



## MEDIA ADVISORY

### ***Top Federal and State Officials Conduct Tour of the Burgeoning Local Food Economy in West Virginia***

#### **The Tour Event**

Through an *Appalachian Foodways Tour through West Virginia on May 21-23*, ARC Federal Co-Chair Earl F. Gohl and top officials from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the U.S. Department of Education, and the state of West Virginia will call attention to the economic opportunity being created by local food systems in the state. During the tour they will explore community activities in the burgeoning local food sector of the Appalachian economy, highlight innovative local models and productive partnerships, examine practical obstacles, and celebrate regional success stories.

Below are the sites and the times for the tour. ***Media is invited to join the officials at every stop and conduct interviews and take photos.***

#### **Major Participants in the Tour**

- Earl F. Gohl, Federal Co-Chair, Appalachian Regional Commission
- Joani Walsh, Deputy Undersecretary for Marketing & Regulatory Programs, USDA
- John White, Deputy Assistant Secretary/Rural Outreach, U.S. Department of Education
- Bobby Lewis, Rural Development State Director, U.S. Department of Agriculture
- Savanna Lyons, Program Manager, West Virginia Food & Farm Coalition
- Cindy Martel, Marketing Specialist, West Virginia Department of Agriculture
- Jason Hughes, Assistant Director and State FFA Director, Office of Career and Technical Instruction, West Virginia Department of Education
- James Bush, ARC Program Manager, West Virginia Development Office
- Guy Land, Federal Chief of Staff, Appalachian Regional Commission.

#### **Schedule**

##### **Tuesday, May 21**

**8:45 a.m.** – Romney, WV—Hampshire County High School. Discussion with educators and students of four agriculture education tracks (animal veterinary science; agriculture mechanics; horticulture,

floriculture, agribusiness; natural resources). Visit will include green house, field crops, high tunnel, large animal facility, meat fabrication facility, and plans for new veterinary technology building.

**12:15 p.m.** – Hambleton, WV—Tucker County High School. Discussion with educators and students on farm to school program; school, community, and industry relationships; local farmers markets; and greenhouse and high tunnel operation. Visit will include seeing construction of high tunnel in progress.

**3:30 p.m.** – Morgantown, WV—Farmers Market. Discussion of the operation of the farmers market (including participating growers, SNAP usage, customer trends), relationship of the farmers market to the WV Main Street program and the Growing Healthy Communities initiative (a program of the West Virginia Department of Health and Human Resources, with funding from the Centers for Disease Control and matching funds from the Claude Worthington Benedum Foundation). Presentation on solar panel installation at farmers market pavilion by The Mountain Institute (with funding from the Blue Moon Fund).

### **Wednesday, May 22**

**8:30 a.m.** – Fairmont, WV—Pierpont Community & Technical College Culinary Arts Academy. Overview of Culinary Arts Academy, courses offered, student profile, job opportunities, expansion plans. Visit will include speaking to the college president, provost, and vice president for organization and development.

**10:00 a.m.** – Philippi, WV—Presentation and site visits associated with Value Chain Cluster (Rural Jobs and Innovation Accelerator grant), including community garden market and aggregation efforts, Tygart Valley Growers Association and farm site visit, collaboration with Heart and Hand House (faith-based food pantry), NRCS high tunnels, West Virginia Small Farm Center, Collaborative for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century (valued added agriculture and niche markets), farm to school, Natural Capital Investment Fund, Claude Worthington Benedum Foundation, West Virginia Department of Education, West Virginia Community Development Hub, and West Virginia Food and Farm Coalition.

**3:30 p.m.** – Webster Springs, WV—Discussion of economic development strategies, including local food systems, farmers market and community foundation work, in an economically distressed county. Report on ARC funded-Flex-e-Grant activities. Visit to The Custard Stand (successful specialty food product business) with discussion of small business, entrepreneurship, and access to capital. Visit USDA-funded Baker’s Island pavilion, Webster County Woodchopping Festival (May 22-26), and Natural Capital Investment Fund, WVU-Extension.

### **Thursday, May 23**

**8:15 a.m.** – Charleston, WV—Lone Willow Perennials, Clerc Daniell Greenhouse. Overview of “Annie’s Project” training program for women entrepreneurs in agriculture. WVU-Extension.

**9:00 a.m.** – Spencer, WV—Walmart store. Visit to “healthy choices” checkout aisle (and discussion of Foodland grocery store and fresh fruit in convenience store). Discussion of CDC Communities Putting Prevention to Work and Community Transformation grants to Mid-Ohio Valley Health Department, the role of local foods in that grant, and the participation of Americorps volunteers in implementing the grant.

**10:15 a.m.** – Roane County, WV—Jim and Freida Wood Farm. Third Graders “Ag Field Day.” Discussion of Roane County agriculture education, youth leadership, Parkersburg Area Community Foundation Civic Leaders Fellowship program, WVU-Extension.

**11:15 a.m.** – Spencer, WV—Farmers Market. Informal roundtable discussion of local food system initiatives in an economically distressed county, including the Mid-Ohio Growers Association, Mid-Ohio Valley Health Department, Parkersburg Area Community Foundation, BB&T Bank (funder for farmers market), Value Chain Cluster (Rural Jobs Accelerator Grant), West Central Beekeepers Association, ARC Flex-e-grant. Joined by Mayor, County Commissioners, and Roane-Jackson County Economic Development Authority Director.

**12:15 p.m.** – Spencer, WV—Church Street Deli. Continued discussion of local food system activities and Rural Jobs Accelerator Grant. Deli listed in “101 Unique Places to Eat in WV” guide.

**2:30 p.m.** – Charleston, WV—Charleston Area Alliance. Export trade roundtable focused on agriculture and specialty food products. Coordinated by Marketing Division of the West Virginia Department of Agriculture, with representatives of the International Trade Division of the West Virginia Development Office, Small Business Development Center, U.S. Export Assistance Center, Natural Capital Investment Fund, two specialty food businesses. Update on ARC-funded export-readiness training.

## Backdrop

ARC launched the Foodways Tour in Asheville NC in conjunction with the Appalachia Funders Network, an informal association of national, regional, and local foundations that has identified local food systems as a priority for funding.

ARC has funded a rich array of foodways activities in every Appalachian state, investing \$7.6 million in food systems-related projects since 2001. Almost every type of activity that ARC funds can help foster a robust food system—infrastructure, entrepreneurship, access to capital, export promotion, health and wellness, workforce development, local capacity building, and telecommunications and technology. The local food system work becomes a useful lens through which to view ARC’s comprehensive approach to economic and community development.

Successful local food systems tap a broad network of partners: other federal agencies (such as USDA and EDA), state departments of agriculture or economic development, educational institutions, and private foundations. They often require committed non-profit organizations, as well as key private sector business leadership.

Building on last year’s popular ARC conference on this topic, the Foodways Tour is promoting a thoughtful and engaged regional conversation about how Appalachia’s communities can seize the opportunities local food systems offer for creating jobs and spurring local economic growth and how this can be an important part of what Agriculture Secretary Vilsack calls “the new economy in rural America.”

## Studies

From the groundbreaking [study](#) “Seasonal Produce Production and its Impacts” issued by the West Virginia Food & Farms Coalition, if West Virginia farmers grew enough fruits and vegetables to meet the in-season fresh produce needs of all state residents, such a shift would also generate 1,723 new jobs and contribute an additional \$ 35.7 million in local sales. The study was released by [Downstream Strategies, LLC](#) together with [West Virginia University](#), [West Virginia University Extension Service](#) and its [WV Small Farm Center](#), and the [West Virginia Food & Farm Coalition](#).

Another study, [“West Virginia Food System Assessment: Seasonal Production and its Impacts.”](#) finds that growing the produce would require less than 10% of West Virginia’s undeveloped prime farmland..

“According to the study, if West Virginians bought their fruits and vegetables from local farmers during the growing season, about \$190 million would stay in the state instead of flowing beyond its borders,” explained Downstream Strategies President Evan Hansen. “These locally spent dollars would circulate in the economy as farmers spend more at supply stores and on other goods and services.”

For farmers, the study also shows big opportunities to capture revenue from products that are currently under-produced in the state, such as greens, mushrooms, onions, potatoes and strawberries. \$6.3 million in consumer dollars could be available from greens alone.

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