

# Increasing Food Access through Rural Grocery Stores in West Virginia

Matthew Thompson

West Virginia Food and Farm Coalition/WV Rural Grocer Network

[MThompson@wvfoodandfarm.org](mailto:MThompson@wvfoodandfarm.org)



# Who We Are

**Mission** - The mission of the West Virginia Food & Farm Coalition (the Coalition) is to build the local food and agriculture sector in West Virginia in a way that provides viable incomes for farmers and food-based businesses and ensures that all residents have access to locally produced food.

**Strategy** - Building off the work of Myles Horton, Paulo Freire, Vaughn Grisham (FUNDAEC), the Coalition utilizes the theory of accompaniment as a framework for achieving our mission.

## Programming

- Work to create greater food access among all residents regardless of geography, income level, age, or demographic
- Developing markets for farmers and food business entrepreneurs
- Changing policies to help them reflect current agricultural needs
- Preserving Appalachian heritage food recipes and agricultural practices

The logo for the West Virginia Food and Farm Coalition is a green square with white text and icons. The text is arranged in four lines: "WEST VIRGINIA" in a small sans-serif font, "FOOD" in a large, bold, serif font, "AND" in a small sans-serif font, and "FARM COALITION" in a large, bold, serif font. Between "AND" and "FARM" are three icons: a fork, a hand holding a leaf, and a knife.

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**According to research by the West Virginia University Food Justice Lab, nearly 25% of the West Virginia population live in a food desert, meaning many of those residents must commute 45 minutes or more to access fresh food.**

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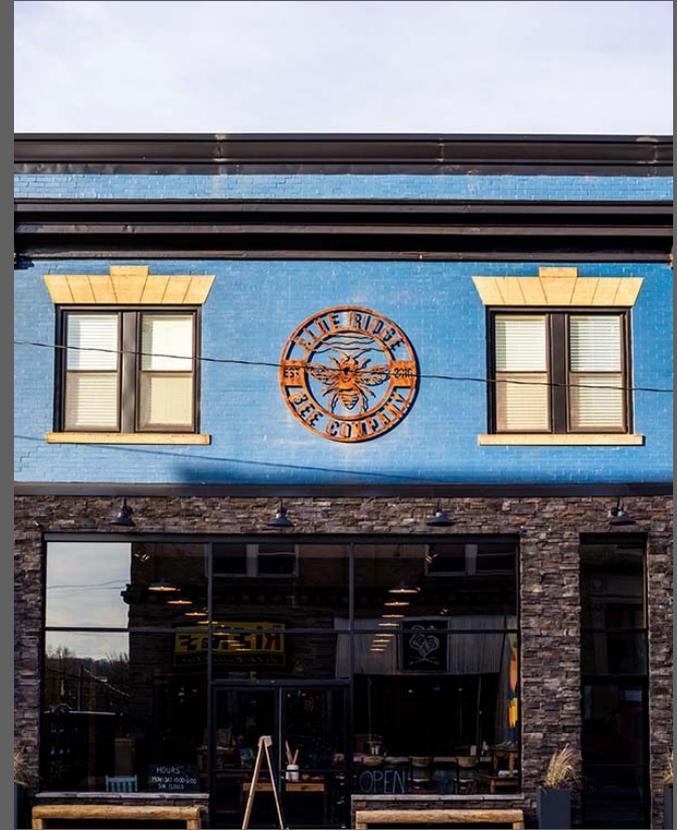
# Pilot Project

The USDA 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.

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.

# Blue Ridge Bee Company

**Blue Ridge Bee Company** (BRBC) is a specialty store located in the grassroots district of Mercer Street in Princeton, WV that sells beekeeping supplies such as their own BRBC Oxalic Acid Vaporizer designed to be placed inside a hive and used to treat bees for varroa mites. In addition to beekeeping supplies, the store features honey and honey products, value-added products such as jams and jellies, fresh produce, meat, eggs, dairy products, hand-dipped ice cream, and more.



# Public Market

**Public Market** is a local and natural foods store located in downtown Wheeling, WV operated by nonprofit food-hub Grow Ohio Valley. Public Market features products from over 40 regional farmers and vendors. Additionally, the store has a kitchen and deli that offers breakfast, lunch, and meals to go. Public Market offers membership options to its patrons that provide opportunities for store discounts, classes and events, and access to bulk and wholesale ordering.



# Route 219 Project

The **Route 219 Project** has added six “mini-market” kiosks in a diverse array of existing businesses in Randolph and Pocahontas counties in West Virginia to better serve those without access to fresh produce due to geography or transportation. These kiosks can be found in places such as restaurants, convenience stores, and specialty stores such as Deer Creek Concrete Supply Company.



# Results at Year One

2020 Year-End Data	Brick and Mortar	Decentralized Kiosks
Average Annual Sales	\$492,157	\$67,895
Average Weekly Sales	\$9,994	\$1,265
Average Basket Size	\$24.88	\$32.25
Average Sales from SNAP	5.2%	N/A
Avg. Full-time Employees	4	2.5
Avg. Part-time Employees	3	1

# West Virginia Grocer Toolkit

This [toolkit](#) was developed by technical assistance providers from the pilot HFFI project to support development of rural grocery stores in West Virginia.



## WEST VIRGINIA GROCER TOOLKIT

CHARTING YOUR COURSE

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# WV Rural Grocer Network (WVRGN)

Through the HFFI pilot project, the Coalition identified the biggest needs amongst grocers to achieve sustainability is reliable equipment and the skills to understand their finances in order to make business decisions.

Assessment, expert technical assistance, and coaching are required to support these businesses, thus, the WV Rural Grocer Network was born.

**Purpose** - To foster sustainable, viable businesses that provide crucial food access points to their communities and a market for locally grown agricultural products.

## Process

- Step 1 - Outreach
- Step 2 - Assessment
- Step 3 - Technical Assistance
- Step 4 - Access to Equipment
- Step 5 - Mentorship



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# Aspects of the Network

**Technical Assistance** - May include utilizing accounting software, learning to read and prepare financial documents, waste management planning, inventory management, garnering customer feedback, store layout and design, community engagement and marketing.

**Peer Support** - Creating a community of grocers that support each other with advice and best practices, shared marketing campaigns, cooperative purchasing, and preventing new businesses from having to "reinvent the wheel".

**Revolving Equipment Fund (REF)** - Allows grocers to lease-to-own non-fixed equipment, such as a freezer or refrigerated display case, interest free while the grocers' work to increase their sustainability and provide a much needed service to their community. The Coalition charges a flat origination fee and as grocers pay on their equipment the payments return to the REF for use with other grocers in the network and to modestly grow the fund.

**SNAP Stretch** - A "double bucks" program that matches SNAP benefits through a 1:1 ratio for adults and 1:2 ratio for seniors and families with children - the match can only be used to purchase additional fruits and vegetables. In 2021, we were able to distribute **\$497,453** in SNAP Stretch funds and capture **\$483,371** in SNAP funds in the local food economy!

The logo for the West Virginia Food and Farm Coalition is displayed on a green square background. It features the text "WEST VIRGINIA" at the top, "FOOD" in a large, bold, serif font, "AND" in a smaller font with a fork and knife icon to its right, "FARM" in a large, bold, serif font, and "COALITION" at the bottom.

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# Snapshot of Current Sites



**Nottingham's Store** is a family owned and operated general store located in Duck, WV that offers groceries, hardware, plumbing supplies, livestock feed, night crawlers/chicken livers for fishing, knives, ammunition, and numerous country sundries. Their family has owned this store for more than 100 years and are expanding their business to cater to outdoor enthusiasts visiting the newly developed river and rail trail nearby and offering programs to customers that receive SNAP/EBT benefits.

**Green Spring Kitchen and Thrift** is a community nonprofit that provides a food pantry, hot meals, and access to clothing and household items to Green Spring, WV - population of 100! With support from the WVRGN, Green Spring Kitchen and Thrift is utilizing local farm products in the pantry and kitchen and organizing pop-up farmers markets with special programming for children and families on SNAP/EBT. The larger goal is to open a grocery store stocked with staple items so that residents no longer have to travel 30 mins and cross a toll bridge to access fresh groceries.



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**Eclectic Goods Market** is a 45,000 square foot antique and artisan mall that features the works of artisans, skilled craftsmen, and value-added producers, as well as numerous upcycled products. A grocery space, coffee shop, and cafe are currently under development and will utilize and sell products from farmers and producers from West Virginia. Additionally, Eclectic Goods Market has a stage and community room that hosts bluegrass concerts, live auctions, activities for families and children, and workshops on topics such as canning/preserving food, quilting, and more!

**Miss Ruby's Corner Market** is a community-owned grocery store under development on the West Side of Charleston, WV by the Keep Your Faith Corporation, Inc. (KYFC) that will provide healthy food access and will employ youth from within the community to help grow food, stock, manage, and conduct community engagement. KYFC is a community-based organization working to grow and cultivate opportunity and supportive community through programs centered around behavioral health, food insecurity, and workforce development.



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# 2021 Results

2021 Year-End Data	Brick and Mortar	Rural Brick and Mortar	Decentralized Kiosks
Average Annual Sales	\$609,749.92	\$45,568.50	\$13,642.26
Average Weekly Sales	\$12,120.49	\$1,446.93	\$635.51
Average Basket Size	\$30.03	\$19.05	\$27.23
Average Sales from SNAP	8.09%	11.24%	20.33%
Avg. Full-time Employees	4.5	0.5	1.17
Avg. Part-time Employees	5.5	4	1.33

# Moving Forward

The Coalition has identified the following goals for the WV Rural Grocer Network as it grows and expands:

- Gatherings for participants to network and receive group trainings
- Deepening connections between project sites and their community through collaborative partnerships and Placemaking activities
- A robust directory of technical assistance service providers and WVRGN partners
- In addition to the toolkit, a library of tools and resources beneficial to grocers
- Catalog of local producers and distribution channels
- Expansion of REF to provide equipment access to farmers, producers, food-based entrepreneurs that will strengthen the local food system which will benefit grocers
- The formation of an association led by WVRGN sites

# Questions?

Contact Matthew Thompson at  
[mthompson@wvfoodandfarm.org](mailto:mthompson@wvfoodandfarm.org)

