

Non-SNAP Nutrition Programs Testimony
West Virginia Food and Farm Coalition, Spencer Moss

Introduction

The West Virginia Food and Farm Coalition was founded in 2010 and its mission is to build the West Virginia food and agriculture system in a way that provides viable incomes for farmers and local food businesses and ensures all residents have access to locally produced food. With this in mind, the Coalition is always trying to marry economic development and advancement of the agricultural sector with food access/food security for West Virginia's communities.

The following testimony will detail the Coalition's successes in implementation of several USDA grant programs that are either designed to increase nutrition and food security or increase economic development in the agricultural sectors. Through the Coalition's execution, we have been able to excel in both areas, further proving that nutrition programs are good for both the economy and the future of food access and security. Additionally, this testimony will explain how these grant programs have given wings to further programming at the community-organization level and allowed for the programs to layer together for maximum efficacy.

Lastly, this testimony will make recommendations regarding these grant programs for ways that they can be more efficient and more equitable in low-income, low-resources, rural, and/or communities of color.

About Non-SNAP Nutrition Incentive Programs

- USDA/NIFA Gus Schumacher Nutrition Incentive Program (GusNIP) (formally the Food Insecurity Nutrition Incentive FINI program) - provides incentives to income-eligible consumers to increase the purchase of fruits and vegetables and prescriptions for fresh fruits and vegetables (Prescription Produce program).
- USDA/RD Healthy Food Financing Initiative (HFFI) - aims to improve access to healthy foods in underserved areas, to create and preserve quality jobs, and to revitalize low-income communities. The program aims to build a more equitable food system that supports the health and economic vibrancy of all Americans.
- USDA/AMS Farmers Market/Local Food Promotion Program (FMLFPP) - are two grant programs under the same heading. The Farmers Market Promotional Program funds projects that develop, coordinate and expand direct producer-to-consumer markets to help increase access to and availability of locally and regionally produced agricultural products by developing, coordinating, expanding, and providing outreach, training, and technical assistance to domestic farmers markets, roadside stands,

community-supported agriculture programs, agritourism activities, online sales or other direct producer-to-consumer. The Local Foods Promotional Program funds projects that develop, coordinate and expand local and regional food business enterprises that engage as intermediaries in indirect producer to consumer marketing to help increase access to and availability of locally and regionally produced agricultural products.

- USDA/FNS Farm-To-School (F2S)- Farm-to-School programming can take on many forms including introducing garden education to youth, developing youth entrepreneurs, building youth farms, conducting educational youth-focused marketing, and developing pathways to get more locally sourced produce in local schools.

Gus Schumacher Nutrition Incentive Program (GusNIP) Became SNAP Stretch: How it Was Implemented in West Virginia

First funded by a USDA/NIFA FINI grant in 2018 then a 2020 USDA/NIFA GusNIP grant, and a supplemental USDA/NIFA GusNIP COVID Response and Recovery award in 2021, the SNAP Stretch program is a triple-bottom-line win for communities! SNAP Stretch benefits low-income West Virginia residents and farmers by doubling and tripling SNAP/EBT purchases for fruits and vegetables at farmers' markets, on-farm stands, mobile markets, Community Supported Agriculture Programs (CSAs), and local food retailers. SNAP Stretch incentivizes purchases of fruits and vegetables from local markets/farmers and helps overcome three key food access issues seen in rural communities:

1. Many rural communities lack access to grocery stores where fresh produce is available. "Dollar stores" litter rural landscapes and these stores often do not offer fresh produce. However, mobile and farmers markets offer an endless supply of fresh fruits and vegetables during six months of the year providing valuable access to rural community members
2. Many low-income folks, especially seniors, lack transportation to grocery stores that are outside of the community. There are dozens of West Virginian communities that require residents to travel 45 minutes or more to access grocery stores. Mobile markets and farmers markets are typically located in the middle of communities, helping residents overcome transportation barriers. In addition, as a result of big box grocery stores exiting rural communities, there has been an influx of locally-owned small grocery retailers beginning to establish in West Virginia. These retailers are located in the center of rural communities and are willing to participate in programs like SNAP Stretch in order to boost their sales, benefit local farmers, and fully engage their community.
3. Often it is not financially feasible for families to purchase fruits and vegetables as they are not shelf stable. However, double and tripling SNAP dollars makes market shopping thrifty and more financially feasible for cash-strapped families. There are countless anecdotal stories of the SNAP Stretch program helping families, however, there is one

story of a family with four-children and they were weekly market shoppers. The mother said on multiple occasions that SNAP Stretch “financially enabled her to feed her children fresh fruits and vegetables.”

How it Works

At participating farmers’ markets a SNAP/EBT user will bring their card to a market staff representative or volunteer and ask to use any portion of their SNAP/EBT balance on purchases. Typically, the market will issue market scrip, such as tokens. Then, they will also issue “SNAP Stretch dollars” in the form of a similar but distinct scrip. For example, if the user asks to use \$20 from their SNAP/EBT card, they will receive \$20 in SNAP tokens and \$20 in SNAP Stretch tokens. If the user has children or they are a senior citizen, they will receive an additional \$20. So, a family with seniors and/or children would have \$40 to spend at the farmers market on fruits and vegetables in addition to their \$20 that could be spent on anything that is SNAP-eligible. Similarly, participating local food retailers offer a discount at the register for allowable items before charging the SNAP/EBT card. Detailed documentation is kept and the Coalition reimburses the market/retailer for the SNAP Stretch redeemed.

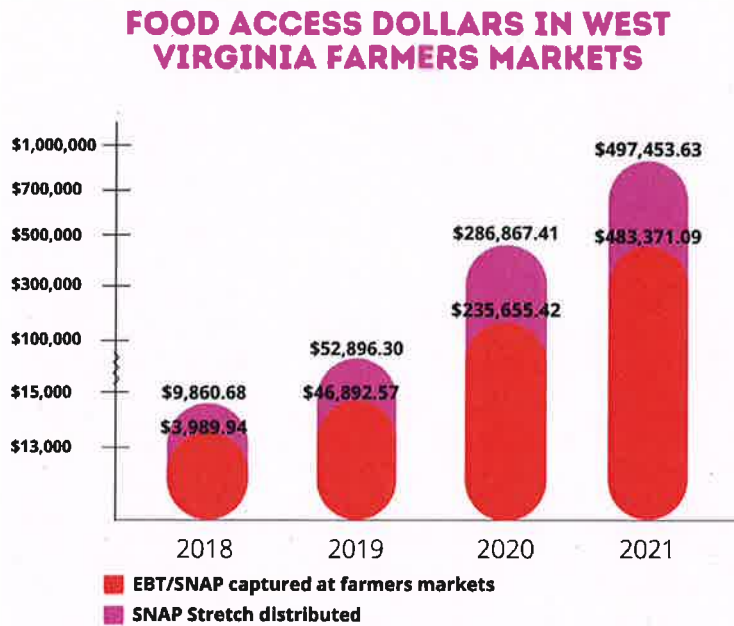
One of the innovations in the SNAP Stretch program, as compared to national programs, such as Double Dollars and Double Up Bucks, is that there is an additional match (1:2) for families with children. This innovation came from an idea tested by the West Virginia University Family Nutrition Program (WVUFNP). WVUFNP began hosting a series of pop-up farmers markets at schools and child-care centers. These children were given \$4 in market bucks to spend on fruits and vegetables of their choosing. Over 600 parent surveys revealed that 91% of participating youth ate all of the produce that they purchased because they had the agency to choose. It is with this in mind that SNAP Stretch has continued this practice that not only supports families, it develops youths pallets for fruits and vegetables, and further supports West Virginia Farmers.

Program Success!

Prior to the inception of the SNAP Stretch Program, SNAP/EBT purchases at West Virginia farmers markets were nearly nonexistent. In fact, many farmers markets paid the necessary internet and point of sale terminal fees for ideological reasons and not because there was a return on investment in SNAP/EBT sales. In a few short years, SNAP Stretch has quickly expanded the use of



SNAP/EBT dollars for fruits and vegetables at local markets:



Farmers' market vendors and small businesses have seen the benefit of the program as SNAP Stretch dollars are reimbursed directly to them. Because of this program, farmers have invested in additional acres of land for an increased output of products to be sold at markets. One of the participating markets normally closes their business for the winter in September, however their SNAP Stretch sales allowed them to remain open for an additional three months through the end of the year. "We paid \$165,171 to [our county's] businesses and fellow farmers in 2021 for their goods and services," the market owner told the Coalition. "We have also teamed together with several farmers in the area and are working to open our own meat processing facility in [our county]. Our added income with SNAP Stretch has made all of this possible."

Finally, many SNAP Stretch recipients speak highly of the program's positive impact on their overall health. One participant shared the impact of the program on his life with a video testimonial, saying "if we didn't have the EBT [SNAP Stretch] program where it doubled and tripled the dollars, I would never be able

40 PARTICIPATING MARKETS

21 FARM MARKETS
10 BRICK & MORTAR
6 MOBILE MARKETS
3 CSA PROGRAMS

IN 2021



2021 SNAP STRETCH CUSTOMERS

61%
FAMILIES
WITH
CHILDREN

39%
SINGLE
ADULTS &
SENIORS



to afford to eat healthy because health food costs more”. Market managers regularly share stories like these with the Coalition as it becomes clear what a strong impact SNAP Stretch incentives are having.

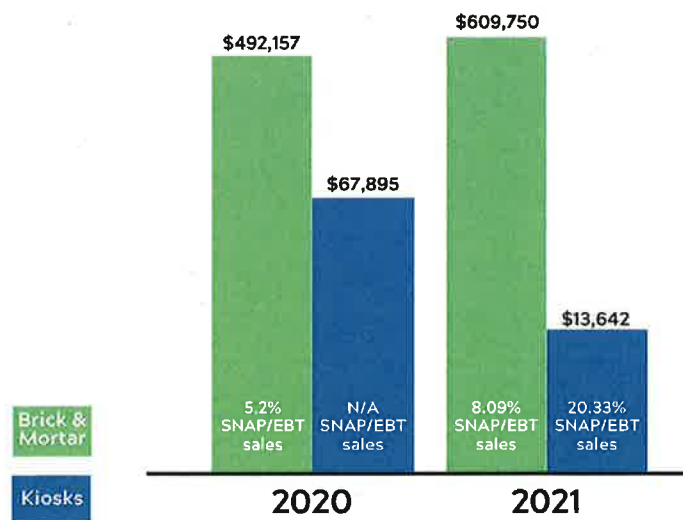
Healthy Food Financing Initiative (HFFI) Became WV Rural Grocer Network: How it Was Implemented in West Virginia

The USDA Healthy Food Financing Initiative (HFFI) aims to improve access to healthy foods in underserved areas, create and preserve quality jobs, and revitalize low-income communities. The program aims to build a more equitable food system that supports the health and economic vibrancy of all Americans. In 2019-2020, the Coalition received an HFFI grant to help establish two brick-and-mortar grocery stores (Blue Ridge Bee Company in Princeton, WV and The Public Market in Wheeling, WV) and five corner kiosks in existing businesses along Route 219 in Pocahontas County to address barriers to food access and support a more equitable food system. This funding allowed the Coalition to 1) develop a grocery store toolkit 2) provide technical assistance to participating nascent grocers 3) provide access to necessary supplies and equipment to open the groceries, and 4) strengthen a network of grocers throughout West Virginia.

Program Success!

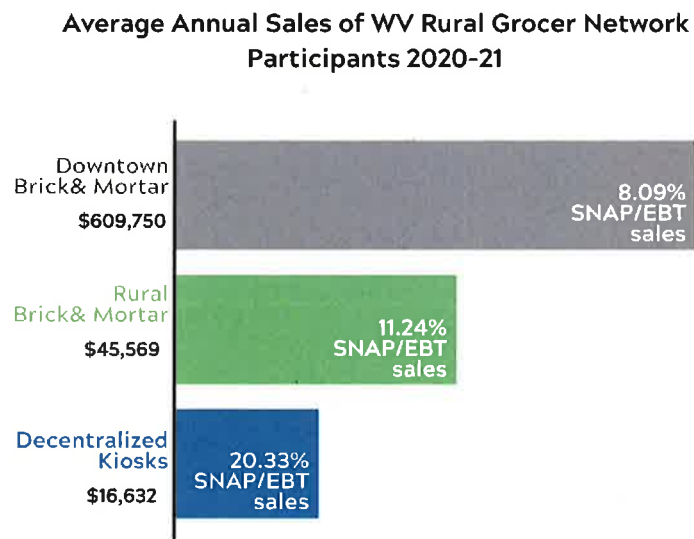
Each year in compliance with HFFI reporting, the Coalition collects end-of-the-year data from these participating grocers. While the HFFI investment was \$215,400, and the projects all had additional private investment, just two years worth of data indicate that there was a significant return on investment in these grocers:

Average Annual Sales between Brick and Mortar Stores and Decentralized Kiosks in 2020-21



Through the HFFI project, the Coalition identified two of the biggest barriers in achieving sustainability in an ever-changing landscape amongst grocers: 1) reliable equipment and 2) the skills to understand their finances in order to make appropriate business decisions. Assessment, expert technical assistance, coaching, and access to capital are required to support these businesses, thus, the WV Rural Grocer Network (WVRGN) was born. In addition to providing access to technical assistance, coaching, and capital, the WVRGN also creates a market for locally grown produce and value-added products.

In addition to HFFI reporting, the Coalition collects end-of-the-year data from all of its WVRGN participants, the 2020-2021 results include:



Blue Ridge Bee Company is one of the grocers that got their start as part of the HFFI project. The owners, Will and Emily, began harvesting honey in 2014 and noticed a need for a cost-effective way to mitigate varroa mites in their hives that didn't include harsh chemicals and after much research, engineered their own BRBC Oxalic Acid Vaporizer. After success through online sales, Will and Emily envisioned a storefront to sell their vaporizer, beekeeping supplies, and honey. Their plan was to use the sales of beekeeping equipment to offset the overhead costs of running a grocery that would benefit their mainstreet community. With support from HFFI and the Coalition, they opened their store in 2019 in Princeton, WV. Once open, the vision expanded and today the store includes value-added products such as jams and jellies, fresh produce, meat, eggs, dairy products, hand-dipped ice cream, and much more!

How do USDA-Funded Nutrition Programs Work Together?

The Coalition views its work as the intersection between economic development and food access. Through programming such as the WV Rural Grocer Network or SNAP Stretch, the Coalition seeks to increase farmers' and food-based entrepreneurs' bottom line while increasing West Virginians' access to fresh local fruits and vegetables. These efforts are combined to support a more equitable food system in the state. Nottingham's Store is a prime example of how this work intersects. Located in Clay County, West Virginia, Nottingham's Store is a family-owned and operated business that offers groceries, hardware, plumbing supplies, livestock feed, night crawlers/chicken livers for fishing, knives, ammunition, and numerous country sundries. In the businesses' 100+ years in operation, it has seen economic declines in their county. Clay County is ranked as the second lowest county in the state in per capita and household income. 27.30% live in poverty including 37.40% children. 29.8% of the population receive SNAP/EBT benefits. With transportation being a large barrier to fresh produce, it is difficult for the population of Clay County to travel out-of-the-county to a full-service grocery store.

Nottingham's Store, however, can see the need its community has for food assistance and more fresh produce options. Nottingham's has also started making business decisions with the changing of the time to meet the needs of their community while also being a viable business. In the fall of 2021, Nottingham's Store began to participate in the WV Rural Grocer Network and SNAP Stretch with the Coalition. After only a few months of participation this small, family-owned business distributed \$9,000 in SNAP Stretch incentives, while capturing \$9,000 in federal assistance dollars that will remain in Clay County to spur economic growth and help the Nottingham's adapt their business model to the changing landscape around them.

"We want to help our community and customers and hopefully (with SNAP Stretch) can support our local farmers more instead of big box stores," said Bryan Nottingham.

The business is situated between the Elk River water trail and a newly developed rail trail which is attracting visitors and new customers to the area - kayakers, hikers, mountain bikers, and nature enthusiasts. Currently, there are few restaurant options in Clay County so the owners of Nottingham's saw an opportunity to add a to-go kitchen that offers pizza, sandwiches, and daily specials.

As participants of the WV Rural Grocer Network, the Coalition is supporting the Nottingham's through technical assistance and access to the Revolving Equipment Fund. Additionally, the extra income generated from SNAP Stretch allowed the Nottingham's to build out their kitchen ahead of schedule. "This business has been around for over 100 years, we

want to see it last another 100 with future generations of Nottingham's," said Pauline Nottingham, when asked about the motivation for changes and updates to the store.

Economic Development Programs Can Develop Nutrition

The Coalition has received a 2016 Farmers Market Promotional Program and is currently a subcontractor on a Local Foods Promotional Program. These two programs are aimed at economic development within the local agricultural sector. However, these programs easily enhance nutrition in communities. For example, currently, the Coalition helps operate the Go Growcery Market. This mobile cold-storage trailer aggregates produce from local farmers and takes it into rural communities that lack access to grocery stores and sets up a weekly farmers market. This program is especially successful with seniors!

Farm-to-School grants are aimed at education, economic development, and nutrition. Depending on the implementation plan, all three outcomes can be achieved! In the Coalition's current Farm-to-School grant activities, we're installing gardens at elementary schools in partnership with teachers to both teach about agriculture and develop the pallet for the taste of vegetables with young children. We're also able to engage farmers and develop systems for farmers to sell their fresh produce into the school system that will increase children's access to more nutritious fresh foods. Also in development is a youth-ran business that sells fresh produce and value-added products to communities!

Future Program Recommendations

Match Requirements

It is understood that most grant programs have matching requirements - in theory, it shows that the community is invested in the project. In reality, matching requirements disadvantages rural communities, low-resource communities, communities of color, and smaller non-profit organizations. These communities inherently have far less access to funds than affluent communities and urban communities. According to a study commissioned by the Bill and Melinda Gates foundation 91 of out 100 of the most disadvantaged communities are rural and 20% of the country's population reside in rural areas (Carlson and Cook 2021). However, according to multiple sources, only 5%-7% of philanthropic dollars are invested in rural communities.

Concessions in matching requirements for rural communities, low-resource communities, communities of color, and smaller non-profit organizations should be made in order to encourage projects that benefit these communities.

Requiring Grants to be Reimbursable

Currently, the vast majority of federal grants are considered to be “reimbursable.” This means that organizations or communities must first spend the funds first and then receive reimbursement. While some grant programs do allow for pre-approved “advances” on known expenses, the practice of reimbursable grants creates two challenges: 1) it disadvantages smaller organizations who do not have the cash flow to manage a grant and wait a minimum of four weeks to four months for reimbursement. It often requires these organizations to take out lines of credit and pay interest fees instead of investing funds into communities, and 2) it locks smaller communities or community organizations out of applying for funds completely, simply because they are unable to operate on a reimbursement basis.

Requiring that grants are reimbursable locks smaller community groups out of the ability to apply – or it requires that groups take out a line of credit and then pay interest rates. Some grants allow reimbursement within 24 hours and some take 4-8 weeks.

Use of Intermediaries Organizations

The use of intermediary organizations can be helpful. Organizations such as the Gretchen Swanson Center and Fair Food Network provide useful technical assistance and data collection support to organizations.

However, using an intermediary to administer the grant makes community groups essentially a “sub-awardee,” which significantly increases the administrative paperwork in order to receive reimbursements, ultimately increasing overhead costs. While it is sometimes helpful to have the support an intermediary can provide, it is usually easier and less time consuming to operate the grant, dealing directly with staff at the USDA.

Length of Time Between the Program Announcement and Submission Deadlines

Annually, the GusNIP Request for Applications (RFA) is made available to the public only 60 days in advance of the submission deadline. Significant changes were made between 2019-2020 in the program funding requirements. Most noticeably, priority areas in program design and preferred firm types along with the allowable options for issuing nutrition incentive dollars. Following the 2020 RFA, every annual request has continued in this pattern. While it is helpful that program operators are listening and responding to feedback, more than 60 days would help community-based organizations submit more thoughtful informed applications as preference is given to those grantees who demonstrate coordination with multiple stakeholders, such as farm organizations, nutrition education programs, cooperative extension services, public health departments, private and public health insurance agencies, cooperative

grocers, grocery associations, and community-based and non-governmental organizations. It can be challenging to coordinate all of these stakeholders on a short schedule.

Programs Need More Funding

In 2016, the Coalition received a Farmers Market Promotional Program grant for \$500,000 and applied for another in 2022. The difference in what can be achieved with \$500,000 in 2016 vs 2022 is astoundingly different. Many of the aforementioned programs have not experienced an increase in the amount of funding that can be applied for in many years. With higher costs associated with travel, having staff, supplies, construction, etc., these programs need higher funding caps.

To illustrate this point even further, GusNIP has increased emphasis on recruiting brick-and-mortar retailers over farmers' markets to participate in the program, with the rationale being that brick-and-mortar stores are open longer hours. However, without a sufficient increase in funds to enable this expansion, there often isn't enough of an incentive for grocery stores to join the program, given the additional administrative oversight that they incur.

Brick and mortar retailers operate longer hours and often have more registers and employees. This creates an increased paperwork and reporting burden for these firms, as well as increased incentive money required to operate SNAP Stretch. Brick and mortar firms often require additional onboarding effort and training, accounting for the increased time commitment and travel per market for program staff. When the GusCRR grant was introduced with an increased emphasis on brick-and-mortar retailers, the grant funds were not increased to account for these considerations.

Concluding Thoughts

The Coalition has continued these programs launched with USDA FINI and HFFI funding and is always finding new and exciting partnerships to work with. One such partnership is Keep Your Faith Corporation, Inc (KYFC) located on the West Side of Charleston, WV. KYFC is a community-based organization working to grow and cultivate opportunity and support community through programs centered around behavioral health, food insecurity, and workforce development.

In partnership with the Coalition, and with American Rescue Plan Funding, KYFC is developing Miss Ruby's Corner Market, a community-owned grocery store, that will provide healthy food access and will employ youth from within the community to help grow food, stock, manage, and conduct community engagement. This store will also accept SNAP Stretch and

engage in a number of community-based programs that other NGO and University Extension Services have to offer – all the economic development, food security, and better nutrition for the community.

Attachments

1. West Virginia Rural Grocer Network by the Numbers
2. SNAP Stretch 2021 Stats
3. Plans for Ms. Ruby's Corner Market

West Virginia Rural Grocer Network by the numbers

The West Virginia Food and Farm Coalition collects year end data from all of its WVRGN participants.

The 2020-2021 results include...

Downtown Brick and Mortar



average annual sales
\$609,749.92

average weekly sales
\$12,120.49

average basket size
\$30.03

SNAP/EBT sales
8.09%

Full-time jobs created
4.5

Part-time jobs created
5.5

Rural Brick and Mortar



average annual sales
\$45,568.50

average weekly sales
\$1,446.93

average basket size
\$19.05

SNAP/EBT sales
11.24%

Full-time jobs created
0.5

Part-time jobs created
4

Decentralized Kiosks



average annual sales
\$13,642.26

average weekly sales
\$635.51

average basket size
\$27.23

SNAP/EBT sales
20.33%

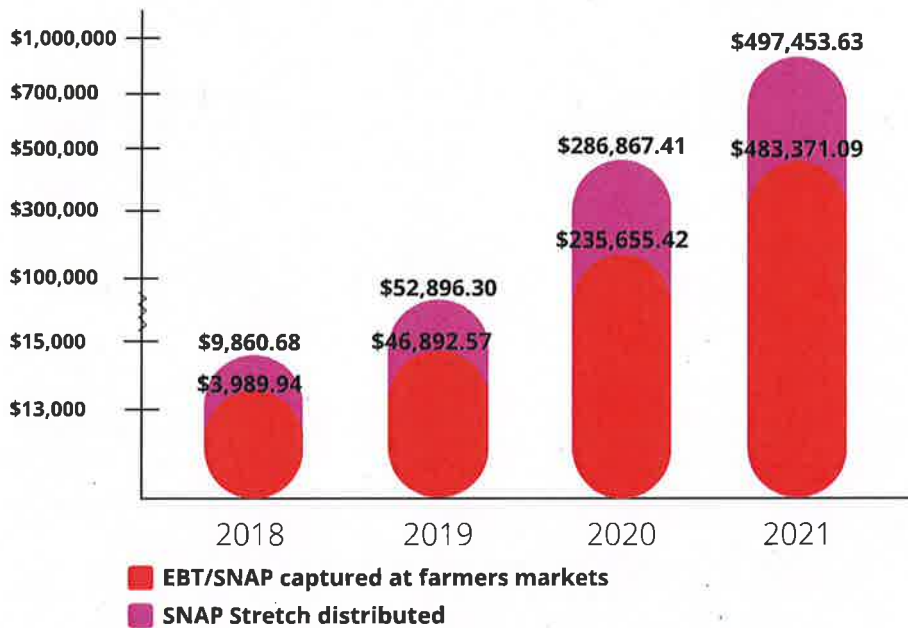
Full-time jobs created
1.17

Part-time jobs created
1.33

WHAT IS SNAP STRETCH?

SNAP Stretch increases the buying power of EBT/SNAP recipients, increases the consumption of locally grown fruits and vegetables, and decreases food insecurity in West Virginia.

FOOD ACCESS DOLLARS IN WEST VIRGINIA FARMERS MARKETS



The SNAP Stretch program matches EBT/SNAP benefits spent at participating farmers markets, farm stands, mobile markets, Community Supported Agriculture programs (CSA) and local independent grocers at a 1:1 ratio. Seniors and families with children are matched at a 1:2 ratio for the purchase of fruits and vegetables. SNAP Stretch also captures federal food assistance dollars, EBT/SNAP, in the local food economy which profits West Virginia farmers. In 2021, \$483,371 in federal food assistance dollars were captured in West Virginia's agriculture economy as a result of SNAP Stretch.

**Updated as of 2/8/22

VISIT [SNAPSTRETCH.COM](https://www.snapstretch.com)

TO LEARN, EXPLORE & DONATE



in 2021

**\$1,674,888
ECONOMIC
IMPACT ***

**35,960
PARTICIPATING
HOUSEHOLDS**

**40
PARTICIPATING
MARKETS**

21 FARM MARKETS

10 BRICK & MORTAR

6 MOBILE MARKETS

3 CSA PROGRAMS



**35 WV COUNTIES
PARTICIPATING**

**61%
FAMILIES
WITH
CHILDREN**

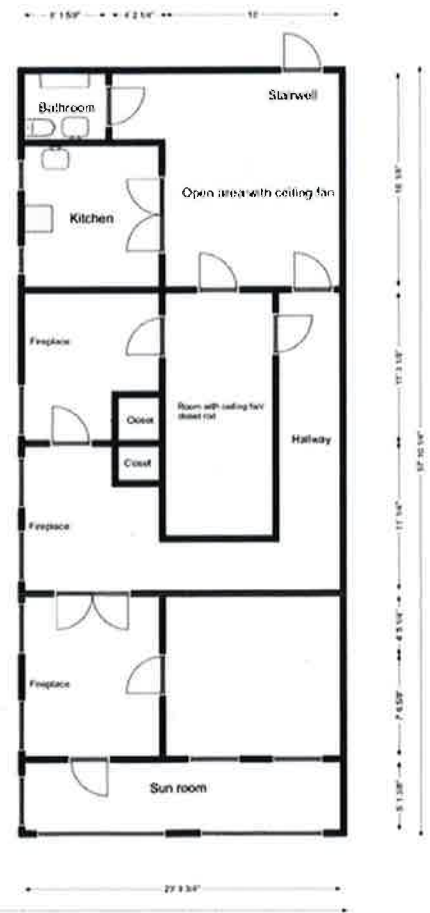
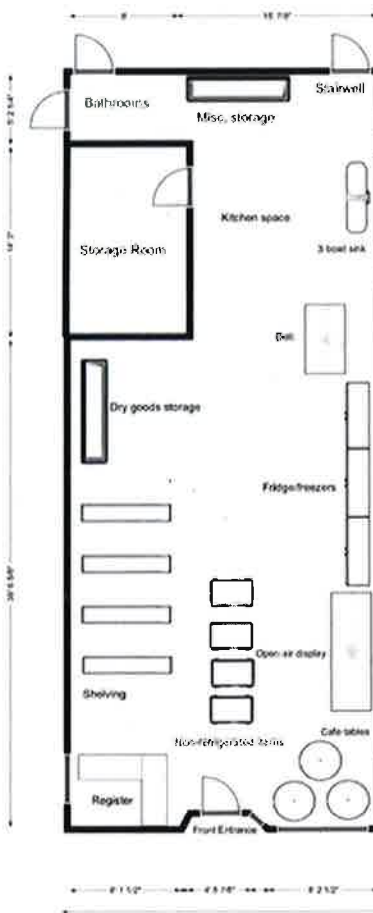
**39%
SINGLE
ADULTS &
SENIORS**

*According to USDA and Colorado State University

West Virginia Food and Farm Coalition • 3820 MacCorkle Ave SE | Charleston, WV 25304 • 304-926-0567

Miss Ruby's Corner Market

Reclaiming community

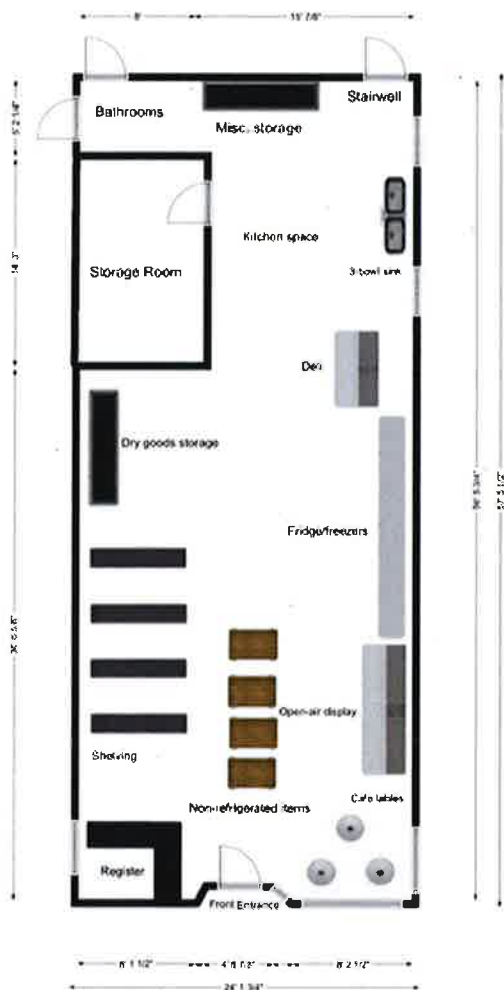




739 Central Avenue was once Abraham Grocery, providing food to the neighborhood and a local gathering place for a soda at the traditional soda fountain. It later became Park Place Bar and was relegated to a location where criminal activity occurred. The community has expressed a real interest in returning this building into a positive location in the neighborhood for years.



The location is situated on the bus line, as well as within walking distance from Jarrett Terrace, a senior high rise living facility, seen above



The view from the front door helps to paint a picture of what could be- a vibrant, positive gathering space for neighbors to gather essentials and connect with each other.



KYFC

Keep Your Faith Corporation

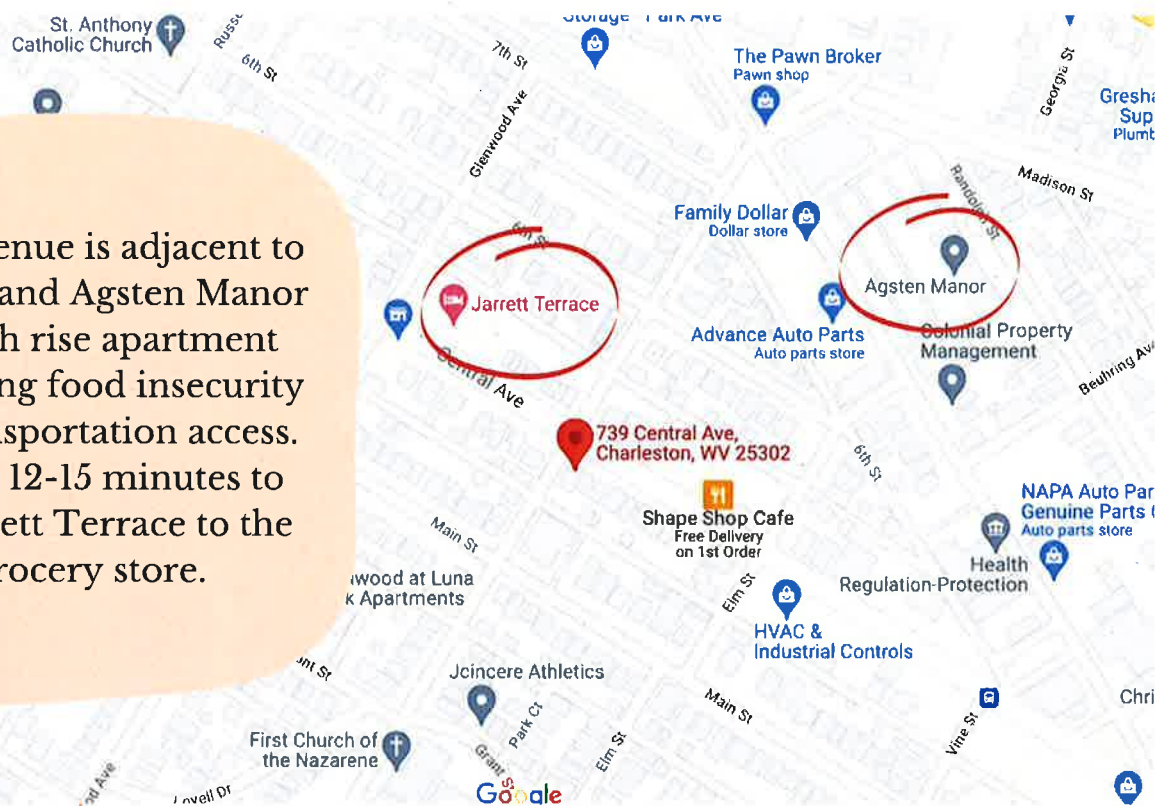
Keep Your Faith Corporation, Inc. (KYFC) began as a literacy-focused volunteer group meeting the needs of local children and adults struggling with the ability to read and write. KYFC has expanded program initiatives in response to community and statewide social and health determinants to include a focus on behavioral health, food insecurity, and workforce development. KYFC operates West Side Grown, a project that is striving to eliminate food insecurity by increasing access to fresh fruits and vegetables while promoting agricultural and nutrition literacy and economic growth.



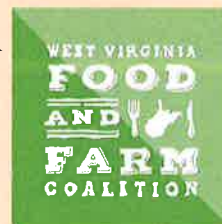
The second level of the building will provide a mixed use work space in the heart of the community allowing KYFC to expand their youth workforce development.



739 Central Avenue is adjacent to Jarrett Terrace and Agsten Manor which are high rise apartment complexes facing food insecurity and lack of transportation access. It takes about 12-15 minutes to walk from Jarrett Terrace to the nearest grocery store.



With the WV Rural Grocer Network, the Food and Farm Coalition is able to connect with community grocery stores, like Miss Ruby's Corner Market, and provide technical assistance, coaching, and support.



Cafe tables and chairs will help to encourage a sense of community and gathering in the restored building.

