

Overview of Organization

Appalachian Sustainable Development (ASD) seeks \$30,000 in support from the Wallace Center at Winrock International to develop a good food regional Lead Team in Central Appalachia.

ASD is a 501 (c) (3) non-profit organization working in the Appalachian regions of Virginia and Tennessee. Now in its 12th year, ASD utilizes a market-driven, field to table strategy to link consumers with producers and create good economic opportunities for farmers, loggers and landowners, and other “natural resource entrepreneurs.” In addition to our food and farming work, ASD operates a sustainable forestry and wood products business and a school-based outdoor classroom program.

ASD has built the Appalachian region’s most comprehensive value chain for good food. We also work with established and emerging food system partners in the broader area of Tennessee, Virginia, North Carolina, Kentucky and neighboring states. Our experience positions us well to convene and manage a Regional Lead Team. We have built capacity, through a range of experiences, including:

- Secured commitments from six supermarket buyers including both regional and national chains, for weekly purchase of *Appalachian Harvest* organic produce and free-range eggs. *Appalachian Harvest* is a brand and system ASD created several years ago, to help small farmers gain access to large markets. These stores include: Whole Foods (mid-Atlantic and southern regions), Kroger (Roanoke, Virginia distribution center), Lancaster Foods (Salisbury, Maryland), Ukrops (Richmond, Virginia), Food City (Abingdon, Virginia), and Ingles (Asheville, North Carolina). Together these chains represent over 600 stores.
- Sales of *Appalachian Harvest* doubled between 2005 and 2007 reaching \$470,000 last year, in spite of the fire that destroyed our packing house at the beginning of the season. Committed demand from our buyers for 2008 approaches 7,000 cases per week, with an average weekly value of \$112,000. While we will not be able to meet that demand we do expect our supply (and sales) to grow substantially.
- The number of farmers raising certified organic produce and/or free-range eggs through *Appalachian Harvest* grew from 28 in 2005 to nearly 65 in 2008. The majority of these are limited resource growers and more than half used to raise tobacco.
- ASD’s Healthy Families, Family Farms program provided nearly 120,000 pounds of local organic produce to needy families during 2006 and 2007.
- ASD initiated a connection with the New River Valley SHARE program in 2007, providing low cost items to the 2,500 – 3,000 households who participate in this monthly discount food club. We expect this to grow in 2008.

Priorities for our Region

Farming in the Appalachian region has historically been dependant upon tobacco, which has been in decline since the mid 1990’s. The majority of farmers here have a limited land base, and even more limited financial resources and access to markets. Household incomes are generally lower and access to organic and healthy foods has historically been limited. Thus, ASD’s approach to building a good food value chain focuses on:

1. Accessing a diversity of large, well paying markets and securing from them demand for specific farm products;

2. Developing grower networks which help train, support and capitalize limited resource farmers, enabling them to grow for these markets;
3. Developing the infrastructure essential to link small farmers to large markets, including facilities for grading, cooling, packing and shipping; and
4. Building community support and innovative means to ensure that healthy local foods also reach people of lesser means.

Our priorities for this project are twofold: First, to strengthen and expand ASD's *Appalachian Harvest* system to serve an increasing number of limited resource farmers and lower income people. Secondly, to move the field forward, both in our region and beyond, by sharing our experiences, and by helping other communities develop value chains that serve limited resource farmers and ordinary people.

Specific Objectives, Strategies and Activities

Objective 1: Expand the *Appalachian Harvest* growers network in Southwest Virginia and Northeast Tennessee in order to better meet current and emerging markets for locally raised organic produce, free range eggs and other sustainable farm products.

Strategy 1.1: Expand organic and sustainable farming education, training and technical support, reaching at least 75 - 100 new and transitioning farmers, to enable them to meet both organic and commercial/retail standards of production.

Activities:

1. Hold 4 – 5 outreach meetings in the fall and winter, targeting tobacco/conventional growers, as well as new growers and minority farmers, to introduce them to organic farming and *Appalachian Harvest*.
2. Train 2 – 3 “farmer mentors” to extend ASD’s ability to provide education and technical assistance to a wide base of farmers.
3. Update and improve ASD’s “Grower Resource Manual” with hands-on information on organic production practices, certification, market demands, etc.

Strategy 1.2: Increase the number of farmers selling organic produce and free range eggs through *Appalachian Harvest* to 75 or more in 2009, with sales of \$700,000 or more.

Activities:

1. Solidify demand with six current *Appalachian Harvest* supermarkets buyers and one new partner, Fresh Market, based in North Carolina. Increase sales and work with buyers on consumer education.
2. Initiate market partnerships with at least 2 and possibly 4 colleges in the region, including potentially: Emory and Henry College, Washington and Lee University, James Madison University, and East Tennessee State University.
3. Secure larger markets for produce “seconds” and off sized eggs. These markets will include the university food service described above, as well as in-store food service within supermarkets.
4. Document the costs, management and labor needs and potential revenues for different crops and farm enterprises, as a tool to assist and recruit farmers.

Strategy 1.3 Test, improve and strengthen ASD's new packing and grading facility. Our new packinghouse will be operational in late June, 2008, with improvements continuing throughout the season.

Activities:

1. Utilize new grading lines and a new inventory management system to improve product quality, speed delivery and reduce loss.
2. Test new procedures adopted to meet organic certification and GAP requirements and update our operations manual for packing and shipping.

Objective 2: Work with Jubilee Project in northeast Tennessee, Leading Green Distributors in western North Carolina, and Cavalier Produce in Charlottesville, Virginia, to strengthen and expand emerging good food distribution systems throughout the region.

Strategy 2.1 Assist Jubilee Project to expand its Farm to School project, increasing the number of farmers and schools participating.

Activities:

1. Help develop a plan and feasibility study for a packing and distribution facility.
2. Assist Jubilee with grower training and preparation, while also recruiting additional growers for *Appalachian Harvest* (note: Jubilee's Farm to School initiative includes both conventional and organic growers while *Appalachian Harvest* requires organic certification).

Strategy 2.2: Work with "Leading Green" a small start up company distributing organic and natural products, to coordinate delivery routes, back haul products, and open more markets for Virginia, Tennessee and North Carolina Farmers.

1. In 2008, undertake limited coordination of deliveries with Leading Green emphasizing smaller buyers (restaurants, health food stores, small grocers), while ASD maintains its focus on larger buyers.
2. In the fall and winter, evaluate the effectiveness, costs, and benefits from this partnership and develop a plan based on that experience.

Strategy 2.3: Initiate *Appalachian Harvest* sales to Washington & Lee University, other colleges and small buyers in the Charlottesville area through Cavalier Produce, a mid-sized distribution company. We will also work closely with Christopher Carpenter, Washington and Lee's food service director, and others involved in this Piedmont area initiative.

Activities: will closely parallel those described for strategy 2.2 and Leading Green Distribution.

Objective 3: Continue developing mechanisms to provide access to good food to low to moderate income people.

Strategy 3.1: Expand the Healthy Families, Family Farms program to annually provide 80,000 – 90,000 pounds of local organic produce to needy families.

Activities:

1. Make presentations to churches, civic groups and businesses to raise funds.
2. Utilize regional newspapers, TV and radio to build public support.

Strategy 3.2: Sell higher quality organic produce seconds to local IGA grocers and comparable stores, at prices their mostly low to moderate income customers can afford.

Activities:

1. Beginning in 2008, make regular sales and deliveries to at least two IGA grocers. Track sales and customer interest with store managers.
2. In 2009, expand this effort to other “Mom & Pop” grocers including potentially Food Country, a slightly larger chain in the region.

Strategy 3.3: Increase sales of *Appalachian Harvest* produce, and possibly eggs, to the SHARE food program, which provides food monthly at a discount price to nearly 3,000 households in southwest Virginia and east Tennessee.

Activities: - Coordinate with SHARE’s manager, to provide more items to the SHARE baskets each month. Include brief educational materials about local organic foods.

Objective 4: Provide education, mentorship and consultation to other communities in Virginia, Tennessee and the Central Appalachian region, through the Regional Lead Team ASD develops.

Strategy 4.1: Convene a Regional Lead Team (RLT), initially in August/September, 2007, and undertake an assessment of needs and opportunities for expanding good food value chains in the region.

Activities:

1. Identify and secure commitments from 6-8 people for participation on the RLT.
2. Convene meetings, probably quarterly, and develop an assessment which includes needs and opportunities of farmers, buyers, schools and universities and lower income consumers. The assessment, rather than being fully comprehensive, will focus on specific, doable next steps.
3. Develop a concise work plan for the RLT for 2008/2009.

Strategy 4.2: Develop and test a “tool kit” designed to provide practical assistance to other communities seeking to start or expand good food value chain initiatives.

Activities:

1. Create a draft tool kit with the RLT based on our experiences, and also drawing on the experiences of value chain efforts from other parts of the country.

2. “Test” the toolkit by utilizing it in at least two other communities (or regions) as part of a learning exchange/consultation with these communities, between August and May. Revise as needed.
3. Continue these two consultations and launch a third, enabling at least one new value chain initiative to get underway.

Results and Outcomes

Among the key outcomes we project are:

1. Expansion of ASD’s *Appalachian Harvest* system to include 75 mostly limited resource farmers, 7 large buyers, 2-4 college/university buyers, and nearly \$700,000 in sales in 2009.
2. Expansion of farm-to-school efforts in East Tennessee, including a plan for development of a small distribution system, and an increase in the number of participating farmers and schools.
3. Creation of a toolkit to provide practical assistance to other communities, and utilization in at least two other communities.
4. Increased access to organic and sustainable foods among low to moderate income households in our region.
5. Development of a strong RLT with knowledge of key needs and opportunities, and the capacity to assist other communities in developing value chains.

Plan for Establishing and Maintaining a Regional Steering Committee

Each of the individuals listed as RSC members have been contacted and most have agreed to serve. An initial meeting will be held in August or September 2008, with 3-4 additional meetings – some by conference call – over the ensuing 11 months. ASD will convene and manage the Steering Committee, members of which were assembled for both their experience and their dedication to expanding Good Food opportunities. Thus, leveraging of this collective knowledge will come readily.

Maintaining the RLT after the first 12 months will certainly require additional support, from Winrock or other funders, as this cannot become self sustaining in one year. One option we will explore will involve “fee for services”, developing the processes and materials to offer high quality paid consultations to other communities. We will also be seeking to institutionalize this work to a significant degree, in the Virginia (and Tennessee) Departments of Agriculture, and in the for-profit packers and distributors around the region.

ASD has two primary strengths that give us the capacity to launch and manage this initiative: First, extensive on the ground experience with value chains, both starting them and building and managing them. We have highly skilled staff whose expertise in this arena will be of great benefit to other communities. Secondly, we have the analytical, organizational and communications skills to help guide other efforts, to help train and mentor other groups, while learning ourselves.