

2014

\$99,555 to Lake-to-River Food Cooperative, Youngstown, OH, strengthen the online market for local produce delivery in the Mahoning Valley; encourage purchases from community, school, and institutions; and expand training opportunities for growers.

Final Report

**Farmers Market Promotion Program (FMPP)
Final Performance Report**

The final performance report summarizes the outcome of your FMPP award objectives. As stated in the FMPP Terms and Conditions, you will not be eligible for future FMPP or Local Food Promotion Program grant funding unless all close-out procedures are completed, including satisfactory submission of this final performance report.

This final report will be made available to the public once it is approved by FMPP staff. Write the report in a way that promotes your project's accomplishments, as this document will serve as not only a learning tool, but a promotional tool to support local and regional food programs. Particularly, recipients are expected to provide both qualitative and quantitative results to convey the activities and accomplishments of the work.

The report is limited to 10 pages and is due **within 90 days** of the project's performance period end date, or sooner if the project is complete. Provide answers to each question, or answer "not applicable" where necessary. It is recommended that you email or fax your completed performance report to FMPP staff to avoid delays:

FMPP Phone: 202-690-4152; Email: USDAFMPPQuestions@ams.usda.gov; Fax: 202-690-4152

Should you need to mail your documents via hard copy, contact FMPP staff to obtain mailing instructions.

Report Date Range: <i>(e.g. September 30, 20XX-September 29, 20XX)</i>	September 30, 2014-September 30, 2016
Authorized Representative Name:	Melissa Miller
Authorized Representative Phone:	330-360-0648
Authorized Representative Email:	info@laketoriver.org
Recipient Organization Name:	Lake-to-River Food Cooperative
Project Title as Stated on Grant Agreement:	DoLocal: Domestic Opportunities Linking Our Local Food
Grant Agreement Number: <i>(e.g. 14-FMPPX-XX-XXXX)</i>	14-FMPPX00H-0133
Year Grant was Awarded:	2014
Project City/State:	Youngstown, OH
Total Awarded Budget:	99755.00

FMPP staff may contact you to follow up for long-term success stories. Who may we contact?

Same Authorized Representative listed above (check if applicable).

Different individual: Name: _____; Email: _____; Phone: _____

According to the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995, an agency may not conduct or sponsor, and a person is not required to respond to a collection of information unless it displays a valid OMB control number. The valid OMB control number for this information collection is 0581-0287. The time required to complete this information collection is estimated to average 4 hours per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) prohibits discrimination in all its programs and activities on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, disability, and where applicable sex, marital status, or familial status, parental status religion, sexual orientation, genetic information, political beliefs, reprisal, or because all or part of an individual's income is derived from any public assistance program (not all prohibited bases apply to all programs). Persons with disabilities who require alternative means for communication of program information (Braille, large print, audiotape, etc.) should contact USDA's TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TDD). To file a complaint of discrimination, write USDA, Director, Office of Civil Rights, 1400 Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, DC 20250-9410 or call (800) 795-3272 (voice) or (202) 720-6382 (TDD). USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

1. State the goals/objectives of your project as outlined in the grant narrative and/or approved by FMPP staff. If the goals/objectives from the narrative have changed from the grant narrative, please highlight those changes (e.g. “new objective”, “new contact”, “new consultant”, etc.). You may add additional goals/objectives if necessary. For each item below, qualitatively discuss the progress made and indicate the impact on the community, if any.

- i. Goal/Objective 1: Increase awareness of our e-commerce site
 - a. Progress Made:

Print Marketing Materials:

Logo
Brochure
Business cards
Infographic Rack Card
2 Professional Videos
Tri-Fold for table display
Eat Local Stickers
Tote Bags/Tshirts
Yard Signs
Conversion Chart Refrigerator Magnets

Social Media/Digital Marketing:

Facebook Growth: 460 likes 1,363 likes
Mailchimp Growth: 329 subscribers to 1,164

New platforms:

Twitter
Instagram
Pinterest
Google+
Google Business
Eat Well Guide
GroupMe Text Reminder Service
Website/Blog- New Content of Recipes, Interviews, Vendor Highlights, Shopping Template Upgraded

- b. Impact on Community: These campaigns have heightened awareness and support of local farms while simultaneously educating residents about the benefits of eating locally and seasonally.

In all, our customer base increased from originally 23 customers to 288 registered accounts for the Online Marketplace with a mailing list of over one thousand and growing.

Goal/Objective 2: Increase presence in Local Schools

c. Progress Made: 6 Local School Districts order from Co-op farms, 3 districts order monthly during the school calendar.

d. Impact on Community: We are the only farm to school service in the region providing access to local produce, educational resources, and easy ordering systems for schools seeking fresh, local produce options.

Goal/Objective 3: Develop additional programming for farm training and resources

e. Progress Made: Multiple farmer training and resources were provided. Trainings included GAP training courses, a committee formed to investigate group GAP certification, a farmer mini-conference in collaboration with partners, 2 pasture walks with combined attendance of 75 farmers, and a several marketing seminars.

The two main focuses were 1. GAP preparedness achieved through manual distribution and in-class training, and 2. marketing tools and strategies achieved through networking events, peer-to-peer presentations and information sharing.

f. Impact on Community: This information equipped Co-op vendors and others with the necessary tools to form a robust marketing plan for their direct to consumer or institutional sales while also taking steps to protect their business interests by safety training for current and future agricultural compliance requirements.

2. Quantify the overall impact of the project on the intended beneficiaries, if applicable, from the baseline date (the start of the award performance period, September 30, 2014). Include further explanation if necessary.

- i. Number of direct jobs created: 1.5
- ii. Number of jobs retained: 1.5
- iii. Number of indirect jobs created: 15
- iv. Number of markets expanded: 3
- v. Number of new markets established: 3
- vi. Market sales increased by \$27,960.88 and increased by 186.67%.
- vii. Number of farmers/producers that have benefited from the project: 32
 - a. Percent Increase: 166%

3. Did you expand your customer base by reaching new populations such as new ethnic groups, additional low income/low access populations, new businesses, etc.? If so, how?

We partnered with several wellness initiatives throughout the community which included distribution of coupons to low income households to increase access to our service. Two of four distribution options are in a food desert. We expanded distribution services to key southern and northern points in our region to capture a larger breadth of the population.

4. Discuss your community partnerships.

i. Who are your community partners?

Howland Township Trustees, Howland Farmer's Market, Catullo Prime Meats, Cultivate Café, Common Wealth Kitchen Incubator, 30 Mile Meal Mahoning/Shenango, Mercy Health, Ohio One Health, Youngstown Neighborhood Development Corporation(YNDC), Trumbull Neighborhood Partnership(TNP), Ohio State University Extension (OSUExt), Eastgate Regional Council of Governments, Trumbull County Health Department, Trumbull Neighborhood Partnership, and Youngstown State University

ii. How have they contributed to the overall results of the FMPP project?

Catullo Prime Meats and Howland Township Trustees supplied brick and mortar locations that served to expand the Online Market distribution sites. Throughout that time, and with the assistance of the 30 Mile Meal local branding campaign, they have led co-promotions, pop-up market appearances, and key marketing events that aimed to increase exposure and awareness of the Co-op.

Cultivate Café and Commonwealth Kitchen Incubator have both contributed to the shared community vision of a local food hub campus through joint media and public relation campaigns while attracting a variety of food entrepreneurs and locavores to the area that widen exposure of the Co-op Online Market audience while additionally attracting new vendors to fill product gaps.

Mercy Health and One Health Ohio have worked closely with us to help promote our services to their clients as an arm of various wellness initiatives within the community. Mercy Health has co-facilitated a Monthly Farmer's Market with our Co-op that helped to generate 16,628 dollars in direct revenue for Co-op farmers during a seven month period while also providing patients with food related chronic disease access to affordable, seasonal produce. YNDC, OSUExt, and TNP were both active partners and co-sponsors for training and educational opportunities to Co-op vendors. Youngstown State University Department of Dietetics partnered with us by supplying interns to help develop relevant content material for our website.

iii. How will they continue to contribute to your project's future activities, beyond the performance period of this FMPP grant? Lake-to-River will continue to partner with Mercy Health on the Fruit & Veggie Rx program in 2017. We've also partnered with YNDC, Mercy and TNP in applying for a FINI grant in an effort to increase access to and consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables. Our ongoing efforts to increase sales of farmers'/food makers' products is the inspiration behind Cultivate: a co-op café which opened in August 2016 two blocks north of the Youngstown State University campus. Lake-to-River also continues member of Trumbull Co. Health Dept.'s "Creating Healthy Communities" committee and takes an active role in their annual School Food Service Conference.

Are you using contractors to conduct the work? If so, how did their work contribute to the results of the FMPP project?

N/a

5. Have you publicized any results yet?* Yes
- i. If yes, how did you publicize the results? Quarterly meeting
 - ii. To whom did you publicize the results? Co-op stakeholders/Board; Real Food conference, Athens Ohio; Northeast Ohio Regional Food Hub meeting; Allegheny College's Year of Meadville.
 - iii. How many stakeholders (i.e. people, entities) did you reach? 150
- *Send any publicity information (brochures, announcements, newsletters, etc.) electronically along with this report. Non-electronic promotional items should be digitally photographed and emailed with this report (do not send the actual item).

6. Have you collected any feedback from your community and additional stakeholders about your work? Yes, we have conducted several surveys throughout the two year period to monitor customer service and quality of product.
- i. If so, how did you collect the information?

Digital surveys were distributed to active customers.

- ii. What feedback was relayed (specific comments)?

The service was generally easy to use and provided products that customers were attempting to purchase. Any criticisms were useful to identify what products people wished we had available and other suggestions to remind customers to order before the deadline. Some comments:

'I think it's a wonderful service.'

'Provide more detailed descriptions of the products. I'd like to see the ingredients and whether an item is non-GMO or organic.'

7. Budget Summary:

- i. As part of the FMPP closeout procedures, you are required to submit the SF-425 (Final Federal Financial Report). Check here if you have completed the SF-425 and are submitting it with this report: X
- ii. Did the project generate any income? *Yes, in all \$13,301.70*
 - a. If yes, how much was generated and how was it used to further the objectives of the award?

A portion of this income will be used to supplement employee wages while we continue to work toward financial sustainability. The Board will further research the opening of a brick and mortar grocery store in our immediate food desert neighborhood in which case a portion of this funding will be used to generate a market feasibility report and as potential start-up funds for operational costs associated with our brick and mortar project.

8. Lessons Learned:

- i. Summarize any lessons learned. They should draw on positive experiences (e.g. good ideas that improved project efficiency or saved money) and negative experiences (e.g. what did not go well and what needs to be changed).

Logistics always proved to be a challenge. On any given week, we are sourcing from about a 6 county radius which we sourced from weekly. We created drop off points in each direction that helped to facilitate receiving products each week. This still proves to be demanding of resources for a small volume of product. Comparatively, this system lessens the burden for an individual vendor who may spend considerable amounts of time and money traveling to a Farmer's Market in addition to risking loss of inventory for harvesting what may not be sold.

Another recurring problem was product reliability. As a service that operates as a third party between consumer and producer, it is difficult to ensure the quality was consistent with the brand we actively promoted which ensured a high quality.

In some cases, creating a 'seconds' market helped make use of end of season or less than perfect produce, especially for institutional and restaurant sales.

- ii. If goals or outcome measures were not achieved, identify and share the lessons learned to help others expedite problem-solving:

The majority of goals were accomplished. We established an infrastructure and business model that is unprecedented for our region and built a strong customer base. The problem will be scaling up volume and maintaining efficient logistics that capture the best local products.

- iii. Describe any lessons learned in the administration of the project that might be helpful for others who would want to implement a similar project:

Institutional sales and direct to consumer sales are two very demanding projects. Each requires slightly different business models and logistics. We discovered as we went along that institutional sales would mostly be low hanging fruit and we would focus the majority of time and money toward direct to consumer sales because that was our largest profit margin and easiest to market.

9. Future Work:

- i. How will you continue the work of this project beyond the performance period? In other words, how will you parlay the results of your project's work to benefit future community goals and initiatives? Include information about community impact and outreach, anticipated increases in markets and/or sales, estimated number of jobs retained/created, and any other information you'd like to share about the future of your project.

Building on the collaboration with local organizations, we anticipate increased sales of locally grown fruits and vegetables through the First Wednesday Market at Mercy Health Main Campus on Youngstown's north side.

Lake-to-River Co-op Board remains committed to opening a "bricks and mortar" store as an adjunct to the Online Market; this will provide the community with regular access to locally produced food. The store also expand the market for farmers and food makers and hopefully serve as a prototype for markets throughout the underserved City of Youngstown.

Building on the great work done over the past two years, we continue to add customers to our Online Market and anticipate it will continue to grow.

We're part of a project with other members of a regional Food Hub testing an ordering/logistics app for sales and distribution of local food and anticipate an increase in sales from this new partnership.

We continue to work with our partners at Eastgate, YNDC, Common Wealth Inc, through the Mahoning Food Policy Council and with Trumbull Co. Creating Healthy Communities committee and others to grow the market share of locally sourced food in our region through Farm to School.

- ii. Do you have any recommendations for future activities and, if applicable, an outline of next steps or additional research that might advance the project goals? *Next steps include marketing to increase co-op membership with a focus on retail sales as we work toward a grocery storefront which may possibly need to include some equity shares to raise funds. Secondly, partnering with other regions to increase wholesale opportunities for co-op farmers; our co-op produces much more product than there is demand for in our six-county region. Finally we'll continue to work with partners on food access issues in our low-income community as this is a way to increase the sales of farm products as well as have an impact on the health of our neighbors.*

Our Local Food System

Building a sustainable and just future means that we carry on our region's agricultural heritage and work together to develop a strong food system that supports both people and natural resources.

We will hear from other communities that have strengthened their economies through food and made healthy, local eating accessible for more people. As consumers, farmers, growers, distributors, chefs, and teachers, we will develop plans for how to best "grow" our community together.

Ben Hewitt



Year of Meadville

Themes and Events

Sharing Our Stories

Networks of Care

Youth Voices

Our Local Food System

Our Local Economy

Community Celebration

About the Organizers

Search

Our Local Food System x

sites.allegheeny.edu/yearofmeadville/our-local-food-system/

Sophia Buggs



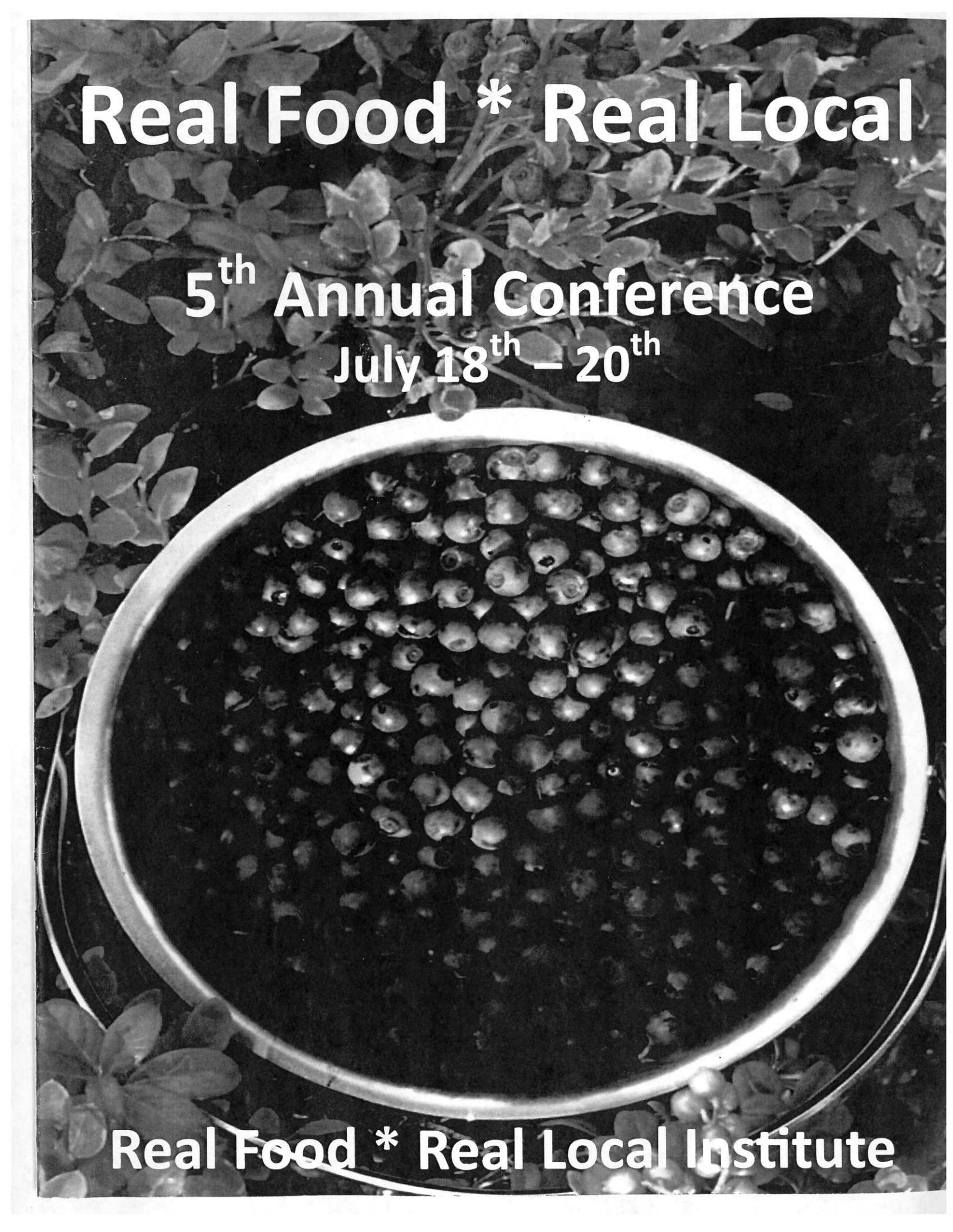
Sophia L. Buggs is the owner and operator of **Lady Buggs Farm**. She is reclaiming the sacred roots of farming through sustainable living in Youngstown, Ohio. Her mission is to Restore, Revamp and Revitalize her community while creating a loving urban homestead with her daughter, Passion. She has been sharing her wellness and farming information through gardening and cooking classes. Sophia holds a Masters of Education with a concentration in Curriculum and Instruction from American InterContinental University, a Bachelors of Science in Criminal Justice from Bethune Cookman University and a year of OJT Specialty Crop Apprenticeship through Goodness Grows.

Gianna Cioffi



Gianna works with the **Lake to River Food Hub** initiative in Youngstown, Ohio as the General Manger for the Coop's Online Market which showcases small farms and food-makers throughout the Northeast Ohio region. The main goal of this service is to connect consumers and institutions to the producers in a way that is convenient, consistent, and fair. Lake to River's main message is to kindly reject the passive, anonymous consumption of processed food that large corporations routinely encourage.

1:04 PM 12/21/2016



Real Food * Real Local

5th Annual Conference

July 18th – 20th

Real Food * Real Local Institute

Monday, July 18th

12:45 - 1:45 PM

Main Floor

Challenges Of Implementing A Multi-state Distribution Network

Local food enterprise facility partners and regional producers from West Virginia, southwest Virginia and Ohio discuss the challenges of implementing a multi-state distribution network and collaborative plans for 2016 and 2017 to move local products throughout Central Appalachia. Leslie Schaller will provide an overview of our regional challenges and opportunities and facilitate updates from Mary Oldham of Natural Capital Investment Fund, Value Chain Cluster Initiative, Gail Patton of Unlimited Future Inc. and The Wild Ramp, Rosemary Roe of ACEnet and Annie Stroud from Downstream Strategies.

Main Floor

Afternoon Multi-Level Tracks

Upstairs

2:00 - 3:30 PM

Food Business Enterprise Centers:

Making Space for Local Entrepreneurs

In the last five years, Ohio has launched many new incubators and food hubs. What kind of processing, aggregation and distribution infrastructure does your community need to assist food and farm entrepreneurs? Management champions include presenters: Rosemary Roe—The Nelsonville Food Hub, Larry Fisher—The Food Ventures Center, Carol Humphreys—Foodworks Alliance, Melissa Miller—The Common Wealth Kitchen Incubator, Paul Keida—Canal Market District Food Hub and Kate Djupe—The Commissary.

New Opportunities in Local Meat Marketing

Navigating policies surrounding local meat production and custom butchering has the potential to open economic opportunities for many food entrepreneurs and farmers. Learn about obstacles and success stories from the Brian Williams leading the Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Council's Meat Task Force. Tony Logan State Director of Rural Development will share opportunities for Rural Development funding for farmers and processors looking to work together. If you are a regional meat producer or processor, please contact ACEnet staff, we would love to include your input on these issues.

3:45 - 5:00 PM

The Market Model: *Blurring the Lines between Farmers Markets and Retail Stores*

Retail markets are springing up to provide a market place for local farm products to be sold, allowing farmers to expand production and sales without needing to be on-site to sell their produce. The story starts in Wooster, Ohio at Local Roots, when Jane Black a writer for the Washington Post publishes an article about this cool cooperatively owned market. Local Roots developed a consignment model indoor farmers market to increase the viability of farm and value-added food businesses. Then a group from Huntington, WV heard about the idea and adapted the model to fit their rural city. More markets focusing on community food access and locally produced foods have continued to pop up in Tennessee, Ohio and West Virginia. The panel will be comprised of experienced market managers including Melissa William--Local Roots in Wooster, Lauren Kemp--the Wild Ramp, Ashley Cavendar--the Boone Street Market and Bill Brinkerhof from Argus Farm Shop.

Moving from Program to Policy

How do local food coalitions and policy councils build overcome economic and political barriers to local food? In rural communities and neighborhoods, local food champions often experience barriers to increase agricultural production, processing, sales and distribution. Amalie Lipstreu from the Ohio Ecological Food and Farm Association and Brandon Nida from the WV Food and Farm Association will discuss regional food plans, statewide policy changes and new cooperative legislation. Other experts from Central Appalachia working at local and state levels will be on hand to share new policies and incentives working in their communities.

5:00 - 7:00 PM

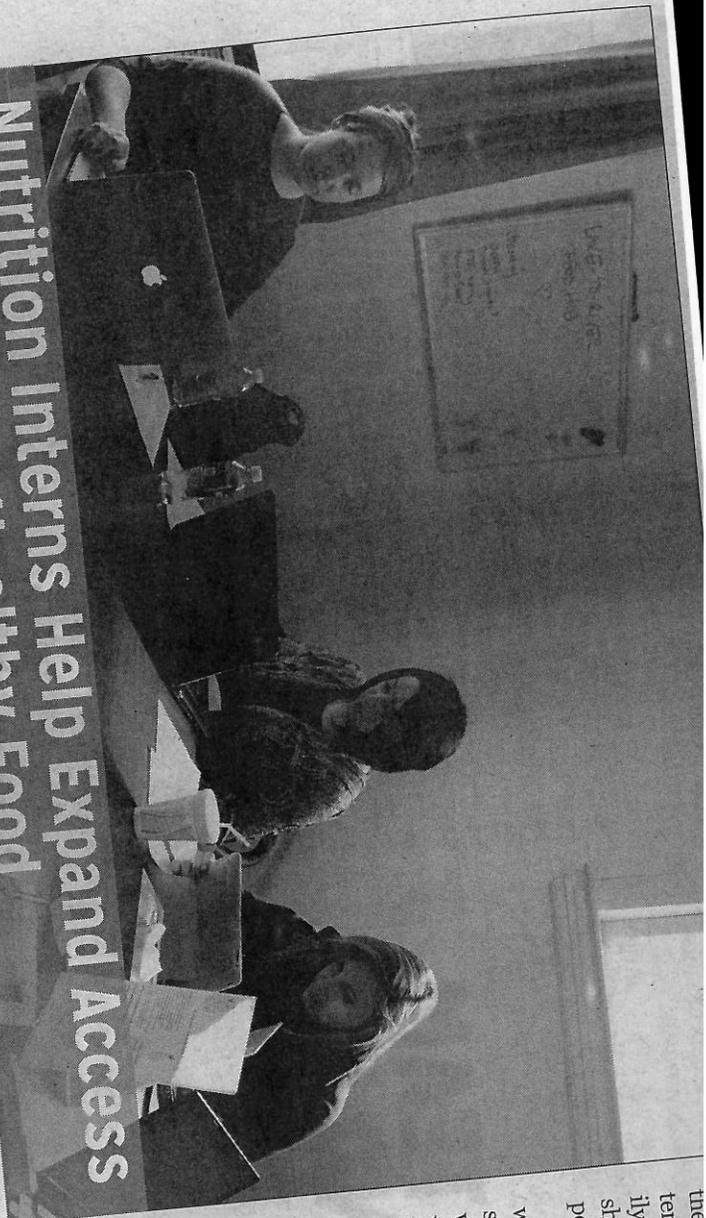
Downstairs: Kick Off Dinner: Keynote Speaker – Sara Eckhouse

Cocktail Hour Cash Bar & Kick Off Dinner

Enjoy a local dinner by Kiser's BBQ catering and enjoy a talk by our keynote speaker. **Keynote: Sara Eckhouse presents New Markets, New Opportunities: USDA's Know Your Farmer, Know Your Food Initiative.** See special Keynote Speakers page for more info!

Nutrition Interns Help Expand Access to Healthy Food

STORY: KATIE MONTGOMERY | KFKMONTGOMERY@GMAIL.COM



According to the United States Department of Agriculture Research Service, buying and preparing healthy meals was a struggle for 14 percent of Americans in 2014. College students in particular fall victim to the joke that Top Ramen constitutes a majority of their diet. While meant to be light hearted, the joke is rooted in the public expectation that twentysomethings will deal with food insecurity as almost a rite of passage. Healthy, local eating isn't easy for people in this area. This is partially due to the general lack of food education, but it's

also because year-round access to fresh and affordable fruit and vegetables in northeast Ohio is hard due to harsh winters. Gianna Cioffi, project manager for The Lake to River Project, is working hard to change both of these obstacles for the health of the community. "[Eating healthy food] is a preventative and proactive way to take hold of your health rather than after the fact," she said. "Building good habits now [is essential] so that diet-related chronic disease doesn't set in later." In order to improve consumer access to

healthier food, Cioffi helped organize the weekly Northside Farmer's Market on Madison Avenue and created a website dedicated to selling local products online throughout the week. "We really want to see a brick-and-mortar [market] open in this area so that people have constant, daily access to fresh fruits and vegetables," Cioffi says. "It all goes back to strengthening the local food network, but also promoting health and wellness in this area." In order to better research and expand the impact of healthy diets

and education, the YSU Health and Nutrition Department assigned three senior interns to work with Cioffi: Jessica Romeo, Allison Shay, and Joanne Starkey. The interns have helped Cioffi write recipe and grocery lists for Lake to River clients and have also researched local chronic health problems, so they can more clearly define the local need for healthy eating cooperatives. Romeo, author of the heart-healthy recipes, said one of the biggest obstacles to healthier eating is understanding the nutrition and putting the

work that we're doing," she said. "If we're applying for a grant in the future, we can use those statistics to say, 'Here are the needs of this neighborhood, these are the people that we're trying to reach, this why we're trying to reach them, and these are the outcomes that we hope to see by providing this service in this particular neighborhood.'" The interns' work involvement has been positive for everyone involved, Cioffi said. "This is an important relationship and partnership that we've built," she said. "[The interns] adding so much to the program and to our getting experience side the classroom building their ability."

Romeo said she's just glad to be a part of an organization like River that is focused on helping people. "I think it's important to give people the opportunity to get involved with vegetables and it helps them," she said. "It's an awesome and it helps them by that's what we care about, the health of the community."

these surveys. Interns have focused heavily on creating healthy shopping lists and recipes for people to use. "People don't know where to start," Romeo said. "They don't know what to do with their vegetables. They need knowledge and opportunity."

Shay, who wrote recipes with college students in mind, said the experience with Lake to River has been different from anything else she's done at her previous internships. "We've never done anything like this, really," she said. "All the stuff we did was clinical based, where this isn't."

While writing the recipes was the practical application of food education for the community, the huge number of chronic health problems was what really compelled the interns. Starkey, the intern assigned to writing vegetable recipes, laughed when she began listing Youngstown's myriad chronic health problems. "It's just all really bad and really depressing," she said. "Depression, heart health, diabetes, obesity — we're pretty bad overall." But the fact that the numbers are depressing makes them important for the future of Lake to



Father Noga says the practice helps local farmers and the local economy

st. patrick church

Monday, October 3, 2016

By William K. Alcorn

alcorn@vindy.com

YOUNGSTOWN

“Where’s the beef” is a popular line from a television commercial of a few decades ago.

“On local farms” is the answer Father Edward Noga, pastor at St. Patrick Church in Youngstown, gives.

As a result, one of the newer traditions at venerable St. Patrick Church, 1420 Oak Hill Ave., is using locally raised beef to make the meatballs for its long-running Sunday spaghetti dinners.

Four years ago, Father Noga decided to “keep it simple, and keep it local” by committing to purchase beef for the dinners solely from area farms.

The church’s spaghetti dinners take place from 11:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. on the first Sunday of each month from October through April. Both carry-out and sit-down dinners are offered.

Since Father Noga’s commitment four years ago, the purchasing of beef for the dinners has generated more than \$15,000 for local farmers.

One of the farmers who has benefited from St. Patrick’s decision is Seth Sharp of Premium Pastured Meats, who raises grass-fed beef, pastured pork and poultry on the family farm in the Alliance area.

“It’s good to see organizations like St. Pats commit to local farmers so that I can help feed my community good, wholesome food while also providing for my family,” Sharp said.

Father Noga said the church also has purchased beef from a farm in northern Trumbull County through the Lake to River Food Cooperative, a Youngstown organization dedicated to coordinating orders and deliveries of locally grown products to customers throughout the Valley, said Gianna Cioffi, Lake to River co-op manager.

Composed of 35 farmers and value-added food entrepreneurs, the Lake to River co-op provides marketing, sales aggregation and delivery of products including fruit, vegetables, pastured and conventionally raised meats, eggs, dairy products, granola, kale chips, and nut butters, all available for purchase on the Lake to Rivers Online Market at localfoodmarketplace.com/laketoriver/products.aspx.

“We’re such small potatoes, I don’t know why people have made such a big deal about it,” Father Noga said.

He said buying local beef can be more expensive and admitted that some members of the church think it could be purchased for less, thus leading to a better profit from the dinners.

But, the pastor said, since he arrived here 30 years ago, he has been buying local when possible.

“Maybe it’s part of my goofiness. I have nothing against chain restaurants, but I like local restaurants such as the MVR and Golden Dawn,” Father Noga said.

“It’s not just beef. It’s amazing what is grown locally,” Father Noga said.

“I hope it’s a trend. I know we plan to keep buying locally raised food. It’s good for local farmers and the economy,” he said.



Local farmer co-op cafe opens on the North Side

Co-op restaurant opens in Youngstown

Friday, September 30, 2016

By GRAIG GRAZIOSI

ggraziosi@vindy.com

YOUNGSTOWN

Cultivate: A Co-Op Cafe may be a new concept for local diners, but there's nothing foreign about its fare.

Cultivate is a restaurant featuring food grown by local farmers throughout the Mahoning Valley. The farmers own and operate the co-op – which includes the Lake-to-River online market, the Commonwealth kitchen incubator and the North Side Farmers' Market – and provide nearly all of the ingredients for the cafe's dishes from their crops. As the menu is based on local availability, offered items change based on the season.

It's located at 901 Elm St. across from the Lake-to-River online market building. Parking is available on the street and in an empty lot next door. Cultivate will celebrate its grand opening at 11 a.m. today with a ribbon-cutting, special menu items and drawings throughout the day.

Co-ops are companies that are owned by a group of members who usually buy into the business, with major company decisions made democratically by vote.

The cafe was open to the public for dinner Thursday evening as part of a soft-open event to build interest for the grand opening.

The night's featured dish was a chicken and waffle sampler produced from Dandelion Lane Farms chicken and incubator-made waffles. Outside of the cafe's twist on the Southern specialty – the chicken was pulled in a black bean stew and served over the waffle – the menu included standard cafe fare, such as soups, salads, sandwiches, scones and smoothies, as well as unique items such as handmade lentil hummus and quinoa salads.

Anette Ricci of Girard and Sybil Torella of Canfield were among the soft-open patrons Thursday. Torella said she heard a radio advertisement for the cafe and decided to invite her friend, Ricci, to check it out with her.

"I work at the library, so there's really nowhere around like this that's close," Torella said. "I heard they had scones here, and I like those, so I came by. It's very good."

Ricci settled on the cafe's salad sampler – a plate with a serving of kale quinoa salad, chicken salad and egg salad – and was impressed both by the plate and its price.

Though the cafe is relatively new – it has been serving customers in a limited capacity since August – it is the result of a long line of community-oriented food endeavors on the North Side.

Jim Converse, the regional economic development coordinator for the Commonwealth kitchen incubator, described the cafe as the next step in the evolution of a “food hub” on the North Side. Beginning with the North Side Farmer’s Market in 2003 and continuing with the founding of the co-op’s online food market and the kitchen incubator, Cultivate is the culmination of more than a decade of community work.

Farming and community are built into the structure of the cafe. A mural across the rear wall depicts green fields and farmlands that give way to the familiar Youngstown skyline; the smoothies bear names such as the “Wick Park” and “Hopewell Furnace”; and most of the minds behind the cafe are also the hands that harvest the crops for its dishes.

Melissa Miller, the president of the Lake-to-River co-op board, is a farmer at Miller Livestock in Kinsman, and just sold the cafe a selection of beef cheek. Bethany Maizel, who handles marketing and outreach for the co-op, also runs Avant Garden Mushroomery with her husband. They, of course, provide mushrooms.

“We want to establish this neighborhood as a place where food happens,” Miller said. “A lot of people are working in different ways to revitalize the city – this is how we’re doing it.”

There are more than 25 farmers and food producers in the co-op, including Miller Livestock, Angiuli’s Farm Market in Canfield, Avant Garden and Iron Roots Farms in Youngstown.

Jim Converse, the regional economic developer, described the cafe as the next step in the development of the Side Farmer's Market in 2003 and as a kitchen incubator, Cultivate is the

Farming and community are built on the land and farmlands that give way to the "Hopewell Furnace" and "Park" for its dishes.

Melissa Miller, the president of the market, just sold the cafe a selection of products. She also runs Avant Garden Mushrooms.

"We want to establish this neighborhood as a place for working in different ways to reduce the carbon footprint," he said.

There are more than 25 farmers participating in the market in Canfield, Avant Garden is the

active-shooter situation," he said.

evacuate, evacuate," Cleavelly advised, killed more than two dozen victims



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