



# 2015 ANNUAL REPORT





Grow Appalachia entered into its sixth year of production in 2015. We partnered with 40 sites in five central Appalachian states, serving 1570 families and more than 4644 gardeners. To date, 934 gardens have been established throughout the region, around \$75,000 in site-generated revenue has been collected, and close to \$780,000 worth of resources have been leveraged by partner site organizations.

For many Grow Appalachia participants and families, 2015 was noted as the most challenging growing season since the program began. Two bouts of winter weather almost a month apart saw many areas of Appalachia covered in more than a foot of snow and ice, forcing sites to postpone activities, some unable to begin until well into April. In July, record-breaking flooding devastated several counties in eastern Kentucky, leaving many of our participants in the area without gardens and much more. But what shone through the unpredictable weather and the higher-than-average crop failure was the resilience and determination of our gardeners, and that is what makes this program so special.

Grow Appalachia's basic mission still remains to help as many Appalachian families grow as much of their own food as possible, but at the end of the day, the families and participants are, quite literally, the hands and feet of the program, putting in the time and effort and braving countless setbacks and adversities in order to make their home, and ultimately their own portion of Appalachia, just a bit better.



# 2015 BY THE NUMBERS



**1,570 FAMILIES**

**120 JOBS**



**159 FAMILIES SELLING AT MARKET**



**\$80,146**  
**PRODUCE SOLD**

**61,091 POUNDS SHARED**



**580,109**  
**POUNDS GROWN**

**659 WORKSHOPS**

**4,644 GARDENERS**



# VALUE-ADDED WITH

Since the beginning, Grow Appalachia has sought to find multi-faceted solutions to food insecurity. Most often our gardeners simply produce food for themselves and their families, stocking pantries and freezers in the process. However, we have found many of our gardeners quickly move past home production to focus on the market and fortunately, our partner sites have both led and followed at times in this movement! Featured below are some of our partner sites that have taken the plunge and created products for the market.

## GREENHOUSE17



GreenHouse 17 is perhaps one of the most important programs in the country, healing women and families who have suffered through domestic violence. The site has incorporated the craft and distribution of value-added bodycare products into their healing-centered program. Survivors learn how to grow herbs, process them into value-added bodycare products and package them for market. This unique learning and healing opportunity sets GreenHouse17's mission and product apart from other shelters across the country.



## SCOTT CHRISTIAN CARE CENTER

If you had a chance to review 2014's Annual Report, you may remember our feature on the Scott Christian Care Center and their brand-new commercial processing space. A true labor of love and leveraging of resources, the kitchen has been open over a year now and has since sparked interest among the community for several value-added goodies. Products range from salsa and jellies to dried soup mixes.



# GROW APPALACHIA



Grow Appalachia is continually searching for resources to make sure commercial processing space is available in our service counties across the region. A hundred years ago, canneries were common in communities across the region. Today, value-added processing space looks much different, whether they are in extension offices, renovated school spaces or shared use church kitchens. All spaces allow producers to process value-added products for market and professionally compete in the marketplace.

## LAUREL COUNTY AFRICAN AMERICAN HERITAGE CENTER



The Laurel County African American Heritage Center sits nestled in neighborhoods in downtown London, Kentucky. After years of planning, the center has purchased a home across town that will be moved closer to the center for the purpose of a community commercial processing space. Within the past few years, the LCAAHC has worked with over 5 hives in town producing honey and selling at its central location and at local festivals. The honey project has brought pollinators into town and has also given the center a distinctive opportunity to communicate its mission and goals to the community.



## THE DAVID SCHOOL

The David School is an alternative high school tucked behind the tall mountains of Floyd Co., KY. Situated very close to the high school is a high tunnel in full production nearly year round. Students at the school learn how to manage a garden, grow under protected agriculture and process hot sauce with peppers and tomatoes grown on site.

# OUR HEIRLOOM BEAN PROJECT

Heirloom beans are a cultural commodity throughout Appalachia. With numerous varieties in existence today, each bean is rich with history, sometimes spanning hundreds of years. Of course, growing beans in Appalachia is just as common as enjoying them. Beginning in the summer of 2015, Grow Appalachia, with the aid of a Berea College student, began a research project, identifying and implementing several trellising and companion planting techniques, with four different varieties of heirloom beans. Before the project began, surplus bean seeds were disseminated to interested Grow Appalachia participants for their own gardens. The research project spanned from May until August, located on the property of Grow Appalachia's research garden. Varieties grown included the Coy Field, Cliffie Boyd Strong Cut-Short Greasy, the Caseknife, and the Junior Snelson tick bean. Beans were companion-planted with Nasturtiums and Marigolds, and donated bamboo poles provided a unique "teepee" as a trellising technique. At the end of the summer, the beans were left to dry, where they were soon harvested and retained to be used for seed for future growing seasons. Thousands of seeds were harvested, and they will be again distributed to interested growers in 2016.





# BEYOND THE TRADITIONAL CLASSROOM

Michelle Morgan, Appalachian Sustainable Development's Grow Your Own Program



One of my favorite groups to work with is the Abingdon High School Special Needs Class. I never thought about what happens when young people with special needs graduate from high school. A few will go on to college and get jobs, but some will simply stay home due to their limitations. Appalachian Sustainable Development's Deni Peterson has crafted a program that promotes growth beyond the classroom not only mentally, but physically as well. Gardening gives children the opportunity to discover their own talents that would otherwise remain hidden in a traditional classroom.

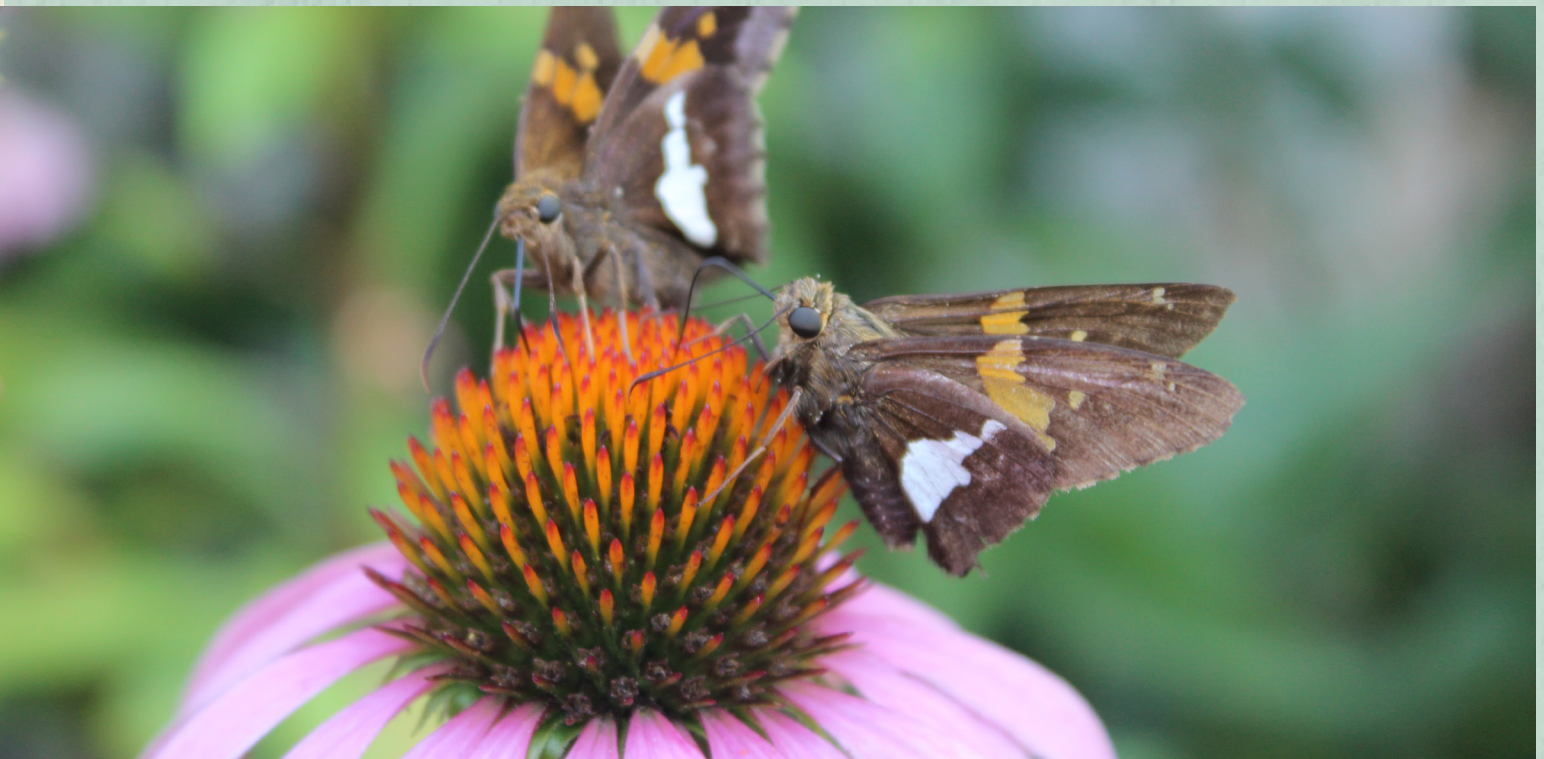


Students in the program go to the Farmer's Market and sell the produce that they harvest on Tuesday mornings to raise money for the Special Olympics and educational support for the program. This allows them to interact with the general public, learn to count money and to make change.

However, bigger things are beginning to take form for this group of students as Mellow Mushroom has approached our partner site coordinator to purchase vegetables from the training garden and give our students another new marketing opportunity.

When our students graduate from high school, most will be able to manage a garden of their own and reap the benefits of a harvest, but all of them leave with a greater awareness of their own abilities and a greater sense of pride. I am excited to see what good things unfold for our students and their families!





# POLLEN

2015 became the inaugural year for “Pollen”, an online literary journal compiled and edited entirely by former Grow Appalachia AmeriCorps VISTA, Jeffrey Helton. The focus for Pollen shied away from the technicalities of gardening and growing and instead, put a heart into the “Appalachia” of Grow Appalachia, showcasing the written and visual arts from Appalachians in Kentucky and beyond.

The call for submissions began in November of 2014 and over two dozen pieces of poetry, short nonfiction, photography, drawings, and personal essays were submitted for consideration. After careful consideration and selection, seventeen pieces total were drafted into the first edition, which was launched on Earth Day, April 22, 2015.

From the editor’s note: “In truth, Appalachia is full of complication and paradox. But it’s also a richly-textured place where diverse voices interact to preserve tradition while also seeking a footing in the changing world...Grow Appalachia collects a lot of hard data on our partners, but we’ve never provided them with a space for storytelling...They use the lenses of photography, poetry, and prose to fill their experiences with narrative meaning while shaping the evolving story of our region.”

A second edition is set to be released in spring 2016. Submissions are now being accepted at [pollen@growappalachia.org](mailto:pollen@growappalachia.org). Submit by 5:00pm, March 15, 2016.

To view the first edition of *Pollen* visit:  
<http://www.berea.edu/grow-appalachia/files/2015/04/Pollen-2015.pdf>



# THE SUMMER FOOD SERVICE PROGRAM



This year, Grow Appalachia Headquarters is addressing child hunger in a unique way. In the town of Berea, KY, we're partnering with local organizations, community members, and Berea College's Partners for Education to implement a mobile-based, locally sourced Summer Food Service Program. The Summer Food Service Program is a USDA-sponsored program that aims to provide meals to children eighteen and under during the summer months when students are out of school and do not have access to the National School Lunch and School Breakfast programs.

Grow Appalachia's partner site, Cowan Creek Community Center, has been delivering meals to youth in Letcher County through SFSP for two years. The program calls itself home at the Letcher County Farmers Market where kids can get a free breakfast, while their parents buy groceries at the market. Smoothies and breakfast burritos are distributed through a food truck at the market every Saturday. Letcher County's Summer Feeding Program provides a healthy meal to children who might not otherwise get more than one meal throughout the day.



Through partnering with Berea College's Dining Services and Motor Pool, we'll be able to distribute locally sourced meals throughout Berea using Berea College vehicles. By delivering meals to locations near apartment complexes and mobile home neighborhoods in Berea, we'll be able to reach concentrated areas of students. Delivering meals will allow us to address the challenge that many students who might depend on Summer Food Service Programs often lack: access to reliable transportation or safe and adequate sidewalks.

Administering the Summer Food Service Program meal delivery through a local, reputable institution of higher learning in our town allows us to lead the way for organizations throughout Kentucky to do the same. We will be the first college/university based organization in Kentucky to operate an open mobile Summer Food Service Program. Not only will we be able to provide a case-study style model for other institutions of higher learning, we will also be able to provide replicable best-practice recommendations to other Grow Appalachia partner sites with nearby colleges and universities.



# CREATING SUSTAINABILITY



2015 was a big year for the high tunnel enterprise at Grow Appalachia! In March, we hired a new installation specialist and manufactured over 30 tunnels in four different states (Kentucky, Tennessee, West Virginia and Virginia). That brings our total number of high tunnels manufactured and constructed, since 2012, to more than 60! High tunnels are without a doubt one of the most successful components of the overall Grow Appalachia program, and we feel as if it's only just taken off! More than that, the high tunnel program at Grow Appalachia has empowered both families and individual producers with a versatile, durable, scale-appropriate structure that delivers the benefit of growing beyond the traditional parameters of a gardening season. On average, those who utilize high tunnels gain an additional six weeks of growing time. This translates into produce availability for consumers well before and after the gardening season, giving these growers a competitive niche in the marketplace, as well as providing additional income on an often year-round basis. Our High Tunnel program incorporates long-term programmatic sustainability to ensure our mission to help as many Appalachian families grow as much of their own food as possible is carried out for years to come.

All Grow Appalachia sites are required to find resources in their communities through leveraging Grow Appalachia funding. We at HQ emphasize this heavily to our partner sites, so this year we took an intentional approach to address how HQ could leverage resources and income for ourselves. Having said that, we're thrilled to announce that we have a few exciting programs in the works for seeking to continue to meet growing needs for Appalachian families. Follow us throughout the coming year as we journey and explore varying ways to keep our program sustainable and long-lasting!



# WITH HIGH TUNNELS



Pictured here are photographs from one of our high tunnel builds this year in Russellville, Kentucky. This build happened to be particularly unique as we were fortunate to partner with the Russellville Urban Gardening Project to build high tunnels in a low-income, historically African American community in the heart of town.

Inmates from the local prison helped install the tunnels which will be used to grow food for the community as well as serve as an education and demonstration site for local members.

To learn more about the build, visit the Bowling Green Daily News and read their feature about our day with the RUGP!



*All photos are courtesy of the Bowling Green Daily News.*





# FARMACY

take voucher to the market manager  
or a market assistant before visiting  
any booths.

## FARMACY

### LETCHER COUNTY, KENTUCKY



Two years after the grand opening of the Letcher County Farmers' Market, a partnership formed between a local healthcare provider, members of the community and LCFM growers.

Last year, Mountain Comprehensive Health Corporation and the LCFM worked to bring forth a new initiative to the local community around healthy food. Out of this initiative the FARMacy program was born.

Patients with illnesses that could be ameliorated with healthier eating habits were given prescriptions for fresh fruits and vegetables to be redeemed at the Farmers' Market, all at no cost to the patient. The prescription is then exchanged for market vouchers.

The cost for a prescription is \$1 per day per family member, to not exceed \$14 for an individual. The program is not a one-time transaction, but rather, throughout the growing season, each week the market is open.

FARMacy has been received with overwhelmingly positive reviews. According to Letcher County Grow Appalachia site coordinator Valerie Horn, "it's not going to fix all ails, but it does have the potential of improving health in a community. I can't say enough good things about it." In 2015, Letcher County Grow Appalachia market participants sold more than \$31,000 worth of produce.

FARMacy is a replicable model that we hope will eventually be common at many of our Grow Appalachia sites and their farmers' markets. If you are interested in the program, talk to healthcare providers in your community and set up a meeting at your local farmers market. If you'd like to learn more about the FARMacy program in Letcher County, visit the Letcher County Farmers Market website where you can read more about how the program works to meet the needs of Letcher County families.



# NOTES FROM THE DIRECTOR



**DAVID COOKE, DIRECTOR**

Author Timothy Hallinan, in his latest novel, speaks of the spirit as "...the light that our lives are wrapped around". When I think about the wonderful rural, Central Appalachian non-profits we work in partnership with and the many hundreds of families we serve together, that word spirit comes immediately to mind. We work primarily in counties which are and have been profoundly impacted by the coal industry. The last couple of decades, and in particular the last few years, have seen immense turmoil caused by changes in that industry. The lives of tens of thousands of families have changed in enormous ways. Hard times have gotten harder and things will never be the same. None of this is meant as a political statement of any kind, just a factual observation. The great light that is the spirit of these strong and stoic people has not dimmed, but rather has strengthened with the determination that collectively we can build a better future for the region. Grow Appalachia is recognized as an optimistic voice in this transformation and as a steady source of training and logistical resources. During this transition, we support these folks in their quest to learn how to grow their own food in an efficient and sustainable manner, cook that produce in heart healthy ways, and to preserve their excess so that they can literally eat out of their gardens year-round. I have been involved in community based social change work in central Appalachia for almost a quarter of a century. If I have learned one thing in that time it is that if we can help folks learn effective ways to address a challenge, equip them with good tools and supplies, and get out of their way, they can deal with their own problems pretty well. We are lucky to have a funder who approaches Grow Appalachia in much the same way. John Paul Dejoria has generously supported us from our beginning seven years ago. Indeed it was his charge to help families become more food secure that began this epic trip. And it is our impact that he cares about. The numbers shared with you in this report tell that part of the story.

I think often of my father as I do this job. He was the youngest of sixteen children who grew up on a small hillside farm in Wyoming County, WV. He never finished high school but he was the smartest man I have ever known; he was not a large man but he has always been a giant in my life. And his spirit still shines like a beacon in the lives of his children and grandchildren and the many people touched by his gentle generosity. The times I feel most at peace are the days when I feel that he would believe that I put in a good day's work, that I made a difference.

And that is Grow Appalachia, really. Putting in a good day's work every day; treating people with respect and dignity; helping folks to have more food secure lives. Helping all those lights shine a little bit brighter.





# REFLECTIONS FROM THE FIELD

*"In Appalachia it is our lifestyle to grow our food and live off the food we grow... It's our culture, it's in our blood; the dirt in our mountains runs through my veins and I know it will serve me well."*

–Kris Arbuckle (High Rocks gardener)



*"Agriculture has literally saved my life... My sorghum crop failed miserably, but I got my life back."*

–Eric Grandon (Vets to Ag gardener)



*"Gardening...brings back good memories of when we was little and my parents would take us to the garden to help...After all we all know that food does taste so much better when you really work for it."*

–PEP gardener

*"We got our grandchildren involved with us... They got to plant the seeds, water them and watch them grow. It was such a delight seeing how excited they would get everyday... They tell everyone about their garden."*

–Gardener from Build It Up East TN

*"This past year has done so much to help me understand myself better, accept myself, and leverage my unique strengths, and I am grateful that I could do all of this while helping this organization carry out such amazing, necessary work."*

–Jeffrey Helton (former HQ VISTA)



*"It is so much more than just growing gardens... All I know is I have never worked harder, slept as little as I do now or had more respect and appreciation for so many here. Every single day I am inspired by someone and their story here, when I take the time to listen."*

–Valerie Horn (site coordinator at Cowan Creek)



*"This patch of tilled earth will provide ample food for my family...on those mornings as I walk the rows, it is not food for the body that I receive, but food for the soul."*

–Bryant Kibler (site coordinator at St. Timothy's)



*"I've learned that there are wonderful spirits all around us if we just take a moment to introduce ourselves."*

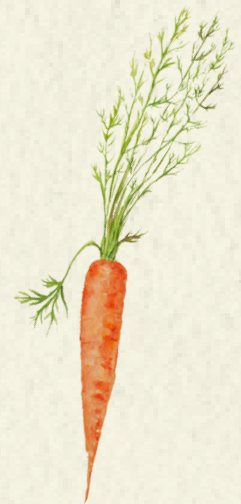
–Deni Peterson (site coordinator at ASD)

*"There is no place quite like the garden. I am very thankful for the Grow Appalachia program."*

–Rhonda West (Scott County Christian Care Center employee)

*"We've had so many special times together growing this food, preparing these vegetables and fruits to eat, learning and working together, getting to know each other better. It's just my humble honor to be a part of this project and I'm in awe of how much food we've grown."*

–Sue Granger (assistant coordinator at LMU)



*"It made me so happy to see people picking turnips and turnip greens last night to take home to try for the FIRST TIME."*

–Maria Arnot (site coordinator at Sustainable Williamson)



*"My family was poor, but I was lucky to live where I did and to have the opportunity to garden and eat fresh food whenever I wanted. Many other low-income Appalachians and Kentuckians are not as lucky."*

–Alix Burke (HQ/KAFB VISTA)

*"The atmosphere that blankets this house and this land is unmatched, and I think it's safe to say that none of us could have asked for a better experience."*

–Bri McIntyre (spring breaker volunteer at GH17)





Grow Appalachia  
CPO 2122  
101 Chestnut St.  
Berea, KY 40404