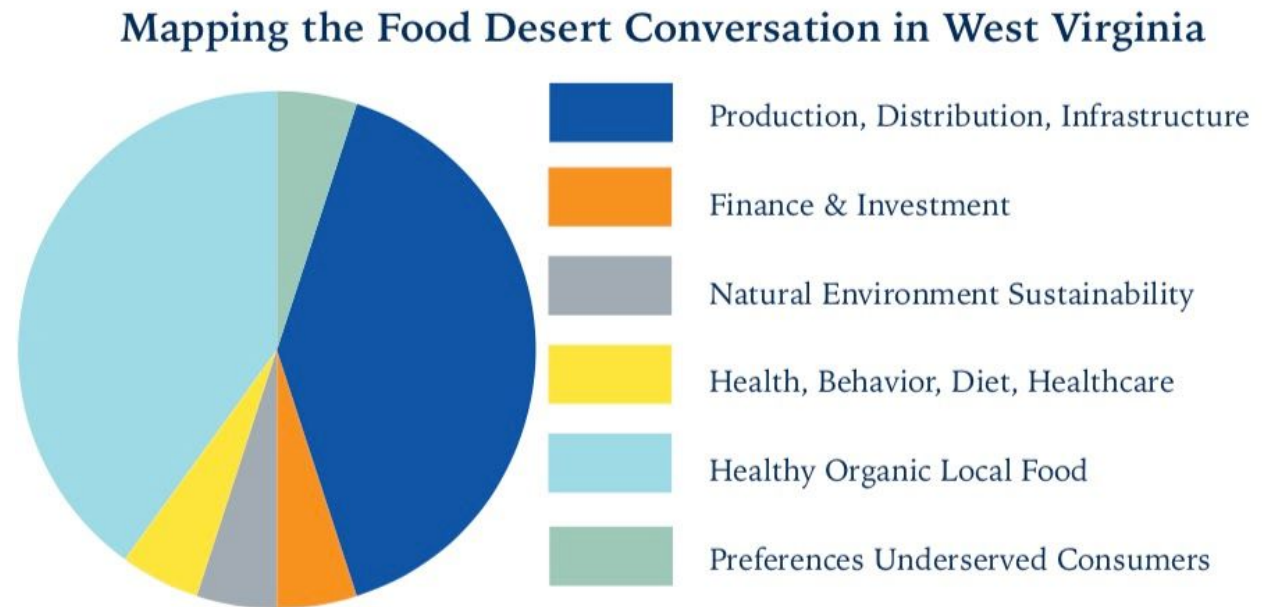


Figure 2. Frequency of the Use of Conversational Lenses on Food Deserts

Table Exercises

Attendees at the Summit self-selected tables to sit at when they entered the conference. The final configuration included 60 participants spread across six tables in the room. Each of the six tables were led through a series of exercises using materials that are located in the Appendix. The exercises were designed to document:

1. Existing efforts to combat food deserts in the state;
2. Missing gaps that would make these efforts more effective; and
3. Roles that various stakeholders could play to start to transform the food security landscape in West Virginia.

Facilitators for the small group breakout sessions included Nicole Muise-Kielkucki, Chelsea Burkett, Kristina Harrold, and Megan Nestor from Fourth Economy. Josh Cook, from West Virginia Forward, and Susan FunkaPetery, from NRCS, were also trained before the Summit by the Fourth Economy team to serve as table facilitators.

Exercise 1

For the first exercise, facilitators asked participants to write down on post-it notes all the existing activities and initiatives in each of the six lenses that came to mind. After they talked through their contributions, table members were asked to think of and capture on post-it notes what was missing that could enhance the approach or impact of those activities in each lens. All answers were placed on Sheet 1 by the facilitator.

Exercise 2

Participants were then asked to think about and write down on post-it notes what actors from six key stakeholder groups could do to help fill those gaps. The six key stakeholder groups were identified by the organizers before the Summit as institutional actors critical to making change in West Virginia. Facilitators placed their table's answers on Sheet 2 under the appropriate stakeholder group.

Exercise 3

Finally, facilitators led table members through a discussion to determine which gap they thought represented the biggest opportunity or challenge, or which would make the largest impact if addressed. Each table then worked through Sheet 3 to design a solution to help address that gap. First, the table participants wrote down action steps on post-it notes. Second, participants described stakeholders who would be responsible for those actions. Third, participants listed other resources that would be needed to enact their solution and where those resources might be found. The facilitator placed those post-it notes on Sheet 3.

Exercise 4

The fourth and final exercise was to summarize the three previous exercises on Sheet 4. Each group then elected one of their members to report out a summary of their group discussion. These report-outs were video recorded.

Post Event Analysis

Fourth Economy transcribed the four sheets from each of the six tables. Existing activities, gaps, and stakeholder roles from all six tables were aggregated and then summarized into the sections below. The ideas generated by each table to address the gap that they prioritized in Exercise 3 were summarized and condensed by Fourth Economy. Duplicate or similar ideas were merged, which resulted in the four main ideas that are described below.

Figure 3 displays how the four main ideas resulting from Fourth Economy’s analysis related to the six conversational lenses. Four of the lenses were not reflected in the ideas generated.

Figure 3. Ideas Generated via Table Exercises in Comparison to Conversational Lenses

Conversational Lenses	Ideas Generated
Production, Distribution, and Infrastructure	1. Create a community-based coalition of students, local leaders, and businesses
Finance and Investment	2. Support Community Owned Grocery Stores; Profitable Market Models 3. Coordination of Business Planning Resources 4. Regional Coordination and Stakeholder Alignment
Natural Environment and Sustainability	
Health, Diet, Behavior, and Healthcare	
Healthy, Organic, Local Food	
Underserved Communities’ Preferences	

Speakers and Presentations

Fourth Economy took notes as each of the speakers presented, which were synthesized into the summaries below and then verified for accuracy with each speaker. See the program in the Appendix for speaker biographies.

Speakers and Presentations

The event opened with speakers and presenters from around the state and region who provided perspectives and context for the interactive group table exercises during the second half of the day.

Opening Remarks

The summaries below highlight the framing provided by local and national food systems leaders. Each speaker brought their own perspective related to their work and experience in the fields of production, retail, and funding, and helped set the stage for the rest of the event’s activities. Bold emphasis has been added by Fourth Economy Consultants to highlight key concepts. To ensure accuracy, the summaries were written by Fourth Economy and then reviewed by each presenter.

Provost Maryanne Reed - *West Virginia University*

Kicking off the event, Provost Reed highlighted the fact that the lack of access to food, and healthy food in particular, is not a problem that is isolated to West Virginia, and that food deserts are just as prevalent in rural areas as they are in the suburbs and urban areas. Therefore, the assumption follows that if West Virginia can solve the problem, **the state can be a model** for countless places across the U.S. This is, of course, not simple, and will take a coalition of willing participants - not people acting alone - to plan, design, and execute a sustainable strategy that works for everyone. It is important to expand the conversation to include approaches that haven’t received as much attention, and enact a bottom-up approach that fits the needs of all consumers.

Provost Reed also cited numerous ways staff, students, and faculty at West Virginia University are **playing a critical role** in ensuring the health and prosperity of citizens across the state, by **collaborating across disciplines** and with partners outside of the University to find solutions to complex and “wicked” problems. This includes a mapping initiative to show where food is available through stores, pantries, and other sources; conducting research to improve food production, distribution, and infrastructure; teaching families and children how to prepare healthy foods; and redesigning supply chains to improve accessibility. These initiatives capitalize on collective knowledge and expertise, and are not WVU-led but rather entail engaging local communities to identify their own solutions.

Cross-sector representation is needed to make real change. In that vein, Provost Reed encouraged the audience to consider engaging with students - a population that is tech-savvy, entrepreneurial, eco-motivated, and who want to make a difference - to tap into their experience, energy, new perspectives, and skills.

Terrell Erickson - Regional Conservationist, Northeast, *USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service*

As a regional conservationist for NRCS, Ms. Erickson presented a framework for thinking about food deserts related to **increasing agricultural activity** and voluntary conservation projects on private lands in food insecure areas. In West Virginia, for example, NRCS has been partnering with WVU and WVU Extension Service to provide outreach, education, and technical assistance around high tunnels to farmers who live in food deserts, in order to increase accessibility of fresh, healthy foods locally, and extend the annual growing season. Other projects between WVU, WVSU, and/or WVDA include informing veterans about NRCS programs and educating them about farming in designated food deserts and underserved areas of West Virginia. Finally, an example of bringing these concepts together exists in McDowell County, West Virginia - a county with one of the lowest accessibility to fresh foods in the state. McDowell County Farms is run by two military veterans who are bringing new life to the area through farmer training around maple syrup, mushrooms, and vegetable production. In addition, they are contributing to future opportunities and economic development of the county, by **training the next generation** on high tunnel production at the local elementary school.

Sue Day-Perroots - Interim Dean, *West Virginia University Extension Service*

Dr. Day-Perroots stressed the importance of **engaging the community and school students** in food production and farmers markets. Children in the state are often among the most vulnerable when it comes to hunger and food access. Summer can be a challenging time for kids, when they aren't in school receiving the nutrition and academic assistance that is available during the school year. Energy Express addresses summer nutrition and reading achievement in a six-week program for children ages 5-9 years. The Family Nutrition Program reaches children throughout the year through a variety of programs, including the summer food service program, used at 55 camps throughout the state to ensure young people are getting the nutrition they need. Other initiatives seek to teach children the sources of the foods they eat; to help establish healthy habits early in life; to increase access to food at in-school farmers market stands; and/or to access local programs such as the Beverly Bookmobile, which delivers fruits and vegetables produced in school gardens and edible landscaping to families in need.

William D. Ramsey, MD, FACEP - Associate Vice President for Coordination and Logistics & Chief Collaboration Officer, *West Virginia University Health Sciences Center*

Dr. Ramsey offered a unique perspective related to children and public health. Citing research showing that living with hunger is essentially a trauma that severely affects children and their ability to learn and develop, he made the case that problems of that magnitude cannot be solved by efforts in a single discipline alone. Each person has an area of expertise, and we want to build massive bridges between them to foster true, disciplined collaboration. It is the only way to solve problems as complex as food deserts and their effects.

Norm Bailey - Chief of Staff, *West Virginia Department of Agriculture*

From a policy perspective, West Virginia is taking important steps to address food deserts. We know that the U.S. population is growing but the number of farms is declining, for example. From the Department of Agriculture’s perspective, **small farms are where innovation can happen**, and with its abundance of small farms, West Virginia is in a great position to change the model.

Recent policy initiatives at the state include the Fresh Food Act, which requires state-funded institutions to purchase 5% of their food from local sources. This can have a huge economic impact on local food and agriculture businesses, and positively impact the health of West Virginians. A focus on broadband came out of the state’s strategic planning efforts for agriculture - as technology progresses in food production and in supply chains, it’s important that farmers can connect to and use technology that is used to manage sales and marketing, as well as make production and logistics more efficient.

There are challenges as well, as national trade policy can either bolster or harm farmers’ ability to do business and make a living. For example, the West Virginia Agriculture Commissioner spent time in 2019 lobbying members of Congress to approve the new North American Free Trade Agreement. Historically, tariffs have been used to buy food that is distributed throughout the state of West Virginia, most of which gets distributed to food banks and the school system, to help address hunger. However, a lack of drivers and **high costs of distribution** limits the amount of food that can be circulated around the state. The WVDA has been working with the business school at WVU to study the feasibility of establishing warehousing operations and backhauling to improve logistics of moving food throughout the state.

Senator Doug Facemire - *West Virginia Senate, District 12*

Senator Facemire spoke of the social responsibility that we all share to provide for people who can’t provide for themselves, not as a “handout,” but as an investment in the future. As one of only two states that is losing population, the Senator noted that it is critical that West Virginia figure out how to get food to sparsely populated rural places in a way that is profitable for the retailer and those along the supply chain, while not burdening the consumer. The Senator has much experience in this area: in 1975 his family bought a grocery store in Sutton, and over the next 30 years expanded to 11 stores across the state of West Virginia. However, two years ago his family sold the businesses because of pressure from competition with big box stores like Wal-Mart, which were locating in small towns that were once thought to be unattractive to larger retailers. Currently, Senator Facemire owns a trucking company that hauls produce, meat, and dairy for large wholesalers.

The Senator mused about the future of agriculture in the state, and the need for local farmers to sell on a bigger scale. He noted that the infrastructure needed to help support the processing and sale of larger volumes of food, including farmer co-ops, and packing houses that can federally inspect meat products, are in **short supply or nonexistent in West Virginia**. He knows that West Virginia farmers are facing competition from huge out of state farms for commodity-like crops such as potatoes, which local farmers cannot beat on price alone. However, the Senator

emphasized that West Virginia has a lot of fresh water and cheap natural gas - two components needed for indoor, greenhouse, and hydroponic growing - which can be done year-round. He thinks **this can be a competitive advantage for West Virginia farmers**, and a way for children who grow up on farms to be able to stay on the farm and make a living.

The answer, Senator Facemire stated, is in traditional retail. Dollar General, for example, has different store formats that could be conducive to selling local food, including their “Dollar General Marketplace.” This could be a solution in places like Clay, WV, where the population is dwindling too rapidly for even a small independent grocer to open a store and sustain itself without a subsidy. He encouraged audience members to be realists but also opportunistic in order to come up with sustainable solutions. Every bag of potatoes from Idaho has a picture of Idaho, for example - West Virginia’s clean air and clean water should be marketed the same way.

Lauri Andress, PhD, JD - Assistant Professor, *West Virginia University School of Public Health*

Political science theory on the policymaking process and agenda-setting says that how a society talks about a problem affects how they think about it, and the subsequent solutions that will be considered during public and policy deliberations. This makes it important to evaluate and possibly reconfigure how we think about hunger and the need for access to food for families in West Virginia. In her research assessing the claims, narratives, images, and ideas used by food systems experts and advocates to talk about food in West Virginia, Dr. Andress highlighted several themes that explain how people conceptualize the issue. These lenses make up the framework that was used to help guide attendees’ thinking during the Summit’s breakout group work.

According to the theory advanced by Andress, the six conversations, or lenses, around food deserts generally fall into the following categories:

- **Production, Distribution, and Infrastructure** - This lens considers how food is grown, processed, moved and transported (logistics), and generates a profit.
- **Healthy, Local, Organic Food** - Promoting locally grown, fresh, healthy or organic produce.
- **Personal Health, Diet, Behavior, and Healthcare** - This is a medicalized view on food as nutrition, diet, and individual behavior that tends to exclude the non-medical determinants of health.
- **Natural Environment and Sustainability** - Environmental aspects of food (i.e., food, soil, water, and climate change).The natural environment as a basis for what we grow and threats to farming.
- **Finance and Investment** - This encompasses economic development and the financing of entrepreneurial activities that span the continuum from farming to retail solutions.

- **Underserved Communities' Preferences** - This concerns the needs of low-income communities and the “Five A’s”:

 - Accommodating - Are vendors and retailers aware of consumers’ needs?
 - Acceptable - Does the food fit the taste and culture of consumers (e.g. seniors may eat smaller portions)?
 - Available - Is the food present?
 - Accessible - Can consumers get to it?
 - Affordable - Can consumers afford it?

Many of these perspectives are in large part walled off from each other, occur more or less frequently, or are simply missing from the food systems work in West Virginia. Dr. Andress’s theory (see Figure 4) conceptualizes the frequency of the use of these lenses, and concludes that the dominant conversations on food deserts center around the *Production, Distribution, and Infrastructure* and *Healthy, Local, Organic Food* lenses. In comparison, the conversation on food deserts features the *Finance and Investment* lens with much less frequency.

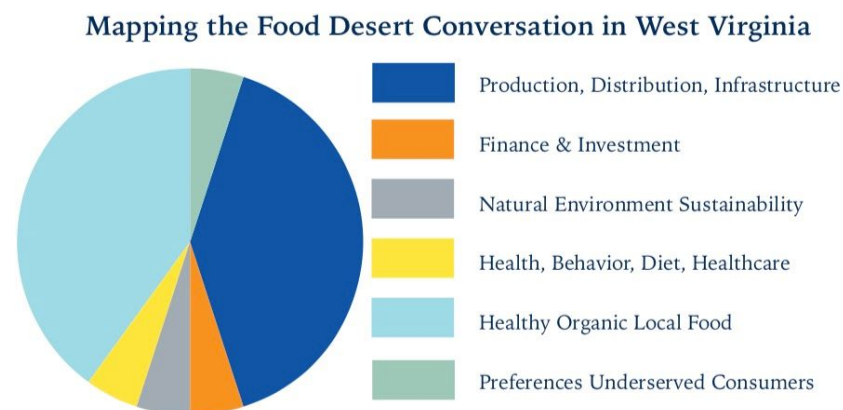
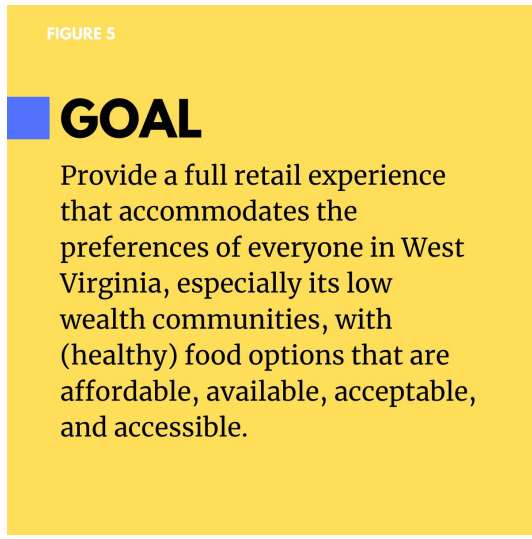


Figure 4. Frequency of the Use of Conversational Lenses on Food Deserts

Finally, employing the findings on the frequency of the use of these conversational lenses, Dr. Andress constructed a goals statement to use at the Food Desert Summit (Figure 5).

The expectation was that the introduction of these food desert conversational lenses and the goals statement would move the participants of the Food Desert Summit to assess how their initiatives could integrate the less frequent conversational lenses into their policy and programmatic initiatives or stimulate new initiatives. While Dr. Andress admits that this analysis is only one way to arrive at policy solutions, it is helpful to consider the communications models that dominate public and expert deliberations when addressing important public issues like food deserts.

The introduction of the food desert conversational lenses and the goals statement were meant to help participants consider how current policy and programmatic initiatives integrate or fail to integrate the underutilized conversational lenses or stimulate new initiatives that include these conversational lenses and goals.



Community Practitioners

Following the opening remarks, attendees heard from five local practitioners who each described their work on the ground around the state addressing various components of food deserts in West Virginia. Fourth Economy captured these summaries and then shared them with the presenters for edits to ensure accuracy.

Lynne Ryan - *The Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) Nutrition Program*

The federal WIC program serves a diverse population of low-income families from all across the country. However, many families enrolled in the local West Virginia WIC agency face challenges that prevent them from fully taking advantage of the program. Some don't make it to their appointments because they can't easily get off work. Transportation is a huge issue because many families don't have cars or a family member with a driver's license, so they instead rely on walking, the bus, taxis, or rides from friends and extended family. West Virginia WIC distributes free bus passes in some counties with a reliable public transportation system to help combat this problem. To counteract many families' low fruit and vegetable intake and poor nutrition, WIC distributes recipe books and vouchers that can be used at local farmers markets, in addition to regular monthly food benefits. However, these interventions are often not enough in the face of a problem as complex as combating hunger. For example, voucher use rate at farmers markets tends to be low, due to inconsistency and lack in breadth of products available at the market, as well as families' lack of knowledge about how to prepare fresh produce. Also, the number of rides

available on the program's transit passes are limited. As a result, families are likely to use their limited trips to go to a big box store where they can get everything else they may need — such as household goods or diapers — in addition to food, in a single trip. Finally, WIC has had great success with their breastfeeding support program. Establishing successful breastfeeding is a dependable way to ensure food security for infants, regardless of transportation or availability.

Peter Butler - *WVU School of Design and Community Development*

The WVU School of Design and Community Development performs engaged scholarship in communities throughout the state via the Community Engagement Lab, envisioning and designing marginal or underused public spaces as productive places in communities, often focused on local food. Opportunities that have been identified for production include brownfields and FEMA floodplain properties in Wyoming and Greenbrier Counties. Designs for food production include other diverse activities, including gathering spaces, recreation, and entrepreneurship. In Marlinton, a partnership created through a participatory design and planning process resulted in the transformation of a downtown site that had formerly been a gas station. The funded project is now under construction and will include a farmers market space, a stage for concerts along the Mountain Music Trail, native landscape plantings, and a splash pad for children. Projects seek to build local capacities towards positive change.

Fritz Boettner - *WVU Center for Resilient Communities*

To battle the statistic that 40% of people in the state are food insecure, in southern West Virginia, the Center for Resilient Communities is working with WVU Extension's Family Nutrition Program SNAP Education to provide healthy food to low-income populations. One of the biggest challenges in the local food system is aggregating food. To overcome this challenge, Turnrow Appalachian Farm Collective is helping to aggregate products from about 40 farms to supply pop-up markets in schools and elsewhere. Beyond this, mobile pantry programs are being explored to ensure that residents have access to foods that can't be grown locally — like rice or bananas — or other goods — like diapers. Where these popup grocery solutions are effective, they can be a proving ground that justifies establishing a permanent grocery store. It is important to consider supply chain efficiencies so that community-owned grocery stores that are established can be profitable and sustainable.

Tom McConnell and Lisa Jones - *WVU Extension Service, Small Farm Center*

West Virginia spends 8.3 billion dollars on food each year, but just a fraction of that is local. Sourcing locally grown food is good for the economy: for example, if West Virginia processed all the cattle and hogs it consumed, that would create 2,500 new jobs. Although West Virginia farm family income is low and the opportunity to sell food locally is great, many managers are intimidated by the prospect of problems with transportation, seasonality, marketing, and the risk associated with growing their businesses.

The state's economy can grow if we help our farmers and communities claim a larger share of the food dollars that are spent by consumers in West Virginia. Studies by the WVU Small Farm Center

reveal that we can compete with larger companies, as we can be more efficient and in closer proximity, which translates to delivering a fresher product. This means that most family farms have to change their farming philosophy from one that sells commodities to a huge faceless market, to a system that sells locally grown food to local markets. In every case, local products must be of higher quality than the competition to get into the market, and the products need to be compelling and convenient for consumers who are used to what they get in stores. What's more, studies have shown that processing foods extends the marketing season, thus increasing total annual sales. Selling locally grown food to our neighbors offers an opportunity for family farms to increase their net income and build their communities.

Amy Jo Hutchinson - *West Virginia Healthy Kids and Families*

Amy Jo Hutchinson wrapped up the community presentations by stressing the importance of taking the lives and realities of poor people into consideration when designing and implementing solutions to food deserts. Empathy is critical, and she urged the audience to use emotion to understand what it's like to be hungry and making tough choices, especially in the face of devastating policies like the administration's recent decision to cut SNAP benefits to millions of Americans.

People with low income often face challenges of availability and access. For example, for those who live in downtown Wheeling, the nearest grocery store is over three miles away. Without a reliable vehicle to carry groceries, that short distance becomes inaccessible. Organizations like Catholic Charities address accessibility through innovative solutions like mobile food pantries, but they don't carry non-food necessities like paper towels or menstrual products, so they don't fully solve the availability component.

Ms. Hutchinson also spoke about food dignity. Food pantries are a great resource to help fill gaps, but relying on them means sometimes people are forced to eat food that they don't want. Children deserve a cake on their birthday or potato chips as an after school snack, just like the rest of their classmates. It is no more "SNAP fraud" when people buy steak with their benefits than it is when they use them to buy expensive organic produce. It isn't fair to shame people for not buying fresh broccoli when they may have young children who change their minds about what they'll eat every week, or work long nights so that fresh food spoils before they have a chance to prepare it. "Consumers" are parents, children, and the elderly, who have lives with unique challenges that everyone may not understand. Therefore, it is important that policymakers get to know the people they are affecting through their policies and programs, and design solutions with them in mind.

Keynote Special Guests

Finally, two special guests spoke of initiatives happening outside of the state that could lend themselves to applications in West Virginia. Fourth Economy captured these summaries and then vetted them with the presenters for accuracy. More information about the speakers can be found in the program in the Appendix.

Molly Hartman - *National Healthy Food Financing Initiative*

Ms. Hartman highlighted the need to bring grocers into the room, noting that there were few practitioners in food retail present. She cited the success of the previous Pennsylvania Fresh Food Financing Initiative, which brought business leaders and the community perspective together to develop a model to address food deserts and food access. The Healthy Food Financing Initiative is a national model to finance innovative solutions like community-owned grocery stores. The Initiative works to turn those ideas into reality by providing funding through Community Development Financial Institutions, often with assistance from the states in which these initiatives happen.

John Glazer - *The Social Enterprise Ecosystem (SEE)*

John Glazer closed out the public speaking portion of the Summit by driving home a critical point: without money to sustain an objective, there can be no support for the mission. In order to address issues of social justice, there must be an economic system behind it that provides resources to cover the financial costs associated with running an intervention. Creating a holistic retail experience requires money changing hands - to build a grocery store or a processing plant, there must be a market for it. Everything requires an exchange of value, and a solution must be delivering sufficient value to the people it serves.

This connects to a point touched on by many of the speakers — the importance of considering or directly involving the people whose problem you are attempting to solve. To create value when addressing food deserts, a solution must meet the “Five A’s.” The best way to do that is to work with the beneficiaries of the solution. Their lived experiences must inform the solution for it to be meaningful and effective. For a person to be effective in serving this role, they must have rapport and standing among those who they are looking to serve. Relationships are key to the ability to deliver value.

Finally, Mr. Glazer focused on the financial return of investments in food desert interventions. Solutions must be sustainable. If a person is trying to move the needle on a social or environmental problem, it’s important to create value that isn’t just financial (i.e. a social return on investment). However, it must also have a financial return on investment (e.g. to service the loan, return capital to the investor, or generate metrics that the foundation wants to achieve).

There is more money circulating in our country today than at any time in history, Mr. Glazer said, yet we are living as if resources are scarce. The question then becomes: how do we pay for a better world? It is essential to tell the story of what is needed - like operating revenue and costs of production - from a resources perspective, in order to move the needle on the problems we are trying to solve and show the sustainability of the solutions we are proposing.

Table Exercises

The final part of the day occurred as small group exercises at each of the six tables. Attendees were led through a series of activities, facilitated by Fourth Economy Consultants, during which existing initiatives were identified, and potential solutions were brainstormed (see methodology section for more details). Materials used during these small group table sessions can be found in the Appendix.

The results of these table exercises were compiled by Fourth Economy and are detailed below. Bold emphasis has been added by Fourth Economy Consultants to highlight key concepts.

Existing Activities and Gaps

Attendees first documented existing initiatives and efforts related to the six lenses of food desert conversations, as well as what is missing that — if present — would have a positive impact on the food system and help productively address food deserts.

1. Production, Distribution, and Infrastructure

As one of the most frequent conversational lenses, this focused on how food is grown, processed, moved, and transported (logistics), and how it generates a profit. In West Virginia, there are many existing initiatives that support producers, food hubs and aggregators, food banks and pantries, home delivery services, and markets.

Production

Strengths include the investment and **encouragement of local farms** throughout the state by groups like the WVU Extension Small Farm Center, teaching farmers wholesaling through avenues like Farm to School, NRCS high tunnel funding and cost sharing for season extension, and high tunnel construction classes through WWSU.

Distribution

Many local distribution assets exist, including **business incubators and commercial kitchens**, community kitchens and cooking classes, WV Department of Agriculture processing facilities, Preston County Workshop's processing of food, and the Turnrow Farm Collective's model of **aggregation/distribution** — a great local best practice. Food banks, donations from farms to pantries, and mobile markets are all additional ways to provide food access to low-access communities, and there is grant-writing occurring to increase the capacity of food banks/pantries like the Mountaineer Food Bank.

Infrastructure

Current activities include **job training** around production, such as the prison system job training and the programs offered through WVU Extension. Research and mapping efforts are underway in the state, as well as education efforts for producers to increase profits. [Infrastructure upgrades to Corridor H](#) were announced in 2019. There is an opportunity to expand upon the work being completed with the dollar stores that are selling healthy local food for a profit.

Gaps

While much infrastructure is in place in West Virginia — including shipping, production, and distribution centers — **equipment** and supports for scaling the industry are largely absent in the state. There are noticeable gaps in large-scale farming equipment, fruit and vegetable value-add facilities, and freezer space.

There is also low production of fruits and vegetables and specialty crops in particular. There is a **need for more farmer co-ops** that can provide production planning, reduce input costs, and focus marketing efforts. Additionally, there is a lack of farm labor in the state, and there is not a proper workforce stream to meet the need of production in coming years.

Other gaps in the PDI space include people not meeting nutrition requirements and a low tax base resulting in poorly maintained infrastructure. Additionally, the state needs more ways to get full-service markets to rural areas at a profit. This includes **transportation**, especially for single-parent families, an increased number of rural markets as a whole, and a USDA inspector.

There are collaborations between main actors, such as the NRCS and the West Virginia Department of Agriculture’s agreements about high tunnels and business development training, but overall there is a lack of **coordination** between all the providers of support and resources, as well as a lack of widespread **public awareness** of local food initiatives. Without adequate supply chain management and coordinated planning around community efforts, consumers are left to fend for themselves or navigate the complicated nuances of a broken system.

All of these gaps limit the development of sustainable market models.

2. Healthy, Organic, Local Food

This lens focused on promoting locally grown, fresh, healthy or organic produce.

The work of programs such as SNAP-Ed and the Family Nutrition Program **help to bridge the gap between the preferences of low-income consumers and what products may be available at farmers markets or grocery stores.** These programs introduce children and families to tastes preparation strategies for new foods, thereby lowering the risk of purchasing these foods. When trying to attract a retailer to a community, it is important to note the presence and impact of these programs.

Current activities to promote healthy, local, and organic food in West Virginia include **pop-up markets, backpack programs, and Farm to School efforts** to bring fresh produce to students throughout the state, as well as distributing fresh produce vouchers, and locating farmers markets at workplaces and community centers. Healthy food is also promoted through nutrition classes at local WIC offices, the new recipe app and online classes, and the nutrition outreach instructors at WVU extension that are deployed into the community.

Gaps

Low-income families must choose the foods they purchase wisely - there is no room for error when a food budget is limited. Generally, research says that low-income families will ignore organic, local food if it competes with their everyday lives. Accordingly, it is likely that families will purchase the foods they can afford, make last a long time, can reach given limited transportation options, are most familiar with, know how to prepare, and feel certain their children will eat.

Though the initiatives to increase healthy, locally produced food are impactful, barriers such as these make it difficult for locally produced food to become a regular part of the of low-income communities' diets. There is also a lack of public understanding of the distinctions between local, organic, and/or healthy food, which could be remedied through **more consistent or standardized education** for consumers throughout the state. Further, stronger networks are needed to continue to support current activities to promote healthy, local, and organic food in West Virginia. Even though there are mobile food banks, they are sparse and are often not willing to travel across county lines. West Virginia has a smaller market for local foods than other states, and a lack of growing, processing, storage, and transportation results in challenges exporting healthy food.

There are also not enough local producers to adequately meet the consumption needs of local households. To address this gap, there are current funding opportunities, such as the financial and technical assistance programs through NRCS, but these would be more impactful if there was more **business planning and outreach** to beginning farmers who were producing locally.

3. Underserved Consumers' Preferences

This lens emphasized the "Five A's" of food access including affordability, availability, access (transportation), preferences (acceptability), and accommodation (treatment by producers, retailers, and food banks).

Underserved consumer preferences are being addressed through **SNAP and WIC** at farmers markets, and grant-writing efforts to provide double-up SNAP benefits to extend the impact of each dollar. In addition, West Virginia boasts strong school breakfast and lunch programs, mobile and pop-up markets, community food education programs, and cooking classes which help make food more accessible to low-income consumers.

Special interest groups make up most programming to address accessibility, including:

- Senior Centers
- Meals on Wheels
- Soup Kitchens (“Mom’s Meals”)
- Churches and religiously-affiliated food pantries (local)

Additionally, efforts are underway to work with communities to map where food deserts are located, understand the impact of food deserts on different socioeconomic groups, and determine the needs and concerns of individuals who live in food deserts. These efforts have resulted in convenings to assess how to better serve food deserts and create programs for individuals that live in food deserts.

Gaps

Despite these efforts, there are knowledge gaps about consumer preferences, and a lack of understanding regarding the lived experience of low-wealth people. Largely, the **people most impacted by food desert issues are not at the table with decision-makers**. The working poor are falling through the gaps, because they are not being brought into the solution-creation process - they are only being called on to deal with the results or repercussions of food system gaps. Problems arise when communicating ABOUT communities rather than WITH them, not listening to poor people, and not properly understanding the challenges people face when it comes to hunger (i.e. lack of reliable transportation or inability to carry groceries for the elderly or disabled; the time it takes to prep and cook while working several full-time jobs; the stigma of fresh food spoiling; etc.). As mentioned during the Summit, these conversations need to happen more locally with the individuals most affected, including low-income and rural residents.

Programs that help assist with food access are only temporary solutions, prone to ebb and flow based on political considerations, and penalize the **working poor by cutting benefits even as they are in low-paying jobs that barely make ends meet**. It is not uncommon for grocery stores in low-income areas to sell low-quality products and have limited options, compared to the same store in a higher-income region. This results in a lose-lose situation wherein consumers are not getting what they want, and retailers aren’t selling enough to make their business sustainable. There is no mechanism for store owners to truly understand consumer preferences in low-income neighborhoods, thereby enabling them to stock products that consumers want and will purchase. A new model is needed.

4. Investment and Finance

This lens focused on economic development and the financing of entrepreneurial activities that span the continuum from farming to retail solutions.

West Virginia is fortunate to have **community foundations and other philanthropy partners** who are interested in investing in solutions to food deserts. In addition, health insurance companies are increasingly looking to invest in solutions to food deserts, as they ultimately bear the cost of the

resulting negative health outcomes when people lack access to healthy food. This extends to venture capital as well - newly launched Vantage Ventures at WVU will focus on four main market sectors: health, security, energy, and sensory, which all have a connection to food and food security.

Finally, there are national and state-wide grant and loan funding streams to help build new stores and other redevelopment in food desert communities, like the National Capital Investment Fund; programs through the USDA, WVDA, Farm Service Agency, and the National Resource Conservation Service; and the Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP), through the National Institute of Food and Agriculture.

Gaps

There are limited donors and philanthropy in this field. Where there are philanthropists, the approach is uncoordinated and lacks direction. This could be due to a number of reasons; in particular, foundations and individual investors may not feel confident about the ability of organizations and companies to provide a return on their investment and may not want to take a risk. Other gaps recognized in the state were the availability of micro grants for community projects, food businesses, and new farm ventures. There should be more creative funding sources, especially ones that are focused on building the capacity of local organizational leadership to build sustainable programs. In order to receive more funding and gain the confidence of local funders, there is a need for more business planning and support for start-up entities. Because there are strict regulations around food production and sales, beginning entrepreneurs and producers need more guidance in navigating the barriers. Creating an “initiative” would multiply proposals, thereby increasing the likelihood of good ideas rising to the top and identifying opportunities to encourage collaboration.

Of great concern is limited amounts of **funding and disinvestment in public services** from state agencies, with most of the public money coming from federal pass-through dollars. Additionally, uncertain and untimely state and federal budgets, changing assistance programs, and legislative attacks on the nutrition safety net are all major problems for the food system in West Virginia. This comes from a lack of political will and leadership.

The State of West Virginia **imposes a work requirement on SNAP benefits**. There may be an opportunity to reinvest the “savings” that the State receives into food desert solutions. As the use of social impact bonds increases, it would be worth exploring if this model could be utilized.

5. Natural Environment and Sustainability

This lens focused on the environmental aspects of food (i.e. soil, water, and climate change), the natural environment as a basis for what we grow, and threats to farming.

West Virginia boasts access to clean soil and water for food production, and there are plenty of **programs to encourage farmland preservation** - for example, as part of the Farm Bill, there is a requirement for source water conservation (10%). Research, reports, and data are available from

universities and colleges — for example, WVU Davis College Soil Analysis Lab provides free sample testing. There are also trainings on environmental and agricultural topics for the general public, as well as for specific populations, like veterans or high school students. USDA's StrikeForce program helps with financial and technical assistance for conserving natural resources in the country's most economically challenged areas.

Gaps

There is not, however, a broad understanding of the environmental pressures in relation to food deserts in West Virginia. From a sustainability perspective, local visions and action plans for climate change or environmental planning are not doing enough to address food insecurity. There should be a spatial analysis and assessment of what is needed on regional levels to grow the necessary food for a given population.

In addition, a lack of education for farmers — whether about sustainable farming practices, natural resources, or environmental sustainability as a whole — means there is a lack of knowledge among many farmers, and **poor farming practices** result. More work should be done to prevent tillage-intensive cropping on erosive soils and the loss of farmland due to farming techniques that don't consider environmental pressures.

6. Personal Health, Diet, Behavior, and Healthcare

This lens represented a medicalized view on food as nutrition, diet, and individual behavior with a tendency to deemphasize non-medical determinants of health.

There are resources available from public entities to address health and healthcare concerns. For example, WV Health Right is a free clinic, and the Rural Health Initiative does work to recruit and train healthcare professions. On a personal level, healthcare programs can provide food insecurity assessments or have "produce prescription" programs, like [FARMacy](#). WVU Medicine hosts classes like "Finding Wellness"- an eight-week, free, healthy lifestyle program open to anyone who is ready to improve their personal health. There are also education programs through state agencies, such as diabetes education or school gardening programs. Existing community health coalitions are also doing good work in this arena.

Strong activities related to personal health in the state are centered around Extension outreach and food education ([Family Nutrition Program](#)), including teaching home food preservation, education for low-income families on managing food dollars, educating children about nutrition and agriculture, and WVU's obesity clinic. There is also an increased awareness of food deserts through identification and publicization and a strong faith community supporting this space.

Gaps

Problems exist with obesity rates, chronic disease, and low or no healthcare accessibility. **West Virginia ranks number one for incidences of diabetes per capita in the US but number 50 in endocrinologists per capita in the US.** There is also a lack of trust and community

engagement in public programming. Along with a stigma around food insecurity, there is also a culture of blaming the poor for being unhealthy. An additional gap is the lack of education regarding the link between healthy food and well-being, and our societal focus on calories rather than nutrients. There is a need for more education about healthy living and building healthy habits for the general public, in K-12 in particular. There should also be more engagement from public entities in senior centers and working with the senior population.

Ideas for Increasing Food Security and Addressing Food Deserts in West Virginia

What follows are the ideas that were generated during the facilitated group table sessions regarding new initiatives or efforts that could be launched in West Virginia to address the most pressing gaps in food desert alleviation. These findings represent the ideas, views, and statements of participants and their tables, who selected the gap that they viewed as most important to address, regardless of which lens it was associated with (see methodology section for more details). Materials used during this exercise are included in the appendix.

1. Support for Community-Owned Grocery Stores Throughout West Virginia and Development of Profitable Market Models

West Virginia could spur the creation of **community-owned grocery stores** by providing market data, capacity, and a “playbook” for creating a sustainable business model.

Market data is needed to better understand the purchasing power and habits of communities across the state. The State Department of Commerce and/or local and regional economic development agencies often provide support for this type of analysis. Ultimately, they could also be critical partners in engaging private sector developers and other partners key to developing a successful business.

A playbook could be developed that offers guidance on how to engage different stakeholder groups in the process of developing a community-owned grocery store. The playbook could expand on the following ideas:

- Nonprofit partners should be engaged to ensure that the **low-income families** that they work with are part of the development of the market model, through surveys, focus groups, and other methods of “human-centered design.” Once a market is established, they can be partners in promoting it to their clients.
- Creative solutions will be required to stock a grocery store in a way that meets consumer demands and is financially sustainable. These could include partnering with larger grocery stores and/or other community-owned grocery stores for **bulk/cooperative buying**. Furthermore, value-added products often provide a higher return to the producer *and* convenience and affordability to the consumer. Partnering with local producers, public agriculture partners, churches, existing cooperatives such as Turnrow, and other partners to develop a supply chain focused on value-added products may be a successful strategy.
- For community-owned grocery stores to be successful, it is critical for them to have broad support, and to sell products that low-income families want. Food deserts are nearly always located in areas of high unemployment. A strategy that focuses on **employing**

local low-income residents would be a win-win - providing jobs and leveraging those employees to help inform the store’s purchasing strategy.

Markets must also be **profitable** so that businesses and small farms can afford to enter and/or do business in food deserts. If farms are profitable, they will be able to sell at lower price points to underserved populations.

Some specific actions towards developing profitable local markets include:

- **Taxing out-of-state food retailers**, and using the revenue from the tax to invest back into West Virginia agriculture/farms. Even a 1% tax would mean increased investment in local farms and agricultural businesses.
- **Developing value-add markets** in order to increase profitability for small, local farms and make local food more affordable for all consumers.
- **Create subsidies (via the state) for businesses operating in food deserts**, as well as incentives for businesses to operate in food deserts and to cater to SNAP customers’ wants.
- Utilize the Massachusetts [“Healthy Incentive Program”](#) as a model for **incentivizing consumers to purchase local, healthy food**.

The creation of a community-owned grocery store that is both financially successful and meets the needs of low-income families is no easy task and would require dedicated capacity. It is critical that the people and organizations shepherding the planning of a store represent the people that the store is aiming to serve. A network of champions should be identified and supported to do this work. This could take the form of some combination of fellowship model and business plan competition, where champions — or fellows — are provided a stipend equivalent to a living wage for the year in order to develop a full business plan and establish MOUs with key partners. At the end of the year, a competition could be held and a certain number of the plans could be awarded initial funding.

2. Coordination of Business Planning Resources

There are a lot of great ideas circulating in West Virginia around new interventions that can better address food deserts. However, in order to attract funding from local, state, or national sources, the organizations behind those ideas must find ways to clearly articulate and justify their investment by demonstrating financial sustainability. Many resources exist locally to help launch new ventures, such as entities like the Small Business Development Center or the West Virginia University Cooperative Extension Service. However, it would help to bring those resources together so that they are coordinated and streamlined, and practitioners can easily find the tools they need. To do this, it would be important to showcase models of successful businesses, drawing upon their expertise and teaching the appropriate “lingo,” as well as highlighting the importance of business planning. It would also be critical to have enough “boots on the ground” support, through agencies

like Extension and Department of Health and Human Resources, to point people to the tools and resources that are available.

Additional resources could be brought in to support this initiative, including: education efforts through high schools, 4H, FFA, and universities, as well as beginning farmer programs and community gardens to get new people interested in the field; associations (i.e. hunting) and communication entities (i.e. private and state government-affiliated entities like WV Grown) to build awareness; Community Action, a nonprofit/government partnership that can provide business planning, payroll, and back office services; and senior centers for mentors and skills sharing.

3. Regional Coordination and Stakeholder Alignment

There are a number of known issues that cause food deserts in West Virginia, largely tied to economic, structural, and systemic issues including income levels, employment, and transportation. Each community struggles more acutely with one issue over another. However, one issue remains consistent throughout all communities - a lack of financial resources.

There is a clear need for more funding from many sectors, particularly from state agencies, to support efforts including the development of local retail opportunities, feeding low-income residents, and helping farmers to grow, harvest, process, and distribute their products. There appears to be a lack of political awareness, or will, to push for more state funding.

This distinct **lack of coordination between organizations and initiatives on a regional level** has created a culture of competition for resources between organizations that have similar objectives and might, in other circumstances, be collaborators and allies. There should be better coordination and advocacy from regional initiatives to garner the political awareness necessary for more support and funding from the state. This could happen through the following steps:

1. Use existing inventories and **networks** of food security actions to **align groups** around common themes and initiatives.
2. Form regional **coalitions** (like Food Policy Councils) around shared objectives, where local stakeholders can share their initiatives and be the voice of community members.
3. Engage foundations and **local funding partners** to help demonstrate collective impact around issue areas.
4. Build a narrative to be shared with local and state legislators and increase buy-in for things like tax incentives.

4. Creation of a Community-Based Coalition of Students, Local Leaders, and Businesses

Empowering the next generation of agriculture and food industry leaders is critical to making progress on these complex issues. To this end, West Virginia stakeholders should come together

to create community-based coalitions of students, local leaders, and businesses to build capacity and lobby/advocate for solutions like the following:

- Encourage local food production and retail markets at every school, using available land to produce agriculture goods.
- Design a Masters in Food Production at the university level.
- Work with businesses to do direct procurement of local foods.

Viewed through an even wider lens, society's devaluing of local agriculture is a major barrier for supporting successful food systems in West Virginia — if the value of these processes and businesses were higher, people might be more willing to pay for them. This coalition could raise awareness about these issues and advocate for investments in infrastructure that could support local food security. In order to encourage investment in infrastructure to support these systems, the state would first need to build their identity, defining a vision and making West Virginia compelling and desirable to invest in.

Stakeholders and Roles

The following stakeholder groups were identified by summit attendees as critical components to moving the needle on the food desert issue in West Virginia. See appendix for material used during this exercise. The role these various stakeholder groups can play is outlined here.

Nonprofits

As the “boots on the ground,” nonprofit organizations are in a unique position to interact with and identify gaps in their community and are the most aware of what their constituents and community members need. They have the local perspective and are the best **champions** of their own efforts and telling the story of those most affected by food security issues.

The nonprofit community can **form coalitions** and working groups around topics with interest group buy-in. They can also partner with private businesses in unique ways to bring awareness to local residents who may not struggle from food security issues but could stand to benefit from local programs that increase access, or tie into workforce development opportunities for local companies.

As 501(c)3s, nonprofits have the ability to secure grant **funding** and are the most able to receive state agency and federal support, so should be the loudest voices in an awareness campaign. They are able to provide a “face” to the issues and build stories that will trigger emotions and bring in investment.

Nonprofits can provide valuable **technical assistance** for small farms and businesses, as well as help individuals and organizations access resources — ideally through a clearinghouse of some kind. Nonprofits can offer start-up business and grant-writing workshops. Additionally, nonprofit organizations often serve as the aggregate for small farms.

Churches deserve particular recognition, as they are frequently on the front lines of addressing the lack of food access for low-income families, and they have the infrastructure to support short supply chain runs (e.g. commercial kitchens, trucks, etc.). The West Virginia Rescue Ministries is an excellent example of this.

Solving limited food access in low-income communities presents a unique opportunity for a focus on social enterprise models. There are many entrepreneurial opportunities to solve challenges on both the supply and demand sides of the equation. However, while there is certainly profit to be made, the need for a strong mission-orientation and the likely low profit margins make this space perfect for social enterprise models. In West Virginia, [Cafe Appalachia](#) is a great example of this. Nationally, the [Daily Table](#) has been receiving attention for its work at the intersection of mission and business.

Private Businesses

Local businesses and farmers often serve as **early adopters** and spread ideas through word of mouth. If there are farms doing a WIC-CSA, for example, they could serve as a model for others. This could be supported by surrounding communities and programs.

Private businesses can commit to buy from local farms through long-term **contracting**. The private sector can also develop processing plants and USDA-inspected commercial kitchens for use.

Banking and Investment

Foundations, Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFIs), and other funding entities hold the key to implementation of projects, and should be conscientious of the types of projects they are approving. These entities can be conveners, build consensus, and **establish a vision** for the kinds of initiatives that make good investments.

There are only six CDFIs in West Virginia — Clarktown, Morgantown, Elkin, Hurricane, Newell, and Shepherdstown. Under the Community Reinvestment Act (CRA), banks could also increase their community investments in food desert solutions. CDFIs and other banks have an opportunity to look for ways to partner — for example, with philanthropy or Farm Credit — on alternative financing options, like loans that are low-interest or require less collateral. Banking and investment entities can provide models and best practices for local businesses and conduct trainings around business planning.

Colleges and Universities

Colleges and universities are **sources of research that can inform new solutions and policy changes**. For example, WVU hosts the [Food Justice Lab](#), which serves as an example of the kind of research that can be particularly useful in understanding the current retail landscape and market opportunities throughout West Virginia.

Institutions of higher education are also a **source of capacity** and can be engaged either via interns or student groups to support the design and implementation of strategies, an approach being used successfully by Grow Ohio Valley. Extension and educational institutions can offer trainings in entrepreneurship, direct marketing, and co-op management, get new people into the field, and build a local knowledge base.

Food insecurity for college and university students is a little-discussed issue that has major consequences; schools might be the most able to bring awareness to this issue. Colleges and universities have a role to play (such as through extension), in **educating policymakers and leaders** about food security issues. They also have a role to play in measuring policies to see if they are working. For example, what impact will the Fresh Food Act have on the state and food deserts in the coming years?

Finally, colleges and universities could support grant-writing, which most nonprofits have limited capacity to do.

State and Local Government

Public agencies can provide valuable **market data** to inform strategies for food access in low-income communities. The federal government in particular has a role to play in funding grants to encourage innovation in the field, through programs like Rural Development and FSA. Small farms do not have the flexibility to experiment and innovate without additional funding. The federal government could also play a role through providing storage facility loans — however, federal funders should do local trainings to ensure organizations can take advantage of these opportunities. Additionally, they could provide a USDA inspector in the state.

There is a desire for the state government to raise taxes or restructure funding streams to direct more **money** to food security issues. State and local government could create tax incentives for production farmland or for food retailers operating in food desert areas, and incentivize local food purchasing through providing subsidies. They could also market cost assistance programs to underserved groups, keeping in mind that the working poor — those most affected by food security — are a main constituency.

The government must look at food systems holistically — combining the concepts of human health, animal health, and environmental health. Attention to all of these interrelated topics will ultimately lead to a stronger return on investment. Ultimately, all branches of government need to listen to how the industry is doing and develop programs accordingly.

Conclusion

In the policy process, how a collective constructs a condition's definition is a large part of the decision to call the issue an actionable threat requiring a particular set of policy responses. As West Virginia continues its battle against food deserts, it will be important to consider how it tells that story. In addition to the common elements of an issue campaign including data, mobilizing structures, and political opportunities, other critical components of a social movement or call to action include the claims made, narratives presented, and depiction of the problem.

The Food Desert Summit began with the identification of several conversational lenses used with different frequencies by food system advocates and experts in West Virginia (see handout in the Appendix). The expectation was that the introduction of these food desert conversational lenses and goals statement would move the participants of the Food Desert Summit to consider how to actualize or incorporate the missing or less frequently used lenses as policy tools to address food deserts. Were this to happen, issues such as the following would have to be considered:

1. The need for financing and investment in retail configurations that would provide affordable, nutritious food in such a manner as to treat consumers with dignity; and

2. Consideration for how consumers would get to sources of food.

Essentially, the Food Desert Summit sought to highlight the various interests of food systems groups and lift up an obligatory and ethical imperative that groups recognize and take account of each others' interests and actions in addressing food deserts.

The major recommendations from the Summit included:

1. Support for Community-Owned Grocery Stores Throughout West Virginia and Development of Profitable Market Models
2. Coordination of Business Planning Resources
3. Regional Coordination and Stakeholder Alignment
4. Creation of a Community-Based Coalition of Students, Local Leaders, and Businesses

Participants recommended the involvement of the following key sectors: Nonprofits, Colleges/Universities, State and Local Governments, Private Businesses, and Banking and Investment.

The Summit made clear that there are many initiatives making progress towards the development of a food system unique to West Virginia and capable of contributing to efforts to address food security. However, it is still important to emphasize that the needs of our low wealth communities should be part of any equation that finances and constructs a West Virginia food system.

Next steps should consider refining the findings in this report through further discussions with the key sectors listed, along with food system experts, advocates, academicians, and the private sector already delivering retail experiences around West Virginia.

It is the hope of the organizers that stakeholders who were present and others who were not able to participate will continue toward a path of developing multi-sectored solutions to the complex issue of food insecurity in West Virginia.

WEST VIRGINIA FOOD DESERT SUMMIT 2019

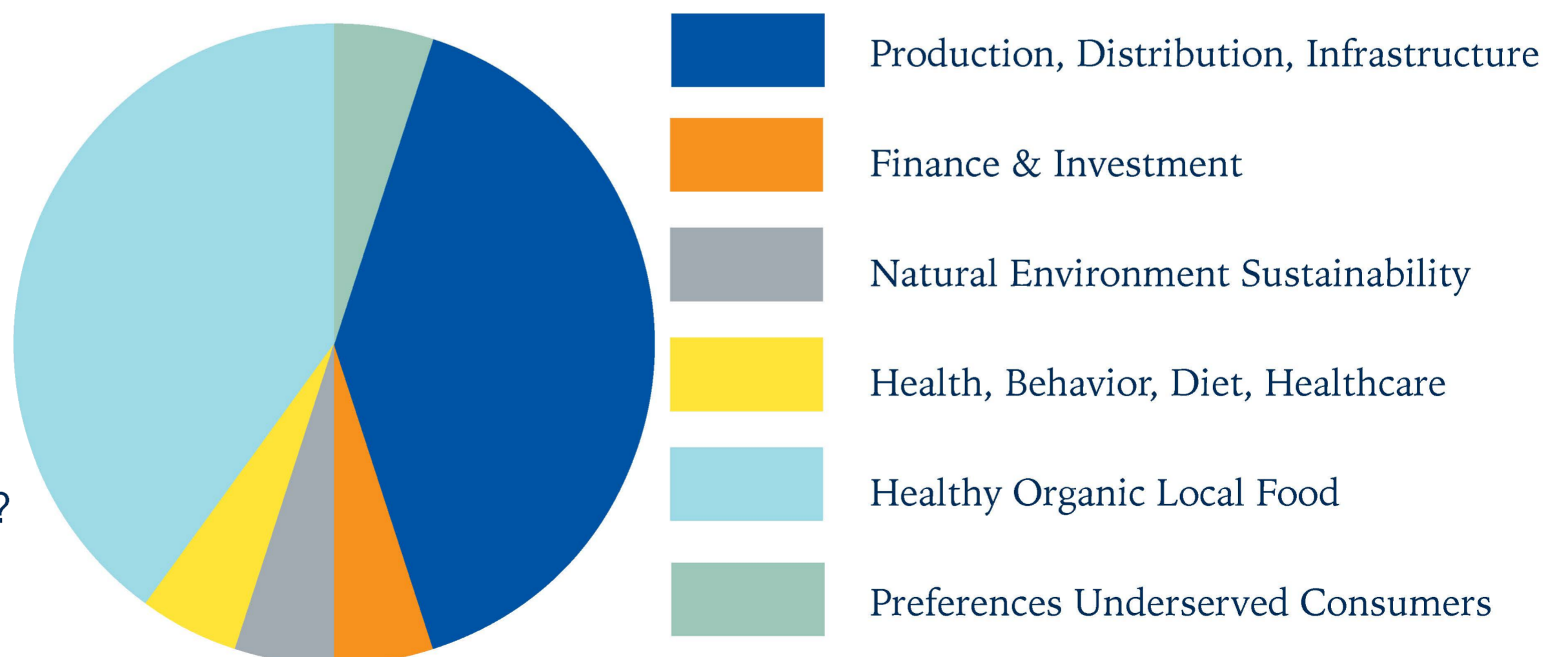
VISION STATEMENT

“Provide a full retail experience that accommodates the preferences of everyone in West Virginia, especially its low wealth communities, with (healthy) food options that are affordable, available, acceptable, and accessible.”

THE 6 LENSES OF FOOD DESERT CONVERSATIONS

- **Production, Distribution, and Infrastructure** - This lens considers how food is grown, processed, moved and transported (logistics) and generates a profit
- **Healthy, Organic, Local Food** - Promoting locally grown, fresh, healthy or organic produce, fruits, vegetables
- **Personal Health, Diet, Behavior, Healthcare** - This is a medicalized view on food as nutrition, diet, and individual behavior
- **Natural Environment & Sustainability** - Environmental aspects of food, i.e., food, soil, water, climate change. The natural environment as a basis for what we grow and threats to farming.
- **Finance & Investment** - This encompasses economic development and the financing of entrepreneurial activities that span the continuum from farming to retail solutions
- **Underserved Communities' Preferences** - This concerns the 5 “A”s
 - **Accommodating**
Are vendors and retailers aware of consumers' needs?
 - **Acceptable**
Does the food fit the taste and culture of consumers? (e.g. seniors - eat small portions)
 - **Available**
Is the food present?
 - **Accessible**
Can consumers get to it?
 - **Affordable**
Can consumers afford it?

Mapping the Food Desert Conversation in West Virginia



West Virginia Food Desert Summit 2019

GOAL: “Provide a full retail experience that accommodates the preferences of everyone in West Virginia, especially low wealth individuals, with (healthy) food options that are affordable, available, acceptable, and accessible?”

How are we as a state currently addressing food deserts by meeting the above goal?	How are we as a state falling short of meeting this goal? Where are there gaps, what is missing?
--	--

Production, Distribution, and Infrastructure

Healthy, Organic, Local Food

Underserved Consumers' Preferences

Investment and Finance

Natural Environment, Sustainability

Personal Health, Diet, Behavior, Healthcare

West Virginia Food Desert Summit 2019

What are one or two ways in which we as a state could make progress towards this goal?

Non-Profits

Colleges & Universities

State/Local Government

Federal Government

Private Business

Banking & Investment
(includes CDFIs, Fed)

West Virginia Food Desert Summit 2019

What is needed to support these stakeholder groups in playing a more active role in reaching this goal?

Action Steps

Other Types of Stakeholders

Resources

Source

West Virginia Food Desert Summit 2019

Report Out

Prioritized Gap:

Stakeholder Group/Role:

1.

2.

3.

Action Step:

1.

2.

3.

WEST VIRGINIA FOOD DESERT SUMMIT 2019

COLLECTIVE ACTION TO ADDRESS
FOOD DESERTS IN WEST VIRGINIA

BRIDGEPORT CONFERENCE CENTER
DECEMBER 10, 2019



Natural Resources Conservation Service



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This meeting is the third installment of an ongoing conversation around the West Virginia food system and the complex problem of food deserts. Recognizing the importance of food access to human health and community well-being, the objective of this convening is to understand what we are already doing and where the opportunities exist to address food deserts.

From retailers, to farmers, to researchers, to food systems advocates, and government agencies, the contributions of each sector are of vital importance in solving a critical problem in West Virginia.

You were invited to this special convening of thought leaders on West Virginia's food system because of your willingness to consider solutions to food deserts and to come together with key players who have various perspectives and diverse methods for building a stronger food system in West Virginia.

This effort was organized by West Virginia University's Davis College of Agriculture and School of Public Health, West Virginia University Extension Service, and the West Virginia University Foundation, and was supported by the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service.

Thank you to the Steering Committee who helped guide the formation of this event: Susan FunkaPetery, Cindy Fitch, Jennifer Williams, Paul Kinder, Lauri Andress, Jack Thompson, Josh Cook, and Shelley Birdsong-Maddex.

AGENDA

10:00 -10:15

ARRIVE AND NETWORKING

10:15 - 10:55

OPENING REMARKS

Provost Maryanne Reed - West Virginia University

Terrell Erickson - Regional Conservationist, Northeast, USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service, West Virginia University Health Sciences Center

Sue Day-Perroots - Interim Dean, West Virginia University Extension Service

William D. Ramsey, MD, FACEP - Associate Vice President for Coordination and Logistics & Chief Collaboration Officer, West Virginia University Health Sciences Center

Norm Bailey - Chief of Staff, West Virginia Department of Agriculture

Lauri Andress, PhD, JD - Assistant Professor, West Virginia University School of Public Health

10:55 - 11:45

PRESENTERS OF FIVE LOCAL PERSPECTIVES

OF FOOD SYSTEMS WORK

Lynne Ryan - The Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) Nutrition Program

Peter Butler - WVU School of Design and Community Development

Fritz Boettner - Sprouting Farms and WVU Center for Resilient Communities

Tom McConnell and Lisa Jones - WVU Extension Service, Small Farm Center

Amy Jo Hutchinson - West Virginia Healthy Kids and Families

11:45 - 12:45

LUNCH AND SETTING THE STAGE

FOR THE SECOND HALF OF THE DAY

During this working lunch, two speakers engaged in financing initiatives to address food systems issues will present their framework and take questions:

Molly Hartman - National Healthy Food Financing Initiative

Partnering with PolicyLink and The Food Trust, Reinvestment Fund has worked with policymakers and advocates to push for a smart, sustainable way to invest in healthy food and good jobs in underserved communities. The national Healthy Food Financing Initiative is a viable,

effective, and economically sustainable solution to the problem of limited access to healthy foods and can achieve multiple goals: reducing health disparities and improving the health of families and children; creating jobs; and stimulating local economic development in low-income communities. This is a smart investment in the health and economic well-being of the country and its citizens. As part of this effort, PolicyLink, The Food Trust and Reinvestment Fund are also working together to promote healthy food and healthy economies through priorities in food and agricultural policy.

John Glazer - The Social Enterprise Ecosystem (SEE)

Led by Ohio University's Voinovich School of Leadership and Public Affairs, SEE is a partnership with Foundation for Appalachian Ohio, Parkersburg Area Community Foundation, Rural Action and experienced local expert consultants. SEE strengthens Ohio and West Virginia economies by helping social enterprises gain resources and operational capacity to expand activities and markets while addressing Appalachia's most challenging determinants of economic and community wellbeing. SEE provides social entrepreneurs with customized venture development services and funders with qualified deals and investment services to maximize measurable impacts. SEE is sponsored by the Appalachian Regional Commission's POWER funding. Since its May 2017 launch, SEE has assisted 95 social ventures in obtaining over \$10 million in resources and creating over 80 jobs while generating significant social return on investment for funders and local communities.

12:45 - 2:25

**DEVELOP RECOMMENDATIONS THAT INSTITUTIONS IN
WEST VIRGINIA CAN PURSUE TO SOLVE FOOD
DESERTS AT A STATEWIDE LEVEL**

2:25 - 3:00

REPORT OUT

NEXT STEPS

ADJOURN

SPEAKER BIOS

Jennifer Williams - Associate Dean for Programs & Partnerships, West Virginia University Extension Service
Jennifer Ours Williams began her career in 1993 as the Upshur County agent working with agriculture, natural resources and youth programs. Currently the associate dean for programs and partnerships, she has also served as the program director for agriculture and natural resources. She recently co-chaired a statewide agriculture strategic planning process. Williams is active in many groups and organizations and has been recognized for her commitment to further agriculture in West Virginia. Jennifer and her sister own and operate a farm in Hardy County, West Virginia.

Cindy Fitch Ph.D., RD - Extension Professor and Associate Dean for Research, West Virginia University Extension Service

Cindy Fitch is a Registered Dietitian with many years of experience working with children and their families. She received her undergraduate degree in home economics from Texas Tech University, a master's degree in nutrition from Texas Woman's University and a PhD in nutrition from Case Western Reserve University. Dr. Fitch joined the WVU Extension Service in 2008 as the Extension Specialist in food and nutrition. She is now the Associate Dean for Research, which gives her the opportunity to facilitate faculty success in developing, implementing, and evaluating applied research that makes a difference in the lives and livelihoods of West Virginians. She is an advocate for food security, particularly in children.

Maryanne Reed - Provost, West Virginia University

In April 2019, Maryanne Reed was named Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs at WVU. Prior to this appointment, Reed served for 16 years as dean of the WVU Reed College of Media, where she began as a faculty member in 1993. Widely respected as a gifted higher education administrator, Reed was tapped to lead WVU's largest college, the Eberly College of Arts and Sciences, as interim dean from 2015-2016. She also has led searches for deans and senior academic administrators

and, most recently, co-led a strategic transformation process at the University. Reed has been recognized both regionally and nationally for her achievements, including as the 2016 Scripps Howard Administrator of the Year award, a 2016 West Virginia Wonder Woman by WV Living Magazine and the president of the Association of Schools of Journalism and Mass Communication in 2016-2017.

Terrell Erickson - Regional Conservationist, Northeast, USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS), West Virginia University Health Sciences Center

Since May of 2018 Terrell has been serving as the Regional Conservationist of the Northeast. As one of four Senior Executive Regional Conservationists for the agency, she oversees and directs NRCS conservation programs and activities for 14 Northeastern States, including supervising 14 State Conservationists and staff across Connecticut, Delaware, Maine, Massachusetts, Maryland, Michigan, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Vermont, and West Virginia. The work includes delivering over \$400 million of program funding on agricultural and private forest lands across the Northeast, building relationships with agriculture and conservation interests within the region, and partnering with the business center and FPAC agencies to accomplish improved efficiencies and effectiveness within the region. She oversees strategic planning for the NE and human resources hiring modeling and workforce analyses to determine priority hires.

Sue Day-Perroots - Interim Dean, West Virginia University Extension Service

Sue Day-Perroots is no stranger to West Virginia University and the State of West Virginia. After 34 years of service in key roles at the University, she retired as associate provost in 2017. When WVU President E. Gordon Gee presented her with an opportunity to return “home” to lead West Virginia University Extension Service, she jumped at the chance to bring her trademark energy, enthusiasm and focus on results to the role. During her career at WVU, Day-Perroots focused on improving access to education for students and adults and became known as an out-of-the-box thinker who is adept at managing change. Day-Perroots, who was named interim dean of WVU Extension has lead efforts

to prioritize WVU Extension Service programs and strengthen WVU’s land-grant mission to the state.

William D. Ramsey, MD, FACEP - Associate Vice President for Coordination and Logistics & Chief Collaboration Officer, West Virginia University Health Sciences

Dr. Ramsey has over 30 years of experience in health care as a provider, researcher, and policy leader, particularly in the area of the development, implementation, and evaluation of unique and innovative methods and systems for providing quality and cost-effective medical care with a focus on trauma, cardiac, and stroke systems of care. He was born and raised in West Virginia and received his undergraduate and MD degrees from West Virginia University and his specialty training at Akron General Medical Center.

Norm Bailey - Chief of Staff, West Virginia Department of Agriculture

Mr. Bailey has more than two decades of public service, leadership and experience in state and federal governments. Before joining the West Virginia Department of Agriculture, he was a project manager for the United States Department of Agriculture’s Natural Resource Conservation Services division, a Conservation Services state cultural resource coordinator and a resource conservation and development coordinator. He was the senior area director for the West Virginia Conservation Agency and worked with West Virginia Conservation Districts implementing projects and programs. Bailey is a West Virginia native and has a bachelor’s in resource management in Agriculture from the West Virginia University Davis College of Agriculture, Natural Resources and Design.

Lauri Andress, PhD, JD - Assistant Professor, West Virginia University School of Public Health

Connected to her broader interests in social justice and uneven power relations, as assistant professor in the Department of Health Policy, Management, and Leadership, Dr. Andress’ research interests have focused on policies affecting the social determinants of health and the role that ideas, framing, narratives, and political ideology versus science, facts, and evidence play in policy discussions. She has conducted research

on important infrastructure issues in rural communities, with a focus on barriers to population health including transportation and food access for low income women, children, the homeless, and seniors in West Virginia. Dr. Andress has a Masters of Public Health and Ph.D. along with a law degree from South Texas College of Law.

Lynne Ryan - Breastfeeding Counselor, Monongalia County Health Department's Women, Infant and Children's (WIC) Program

Originally from New York, Ms. Ryan has lived in the Morgantown area since 1975 and is a WVU graduate. A breastfeeding counselor with the Monongalia County Health Department's Women, Infant and Children's (WIC) Program since 1997, she became an International Board Certification Lactation Consultant in 2002, a nutritionist at WIC several years ago, and then breastfeeding coordinator for a six-county region in 2016. Lynne has a small lactation clinic at WVU Medicine's Cheat Lake Physician's office and teaches breastfeeding classes for WVU Medicine at their UTC location. Lynne has a passion for helping families get off to a strong start through breastfeeding and good nutrition. She is the mother of four and grandmother of four (all breastfed!)

Peter Butler - Director of the School of Design and Community Development, Associate Professor of Landscape Architecture and Extension Specialist in Landscape Architecture, West Virginia University.

Peter joined the WVU faculty in 2008. His research interests include cultural landscape research and planning; community design process; industrial landscape reclamation and interpretation; and design studio pedagogy. His research projects include cultural landscape inventory, analysis and treatment; design visualization; brownfields redevelopment; land use planning; historic transportation corridor planning; participatory design methods; and methods of community engagement. Peter leads the Community Engagement Lab through the Family and Community Development program at WVU Extension Service by integrating experiential service-learning courses in the curriculum to build and strengthen partnerships with communities and stakeholder groups across West Virginia.

Fritz Boettner - Founder of Sprouting Farms and the Food System Development Director for the West Virginia University Center for Resilient Communities

Mr. Boettner has 15 years of professional experience in a wide array of project development and implementation activities. He holds a graduate degree in environmental management from West Virginia University and worked for a variety of planning and engineering firms in the northeast and western states. Former Principal at Downstream Strategies, Mr. Boettner led the development of the Land Program at Downstream Strategies, having pivotal roles in all of the local food and sustainable agriculture projects for the past 10 years. As a small farmer himself, he has worked in his local community to create Sprouting Farms and the Turnrow Appalachian Farm Food Hub.

Tom McConnell - Director, West Virginia University Extension Service Small Farm Center

Lisa Jones - Program Coordinator, West Virginia University Extension Service Small Farm Center

WVU Extension Service experts know West Virginia farms are unique. With advice that's sized "just right" for all of our producers, there's something for budding farmers who want to sell at their local farmers market all the way up to large-scale poultry farmers who want to increase efficiency. The Small Farm Center equips West Virginia small farm families with the information and education required to make them both sustainable and successful.

Amy Jo Hutchinson -Northern Regional Organizer, West Virginia Healthy Kids and Families Coalition

Amy Jo views her position as the Northern Regional Organizer for the Our Children, Our Future campaign as a way of advocating for thousands. Being raised by a single mother and, in turn, raising two daughters of her own alone for more than eleven years now, Amy knows firsthand the struggles and obstacles faced by children and families living in poverty. Amy Jo has worked with at-risk populations since the age of 16, ranging from the elderly to the homeless. Some of her favorite successes are associated with her years as an infant/toddler teacher for Early Head Start. She has served as a volunteer in various leadership roles in an effort to raise awareness and provide opportunities for

those struggling with socioeconomic issues. Amy Jo designed and served as the leader for Borrowing A Dad (BAD) ministry, which serves single-mom families as a whole through volunteer male mentors, who serve as borrowed dads for the children, and small group discussion for the moms.

John Glazer - Technical Director, Social Enterprise Ecosystem, Ohio University

At Ohio University since 2008, John Glazer collaborates with program leaders, research faculty, and external partners to support programs in economic development, social enterprise, impact investment, and a variety of community engagements. He is the Technical Director of the Federally-funded Social Enterprise Ecosystem program assisting social entrepreneurs and impact investors in Ohio and West Virginia. From 2008 to 2019, he oversaw a State-funded technology commercialization program working with inventors, entrepreneurs, and investors to start companies and bring new technologies to market. After a career as a university instructor, John was the owner and CEO of the largest organization of independent bookstores in the U.S. He also founded four other startup companies. John has organized technology-based economic development projects in the U.S. and internationally.

Molly Hartman - Program Director, Healthy Food Financing Initiative at Reinvestment Fund

The Healthy Food Financing Initiative is a national initiative to improve access to healthy food in underserved rural and urban areas, to create and preserve quality jobs, and to revitalize low-income communities. Previously, she was Senior Advisor for Food Policy in the Office of the Mayor of New York City. She has a Master in Public Policy degree from the University of Southern California and a BA from Wesleyan University.