

# Nourishing Networks Workshop

**Wetzel County – February 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2018**

*Preliminary Report*

# **Nourishing Networks Wetzel County: Workshop Reflections and Report**

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## **Introduction**

Each year we witness a widening gap in the U.S. between those who can access high quality, affordable, nutritious foods and those who cannot. Across West Virginia, where disparities in food access are particularly acute, many intrepid advocates are working hard to close that gap. How can we bring these diverse food access initiatives together around one table to advance community health and wellbeing for all West Virginians?

On February 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2018 the Wetzel County Nourishing Networks Workshop brought together folks from different backgrounds, expertise, and experience to explore food access barriers and the effectiveness of healthy food access strategies in Wetzel County. We had some fun, learned together, and used shared tools to deepen our understanding of what limits access to healthy food and what we can do about it. Our workshop advanced through three stages.

- 1.** First we worked as a team to conduct a rapid assessment of healthy food access barriers in Wetzel County. Participants worked together to identify access barriers.
- 2.** Second the room identified community assets, food resources, and existing initiatives in Wetzel County which could be mobilized to improve access to healthy food for all.
- 3.** Third, reflecting on the key barriers to healthy food access in Wetzel and the major assets that could be mobilized our teams developed strategies to improve access to healthy food.

Over the course of a mere 5.5 hours (10:30am-4pm), our 12 participants collectively identified:

**75+ Healthy Food Access Barriers**

**52+ Community Assets to Support Healthy Food Initiatives**

**6+ New Healthy Food Access Strategies**

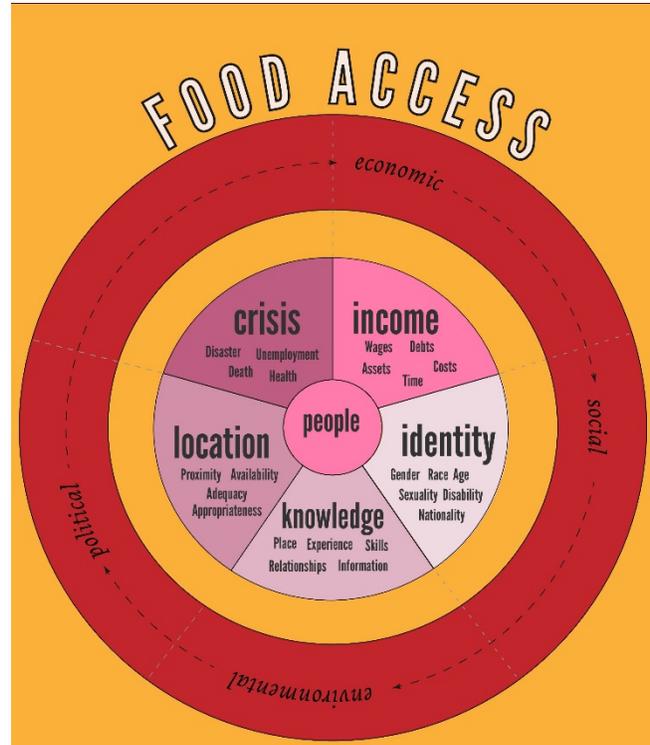
In this brief reflection on the workshop we present the results of these discussions, collective analyses and strategic planning exercises. The intention of the document is to inform the next phase of consultation among those who wish to continue working together to advance a healthy food access plan for Wetzel County. Here we aim to document and represent the findings our collective experiment in its rawest format. In the conclusion your facilitators offer their reflections on the process and potential next steps.

Overall, we found the Wetzel County Nourishing Networks Workshop to be a tremendous success and look forward to accompanying you in a process of planning and action that enhances the amazing work you are doing to improve access to healthy food in Wetzel County and beyond.

## Access Barriers: What limits people's access to healthy food?

At the center of our concern about healthy food access is people. Across West Virginia many people confront significant barriers to accessing affordable, adequate, nutritious foods. Some of the forces that affect people's ability to access healthy food are represented in our food access barriers wheel (represented to the right). The inner circle is composed of a series of social constraints that have the most direct impact on the ability of an individual, a household, or a community to access food.

**Income** refers to the effect of someone's resources in wages or assets as well as the costs of food, debts carried, and the time limits placed on those who work rather than growing food for themselves. As most people in the U.S. work to earn money to buy food, this is the largest constraint on food access. **Identity** refers to the way someone's gender, race, disability, sexuality, nationality or age affects their ability to access food. **Knowledge** refers to what people know, what experience or skills they have, their place-based understanding, and the relationships they have with others. **Location** refers to people's proximity to healthy food outlets, the availability of particular foods, as well as the ability to grow food. And last, **Crisis** refers to disasters, unemployment, health issue or death that can undermine food access for an individual, household or community.



At any one time, people may confront one or more of these social constraints to accessing healthy food. Furthermore, there are a range of indirect forces that also shape access. We characterize these as broad structural forces such as economic change (financial crisis, mine closures), political change (budget cuts, program elimination), environmental change (flooding, pollution), or social change (expansion or reduction in civil rights). These indirect structural forces are also constantly changing and thereby shaping the direct forces that shape people's access to healthy food. Environmental change in the form of a flood disaster. Economic change in the form of layoffs or wage reductions. Social change in the form of racism and marginalization. Political change in the form of cutting nutritional program budgets. In conjunction we understand people's ability to navigate these barriers to be harrowing at best. It is for this reason that there are various healthy food access initiatives that approach these barriers and help people to overcome them.

## Wetzel County: Healthy Food Access Barriers

According to the workshop participants, low-income households in Wetzel County confront significant barriers to accessing healthy food. Furthermore, participant observed particular gaps in the strategic efforts to improve access to healthy food. These concerns can be grouped into the following five main categories:

### Income Barriers

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- Lots of people on state assistance
- Nontraditional homelessness issue in Wetzel (E.g. kids living with grandparents)
  - At least 20 students are homeless
- Farms stop farming & put trailers/campers on property as an investment instead because rent is so high in Wetzel that they can make more money doing this than farming
- Smithfield and Short Line areas are very impoverished – food access ranking should be red and not orange
- Lots of oil drilling in Wetzel but the employees are not from Wetzel - in fact many are from outside states
- Out of 281 townships in WV, Littleton (of Wetzel) has the lowest income per capita and their foodbank is calling constantly for food
- No job opportunities
- Entire hundred area a “bedroom community”
- People can’t pay of bills, sometimes for many years
- Issues passing a drug test
- Flooding in Hundred took away a grocery store
- People cannot afford a car and face low food access
- No public transportation
- Senior centers have transportation – but only accessible to seniors
- It takes an income to buy the proper tools to be able to do self-provisioning
- Rent went from \$300-\$400 to \$800 a month about 10 years ago
- Gas prices are high in New Martinsville
- Many families have started doubling up to meet basic needs
- WIC is difficult because they don’t know how to get it to people and people do not use it at markets
- People’s time is limited
- Major lack of industry in the last 15 years (Bayer, PPG, and OSI all left)

### Identity Barriers

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- People too proud to ask for help
- Parents will return food from backpacks
  - Kids hiding food along the walk home so parents will not take it away
- No shaming like hand stamps on hands of children takes place in schools in the lunch line
- Farmers market tokens cause shaming – It’s like using monopoly money to buy carrots

- Issues getting vouchers to seniors and getting them to places to use them
- Mothers with children cannot always get to markets

## Knowledge Barriers

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- Being able to identify types of fresh produce and cook with it
- Very few home ec. classes anymore in schools
- There are state guidelines on this
- They can sometimes only make pastries in these classes
- Staffing, scheduling issues in high schools
- Communication issues, especially about when resources are open
  - But a community resource calendar is available
- No mobile facilities in Wetzel
- No kitchen in Family Resource Center
- Not a lot of home gardens, but a few are growing basic vegetables
- Most of these home gardens are owned by the older population
- Natural disasters wipe out home gardens
- Not as much hunting going on as before in the county
- Only 3 families showed up to FRC nutrition classes
- People eat high carb vegetables and don't know about other types
- Lack of awareness of seasonality of produce
- Soon GAP and other certifications may be required to sell local produce to schools
- AmeriCorps members are not forever
- No Pro-Start programs in any of the 4 single-A high schools

## Location Barriers

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- Empty refrigerated trucks drive through Wetzel county
- People favor processed foods
- The Walmart in Wetzel County has a poor selection of produce and is a night and day difference when compared to the Moundsville Walmart
- People cannot get to the farmers market
- People have to go all the way to Morgantown, Waynesburg, and Marietta to shop for better groceries
- Wetzel County is a food desert
- Produce in stores is prepackaged and often going bad in the package (sometimes on the underside but people cannot tell until they take it home and open the package)
  - People cannot smell or taste fresh produce to try and appreciate it because of the prepackaging
- There are no resources to access food in the Short Line area and it makes up half of the county
- How do we get kids out to summer programs for summer feeding?

- Wetzel is a big county geographically and that causes transportation barriers
- No public transportation

## Crisis Barriers

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- How do you teach people to grow food?
- Hard to get people on projects and stay with it
- Paden City has lots of hopelessness but many in the area are in denial about it
- Community services have trouble recruiting people for programs – this is also a problem statewide
- Wetzel had two 100-year floods within a week in summer of 2016
  - 40 families affected
  - No commercial kitchen available so people had to depend on schools as a shopping outlet, etc.
  - Schools and churches did all the cooking
  - Emergency food resources were flooded out as well (8 ft of water in the fire station)
  - Trailer parks were flooded out
- The 2016 floods affected low income folks disproportionately
  - Low income people live in flood plains and don't have flood insurance. Those who can afford flood insurance usually are not the ones actually living in the flood plains
- Belko was heavily affected by floods and only recently reopened as of late fall 2017
  - The community stepped up and came together to get it up and running again
- Drug epidemic is everywhere
  - People face many struggles in the county which leads to this crisis
  - Account of 2 children unable to get off school bus because parents were overdosed in the house and not at the bus stop.
- There are more outlets for drugs in Wetzel than there are for food
- Difficult to get community volunteers and program participation
- A lot of apathy in the county
- Sense of hopelessness in the county
- People do not care about nutrition and other important issues
- Pine Grove sewer system and water issues
  - Sewage backs up into homes
- New Martinsville used to have the highest percentage of college educated people in the state
- New Martinsville isn't what it used to be
- Community gardens fail in the county

# Existing Healthy Food Initiatives and Community Assets in Wetzel County

Central to any plan to overcome healthy food access barriers is assessing the existing initiatives and assets within a given community. In this phase of the workshop participants identified many different assets in Wetzel County that contribute to community well-being and specifically healthy food access initiatives. We have categorized these assets into six asset types.

## State Assets

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- Breakfast and lunch programs in schools
- Trying to expand after school snack into a dinner
  - Will need to sort out transportation for this
- Amanda McPherson
- Salad bars in schools
- SNAP accepted at farmers market
- McGuane foundation donates to schools (someone at Valley High to have a contact)
- WVU Extension Office
- School chefs promoting healthy food
- Health Right
- Marshall County schools
- All workshop participants
- 17 full time AmeriCorps people
- Backpack program at Long Drain school

## Market Assets

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- Pop up farmers markets for kids through SNAP and WVUF – very successful
- SNAP accepted at farmers market
- Wetzel County Farmers Market
  - Farmers Market has a great manager
- Doddridge farmers market for kids

## Charitable Assets

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- New locations for summer food
  - Partnering w/ churches as feeding sites
- Methodist church very involved in the community
  - Used to do an after school program but lost it since members of church stopped attending who did the grant writing for it
  - Abby is connected to the after school program
  - Outdoor chapel that grows veggies
  - Has commercial kitchen
  - Large multipurpose room
  - Contribute to food pantry

- Bags of Bounty
  - But only serves up to the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grade in schools
  - Linda Koontz
  - 120 bags
- Gabriel Project for expecting mothers and new moms does formula and baby food
- Lion's Club in New Martinsville
- Rotary Club in New Martinsville
- Catholic Church
- Open Door Ministries
- Backpack program at Long Drain school
- Refrigerated truck goes though Wetzel County twice a week (is currently usually empty during these runs)
- Federal food to foodbanks
- Farmacy program
- Grow Healthy WV grant to start Farmacies in WV
- Community Resources
- Community Gardens donate to Catholic Church
- Second Harvest Food Pantry
- Helping Hand
- Catholic Charities food purchasing grants available
- WE CARE
- Stealey Fund (Tyler/Wetzel)

## **Farming/Self-Provisioning Assets**

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- Pop up farmers markets for kids through SNAP and WVUF – very successful
- Lots of growers
- Grow Ohio Valley
  - Mark West
  - EQT
  - Pre-K to put in raised beds
- Grow Local Go Local
- Schools are required to choose local food over other types up to a 20% increase in price
  - Some extra paperwork required for this
- Wetzel County Farmers Market
  - Farmers Market has a great manager
- WV Department of Agriculture
- Community gardens
- Doddridge farmers market for kids
- All workshop participants
- Greens can be provided locally

## What strategies enable people to access healthy food?

People access healthy food through various mechanisms. While many people who might be reading this report primarily access healthy food by spending their wages in a market (grocery store) or through the farming sector (local farmers market) many other individuals, households and communities cannot afford to access food only in this way. Some of the strategies and initiatives to improve people's access to healthy food are represented in the food access strategy wheel (represented to the right).

The inner circle is composed of the primary mechanisms that people access healthy food. **Market** refers to grocery stores, convenience stores, restaurants, dollar stores and the like where people exchange wages for food. **State** refers to government programs such as SNAP, WIC and School programs that provide direct subsidies to offset the cost of food for individuals and households (especially children) who lack the money to access food in the market. **Charity** refers to free food rations provided by food banks, food pantries, and soup kitchens that is funded by donation. **Farming** refers to grower-based initiatives to sell produce through farmers markets and other mechanisms. And lastly, **self-provisioning** refers to practices of hunting, foraging, fishing or growing your own food. Taken together these strategies represent the dominant and divergent ways that people access food.



At any one time an individual, household or community may utilize a combination of these strategies to gain or maintain access to food. Furthermore, as this wheel demonstrates, the retail marketplace is not the only way in which people access food. Government programs play a major role in supporting low-income families and those confronting crises. Charitable assistance agencies also play a supplementary role. Farmers make important local contributions to food access and hunters put away a lot of protein for the winter. However, surrounding the inner ring again are the broader structural forces that shape these various strategies. In conjunction with the barriers described earlier these can indirectly impact people's ability to exercise these food access strategies. Economic change can lead retailers to close up shop or raise prices. Political changes can cause the loss of vital government nutrition programs. Charities may become overwhelmed by the growing need or fail to raise enough money to meet demand. Farmers may confront environmental changes like social degradation or drought. Self-provisioners might confront disease in their gardens, declining game habitat or access to fishing areas. It is for this reason that healthy food initiatives work with people to develop creative strategies and protect vital programming that enables people to sustain themselves, their households and their communities.

## **How can we promote innovative action to support healthy food access?**

Through four years of research we have observed and assessed a range of strategies to improve access to health food for all in West Virginia. Most commonly, these strategies operate in distinctive programming associated with the State, Charitable or Farming/Self-Provisioning mechanisms described above.

However, there are also some very interesting innovations that we describe as Hybrid Healthy Food Initiatives that bring together strange bedfellows and mix together various strategies to close food gaps and promote community well-being. Many of these hybrid healthy food initiatives are project-based and represent outside-the-box thinking. Mobile farmers markets, Hunters for the Hungry, Food pantry CSA programs, Double Bucks Farmer's Markets, and much more. Furthermore, in some cases, these hybrid healthy food initiatives are leading to new policy innovations that link people across these differences. For instance, the recent Farm to Food Bank bill in WV brought charitable agencies, farmers and state officials together to create an innovative law providing farmers tax breaks for farm food donations.

We believe there is much to learn from the creative thinking that comes from bringing many people with different expertise and experience to the table. Hybrid healthy food initiatives are just one example of how we can work together to imagine and enact a different food future.

## **Thinking Outside the Box: Beyond Program-Thinking**

One of our goals with our workshop in Wetzel was to invite participants to break away from existing program thinking. We all work within programs of some sort or another. Programs are structured interventions that are often funded on an annual basis, have staff, clearly defined goals to promote change and assess effectiveness. Government agencies have programs. Non-profits have programs. Corporations have programs. Schools have programs. There are numerous existing state-based, charitable and educational programs focused on improving access to healthy food. Many of these programs are funded, operate effectively, and are successful according to their own measures and forms of assessment. Programs work. Yet, programs can also be limited in scope, ineffective or they can stagnate in their efficacy.

Reinvigorating Strategic Thinking. One of the reasons that programs stagnate is that we forget that they are the result of strategic thinking, strategic projects and strategic policies that have come before. Programs have a history, a set of logics, assumptions, and parameters that are rooted in past processes of strategic planning and design by individuals and groups. These folks developed these programs based on a particular framing of the problem. Today those problems may have changed, or opportunities may have arisen. To get past existing program-thinking we need to reinvigorate the kind of energy that comes from strategic thinking, collective inquiry, and innovative actions.

## **How do we get beyond existing program-thinking?**

To get beyond program-thinking we think it is important to begin by fostering conversations among folks who are engaged in various forms of programming, policy work, and projects that address healthy food access in our communities. Second, we mobilize information on limits and barriers to healthy food access to serve as a basis for collective problem identification. Third we invite participants in diverse teams to consider new strategies (not programs) to mobilize community assets to address these collectively defined problems. And fourth, we invite participants to work together to come up with creative campaigns that advance policies and projects that address healthy food access barriers. Using a series of exercises, the teams participate in a strategy planning process that moves us beyond program thinking and toward new kinds of collective action that addresses pernicious problems.

## **What are healthy food access strategies?**

We define healthy food access strategies along two essential axes of innovation: the development of healthy food access policies and projects. These two strategic approaches are very different from programs. Indeed, as stated earlier, policies and projects result in programs; not the other way around.

*Policy-focused strategies* target local, state and national laws, rules, public assets, activities or budget allocations to improve healthy food access. Policy strategies can reform the way schools, universities, corporations, and government operate. These strategies employ research, communication, networking, canvassing, organizing and lobbying efforts to create change. Usually the goal is to persuade a decision-maker to adopt a given set of practices, rules or adjust their goals to benefit your constituency. The tactics include new policy proposals, defending existing programs, consciousness raising, and coalition building. These strategies may in some cases have longer timeframes to implement, but not always. Indeed, with the right organizing, conditions and constituency (as a result of organizing efforts) policy change can happen quickly (even faster than projects). Because policy-focused strategies affect existing institutions they can have far reaching impacts from on the direction of programs that affect many people.

*Project-focused strategies* pilot and test out our new ideas and bring together novel resources and people to create a model, case study, or example. Projects tend to advance on more restricted timeframes that reflect their experimental nature. Projects have a beginning and an end. To evolve into a permanent activity or program that improves access to healthy food, projects must either result in volunteer-driven ownership or sustained financial support from private foundations, state, charitable or market-based efforts. Unlike policy strategies, projects can often take shape independently and autonomously from any particular constituency. This gives projects a nimble and entrepreneurial feel and can result in quick learning to be adapted to various future circumstances.

## Wetzel County: Healthy Food Access Strategies

The strategies below were developed in consultation among participants in the Nourishing Networks Wetzel Workshop to improve healthy food access. These strategies are a result of group consultation following a collective assessment of the barriers to healthy food access in the county and the community assets that could be mobilized to address the problems identified. Each team arrived at their strategy through a different process whereby members evaluated potentials and set priorities. While these strategies were developed rapidly, they nevertheless represent several promising avenues for near term collective action which could be carried forward in Wetzel County.

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### *Name of Strategy: Expanding Local Produce in Local Stores*

#### **Approach:**

- Connect local producers and local store owners so that local produce can become more available to Wetzel County residents

#### **Barriers Addressed:**

- Low food access
- Low farmers market participation
- Location of market
- Market hours
- Poor produce selection at Walmart

#### **Dream Team:**

- Belko
- Witschey's
- Kacey Gantzer
- Store owners
- Local growers

#### **Outcomes:**

- People in the county eating local foods
- More produce available to community

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***Name of Strategy: FARMacy Program***

**Approach:**

- Wetzel on the fringe of incorporating this program
- Program is for 25 individuals chosen by Health Right physicians
- Participants have to have a diet related illness, biometrics measured 3 times during prescription
- Wetzel can create their own model for this program

**Barriers Addressed:**

- Location – people currently having to travel to Moundsville to access the program
- Community participation
- Diet-related illnesses

**Dream Team:**

- Health Right (funders)
- Food pantries
- Grow Local Go Local
- Someone to manage the program - coordinate, pay farmers, create a newsletter etc.
- Holly Giovinazzo – Wetzel County Farmers Market Manager
- Potentially Grow Ohio Valley (to trade farmers back and forth)
- 5 committed farmers
- Some additional farmers

**Outcomes:**

- Better health and weight loss for program participants
- A reduction in diet-related illnesses
- Increased food access

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***Name of Strategy: Get Food to Short Line Area (Energy Express; Summer Feeding)***

**Approach:**

- Find ways to alleviate hunger in the Short Line region where resources are virtually nonexistent – focusing primarily on summer feeding for children.

**Barriers Addressed:**

- Low program participation
- Transportation
- Social Stigma around needing assistance
- Politics between teachers and parents
- Currently an 8-12 bus run which may be too early

**Dream Team:**

- Food Pantries
- Energy Express
- Schools
- Mountaineer Foodbank
- Someone in Short Line to do backpack program

**Outcomes:**

- Break down barriers to food access in Short Line area
- Greater participation in summer feeding programs for children

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***Name of Strategy: Feeding Kids Supper at End of School Day***

**Approach:**

- Children can currently receive a snack at the end of the school day before getting on the bus. The objective is to expand this snack time into a supper allotted to students before they go home for the evening.

**Barriers Addressed:**

- Social stigmas and pride that causes parents to discourage children from accessing food resources offered by schools
- Hunger among children

**Dream Team:**

- After School supplemental staff for 2 hours to cook

**Outcomes:**

- Alleviating hunger for school aged children who may not have access to supper after school
- Ensuring that children can receive 3 nutritious meals a day in school

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***Name of Strategy: Add Commercial Kitchen Information to a Map***

**Approach:**

- Resource list/map of commercial kitchens in Wetzel, fees, procedures, certification requirements, etc.
- Kitchen will be open to the public
- Will establish fees for this – Possible to waive fees?
- Must go through process to make a kitchen commercial

**Barriers Addressed:**

- Floods and other natural disasters call for resources such as this
- Lack of facilities in the county
- Need for increased knowledge on produce and cooking

**Dream Team:**

- Location for these resources

**Outcomes:**

- Increase in communication around resources in the county
- Increase in community participation in programs and projects
- Potential to increase knowledge around produce, cooking, and nutrition

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***Name of Strategy: Increase School Pop-Up Markets***

**Approach:**

- Increase number of pop-up markets in Wetzel schools which have proven to be successful for students, parents, and local farmers.

**Barriers Addressed:**

- Lack of knowledge on identifying produce and knowing how to use it
- Inability to touch and taste fresh produce in stores due to prepackaging
- Community participation

**Dream Team:**

- PTA – They are already very excited about this in New Martinsville
- Local producers
- Wetzel County Schools
- Students and parents

**Outcomes:**

- Increased knowledge on fruits, vegetables, and nutrition
- Healthier eating habits in children
- Extra income for local producers