Washington County, Virginia Food Assessment
Food Security and Food policy

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Final Report Narrative

Name of Project: Washington County, Virginia Food Assessment Food Security and Food Policy

Grant Period: September 1, 2010—December 4, 2010

Grantee Name: Emory & Henry College, The Appalachian Center for Community Service, the Department of Public Policy and Community Service

Project Director: Talmage A. Stanley

Description of Project:

In collaboration with People Inc., Appalachian Sustainable Development, and Meadowview First, Inc., a place-based research team composed of Emory & Henry students assessed and evaluated the availability of nutritional, quality food to low and moderate-income individuals and families in Washington County, Virginia, the degree of food insecurity, and the community resources available to address that insecurity. The results of this place-based research process are being used to support the development of a food policy board, undertake economic development initiatives focused on creating access to quality food, and determining other strategies to meet food needs in low and moderate-income families of the area. Students made presentations of their work and findings to the Smart Beginnings Board of Directors, the Board of Directors of the partnering organizations, and the Appalachian Teaching Project.

Students were fourth-year, first semester students in Public Policy and Community Service (PPCS) 400, Senior Practicum. The course carried a nine-hour credit, and Dr. Talmage A. Stanley was the instructor.

Activities:

1. Responding to guidelines for information provided from People, Inc., student researchers collected data from organizations and other resources
   a. Department of Social Services: SNAP, WIC, other Federal-subsidized food assistance programs
   b. Mount Rogers Health Department: Rates and background information (quantitative and qualitative) for obesity, heart disease, diabetes, infant birth weights, other food-related health matters
   c. Southwest Virginia Community Health System, Inc: Rates and background information (quantitative and qualitative) for obesity, heart disease, diabetes, infant birth weights, other food-related health matters; number of persons seen and economic profiles, insured vs. uninsured
   d. Virginia Outdoors Foundation: total acres of farmland, total acres of farmland that’s preserved/under conservation easement
   e. Washington County Agricultural Census, 1900-2010: number of dairy farms and farms producing goods for local markets
f. Undertook a comparative analysis of basic food staples in supermarket and in small locally owned stores, comparing and contrasting areas of the county in relation to the proximity of main roads and highways

g. Washington County Public Schools: number of students receiving and/or eligible for free or reduced price lunches; status of the breakfast program; obtain figures per school and system-wide

h. District 3 (transportation & senior services) transportation routes, numbers served, service area, number of people eligible for service

i. Food Pantries/kitchens: number of operations, locations, numbers served, routes

j. ASD and Virginia Cooperative Extension: distribution centers, farmers, types and sizes of farms (current and historically), cooperatives, farms, programs (overview and particulars)

k. Washington County: agriculture, food, land-based policies, tax policies and structures

l. Food retail stores: how many, what type, location, food store survey

2. Asset Mapping
   a. Student researchers developed a map showing GPS points and addresses for food-related sites in Washington County, as well as assets identified in assessment process

**Project Outcomes:**

1. Student researchers addressed questions provided in collaborative planning process with partnering organizations and places

2. Student researchers presented findings to program development/grant writing staff of People, Inc.

3. Student researchers made presentations of findings to members of the collaborative:
   - Meadowview First, Appalachian Sustainable Development, People, Inc.
   - Smart Beginnings

   Students made a presentation and a poster display to the Appalachian Teaching Project. The presentation did not depend on PowerPoint technology, contained both quantitative and qualitative data, and provided ARC with recommendations and policy options.

4. Student researchers concluded that the price of staple foods dramatically increased the farther one traveled from the I-81 corridor, that persons living in the more rural areas of Washington County were paying 60-75 percent more for food purchased in stores in their localities than those same food staples purchased in stores along the I-81 corridor. Transportation to the I-81 corridor supermarkets was largely unavailable unless one had an automobile, and the agricultural infrastructure for producing local food has largely collapsed in the last twenty-five years. Moreover, local farmers markets are not appropriate sources of nutritional food for low and moderate income individuals and families because operating hours do not correspond to the working hours of low and moderate income families, these markets are inaccessible because they are located mainly within the I-81 corridor, and prices are prohibitive for low and moderate income persons and families.

5. Research results are now being utilized in initiatives focused on sustainable economic development based on providing local food to low and moderate income persons and families, value-added processing, and a creamery in Meadowview, Virginia; utilization of these findings in the long-term strategic plan for Meadowview, Virginia. The processing facility will provide value-added food goods for sale in Heartwood, soon to open in Abingdon.

6. This research is part of the continuing effort in Washington County and Southwest Virginia to build on assets already in place, capitalizing on them to meet economic and food needs.
**Problems Encountered:**

The scope of the research sometimes was greater than time or talents could accommodate. Another problem that is ongoing is the general disregard that many had toward the research results; those in power, while interested, did not understand its implications for economic development or for improving the quality of life in this place.

**Program Continuation and Sustainability:**

Because of its linkage with Meadowview First, People, Inc., the Heartwood Center and other collaborative ventures, the sustainability of this initiative is somewhat more certain. Meadowview First is now using the results of this research to fund the development of a processing facility. This development will generate new demands for student research from Emory & Henry College.

**Conclusions and Recommendations:**

In this place, the development of a local food network that provides nutritional, affordable food to low and moderate income families and individuals necessitates the rebuilding of an agricultural infrastructure. Farmers markets are not an appropriate response to either the need for nutritional food for low and moderate income persons or the needs for a more vibrant network of local farmers producing for this market. Tax structures and buying conglomerates that discourage small, local stores must be challenged and dismantled to make food in rural grocery stores more affordable.