



Healthy Families - Family Farms

Appalachian Sustainable Development



Overview

Appalachian Sustainable Development's (ASD) Healthy Families – Family Farms (HFFF) program purchases “seconds” produce from local farmers and in turn donates it to area food banks and food pantries. Seconds produce is just as delicious and nutritious as #1 quality graded produce, but does not meet the strict shape, size and color standards of grocery stores.

Since 2004, the program has donated more than 1.2 million pounds of produce to the Feeding America food bank of Southwest Virginia and other smaller local food pantries. The program is funded primarily through personal donations. It is part of ASD's mission to meet people where they are and move them along a food access continuum, beginning with providing access to fresh, healthy food and culminating in teaching them how to grow, preserve and even sell their own food.

1.2 million pounds of seconds **produce bought** from farmers and donated to **food banks & pantries**



Opportunity Seized

The costs of fresh foods in grocery stores and supermarkets is escalating. Many people, especially those who are ineligible for SNAP, increasingly rely on the food available from food pantries, much of which is nonperishable and processed food. As a consequence, the diets of food pantry recipients and their families lack important nutrition that comes from consuming fresh foods.

Meanwhile, seconds produce can amount to 20-50% of a farmer's production, depending on the crop, weather, and other conditions. Without a market for this produce, farmers have little incentive to harvest it.



Key Ingredients

DEEP RESPECT FOR EVERYONE IN THE PROCESS

This program respects the needs of food pantry recipients by providing them with food that is fresh, not rotten or spoiled, and equally nutritious and delicious to what's being sold at the grocery store. It also respects the needs of farmers by purchasing their produce instead of requesting it as a donation, thus honoring that farmers earn a living selling what they produce.



STRONG COMMUNICATION CHANNELS AMONG PARTICIPANTS

The logistics behind a program like HFFF can be complex, and even more so as the program scales up. Clear communication and establishing a working rhythm with farmers, the food hub, and food banks/pantries are the keys to coordinating the movement of all that produce.

A COMMITTED & ENGAGED COMMUNITY

At the community level, the outcomes of a program like HFFF can parallel those of national-scale nutrition incentive program, without the administrative burden or limits to who can be served. By partnering with stakeholders that share a commitment to the program and benefit from its outcomes, HFFF is able to meet needs without limitations.



Lessons & Best Practices

MAXIMIZE THE INCENTIVES OF FARMERS TO HARVEST SECONDS

Many large-scale farmers sell produce direct to consumers and may not see the benefit of transporting pre-graded seconds to the food hub to sell to the HFFF program. Smaller-scale farmers may leave seconds in the field if they lack the financial incentive of a market to make the harvesting worthwhile. The food hub now offers farmers the ability to grade their produce on site, where they have a built-in market for both their #1 quality grade and seconds produce. In addition, some farmers, regardless of the scale of their operations, share a personal commitment to the goals of the program and will sell their seconds to HFFF to support its outcomes.

UNDERSTAND CONSUMER PREFERENCES

Donated food does little good if the recipients don't recognize a food, like eating it, or know how to prepare it at home. The food bank offers cooking demonstrations so clients learn how to prepare something they enjoy using unfamiliar produce.



BUILD STRONG PARTNERSHIPS TO KEEP UP WITH SCALE

When HFFF started, excess capacity in trucks leaving the food hub could be used to deliver purchased seconds to the food pantry. Now that operations have scaled, dedicated deliveries are required, creating the need for different logistical solutions. Partnering with committed stakeholders, whether it's the food bank, the food hub or the farmers, opens more channels to manage the logistics of getting purchased seconds to the food banks 60 miles away.



Impact on Health

HEALTHIER FOOD OPTIONS ARE MORE AVAILABLE TO LOW-INCOME FAMILIES

Many low-income families who rely on the food bank are ineligible for SNAP, so if not for healthy fresh food options at the food bank, they would likely go without. In addition, the food bank offers nutritional education and materials designed to deepen their customers' understanding of the importance of eating fresh, healthy food.



Impact on the Economy

FARMERS' INCOMES INCREASE

The HFFF program provides local farmers a market for their seconds produce so they can earn additional income. In aggregate, farmers receive between \$25,000-35,000 annually. At the same time, it reduces food waste in the system, which is a problem with both economic and health consequences.



What's in Store

ASD currently operates the HFFF program out of the Duffield, VA, food hub. However, the delivery routes ASD's Appalachian Harvest food hub serves stretch from Maryland to Georgia. There is potential to expand the program to other food hubs within that footprint and provide healthy food access to more people in need.

ASD is also considering a model that co-locates a food hub with a food bank. This model is being piloted in other states and can dramatically lower transaction costs of moving produce between locations. It also has the potential to increase available donations since farmers using the food hub may be more inclined to sell their seconds when they can see the immediate benefit in their own communities.



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