

IMPLEMENTING FARM TO SCHOOL IN MCDOWELL COUNTY, WEST VIRGINIA

FARM TO SCHOOL IN RURAL APPALACHIA

LAKEISHA PERKINS

Bill Emerson National Hunger Fellow

Last Updated March 2019

Disclaimer

This guide is Reconnecting McDowell's effort to coordinate stakeholders in strengthening the McDowell County Farm to School program. This guide is comprised of information regarding the benefits and challenges of implementing farm to school programs in rural Appalachia and includes recommendations on how to move farm to school efforts forward in McDowell County. This has been prepared with the best information and resources available at the time it was written; however information is always changing and this document cannot guarantee reliability or accuracy beyond the date it was published. This document should be updated as new information is gathered and as progress is made to strengthen farm to school efforts. Each school should perform their own independent analysis, consult with available resources, and develop district policies and steps for implementing farm to school programming and geographic preference in the procurement of local produce.

PRODUCED FOR

Reconnecting
McDOWELL



Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank several individuals and organizations for their advice, editing assistance, expertise and support that led to the creation of this guide.

American Federation of Teachers

Congressional Hunger Center

Bonita Miano, Director of Attendance, Student Services & Child Nutrition

McDowell County Food Service Staff - Cafeteria Managers & Cooks

McDowell County School District

McDowell County Board of Education

McDowell County Farms: Jason & Dorothy Tartt, Producers

Roadside Farms: Joel McKinney, Producer

American Youth Agripreneur Association: Jason Tartt, Jr.

West Virginia Food & Farm Coalition

Dr. Barbara Liedl, Associate Professor at West Virginia State University

Bekki Leigh, National Farm to School West Virginia Core Partner

Chad Webb, Partnership Coordinator: Reconnecting McDowell

Jenny Totten, Community Development Coordinator: WV Community Development Hub

West Virginia Department of Agriculture

Sodexo Stop Hunger Foundation

Made possible by funding from:



Reconnecting McDowell

Reconnecting McDowell is a non-profit initiative piloted by both the national and West Virginia chapters of the American Federation of Teachers. McDowell County, West Virginia ranks among the poorest counties in the nation in regard to socio-economic and public health metrics among its public school student body. Reconnecting McDowell was founded to more holistically supplement the needs inside and outside of the public school system in order to ensure better educational and vocational outcomes for its students through in-school curriculum and development, wrap around services and economic development. The work being done to strengthen farm to school efforts and increase the amount of local, healthy food options brought into the McDowell County school system is one part of this overall goal.

Bill Emerson National Hunger Fellowship

The Congressional Hunger Center is working to end hunger around the country and around the world by 2030. This work is done by training a new generation of social justice leaders through the Emerson National and Leland International Hunger Fellowship programs. These programs are designed to bridge the gaps in understanding and action between anti-hunger and anti-poverty work at both the community and national policy level. The Bill Emerson National Hunger Fellowship is a year-long program where during the first half of the fellowship, fellows are placed into a field site somewhere in the United States working with a local organization and then, spend the second half of the program working with an national organization on policy work. Throughout this time period fellows build a deep understanding of many issues, including, but not limited to, hunger, poverty, racial and social oppression, and community development.

The 25th Class of Bill Emerson National Hunger Fellows

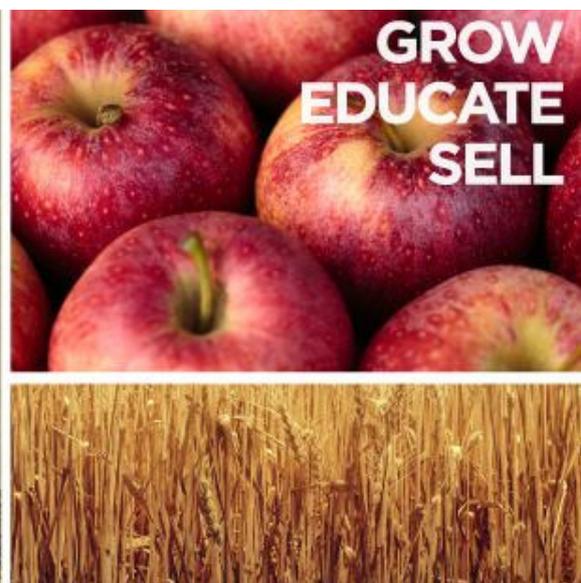
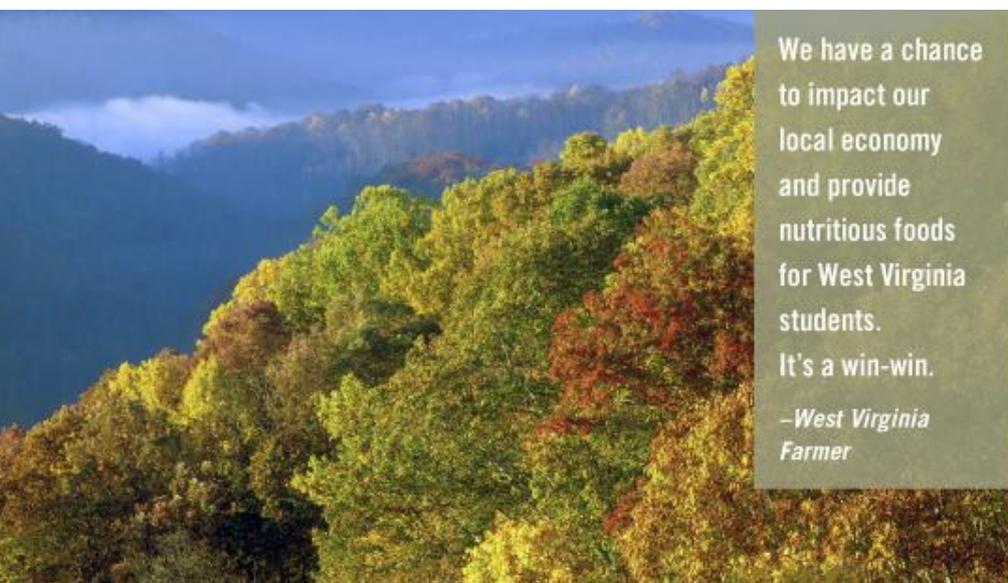


Table of Contents

Introduction	5
Child Food Insecurity	6
McDowell County School System Overview	7
McDowell County Farm to School	8
Goals	9
10 Benefits of Farm to School	13
History	14
Barriers to Implementation	18
Recommendations	20
Resources	25
Produce Availability Calendar	26

Introduction

This Farm to School guide is designed to serve as a reference and informational guide to assist in the creation of farm to school programs in rural Appalachia, but will focus solely on the current and past programming efforts in McDowell county. There are numerous factors that need to be considered to fully understand how farm to school functions in this geographic area, including land access in gaining more producers, limited equipment in the county school kitchens, and the history and current state of key stakeholder relationships. This guide contains information to provide a better understanding of McDowell county as a whole. This includes, but is not limited to, how the school system functions, the goals of the McDowell Farm to School Program, and the history of farm to school in the county. This guide will also offer recommendations going forward that will help improve the current and future efforts within the McDowell County Farm to School program.



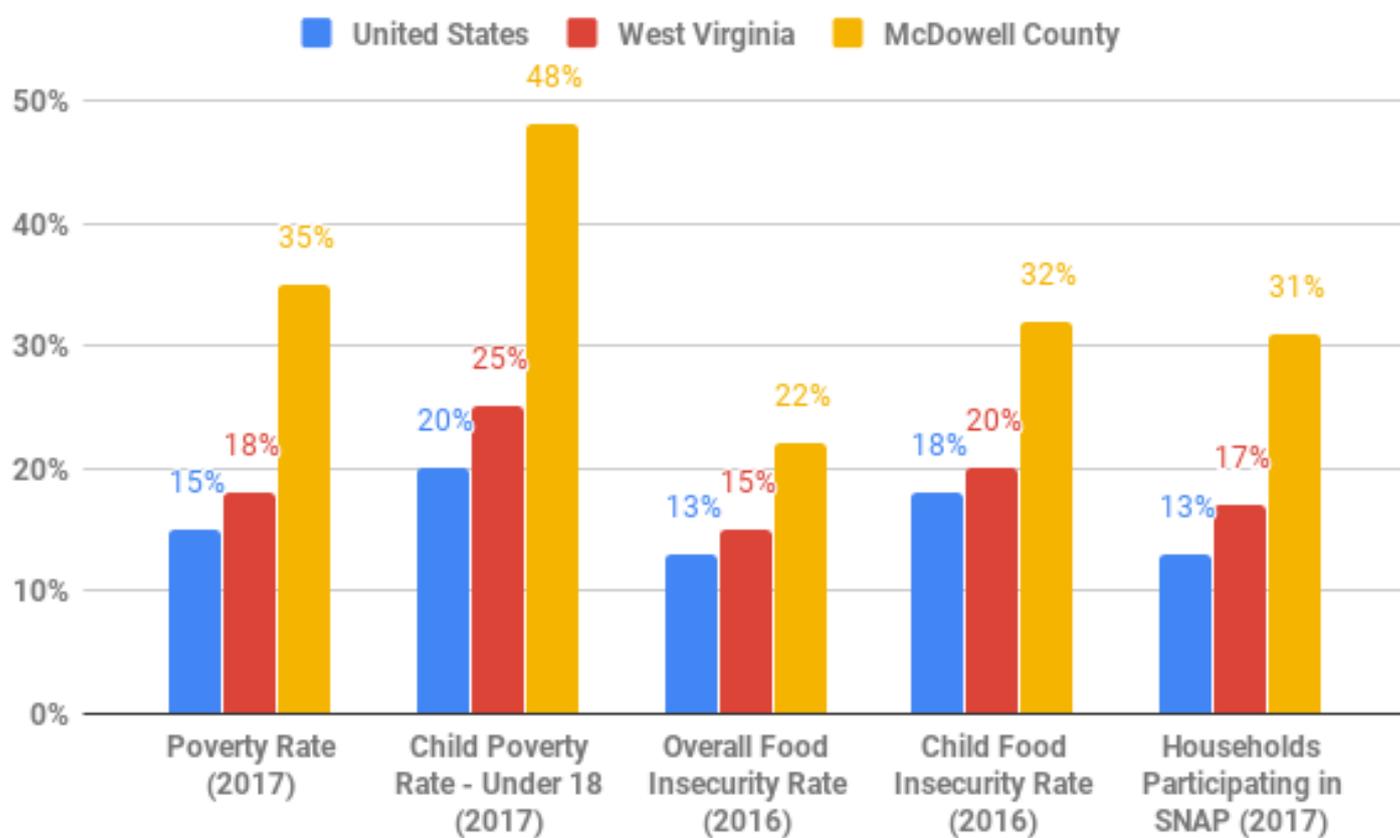
PC: WV Farm to School Community Development Group

West Virginia Farm to School Community Development Group

West Virginia's Farm to School effort is led by the West Virginia Farm to School Community Development Group, a public and private task force made up of various stakeholders that have met on a regular basis since 2011. These stakeholder groups include the West Virginia Department of Education, the West Virginia Department of Agriculture, the West Virginia University Extension Small Farm Center, New Appalachian Farm and Research Center and the Collaborative for the 21st Century Appalachia. The group works with the Office of Child Nutrition and is a model for the type of support group that could be formed in every county in West Virginia. The goal is to increase the amount of local foods served in schools and develop the next generation of farmers in West Virginia.

Child Food Insecurity

Food insecurity refers to the inability to have reliable access to a sufficient quantity of affordable, nutritious food for an active and healthy lifestyle. Food insecurity is a stressful condition for any person or household. There have been proven to be disproportionately worse health outcomes on food insecure individuals and food insecurity has even more detrimental effects on children. In all 50 states, the estimated rate of child food insecurity is higher than the rate of overall food insecurity. In the state of West Virginia, McDowell County has the highest rate of food insecurity affecting 4,550 people and 1,250 children, according to Feeding America's Map the Meal Gap.



This graphical representation above shows that in every instance, McDowell County has much higher rates of poverty and food insecurity in comparison to the state of West Virginia and the United States as a whole. These statistics have real life implications for community agencies, like school systems. In particular, it has been shown in numerous studies that children suffering from food insecurity tend to struggle academically due to the lack of nutritionally sufficient meals that lead to decreased brain function, focus, and energy. One way in which schools have tried to meet the needs of their students while supporting local food systems is through farm to school efforts. The McDowell County School system is a key stakeholder in eliminating childhood food insecurity and as an economic driver for the county as a whole.

McDowell County School System Overview

All of the schools within the McDowell County School System are participating in the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) which allows the nation's schools and districts with the highest poverty rates to serve breakfast and lunch at no cost to enrolled students.

Unlike the National School Lunch Program (NSLP), this provision does not require household applications. Instead, eligibility is determined by the Identified Student Percentage (ISP) which is calculated by the number of identified students that are directly certified for free school meals through data matching based on if their households receive assistance from the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), or the Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR) and in some states, Medicaid. A school with an ISP score of 40% or greater indicates a school that qualifies for the community eligibility provision.

The Community Eligibility Database was created by Food & Research Action Center (FRAC) using data made publicly available by state agencies in accordance with the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) annual notification and publication records. Below is a chart of each McDowell County school and its ISP score, in which its percentages show the need for free school lunches in the school system.

Community Eligibility Database: Eligible & Participating Schools for the 2018-2019 School Year			
School	ISP	ISP Students	Total Student Enrollment
Anawalt Elementary	59.65%	34	57
Bradshaw Elementary	73.91%	204	276
Fall River Elementary	75.31%	122	162
laeger Elementary	68.42%	105	285
Kimball Elementary	73.31%	157	213
Mount View High	67.10%	465	693
River View High	68.45%	319	466
Sandy River Middle	70.75%	150	212
Southside K-8	75.31%	299	397
Welch Elementary	71.28%	201	282
McDowell County Schools	70.52%	2,146	3,043

McDowell County Farm to School

The goals of the McDowell County Farm to School program are to connect students to local food producers with the objective of serving locally-grown produce, improving child nutrition and providing education on where food comes from and how it is grown. This exposes students to healthy, local foods, like fruits and vegetables, which will encourage healthier eating habits. This program can help to increase children's preferences for healthy food options, help address the issue of childhood diet-related diseases and food insecurity by improving child nutrition, and provide health and nutrition education opportunities while supporting local farmers.

Being a part of the McDowell County Farm to School program will allow farmers to sell closer to home, providing an additional marketing source for their business. This raises awareness of the valuable contribution that local agriculture makes to the economic well-being of communities and encourages future generations to get involved in farming in McDowell County and the state of West Virginia.

In order for this program to be successful, it depends on many partners being actively involved in the process which includes, but is not limited to the leaders and organizations listed below.

School Community

Administrators
Teachers
Parents/Guardians

Students
School Board Members
School Nurses

Community Partners

Non-Profit Organizations
Local Businesses
Local Government

Colleges
Universities

Key Practitioners

Local Producers
Cafeteria Managers
Cooks

School Nutrition Directors
Food Service Supervisors
Local Distributors

Advocates & Experts

Medical Practitioners
Public Health Officials

Community Development Experts
Local Extension Educators

Goals of the Program

The McDowell County Farm to School Program aims to accomplish four main goals in order to connect students to local producers with the objective of serving locally-grown produce, improving child nutrition and providing education on where food comes from and how it is grown. Below are the program goals and the agreed upon steps for how these goals can be accomplished.

Goal 1: Streamline the process of local food purchases for the McDowell County School System

This will be accomplished through hiring a part-time Farm to School Coordinator to coordinate farm producers, workshops, school system needs and the logistics of payment for produce. The Coordinators tasks will include, but not be limited to:

- Working with the Food Service Supervisor to determine a process for ordering, invoicing, delivering and paying for locally sourced foods
- Developing a best-practices manual and tool-kit for farm to school operations in McDowell County
- Host workshops for local growers and producers on the farm to school process
- Working with school farms and gardens to source locally and provide relevant youth education on the process as needed

In addition to this, the Coordinator will assist farm producers with Good Agriculture Practices (GAP) certification by providing assistance in paying for the annual GAP audit for any producer selling into the school system, including school-based garden and farm programs.

- Work with the West Virginia Food Safety team to develop protocol for this
- Coordinate a mock GAP audit day with the Department of Agriculture and then an official GAP audit with a Department of Agriculture representative
- Conduct workshops for producers wanting to sell into the McDowell County School system with the Department of Agriculture and West Virginia University Extension Service

Goal 2: Educate and empower students to participate in agricultural processes at scale

This will start by expanding upon or creating new school farm spaces at all McDowell County School locations within the next two years which will be done by:

- Revitalizing the growing space at Mount View High School to include areas beyond the existing high tunnel
- Expand the growing space at Sandy River Middle School to include the areas beyond the existing greenhouse and outdoor raised beds
- Create or revitalize growing spaces at Southside K-8, Jaeger Elementary, Fall River Elementary, Kimball Elementary, Bradshaw Elementary, River View High School, and McDowell County Career and Technology Center

After these spaces have been created or expanded upon, an agriculture learning club will be created at the McDowell County Career and Technology Center, involving 12 participants in year one and growing to 24 participants by year two. In order to make this club successful, the following steps will be taken:

- Apply for an Americorps VISTA to develop a marketing plan and curriculum for a weekly workshop series and club structure. This work will be in collaboration with the part-time Farm to School Coordinator, West Virginia Community Development Hub's Community Development Coordinator, West Virginia University Extension, and the Career and Technology Center staff.
- The VISTA will coordinate guest speakers, activities and events related to the agriculture club, administer topic surveys for evaluation purposes, and will work with the part-time Farm to School Coordinator to sell produce to the school system.



Goal 3: Increase Fresh Food Access for Youth in McDowell County

The Farm to School Coordinator will coordinate with West Virginia University Extension and school principals to schedule school-based farmers markets at least twice a year utilizing local produce.

- West Virginia University Extension will identify producers for the markets 2-3 weeks beforehand, will coordinate market days at the schools, and will administer surveys and aggregate data.

The purchasing of locally sourced products will be prioritized for food demonstrations by West Virginia University Extension and other agencies by having at least 10% of produce for demonstrations purchased locally.

- The Extension youth health educator will determine recipes and a schedule for farmers and school farms and will purchase produce locally when in season and available.



Goal 4: Educate students on engaging with state and local decision makers and fostering a culture of community support for local food programs

Create an "I Grew That" campaign for local producers to showcase farm to school success stories.

- Using the Smarter Lunchroom model, feature producers when their product is served in cafeterias
- Create student made 1-2 minute videos of local producers to be advertised on social media and throughout West Virginia

Connect producers and youth with West Virginia Food and Farm Coalition to engage with decision makers at all levels of involvement.

- Encourage producers and personnel to attend Local Foods Day
- Create a system for relevant food issues to be heard by decision makers



Benefits of Farm to School

- 1 Increases market diversification and economic growth opportunities for farmers
- 2 Improves willingness to consume a wider variety of fruits and vegetables which will increase the amount of healthy foods incorporated into family diets
- 3 Builds positive relationships for farmers with school districts, parents and community members
- 4 Provides students with an opportunity for social and emotional growth by improving life skills, self esteem, social skills and behavior
- 5 Increases student and family knowledge and awareness about gardening, agriculture, healthy eating, nutrition, and other STEM concepts
- 6 Generates positive attitudes about integrating farm to school related information in school curriculum
- 7 Improves food service staff motivation and morale and increases interactions with teachers to strengthen classroom and cafeteria connections
- 8 Enhances students understanding of Appalachian history, culture and agricultural practices
- 9 Improves the viability of the local farming economy
- 10 Enriches the connection communities have with fresh, healthy food and local food producers by changing food purchasing and education practices at schools

History

There are have been efforts in the past to improve farm to school programming in McDowell County, but there has never been a centralized process to ensure sustainability of the McDowell County Farm to School Program. Below is a catalog of all farm to school related activities that exist, at this time, within each of the schools.

Kimball Elementary School

The school has a garden and is using it as of the Fall 2018. Agriculture education is also being integrated into the classroom through the teaching of microgreens. Microgreens are becoming a more popular trend. They are usually used in fine dining restaurants, but are easy and fun to grow at home and in the classroom. Microgreens are nutritious and contain considerably higher levels of vitamins than their mature plant counterparts. They are the first stage of the growth of a plant and can be used in many different ways, including adding to salads, sandwiches, stir-fries or rice bowls, in omelets, as garnish, etc. This is a great way for students to learn about a different method of gardening that can be done in their own home while also understanding the growth cycle of a plant.

Anawalt Elementary School

The principal, Ginger Blankenship, was interested in starting a school garden but the Board of Education has approved the closure of the school at the end of the 2018-2019 school year so students from Anawalt will now be sent to Kimball and Welch Elementary schools.

laeger Elementary School

As of right now, there are no farm to school related activities at laeger Elementary School. The principal, Sheena Ashby, and a health, science and nutrition teacher, Matthew Martin, are interesting in starting a school garden and incorporating agricultural learning into the classrooms.

Bradshaw Elementary School

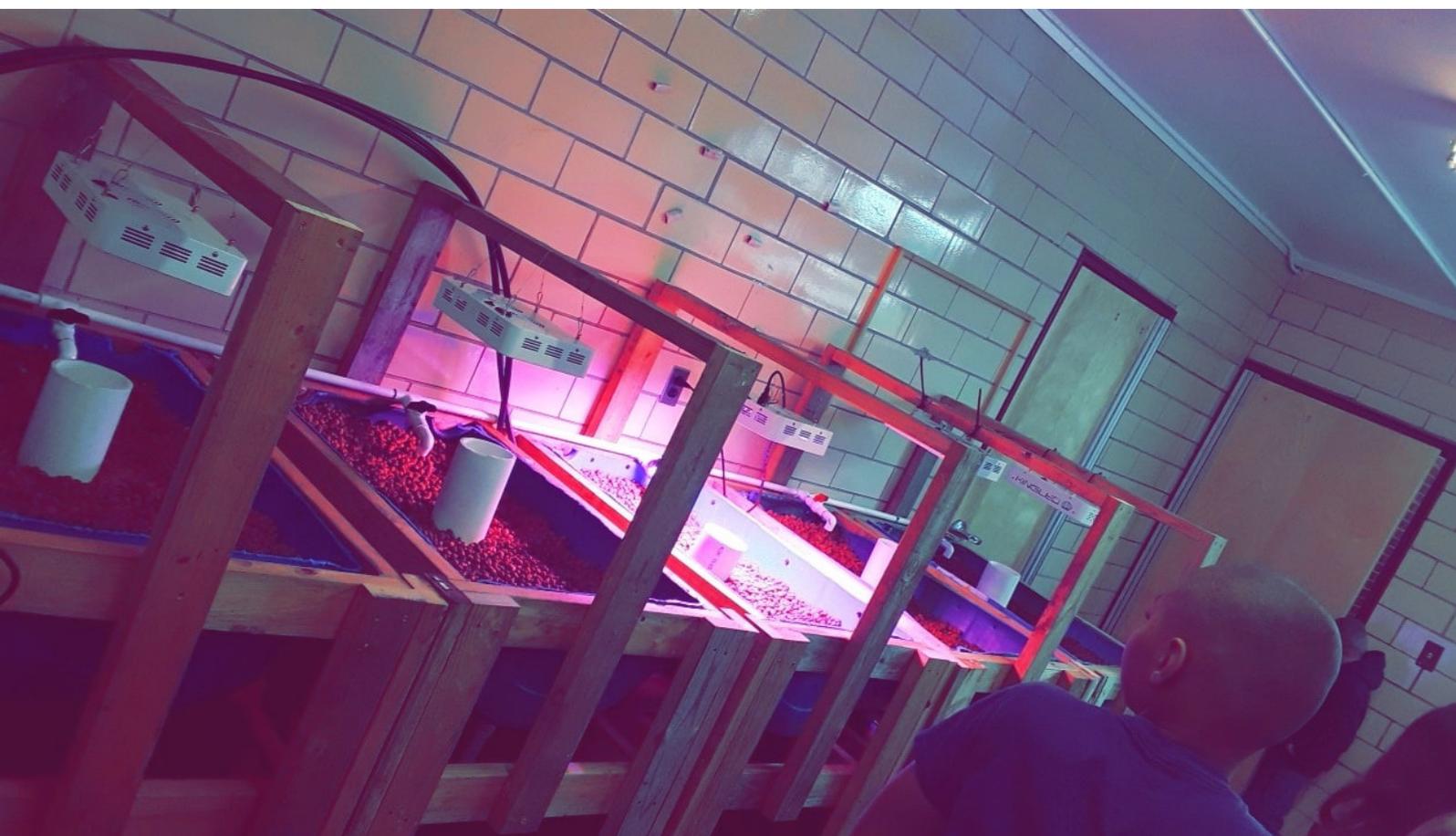
Currently, there is an after school garden program that is managed by Sheila Muncy.

Fall River Elementary School

The school currently has garden beds that the third, fourth, and fifth grade teachers use for their classes. These beds are used all year round and usually have sweet potatoes planted during the summer so that the students have something to look forward to when they come back to school the following year.

Welch Elementary School

The school has ten 3x8' garden beds, but they are not currently being used. There is a West Virginia University (WVU) Extension Agent in the county, Dana Lester, that is a Health Educator working on the Sandy River Middle School garden. She is planning to use the gardens beds for agricultural education in the class room. There is also a hydroponic growing space that is set up inside of a classroom to teach students a method of growing plants without soil by using mineral nutrient solutions in a water solvent.



PC: Angel Courtney

Southside K-8

At this time, there are three school garden beds that the middle school clubs use. There are plans currently in place for a high tunnel to be built at the school through a West Virginia Department of Agriculture Specialty Crop Block Grant that will be used to expand the current farm to school activities going on at the schools.

Sandy River Middle School

Sandy River Middle School has the most successful farm to school programming in the county. Years ago, the school garden was damaged by a storm and a WVU Extension Agent, Dana Lester, secured funds from the Women of Steel Union to buy plastic sheeting to repair the roof of the greenhouse. This paved the way to incorporating agricultural education into the school and the creation of the Sandy River Student Cooperative.

The program got started through WVU Extension going into the school for three years in order to survey how students reacted to agriculture-related programming and classes, such as canning, making jams, etc. They found there was over-whelming support and interest from the students. After this reaction, WVU Extension wanted to explore more agriculture opportunities for the students now that they had a baseline understanding of gardening and agriculture education. To accomplish this, WVU Extension decided to let the students run their own business to expand upon what they had learned so far about agriculture and to give them autonomy in how to further this education.

As a part of this cooperative, teachers spend once a week doing business development planning with the students. The students are divided up into different groups based on their interests from producing fruits and vegetables to creating value-adding products (smoothies, jellies, jams, etc.). This offers a chance for students to take control of their education and encourages agricultural entrepreneurship.

In addition to this program, Mrs. Lester also offers a kids farmers market where she brings a variety of locally grown produce into the schools. Students are given tokens to "purchase" the items and are given the chance to take home fresh fruits and vegetables, which for many are difficult to access due to the limited number of grocery stores in the county and overall lack of access to affordable fresh fruits and vegetables.

Mount View High School

The high school has a functioning high tunnel, but there is a lack of student participation in the farm to school programming at the school.

River View High School

Currently, there is no farm to school activities at the school, but there is interest from the students to start a school garden.

Career & Technology Center

The McDowell County Career & Technology Center offers students, who are not interested in the traditional high school route, a chance to take classes focused on a specific topic area. Classes are focused around these areas:

- Adult Education
- Automotive Technology
- Building Maintenance
- Coding Applications & Game Design
- Computer Systems/Hardware Support
- Criminal Justice
- Early Childhood Education
- Electrical Technology
- Gifted
- Health Operations
- Licensed Practical Nursing
- Machine Tool Technology
- Pro-Start
- Welding Technology

Many of the classes are taught through a simulated workplace methodology and are intended to give students real-life work experiences in the career field they are interested in.

At this time, the school has a non-functioning greenhouse, but there are current efforts to revitalize the greenhouse through the efforts of a local chef, Robert Diaz, who was recently hired as the Culinary Arts Teacher at the Career & Technology Center.

Spotlight



Local chef, Robert Diaz, was recently hired as the Culinary Arts Teacher at the Career & Technology Center. He is passionate about revitalizing the McDowell County School System by offering a better education and believes this can be accomplished through food. Instead of thinking of school cafeteria staff as simply cooks, he says students should think of them as mentors. By using fresh, locally grown ingredients, cooks can offer a more nutritious meal and garner excitement from students with meals they produce so that students look forward to what is being served on the menu.

Mr. Diaz's plan is to reinvigorate the greenhouse at the Career & Technology Center through a combination of aquaponics and soil-based plants with the goal of producing enough fruits and vegetables to service the entire school, plus more schools in the future. The greenhouse will be designed to be self-sustaining and will have produce growing year-round. Eventually he hopes to incorporate recycling and composting and plans to offer classes to students and families on canning, making jams, and creating small in-home gardens based on the materials and space available.

Barriers to Implementation

In all farm to school efforts there are barriers to programming. Below are the barriers that McDowell County faces in its efforts to increase the amount of local, healthy food options available to students.

Cost

The McDowell County School System has limited financial resources. Due to this, it can be difficult for the Director of Child Nutrition and Cafeteria Managers to purchase locally-grown produce because it often costs more than the produce offered by their current distributors, U.S. Foods and Crooks Brothers. This also limits their ability to pay cooks for the additional cleaning and processing of local produce and to do farm to school activities, such as taste tests, cooking competitions, farm visits, etc.

Time & Effort

Farm to school work requires additional time and effort, especially in regards to cleaning and processing the produce and organizing deliveries from multiple farmers. Cafeteria managers and cooks have many responsibilities that prevent them from having extra time to take on additional responsibilities. Secondly, many school kitchens in the county either do not have the equipment for processing or are in need of new equipment which is unable to be funded due to the lack of school funds. In addition to this, it is common for people in the county to have multiple job titles. The Director of Child Nutrition in the county is also responsible for attendance and student success so all three of these roles do not allow her the ability to focus on farm to school efforts.

Communication & Follow Through

The county suffers from a lack of cell service and internet access which serves as a major communication barrier that makes it difficult to organize farm to school programming. Even if there were adequate access to this technology, the county historically prefers a word-of-mouth method of communication which has led to a lack of written documentation and evaluation of past farm to school efforts. Furthermore, many people in the school system and county hold numerous positions/titles which leaves them unable to dedicate additional time to farm to school efforts. Due to this, some projects are often neglected because other projects have higher priorities and therefore some sacrifices must be made to make best use of the school systems resources.

Stakeholder Collaboration

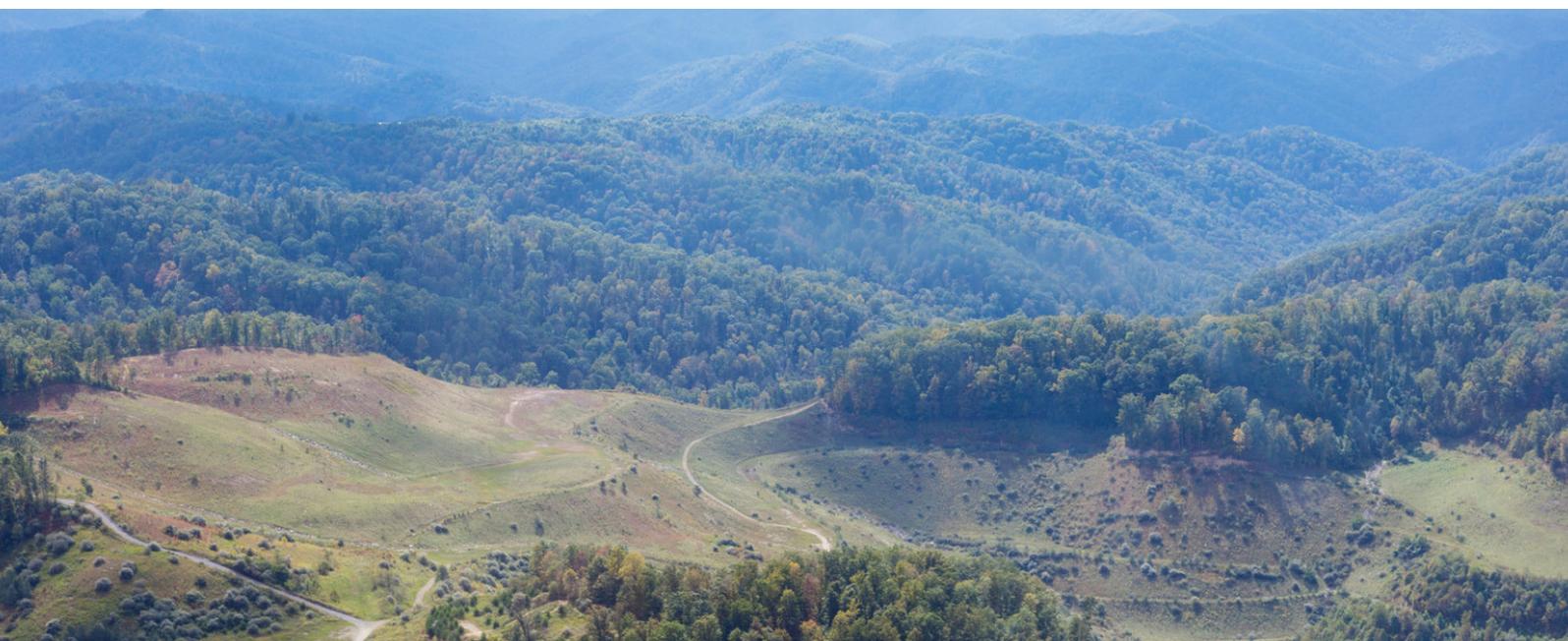
There is a long history of key stakeholder relationships being build and broken over time which has led to some stakeholders being reluctant or unwilling to work with others. This can complicate focusing on farm to school programming because collaboration is necessary to move the process forward. Through conversations with the school system and producers in the county, it has been determined that there is a strong need for Farm to School Coordinator to serve as an intermediary and coordinate all farm to school activities and stakeholders.

Land Access & Lack of Producers

McDowell County is subjugated by densely forested mountains and rivers. The narrow valleys with slopes of 16% or more leave little land for development and it is estimated that 93% of the land is owned by out-of-state companies, often as a result of the role coal industries played in the counties history. This makes it challenging for people to purchase land in the county for farming practices. Additionally, it is difficult to measure the number of producers in the county because some people do not self-identify as a producer/farmer for various reasons. At this time, there are only two known producers in the county, McDowell County Farms and Roadside Farms. These producers operate on a small scale and are only able to accommodate a single school.

Commercial Kitchen for Produce Processing

A major barrier in the county is the lack of a facility for aggregation and processing. As mentioned previously, school cafeteria staff do not have the additional time or equipment to handle the cleaning and processing of fruits and vegetables. The producers in the county also lack the equipment and space needed for cleaning and processing, which is why a facility like this is needed.



Recommendations

1

HOLD REGULAR FARM TO SCHOOL STAKEHOLDER MEETINGS

HIRE A FARM TO SCHOOL COORDINATOR

2

3

OBTAIN NEW KITCHEN EQUIPMENT

DEVELOP PLANS FOR THE COMMERCIAL KITCHEN

4

Recommendations

HOLD REGULAR FARM TO SCHOOL STAKEHOLDER MEETINGS

Since there is no centralized process for farm to school programming in the county, the first step to creating this should be through stakeholder meetings. This gives all of those with an interest in farm to school activities the chance to stay involved in future programming. All McDowell County schools are operating their farm to school activities separately with little to no collaboration with others. These meetings would offer stakeholders the chance to discuss current farm to school efforts, create a centralized plan for how to increase the amount of local foods brought into schools, and discuss ideas and implementation of farm to school events, activities, and agriculture education programs.

Steps for Implementation

- **Set up a Farm to School Stakeholder Meeting once a month.** This meeting should be at on the same day at the same time to ensure sustainability by making it easier for stakeholders to remember when the meeting is taking place.
- **Select a Meeting Leader.** This person will be responsible for planning and organizing the meeting, which includes making sure the space for the meeting is available, ensuring all stakeholders will be present at the meeting, setting the agenda, and keeping the meeting on track. The Meeting Leader will also be responsible for inviting new stakeholders to the meeting as the farm to school program expands.
- **Designate someone as the Notetaker.** This person will be responsible for transcribing everything said in the meeting and sending out notes to all stakeholders. This would help combat communication barriers by ensuring all information is written down and accessible to all those involved.
- **Make sure to leave every meeting with an Action Plan.** Leave the last 10-20 minutes of the meeting to discuss next steps. This should include deciding who is responsible for which action item and what the deadlines for those are. The designated Notetaker will be responsible for sending out reminders to those with action items which would ensure accountability for what stakeholders say they will do.

These steps would help alleviate the barriers related to communication and stakeholder collaboration by providing an opportunity to give updates on farm to school activities, discuss challenges and successes, plan for the future and share resources. These meetings will also be used to figure out how to expand farm to school programming at each school until all schools have operating school gardens.

Recommendations

HIRE A FARM TO SCHOOL COORDINATOR

The farm to school coordinator will be in charge of all farm to school activities including, but not limited to, creating the contracts between producers and the McDowell County School System, coordinating all farm to school events, and facilitating all stakeholder meetings.

Steps for Implementation

- **Create a job description with list of qualifications, roles & responsibilities.** The roles and responsibilities should include all information listed in the Goals of the Program section of this report. All applicants should have the following qualifications:
 - Bachelor's degree or higher in an agriculture or related field
 - Experience in leadership, management and staff supervision
 - Exceptional organizational skills and flexibility; self-motivated and able to work independently with minimal supervision
 - Demonstrated ability to work with people of diverse backgrounds, ages, cultures and abilities; Ability to find value in everyone's contribution
 - Strong interpersonal skills, including writing and public speaking
 - Computer and internet skills
 - Knowledge of school systems
 - Can embrace and work through conflict without escalating it
 - Previous experience and/or education in gardening
- **Secure funding to start the hiring process.** Apply for farm to school grants and look at other sources of funding, such as the AmeriCorps VISTA program, in order to hire a part-time Farm to School Coordinator.
- **Farm to School Coordinator should spend the first month reviewing all Farm to School Program background and transition documents provided by the author to Reconnecting McDowell.** This will include reading about stakeholder relationships and understanding the history behind them so that the Coordinator can serve as an intermediary. During this month, the Coordinator should also set a meeting with each stakeholder to start building a relationship with them, using the contact list and interaction tips provided by the author. This person will also sit and observe the Farm to School Stakeholder Meeting the month they are hired.
- **After the first month, the Farm to School Coordinator will serve as the Meeting Leader for the Farm to School Stakeholder Meetings going forward.**

Recommendations

OBTAIN NEW KITCHEN EQUIPMENT

Due to all McDowell county school kitchens having outdated equipment and lacking the equipment needed for farm to school efforts, it is recommended that once a part-time Farm to School Coordinator is hired that this be one of the main focuses of their work.

Steps to Implementation

- **Finish obtaining a list of all needed equipment.** This work has already been started by the author and all information obtained is included in the Farm to School Background Information provided to Reconnecting McDowell. The part-time Farm to School Coordinator will need to meet with each schools Cafeteria Manager, as well as cooks if they are available, to create a list of needed equipment.
- **Collect testimonials from some Cafeteria Managers and cooks about why this equipment is needed.** Testimonials can be compelling to gaining funding through some farm to school funding opportunities and can also be used when asking for donations from school kitchen manufacturers.
- **Meet with Bonita Miano, Director of Child Nutrition, to get a list of current kitchen equipment manufacturers.** Use this list to draft letters to each manufacturer to ask for donations.
- **Create an ongoing list of farm to school funding opportunities.** Add on to list started by the author in the Farm to School Background Information document and update as new funding opportunities come available.
- **Collaborate with stakeholders to apply for school kitchen grants.** Make sure to discuss these opportunities during Farm to School Stakeholder Meetings and give updates on progress when funding is applied for.



Recommendations

DEVELOP PLANS FOR THE COMMERCIAL KITCHEN

As farm to school programming expands in the county, there will be an increased need for a facility for aggregation and processing. This will be used to aggregate all produce from school gardens and purchased from local farmers, where it will be cleaned and packaged to be sent out to schools to be used for school meals and snack programs.

Steps for Implementation

- **Work with Robert Diaz and Dennis Jarvis, Director, from the Career & Technology Center to figure out how building space can be utilized before it can be converted into a commercial kitchen.** There is a space that Mr. Jarvis wants to use for a commercial kitchen but right now, part of the building is being used for other purposes. The open space that is available for use within the building can be used for packing Community Support Agriculture (CSA) boxes for the McDowell County Youth Producers Association. More information about the space can be found in the Farm to School Background Information given to Reconnecting McDowell.
- **Create a plan by all stakeholders for how the commercial kitchen will be designed.** This should be discussed during the monthly Farm to School Stakeholder Meetings until a plan is agreed upon and should be in collaboration with a contractor to create building design and construction timeline. Once plan has been agreed upon and funding acquired, construction should begin.
- **Construct a written contract for producers selling into the McDowell County School System and a separate contract for produce coming from school gardens outlining procedures for how each entity must operate.** These contracts should include, but are not limited to, the name of the product, quantity being delivered with date of delivery, packaging requirements and other product specifications, payment terms and processes, timeline of tasks to be completed and by whom, and any food safety requirements.
- **Create a Best Practices Manual.** This will include information on how delivery, processing and distribution will take place at the aggregation and processing facility and will detail food safety requirements and procedures. A copy of this manual should be provided to each stakeholder and school.

Resources

Cook, John & Jeng, Karen. (2009). Child Food Insecurity: The Economic Impact on our Nation. Retrieved from <https://www.nokidhungry.org/sites/default/files/child-economy-study.pdf>

F.A.C.E.S. (2010). Blueprint Communities of McDowell County. Retrieved from http://www.facesfrn.com/Microsoft_Word_-_Narrative_for_BC_Team_Strategic_Plan.pdf

Feeding America. (2016). Map the Meal Gap: Child Food Insecurity in McDowell County. Retrieved from <http://map.feedingamerica.org/county/2016/child/west-virginia/county/mcdowell>

Food Research & Action Center. (2018). Eligibility for Community Eligibility Provision. Retrieved from <http://frac.org/community-eligibility-database/>

FRAC. (2017). Hunger & Health: The Impact of Poverty, Food Insecurity, and Poor Nutrition on Health and Well-Being. Retrieved from <http://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/hunger-health-impact-poverty-food-insecurity-health-well-being.pdf>

United States Census Bureau. (2017). Food Stamps/Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and Poverty Status in the Past 12 Months. Retrieved from <https://factfinder.census.gov/>

USDA Food and Nutrition Service. (2018). School Meals: Community Eligibility Provision. Retrieved from <https://www.fns.usda.gov/school-meals/community-eligibility-provision>

Workman, B. (2016). We're a Seasonal West Virginia Market! Retrieved from <https://bridgeportfarmersmarket.com/2016/07/08/were-a-seasonal-west-virginia-market/>

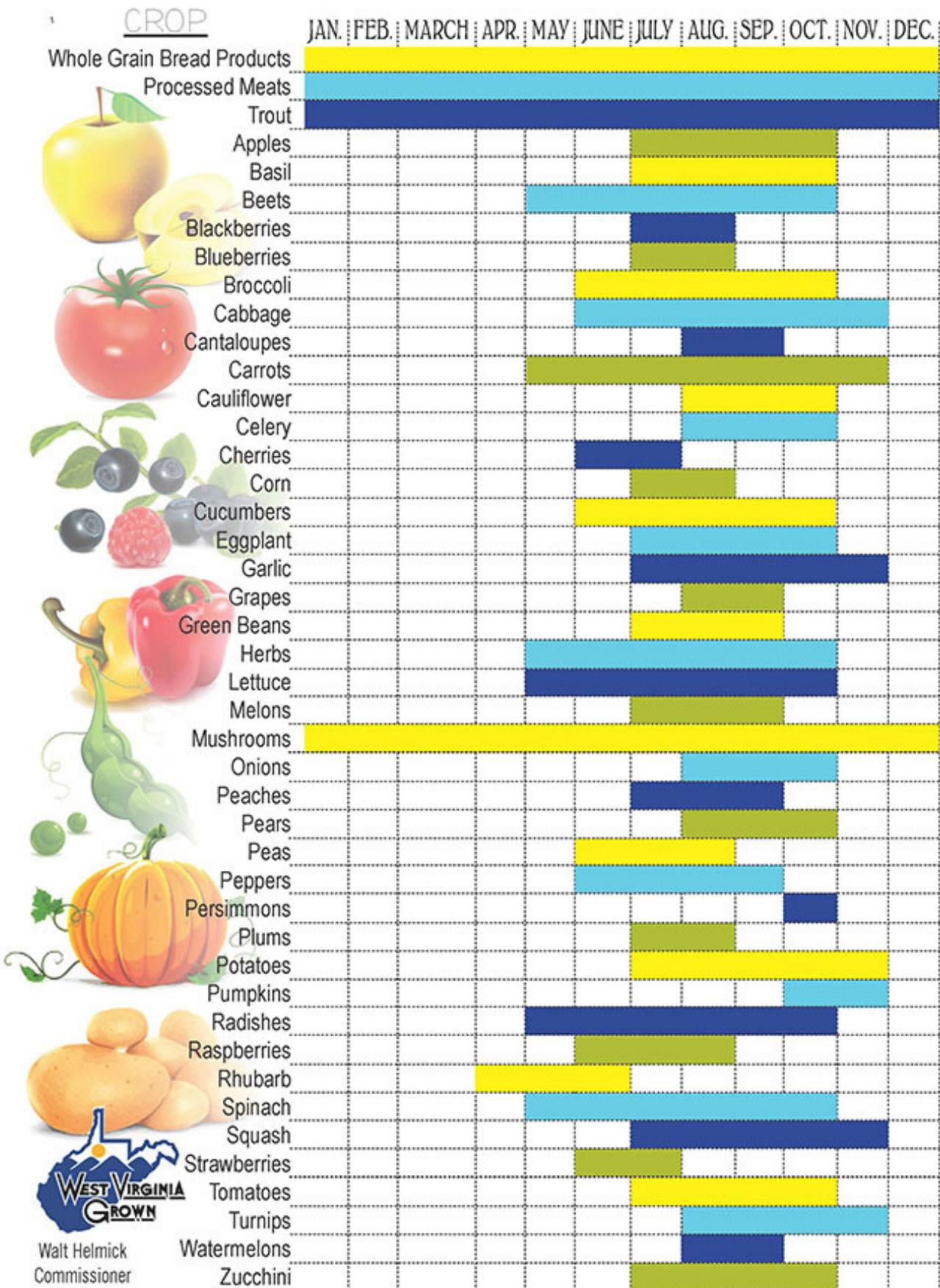
West Virginia Department of Agriculture. (2019). Farm to School. Retrieved from <https://agriculture.wv.gov/divisions/executive/Pages/Farm-to-School.aspx>

****All photos and graphs were either photographed or created by the author of this report, unless stated otherwise by the photo credit underneath.***

*****Due to the lack of written information and reports on and within McDowell County, this report was primarily comprised of information gathered from numerous individual interviews with various community members that work with or in the McDowell County School System. For more detailed information regarding this report and how it was created, please contact Chad Webb, the Reconnecting McDowell Partnership Coordinator at cwebb@aftwv.org***

WEST VIRGINIA GROWN

PRODUCE AVAILABILITY CALENDAR



Walt Helmick
Commissioner



Produce may be available during other times of the year using alternative growing methods such as hydroponics, high tunnels, etc.