

Food as Infrastructure:

Strengthening Local Food Systems for
Community Health in West Virginia

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What We'll Cover Today

1 The Challenge in Rural WV <i>Food access & nutrition gaps</i>	2 Central Kitchen Model <i>Healthy Kids Inc.</i>	3 Pivot Meals: Food as Medicine <i>Pilot results & scale</i>	4 Rural Grocer & SNAP Stretch <i>WV Food & Farm Coalition</i>	5 Policy & Systems Change <i>How leaders can act</i>
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Two organizations. One shared mission: nutrition as a community health strategy.

The Rural Food Access Challenge in West Virginia



Food Deserts & Access

- WV ranks among the most food-insecure states in the nation
- Many rural counties have NO full-service grocery store
- Residents may travel 30+ miles for fresh food
- Transportation is a major barrier in mountain communities



SNAP & Nutrition Gaps

- ~16% of WV residents receive SNAP benefits
- SNAP benefits often spent on processed, low-nutrition food
- Fresh produce accounts for a small % of SNAP purchases in rural areas
- Food insecurity drives chronic disease — WV's #1 health burden



Farmer Economic Pressure

- WV farms are declining — losing 100s of small farms per decade
- Without local markets, farmers can't survive on local sales alone
- Commodity crop subsidies favor large-scale industrial agriculture
- Local food systems need institutional buyers to be viable

When food systems fail, the health system absorbs the cost — in chronic disease, hospitalizations, and lost productivity.

The Problem We're Solving Together

67%

of children's calories
come from ultra-
processed foods

\$1.1T

annual cost of diet-
related
chronic disease in the
U.S.

#1

WV consistently ranks
among
the least healthy states

1M+

healthy meals served
by Healthy Kids Inc.

Food IS medicine — and West Virginia communities need us to treat it that way.

Bridging the Missing Middle

One team — HKI + WV Food & Farm Coalition — building together for 3 years

WV Farmers

How we're tackling the missing middle

End Users

WV produce

WV livestock

WV grain / hops

WV dairy

WV egg / poultry

Cold Chain

& distribution

Aggregation

& food hubs

Central Kitchen

chef-prepared meals

Pivot Meals

medically indicated meals

Appalachia Egg Co.

local protein supply

Processing

facilities

Value-Add

co-packing

Rural Grocer Network

local food retail

SNAP Stretch

local food access

Appalachian Cellar

producer co-op

hospitals & clinics

childcare & schools

recovery centers

rural grocery stores

online marketplace

The missing middle is being built — right now, together.

Farmers can grow it. Communities need it. We're collectively closing the gap.

Healthy Kids Inc.: Central Kitchen Model

Started ~2010

Born from a simple question: could centralized kitchens help children eat healthier in WV? An idea sparked by a physician, funded by private foundation, and implemented by a social entrepreneur with a passion for kids health.

Central Kitchen Model

Shared-use kitchen model reduces overhead. Serves childcare centers, recovery centers, and private schools across 6 WV counties.

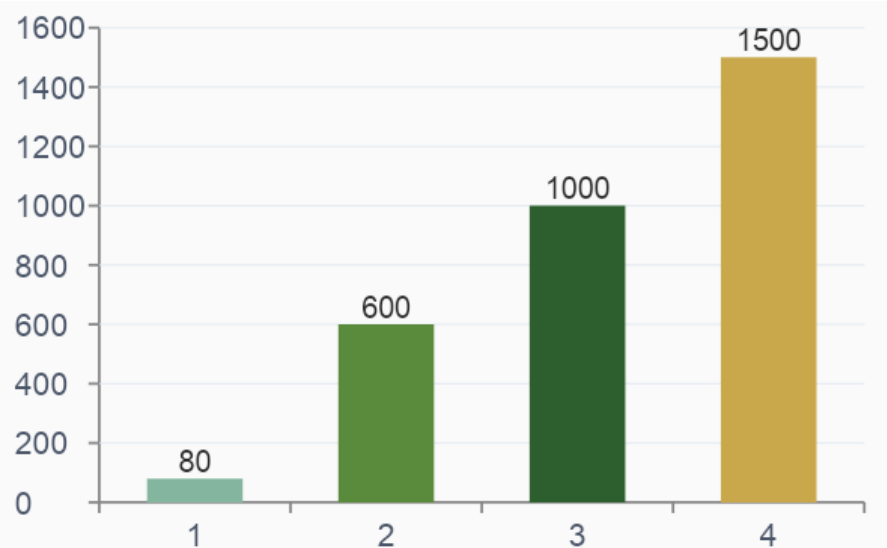
20 + 3 Employees

HKI employs 20 people in local communities. Our nonprofit arm, Project Healthy Kids, employs 3 additional staff providing wrap-around health & education services.

Public-Private Partnership

Integration with Project Healthy Kids creates a unique model funding the new local food system — serving children AND adults in recovery.

Daily Meals — Growth Trajectory




 **1 MILLION meals served — and counting.**

Policy & System Barriers Holding WV Back

Why innovation became necessary — and why federal dependency is a real vulnerability

Federal Meal Reimbursement vs. Real Cost

Meal Level	Family Income	Federal Rate	Our Cost
Free Lunch	\$40,560	\$4.43	\$3.50
Reduced Lunch	\$57,720	\$4.03	\$3.50
Private Pay	Any	\$0.42	\$3.50

 Private pay reimbursement of \$0.42 covers less than 12 cents on the dollar of real meal cost.



CACFP/CEP Exclusion

Childcare centers cannot use Community Eligibility Provision — so they must collect household income forms instead of offering universal free meals.



Federal Subsidy Misalignment

Commodity crop subsidies flow to corn, soy & wheat — not to local, nutrient-dense food. The system funds the problem, not the solution.



Distribution Infrastructure Gaps

No cold-chain distribution network in rural WV. Innovative food products can't reach patients without building new logistics from scratch.

WV is highly dependent on federal funding — which means federal policy failures hit our communities hardest. This is why local innovation isn't optional. It's the only path forward.

Pivot Meals: Scaling Nutrition as a Health Intervention

From daily hot meals → frozen medically indicated meals for hospitals & clinics



The Product

- Manufacturer's license obtained
- Produced with chef + Registered Dietitian
- Frozen for hospital & clinic distribution
- Every meal: ≥ 1 ingredient from a WV farmer



The Partners

- Distributed through Mountaineer Food Bank
- Distributed through Facing Hunger Food Bank
- Prescribed at hospitals and clinics
- 2-year soft pilot — now scaling



The Results

- Patients reporting measurable health success
- Some patients reduced medications up to 2x during pilot
- Connects food prescription to local farm economy
- Proof of concept for food-as-medicine at scale

Now adding vending machines — meeting patients physically where they are.

The Vending Strategy

The next frontier in food-as-medicine access

Placing Pivot Meals frozen vending machines directly in clinics, waiting rooms, and community health centers - making medically indicated meals available 24/7.



Physical Accessibility

Patients often leave appointments without access to healthy food. The vending machine closes that gap immediately — in the building, at the point of care.



Continuity of Care

A discharged patient can grab a week of medically appropriate meals on the way out. Nutrition doesn't stop when the appointment does.



Scalable Without Overhead

Vending infrastructure scales faster than brick-and-mortar. One machine in a rural clinic can serve a whole county with no added staffing.

The Vision: Reimagining the System

What WV could look like if we get this right

01 Decentralized Food Networks

Move from large-scale federal dependence to community-driven food ecosystems powered by local farms, food hubs, and shared kitchens.

02 Medically Tailored Meals as Standard

Position healthy prepared meals as preventative healthcare — integrated into employer wellness programs, Medicaid, and insurance coverage.

03 Mission-Driven Business Investment

Partner with businesses aligned with food, health, and children to fund real food solutions. Sustainability requires revenue, not just grants.

04 Radical Subsidy Shift

Redirect agricultural subsidies away from commodity crops toward local, nutrient-dense foods that actually fuel community health.

We are just one piece of the puzzle — but if we are truly going to impact WV communities with nutrition, it is going to take innovation.

Partnership Makes the Dream Work

WV Food & Farm Coalition

Building the food system infrastructure West Virginia needs

What Does This Look Like: Programming



Youth Education & Entrepreneurship

Schools & interns statewide

1



Farmer Technical Assistance

*Growing, markets,
resources*

2



Value-Added Products

Scale & new markets

3



SNAP Stretch

35 counties, \$4M returned

4



Rural Grocer Network

Viability & access

5

+ Policy Advocacy and Change!!!

Youth Education & Entrepreneurship

Interns Across West Virginia

- Nutrition Education in Schools

Interns learn and teach nutrition education directly in school settings across the state

- Farm to School Purchasing

Working with Nutrition Directors to purchase more local farm-to-school products

- Real-World Business Experience

Partnering with food and agriculture businesses to give interns hands-on experience



Investing in the next generation of West Virginia's food system leaders.

Farmer Technical Assistance

Supporting WV farmers with the tools and knowledge they need to thrive.



Growing Practices

Hands-on guidance for sustainable growing methods, season extension, and crop diversification to strengthen farm viability.



Market Access

Connecting farmers to new buyers, institutional markets, and direct-to-consumer channels to expand revenue streams.



Resources & Support

Navigating grants, loans, certifications, and business planning resources that help farms grow and sustain.

When farmers succeed, communities eat better.

Value-Added Products Program

Providing technical assistance and staff support to help value-added producers scale their business and meet new markets.

Mountain State Co-Op

Partnered with the Mountain State Co-Op that operates the Appalachian Cellular brand

Pivot Meals

Pivot Meals are a key value-added product in our network

Chop & Freeze Facility

Working on a chop and freeze facility to help with PHK's production efficiencies

Cold Storage & Warehousing

Using the warehouse for cold storage of products that PHK has purchased for future use



Scaling local producers to meet institutional and retail demand.



SNAP Stretch



Providing a match at farmers markets, mobile markets, CSAs, and grocery stores for purchase of fruits and vegetables (fresh or frozen, no salt or sugar added).

1:1

Match

Single Adults

Dollar-for-dollar match on fruits and vegetables for individual SNAP recipients.

1:2

Match

Families & Seniors

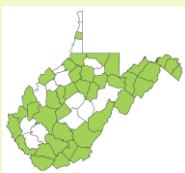
Double match for families and seniors, stretching every SNAP dollar further.

1:3

Match

Grand Families

Triple match for grandparents raising grandchildren, maximizing purchasing power.



35 counties | \$4 million returned in fruits and vegetables

Stretching every dollar toward healthier communities.

SNAP Stretch: Why It Is a Win!



Captures Dollars Locally

Both SNAP/EBT and SNAP Stretch dollars stay in the local economy, supporting farmers and retailers.



Incentivizes Healthier Eating

The match makes it more fiscally viable for recipients to choose fruits and vegetables over processed alternatives.



Supports Rural Grocers & Pivot Meals

Creates an opportunity to support rural grocers, and Pivot Meals are SNAP Stretch eligible.

A win for families, a win for farmers, a win for communities.

Rural Grocer Network

Strengthening the backbone of rural food access.



Technical Assistance

Engages rural grocers in accessing technical assistance toward long-term business viability.



Capital Stacking

Provides loan and grant capital stacking to help stores invest in infrastructure and inventory.



SNAP Stretch Opportunities

Supports SNAP Stretch implementation at rural grocery stores, expanding healthy food access.



Pivot Meals Distribution

Creates opportunities for Pivot Meals to be stocked in stores, expanding the reach of medically indicated meals.

Rural grocers are health infrastructure. We treat them that way.

Policy Change

Opportunities to support agriculture viability through systems-level advocacy.

Recent Wins

\$360,000

Line item secured in the state budget for SNAP Stretch, ensuring continued funding and expansion of the program across West Virginia.

**Food is
Medicine**

Won a bill that will allow Managed Care Organizations to support Food is Medicine as an in-lieu-of-service benefit. Another great opportunity for Pivot Meals to enter the market.

Policy wins that put food at the center of health and economic strategy.

Coalitioning

How can we support bringing partners to the table and getting creative about funding mechanisms to support innovative approaches to health-oriented outcomes that also support farmers?



Projects like our work with Project Healthy Kids bring together so many elements of the food system. When we coalition effectively, we create models that connect farming, nutrition, healthcare, and economic development into a single, powerful strategy.

Partnership makes the dream work.

How Healthcare Leaders Can Act

You are in the room where it happens. Here's what moves the needle:

01 Explore Local Food Pilots

Explore ways to integrate locally prepared frozen medically indicated meals or meal kits into discharge planning and chronic disease management protocols.

02 Source Local Food Institutionally

Many of you are anchor institutions. How can we work together to reduce the barriers to food procurement to support local farmers and products.

03 Champion SNAP Stretch & Rural Grocers

Advocate for and co-locate SNAP Stretch programming. Support the Rural Grocer Network as a health infrastructure investment, not just retail.

04 Lead on Policy

Champion food-as-medicine in Medicaid, support higher meal reimbursement rates, and back local food procurement policies at the state level.

The health of our communities can't wait.

Let's Build This Together

We are just one piece of the puzzle — but together we can transform how WV communities experience nutrition, health, and food access.

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Questions · Discussion · Coalition Building