**Building a Local Food Economy Workshop**

**Saturday afternoon**

*Martin Richards, Community Farm Alliance (CFA)*

*Anthony Flaccavento, SW Virginia*

*Todd Howard, Floyd county farmer, CFA board*

*Alexa Arnold, CFA organizer*

**Context:**

Martin Richards opened the session noting that today agriculture is at the intersection of many issues including climate change, water supplies, energy issues, and food systems. The dominate food system is heavily dependent on fossil fuels.

Central Appalachia can be a model for addressing many issues. “It is the culture of Appalachia that offers the greatest hope. A culture of food can help lead the conversation. Families often add odds over the issue can literally and figuratively come together around food.”

Locally produced food is a pathway to a sustainable economy. It’s not the silver bullet but it will help. Local farming can have a big multiplier effect in terms of jobs. 7 new farmers markets in 7 coal producing counties that currently don’t have them could produce $250,000 in annual sales, $482,000 in local income and 30 new jobs. “With 8 state parks, numerous hospitals, and many school districts, institutional food sales are a huge potential market for local food.” A barrier is public policy.

**Case Studies:**

Anthony Flaccavento:

SCALE, inc. [www.ruralscale.com](http://www.ruralscale.com)

“For a long, long time food and farming were thought of nothing more than something that was dying in Central Appalachia and all over the country.” “We’ve made some progress, but it’s a fair question to ask what kind of impact it can have.”

It’s been a steady shift in Southwest Virginia. There’s now more interest in local foods and farm diversification. They’ve helped change the way the Appalachian Regional Commission is talking about the food economy.

Farmers markets are growing. In VA, they’ve more than doubled since 2005. There’s strong demand, across the income spectrum, for folks who want to eat fresh and eat local. Farmers markets help connect small farmers to consumers.

They’ve also started a “value chain” called Appalachian Harvest. This is a coordinated system in which 60-70 farmers come together and pool their produce and eggs in order to sell to larger markets. “Value chains are a key piece for growing a local food economy. There’s a logical cap to how much we can grow for farmers markets. We need value chains to put local food in places where other folks shop or dine.”

Anthony noted that there are three main challenges: Culture. Economic. Public policy. In terms of culture, the fast food industry is still growing and outpacing local food. In terms of economic challenges, it’s important to keep the dollars local (including, for instance, money spent on marketing). Finally, while there have been some improvements in policies, Big Ag still wins.

Assets we have include the fact that a local food economy has taken hold as well as the emergence of young folks who are interested. Tobacco farmers are an asset and land grant universities and cooperative extension offices are doing more.

“Our goal should not be exotic products and niche markets but a local food economy: diverse, healthy, regular foods.” “Arugula alone won’t save rural America.”

Alexa Arnold:

Community Farm Alliance coordinates the Eastern Kentucky Food Systems Collaborative--a network focused on building a local foods system in EKY. It includes farmers, gardeners, extension officers, etc.

People get together regionally to have a dialogue about how to support the region. They focus on networking. Over 75 people came to the last meeting. They have workgroups: supporting producers; supporting community education; supporting community and school gardens; market development.

“Setting aside the space for people to talk and discuss ideas have led to some great things. They are sharing ideas and coming up with some new projects. They’re going back to local communities and doing incredible things.”

Farmer’s Market Meetings and Farm Field Days are hosted by the Collaborative. People from over 30 EKY counties have come out to meetings. Next meeting: May 16 in Leslie County, Hyden. “How to Start a Buy Local Campaign”

[www.appalfoods.org](http://www.appalfoods.org)

Todd Howard:

Co-founder, Floyd County Farmers Market

Todd is a farmer who co-founded the Floyd County Farmers Market and is involved in lots of work to build a local food economy in eastern Kentucky. He used to work in the coal industry but left to farm on his family’s homeplace.

The Floyd County Farmers Market has evolved and is now in a really good place. They’ve moved locations but now have lots of local support from the St. Vincent Mission, local extension office, local government and more. Local businesses have donated signs, etc.

In 2012, St. Vincent Mission hosted a meeting that over 50 people attended. There was clear interest in the farmers market. Producers came with lots of questions but they became engaged and provided a sense of direction.

“We had a ton of community support and I can’t tell you how important it is to have that kind of community support.” In 2012, the farmers market grossed $23,000. They had an average of 200 customers each Saturday.

Now, the local producers are looking to find and develop other markets. They’re working with CFA to do a Community Food Systems Assessment that surveys producers about what they’re growing and it surveys consumers about what they want, etc. They’re exploring assets and barriers.

“We can create real jobs through agriculture.” “What we’re doing in Floyd County will be easily replicable in other counties.” “We’ve got to learn to cooperate. The information we’re gathering shouldn’t just stay in Floyd County. We’ve got to share what we know and what we’ve learned.”

“We’re right on the cusp of creating small networks throughout Eastern KY connected together to help feed our region and beyond.”

**Q&A**

*What’s ARC done? Were they making a network? Also, what about connections to schools?*

ARC is starting to support some ideas and figure out what they can build on. In terms of public schools, there’s lots of potential but they can also be a tough nut to crack. Food safety regulations are a new challenge. Even though the food safety issues in recent years come out of industrial agriculture facilities, the standards have to also be borne by small farmers. CFA is part of the state’s Farm to School Task Force.

*Land ownership issues?*

Martin noted that CFA is exploring a land link program, connecting landowners with young farmers who don’t have land.

*Is there a market for growing heirloom seeds to sell?*

It’s taking off. Once local foods take off, other things take off. Need for seeds, compost, etc. Appalachia has a great reservoir of heirloom seeds. How do we keep the value there?

*What are the challenges to creating a value chain in eastern Kentucky?*

You need money. You need a central distribution center. The best thing to do is to start with the limited investments you have and see if it will work. You have to have enough people growing whatever you plan to sell to have enough product to make it. And you need a market.