



## APPALACHIAN FOODSHED PROJECT

*Enhancing Food Security by Cultivating Resilient Food Systems and Communities*

# Capacity Building Forum

Oct. 28-29, 2011

Blacksburg, VA

### Goals of the Forum:

- Increase capacities of all stakeholders to effectively engage in food systems work;
- Increase the effectiveness of existing partnerships;
- Improve networks and knowledge building among organizations engaged in partnerships;
- Develop a preliminary participatory model of the Appalachian regional foodshed that can be used to analyze the impacts of changes within the food system;
- Create a vision for local and regional food systems work in Appalachia;
- Build a foodshed coalition to address food security issues across state lines in Appalachia;
- Develop a shared understanding of issues of food security in Appalachia; and
- Shape the activities and direction of the Appalachian Foodshed Project.

### Forum brings together stakeholders, community practitioners, community liaisons, and academics to engage in dialogue on food security in Appalachia.

This past October, 45 people gathered in Blacksburg, Virginia to share their knowledge of food security in Appalachia. The Capacity Building Forum was intended to bring together people engaged in food systems work, including nutritionists, producers, academics, extension agents, community organizers, activists, and emergency food providers. Over a day and a half, participants learned from one another through structured dialogue, sharing stories of their successes and opportunities for future work.

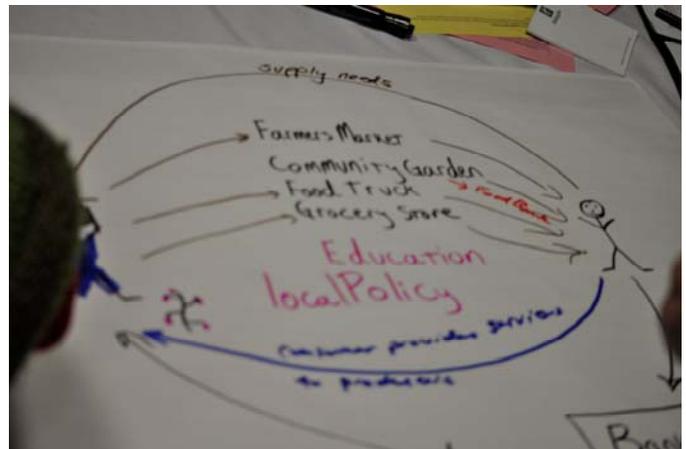
As part of the Forum, participants explored ways to work together, and identified the keys for effective collaboration.

These included:

- \* making sure everyone is at the table,
- \* establishing good communication,
- \* facilitating trust,
- \* cultivating patience,
- \* developing shared resources,

- \* making time for celebration,
- \* distributing leadership,
- \* active listening,
- \* ensuring clear benefits to participants,
- \* creating a shared vision,
- \* being willing to learn,
- \* sharing credit,
- \* engaging voices, and
- \* using inclusive language.

Participants also worked together to create



Participants worked in small groups and drew visual representations of the food system. The visuals were then used as the basis for creating a draft of a computer model.

visual diagrams, or “maps” of the food system. The maps identified key components in the food system, and then used visual elements to show how those components linked together. The group maps were then put together into a larger map—



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*A collaborative effort of North Carolina State University, Virginia Tech, West Virginia University, and community stakeholders*

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- ◆ The Appalachian Foodshed Project is using a **foodshed concept to address issues of food security in West Virginia and the Appalachian regions of North Carolina and Virginia**. Similar to the concept of a watershed, a foodshed takes into account everything between where food is produced and where it is consumed. This includes the farms and gardens used to raise food, travel routes used to transport products, processing facilities, distribution (farmers markets, brokers, retailers), and the restaurants, institutions, and homes where we all eat.
- ◆ The Appalachian Foodshed Project is designed to build on the work that is already happening in Appalachia, facilitating and enhancing formal and informal work by creating **a network of organizations and individuals** who are engaging similar issues related to community development, economic viability, health and nutrition, food access, social justice, and agriculture.
- ◆ By working collaboratively, the Foodshed Project hopes **to build on the human and natural resources in the region** to improve access, expand food security, and enhance food economies, especially in communities that have been underserved and are economically vulnerable.
- ◆ The Foodshed Project will work to **cultivate resilient food systems within the region**. This means creatively working with communities, farmers, policymakers, non-profits, and institutions to better understand the food system and implement changes that have long term benefits for all people in the region.

## Capacity Building Forum (*continued*)



Participants discussing their work in the food system.

the first draft of a computer model of the food system.

Participants also came up with a series of “provocative propositions”—concepts that could meaningfully address food security in Appalachia. The group decided to focus on four propositions:

- \* What if every school had a garden, kitchen, and curriculum?
- \* What if policy makers actively engaged in food work?
- \* What if no one had to choose between food and other basic necessities?
- \* What if every farmer had access to scale-appropriate processing facilities?

Participants then went to work on the proposition that resonated most with them, identifying actions that could actually bring those propositions to life. The conversation created lots of energy, and began to open up the possibilities for collaborative food systems work in Appalachia.

At the end of the Forum, participants broke up into their state groups, and began discussing next steps. Each state planned regional meetings for the near future, to continue the work begun at the Forum, and to bring more voices to the table.

As a follow up to the Capacity Building Forum, a Search Conference has been planned for March of 2011.

*For more information, and additional details from the Forum, please contact Nikki D'Adamo-Damery, Project Coordinator: nikkid11@vt.edu or 540-231-22654*