

December 4, 2018

Dear Participants:

First, we wish to thank you all for taking time out of busy schedules to participate in this initial workshop. We are sending this out to workshop participants as well as to those originally invited, but could not attend. Please share this report with others that we may have missed and/or with those individuals you know might have an interest.

Under the leadership of Daniel Robison, Dean of the Davis College of Agriculture, Natural Resources, and Design, and Louis Aspey, State Conservationist of the United States Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), the two entities developed a five-year project agreement in 2015, initially allocating resources for six research projects to be carried out by West Virginia University researchers. With the goal of improving the lives of West Virginians, one of these projects focuses on food deserts.

After fourteen months of organizing and small group discussions, a strategic planning effort was launched on September 13th, 2018 with the convening of key informants assembled for a day-long meeting structured with the aid of a neutral facilitator.

The initial planning committee is pleased to submit a **Summary Report of the Food Desert Workshop** to all members of the working group including those that attended the strategic planning workshop outlining the results of that meeting. We recognize certain limitations to the strategic planning effort including the need for an increased number of attendees representing geographic regions and food production sectors.

Our plan is to hold a second strategic planning effort in the late spring of 2019. Further, one of our efforts will involve the development of a food dessert framework that will be

used to assess regions of West Virginia. To move forward we would like to invite everyone to do the following:

- Provide comments about this Summary report.
- Send ideas and comments to us describing ideas and issues we should explore and/or individuals from sectors we need to include.
- Let us know if you want to continue to be involved and how.
- Provide ideas on other methods to use to gather information around food deserts.

Thank you!

Paul J. Kinder, Jr., Ph.D.
Director, Natural Resource Analysis Center
Research Assistant Professor
West Virginia University, Davis College of Agriculture, Natural Resources and Design
Paul.Kinder@mail.wvu.edu

Lauri Andress, MPH, J.D., Ph.D.
Assistant Professor
Department of Health Policy, Management & Leadership
School of Public Health
West Virginia University Health Sciences Center
laandress@hsc.wvu.edu

Greg Stone
Assistant State Conservationist – Field Operations
South Area, USDA-NRCS
greg.stone@usda.gov

Summary Report of the Food Desert Workshop

On Thursday, 13 Sep 2018, West Virginia University's Davis College of Agriculture, Natural Resources, and Design hosted a planning meeting to generate strategies and project ideas to address the issue of food deserts in West Virginia. For an outline of the meeting's process and list of attendees, see Appendices A and B, respectively.

After big-picture, context-setting remarks from Dan Robison, Dean of the Davis College, and Louis Aspey, State Conservationist of the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, Lauri Andress offered a potential framework, *The 5As*, of Food Access for thinking about the food desert issue (Appendix C)(Andress & Hallie, 2017).

The proceedings of the day were recorded and may be found online at

Food Desert Part One

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zTZi38F6bgY>

Food Desert Part Two

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IN2F6F8z5E0>

Food Desert Part Three

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p4gm3PHTBlw>

Strategies

Attendees nominated 36 strategies, 15 of which were deemed high priority. All strategies offered at the meeting are listed here. None have been deleted.

Fifteen High-priority Strategies

1. In rural communities, identify floodplain, strip-mined, and brownfield areas for growing food.
2. Develop a land bank in West Virginia that is accessible to beginning farmers.
3. Double the production of locally grown food within five years.
4. For measuring success of a food desert program, develop short-, intermediate-, and long-term goals and metrics.
5. This strategy supplements the previous one. Develop a measurement process including indicators and methods, for quantitatively describing progress. What measurable objectives can be applied to food deserts? What does success look like quantitatively? How will we demonstrate quantitatively that a community is no longer a food desert? What data would take a community off the food-desert list?

6. Create an ongoing partnership among organizations to increase the urgency and accountability for dealing with the food access problem.
7. Incorporate a locally grown food component into all of West Virginia's 55 county school systems.
8. Enact a modified West Virginia Homestead Act that incentivizes people with capital to move to and invest in West Virginia using land as a possible inducement.
9. Find corporate partners to creatively solve food desert issues.
10. Incentivize West Virginia farmers to produce more nutritious foods.
11. Find a method to pass farms on to the next generation.
12. Incubate business entrepreneurship for local climate-controlled food production.
13. Compare and contrast food deserts in West Virginia and other states. Learn from other Appalachian areas that are not experiencing a food-desert problem. Let's not reinvent the wheel.
14. Develop a statewide climate mesonet.
15. Develop a set of ethical guidelines for a food-desert strategic plan.
16. Create and leverage existing "train-the-trainer" programs.

Other Strategies

17. Provide more opportunities for employment. That is, address food desert challenges by creating more employment opportunities.
18. Leverage institutional purchases to stimulate local food production.
19. Develop approaches to aggregation and distribution that would mitigate the seasonality of food production.
20. To help new and/or struggling growers succeed, provide them with tools, technologies, and methods to be successful.
21. Develop a statewide food-production feasibility study to identify what and where foods will grow.

22. To develop locally relevant solutions, use county-level infrastructure (e.g., county governments, NRCS offices, WVU Extension offices) as focal points for developing policies and delivering services.
23. Develop or expand economic incentives for local-food production.
24. Develop a statewide climate assessment.
25. Develop leadership to communicate innovations throughout the agricultural community.
26. Develop several peer panels composed of retailers, consumers, and others to review this plan's strategies and ideas.
27. Develop creative subsidies to support beginner growers, e.g., farm corps, creative credit, wholesale aggregation, farm laborers.
28. Develop a fine-grained spatial model to understand the feasibility of agricultural development.
29. Incentivize agribusiness growth, e.g., business and tax incentives, access to non-traditional capital.
30. Develop multiple approaches to enhance local food production.
31. To assist regions in addressing food deserts, develop a template/checklist that covers all issues identified in the present plan.
32. Develop a strategy that supports locally-owned grocery stores, e.g., tax incentives, healthy financing initiative.
33. Explore further opportunities to develop P3's as an option for sustainability. A P3 organization is a public-private partnership.
34. Assess the infrastructure supporting agriculture, including aggregation, transportation, and distribution.
35. Protect federal safety net and food supplemental programs, like SNAP and healthcare programs, to ensure that they remain in place.
36. Incubate support groups.
37. Integrate this present planning effort into the emerging statewide agricultural strategic plan.

Projects

Attendees proposed the following 13 projects, each of which was intended to support one or more strategies. Attendees suggested organizing the projects within eight categories.

1. Land and infrastructure availability for agriculture

Strategy: Identify floodplain, strip-mined, and brownfield areas in rural communities to grow food.

Project: Peter Butler will continue his service learning classes through the Community Engagement Laboratory (School of Design and Community Development). These classes work on community design projects that include urban agriculture as a programmatic element. Work is finishing up in Mullens, WV and Marlinton, WV while new project will begin in Richwood, WV 2019. Peter Butler and Paul Kinder are planning to jointly explore the spatial distributions of floodplains, strip-mines, and brownfield areas in rural WV communities which hold promise for growing food.

2. Incentives & Legislation

Strategy: Investigate the likelihood of creating a modified West Virginia Homestead Act that incentivizes people with capital to move to and invest in West Virginia using land as a possible incentive

Project:

By December 2019 collect additional informed opinions on the viability of this idea including using the food desert strategic plan and other working group meetings that will be held to further this initiative.

3. Local food production

Strategy: Incorporate a locally-grown food component into all 55 county school systems.

Project: The WV Department of Education and the USDA Farm to School Program will add value to ongoing programs that produce locally grown food in local schools. The when and what resources were not specified.

Project: Cassey Bowden reported that Cindy Bailey will publish a Farm to School Strategic Plan in 2020. Resources include the USDA FNS, WVDA, and partners.

Strategy: Incubate business entrepreneurship for local climate-controlled food production.

Project: John Saldahna will continue working on a climate-controlled food production project. Using student labor, the project will be completed by fall 2019. He has agreed to provide periodic status reports to this Workgroup.

Strategy: Incubate business entrepreneurship for local climate-controlled food production.

Project: Nicole Waterland will map the locations of high tunnels in West Virginia. With an end date of May 2020, the project will use the following resources: an NRCS grant, a graduate student and other faculty members, and a geographic information system. While this summary report was being finalized, Paul Kinder stated that Katrina High will work on this project as a funded M.S. student. She will work beyond mapping to evaluate current uses, production levels, and other variables. Paul and Nicole have discussed this project with the aim of a collaborative project.

Strategy: Double the production of locally produced food within five years.

Project: The who, what, and when are the same as the above project. Resources include those listed above plus the WVU Farm.

4. Partnerships

Strategy: Integrate the present planning effort into the emerging statewide agricultural strategic plan.

Project: Cassey Bowden reported that the WVDA and Governor's Office, serving as the lead of a steering committee, will produce a draft statewide strategic plan for agriculture by December 2018. The steering committee includes NRCS, WVDA, WVU, and others. Members of the present Food Desert Workgroup will be invited to participate.

Project: In support of food desert projects, Jackie Strager, Assistant Director of WVU's Natural Resources Analysis Center, can provide geospatial analyses of floodplains, coal strip-mines, brownfield sites, land ownership, and others. The what, when, and resources will be unique to each project.

5. Education

Strategy: Create and leverage existing "train-the-trainer" programs.

Project: Peter Butler will explore current curricula to educate agriculture educators and, if needed, create a teaching module on food deserts for agriculture teachers and extension agents. To be completed by August 2019, he will need no additional resources.

6. Feasibility and Assessment

Strategy: Develop a set of ethical guidelines for the present strategic plan.
Project: Lauri Andress will coordinate a team that will draft ethical guidelines by December 2020 for consideration by the Food Desert Workgroup. No additional resources needed.

Strategy: Compare and contrast food deserts in WV with other states. Learn from other Appalachian areas that are not experiencing a food-desert problem. Let's not reinvent the wheel.

Project: Bradley Wilson will continue to prepare the WV State Food Access Report: A Comparative Analysis. He will provide the Workgroup with progress reports. By when and what resources were not specified.

Strategy: For measuring success of a Food Desert Program, develop short-, intermediate-, and long-term goals and metrics.

Project: Lauri Andress will identify aggregate goals and indicators for measuring success by September 2020. She will use the following resources: one student, two Workgroup members, and funds from several sources.

No proposed projects fell clearly under the eighth category of "Agricultural climate prediction center".

Action items

1. Paul Kinder will devise and execute/delegate a plan for how we will contact invited, but non-attending, folks to solicit their opinions about strategies and projects.
2. George Constantz will draft a summary report about the Workshop.
3. To provide leadership for an ongoing effort, Lauri Andress will serve as the starter coordinator of the Food Desert Workgroup.
4. For the Workgroup's next meeting, John Saldahna will present a program on multi-group approaches to solving food deserts.

During post-workshop evaluation, the Food Desert Program's inaugural leaders—Paul Kinder, Lauri Andress, and Greg Stone—adopted the USDA NRCS' *Nine Steps of Conservation Planning* as a framework for addressing the complex issues inherent within food deserts.

- Step 1 – Identify problems. Although much of this work has been accomplished for general issues, there remains the identification of details, especially in local settings.
- Step 2 – Determine objectives. What conditions must be met to conclude that a problem has been solved in any particular community? How do we measure success?
- Step 3 – Inventory resources. Assemble a comprehensive inventory of existing infrastructure, current growing capacities, and opportunities for expansion. Can healthy food get to those who need it? Is it affordable? Is it supported by businesses? These and other basic questions answer what we have and what we lack.
- Step 4 – Analyze resource data. Data gathered in step 3 are analyzed to define current conditions relative to objectives. Causes and effects of existing problems are clarified. Work to understand the data and begin to think about where it leads us. What can we take advantage of? What capabilities or resources must we acquire? What can we do without and still reach the objective?
- Step 5 – Formulate alternatives. Draft alternatives to achieve the objectives, solve existing problems, and exploit opportunities to address undesirable conditions. Devise projects that work together to reach objectives. What are the parts, projects, and actions that will achieve an objective? In fact, much work by USDA, WVU, WVDA, health and wellness advocates, farm producer groups, business leaders, and others, is currently underway to formulate alternatives. It seems there is little communication and coordination among these groups.
- Step 6 – Evaluate alternatives. Evaluate each alternative to see if it addresses the objectives and is working in concert with other alternatives. Evaluate alternatives for both ability to address the intended leg and how it affects other legs. This step evaluates interactions, causes and effects. Current work lacks this step.
- Step 7 – Make decisions. Select evaluated alternatives as part of a larger plan. As mentioned above, several parties are already working on pieces to reach larger objectives. Incorporate these projects into a larger planning process. What is needed to achieve the objective? The answer can yield a roadmap in which others contribute critical, missing pieces.
- Step 8 – Implement the plan. A complete plan typically contains several projects. Each project will have 4 parts: Who is going to what by when using what resources? Which projects go first and what activities can work simultaneously?
- Step 9 – Evaluate the plan. Conditions change, outcomes are unexpected, learning changes view. Devise and implement a plan for measuring success.
- Almost surely, the planning process will be dynamic. These 9 steps must not be regimented. It will be necessary to adjust through the process. Apply the teachings of adaptive management.

Appendix A. Agenda for the Food Desert Workshop. Note the sequence of planning steps from 10:45 am to 4:45 pm.

Food Desert Workshop

West Virginia University, Davis College of Agriculture
13 September, 2018

10 am – **Convene**, Welcome, Logistics, Introductions

10:15 – **Remarks-**

Daniel J. Robison, Dean, Davis College of Agriculture, Natural Resources and Design

10:25 –**Occasion-**

Louis Aspey, State Conservationist, USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service.

10:35 – **A Potential Framework** - The 5 A's of Food Access,

Lauri Andress, Faculty, WVU School of Public Health

10:45 – **Strategic Planning**

- Brainstorming – What do you suggest to solve WV's food desert issue? Round-robin process, no valuing, all ideas are captured.
- Valuing – What do you like/don't like about a particular suggested solution?
- Prioritizing – By voice vote if possible, hand voting if needed for clarity, dot voting if need for quantification

12:30 – **Lunch**

During this 1/2-hour break the project coordinators and facilitator will rewrite the prioritized solutions into strategies and post the strategies list.

1:00 pm – **Reactions** to, revisions of, and generating consensus on the list.

1:30 – **Operational Planning** – a list of potentially implementable projects

- Brainstorming – Suggest specific projects/tasks to implement strategies.
- Valuing – Invite plus and minus statements about suggested projects.
- Prioritizing – List projects in descending order of priority.

Outcome – Generate a list of specific projects ranked in descending priority. Each project will have 4 parts: **Who** is going to do **what** by **when** using what **resources**?

4:45 – **Next steps:**

Minutes/summary report, draft strategic plan and status of operating plan, action items, ongoing organization and how to keep in touch, next meeting?

4:55 – **Workshop Evaluation**—Two questions; participants record their responses

5 pm – **Adjourn**

Appendix B. Attendees of the Food Desert Workshop

Participant	Affiliation	Email
George Constantz	Contract Facilitator	constantz@frontier.net
Katrina High	WVU NRAC	Katrina.high@mail.wvu.edu
Greg Stone	USDA-NRCS	Greg.stone@wv.usda.gov
Matt Wilson	WVU Davis College	Matt.wilson@mail.wvu.edu
Louis Aspey	USDA-NRCS	Louis.aspey@wv.usda.gov
Jackie Strager	WVU NRAC	jmstrager@mail.wvu.edu
Dan Robison	WVU Davis College	Dan.robison@mail.wvu.edu
John Saldanha	WVU B&E	jpsaldanha@mail.wvu.edu
Nicole Waterland	WVU Davis College	nlwater@mail.wvu.edu
Jason Hubbart	WVU Davis College	Jason.hubbart@mail.wvu.edu
Peter Butler	WVU Davis College	Peter.butler@mail.wvu.edu
Melissa Olfert	WVU Davis College	Melissa.olfert@mail.wvu.edu
Bradley Wilson	WVU Geography	brwilson@mail.wvu.edu
Cassey Bowden	WV Department Agriculture	cbowden@wvda.us
Lauri Andress	WVU School Public Health	laandress@hsc.wvu.edu

Appendix C. The 5 A's of Food Access (Andress & Hallie, 2017).

DIMENSIONS OF FOOD ACCESS	GRADE	COMMENTS
AVAILABILITY Are there sources for food?	A-	The adequacy of the supply of healthy food (e.g. presence of certain types of restaurants near people's homes, or the number of places to buy produce).
ACCESSIBILITY Can the elderly get to or make use of the food that is available?	F	The geographic location of the food supply and ease of getting to that location.
AFFORDABILITY Are the elderly able to pay for the food that is available?	D	Food prices and people's perceptions of worth relative to food cost.
ACCOMMODATION Do food sources respond to the needs of the elderly?	D	How well local food sources accept and adapt to local residents' needs (i.e. store hours or types of payment accepted).
ACCEPTABILITY Does the food available meet the standards of the elderly?	B-	An individual's attitude regarding the attributes of their local food environment and whether or not the given supply of products meets their personal standards.

Andress, L., & Hallie, S. S. (2017). Co-constructing food access issues: Older adults in a rural food environment in West Virginia develop a photonarrative. *Cogent Medicine*, 1309804. doi:10.1080/2331205X.2017.1309804