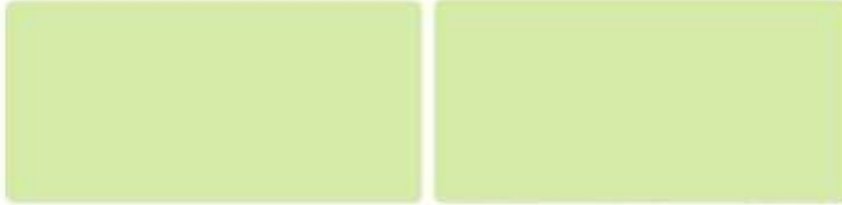


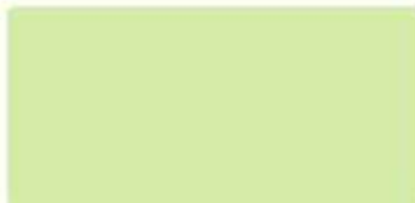
# Local Foods, Local Places

## Technical Assistance Program



Strengthening the  
Local Foods System:  
Actions and Strategies  
for the City of  
Williamson, West  
Virginia

August 24, 2015



## Community Story

Williamson is a small city of about 3,000 people in West Virginia near the Kentucky border. It is nestled in between lush mountains along the Tug Fork River in Mingo County. It is also the site of the famous Hatfield-McCoy Feud which draws visitors from all over, particularly for the Hatfield-McCoy annual reunion in downtown Williamson. There is also a recreational trail that runs throughout the county called the Hatfield-McCoy Trail system.



*The Ramella Community Garden provides raised beds for residents to rent. Across the street is a low-income housing complex whose residents use the community garden. One of the three high tunnels is strictly used for vegetables sold at the farmers market. Credit: Renaissance Planning*

The city has a coal-based economy, which has declined over the past decades due to decreasing reliance on coal for energy and has put many out of work. This decline has also led to abandoned coal mine sites sprinkled throughout the county. While Williamson’s 2014 Median Household Income was fairly high at \$42,500, 29 percent of people live below the poverty line and almost 48 percent of families with children under 18 live below the poverty line.<sup>1</sup>

In addition to economic concerns, Williamson residents face health concerns as well. Over 33 percent of adults in Mingo County are obese and almost 12 percent have diabetes. The fact that Williamson is a food desert, which means that its residents do not have ready access to fresh, healthy, affordable food, contributes to this trend.

Williamson has made many strides with its food system, health care system and downtown over the past several years. The Williamson Health and Wellness Center, Inc. (WHWC) is a Federally Qualified Health Center that opened in Williamson in 2014, with a mission dedicated to building a culture of health through holistic community and clinical interventions in order to stimulate a thriving local economy centered on wellness for the entire population. The charitable organization operates three sites including the WHWC clinic (a free clinic that opened in the past year), the Mingo County Diabetes Coalition and the Health Innovation Hub. Health is a major concern in Williamson and is the impetus for the push to create a culture of health by expanding the local food system, improving access to fresh, healthy foods, promoting an active lifestyle, and providing access to health care. Thanks in part to the new free clinic, Mingo County fares well compared to similar counties in terms of health care access with only 19 percent of adults not seeing a doctor due to cost<sup>2</sup>. In 2014, Williamson was one of six communities nationwide to receive the Robert Wood Johnson



*The farmers market spun off a mobile market that distributes food to six locations in Mingo County. The mobile market currently contracts with three vendors and a wholesaler to meet demand. Sometimes they sell produce from the community garden. Credit: Renaissance Planning*

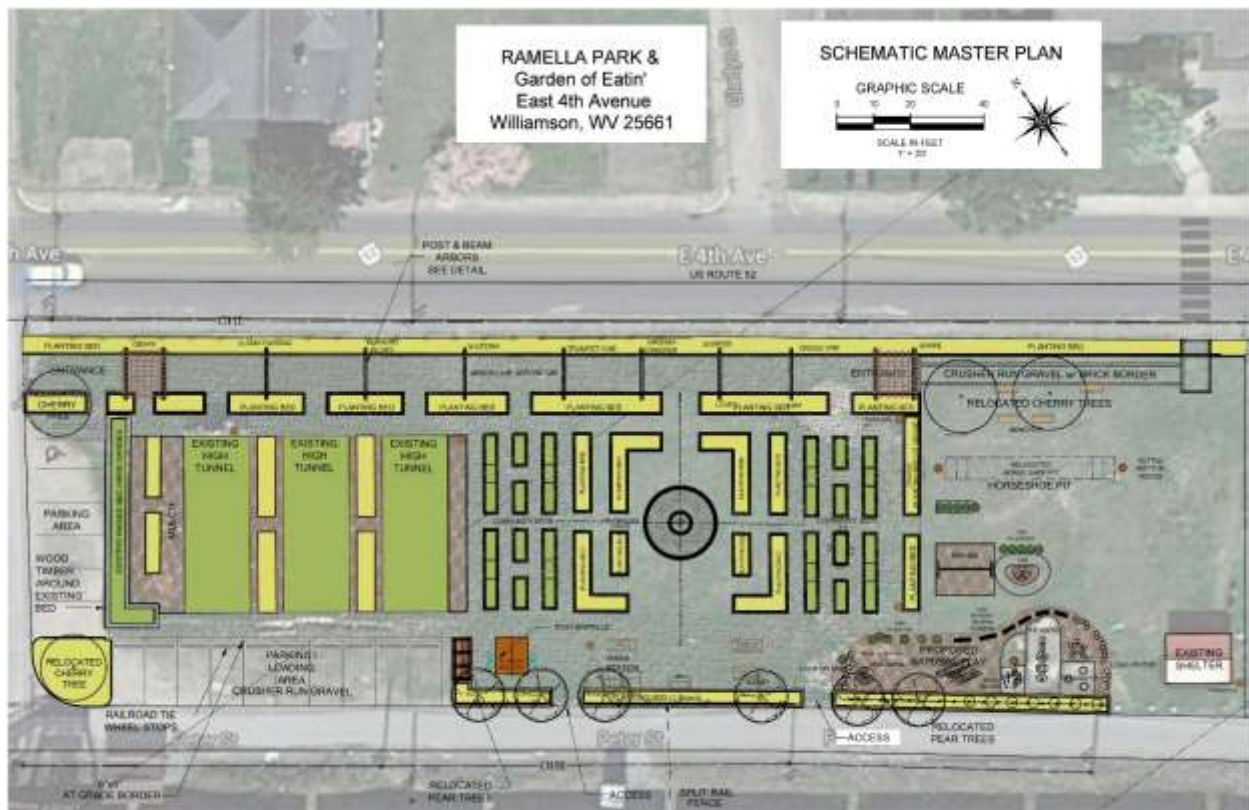
<sup>1</sup> American Community Survey, 2013

<sup>2</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Community Health Status Indicators, 2015

Foundation Health Prize, which is a prestigious recognition that “honors communities that place a high priority on health and bring partners together to drive local change.”

Williamson has a weekly farmers market, now in its third full season, and runs from May to October. The small farmers market typically has just over 200 visitors per week and six local vendors, including value-added producers. The market accepts SNAP (or food stamp) benefits and participates in a program to double SNAP dollars spent at the farmers market. The WHWC has a Prescription Veggies program that gives coupons to patients that they can use to redeem fresh fruits and vegetables at the farmers market. The market also provides recipe cards and hosts cooking demos to encourage people to expand their food purchases. Williamson launched MyMobile Market in 2014 that has six stops in Mingo County to improve access to fresh food for lower income areas.

Williamson also has a community garden, called the Ramella Park Community Garden. The gardens were built with input from community and service learning groups helped to construct the physical space, making improvements to the gardens each year and replicating the gardens in surrounding communities. The garden now has three high tunnels and 42 garden plots. Residents are able to rent a raised bed to grow their own vegetables. The high tunnels provide produce for the mobile market and the local farmers market. The garden is located near downtown and the farmers market, and across the street from a low-income housing complex, whose residents use the garden regularly. The garden is also a community center for agriculture education where workshops are held each year.



Map 1 – Schematic Master Plan for Ramella Park Community Garden. Credit: Williamson Health and Wellness Center

Williamson is a success story in many respects. They have figured out a way to deliver health care to residents through combined community and clinical interventions utilizing the Federally Qualified Health

Center as an anchor institution with a sustainable funding stream. Among the various programs housed under the WHWC, they have 36 full- or part-time employees operating in two locations with the third location coming soon. Their goal is to build sustainability into their business model so that each of the programs can stand on its own.

One key to their success is the use of service learning organizations such as AmeriCorps VISTA and Amizade Global Service-Learning. Using these groups, they have been able to build the community garden, run the farmers market, and sustain other local foods oriented programs.

## Vision

Williamson's vision to create both a local as well as a regional Culture of Health is well-underway but there are additional components they would like to implement to further advance this vision. Williamson envisions a Health Innovation HUB that will play a central role in local and regional economic growth through support for entrepreneurs, replicating Williamson's success regionally, strengthening the local food supply, and continuing to improve health outcomes.

Williamson is in the process of building the Health Innovation HUB (HUB) that will act as a shared meeting space for startup entrepreneurs to have a place to work, share ideas, and collaborate. Above the HUB they plan to create a hostel to provide short-term housing for visitors and service-learning volunteers. Additionally, the HUB will house an indoor growing facility specifically designed for workforce development and expanding agricultural markets.

Additionally, Sustainable Williamson, a component organization of the Williamson Health and Wellness Center, is presently creating a community kitchen that will provide space for food entrepreneurs to work and a place to educate residents through cooking classes. The future certified kitchen will provide a space for existing home-based gardeners that create value added products to prepare those for sale at the farmers market and in local retail outlets. The certified kitchen space can also serve as a location for knowledge exchange between the youth, hardly reached populations and older residents on how to make value-added products, grow their own foods and prepare foods. The space could also be a HUB for additional health and nutrition educational initiatives.

Though the farmers market is successful, there is more demand for local food than there is available supply. Sustainable Williamson is presently developing concrete steps towards expanding the number of local growers and increasing the amount of locally-grown produce. The farmers market currently invites growers from a 70-mile radius.

Economic and health concerns experienced by Williamson residents are not confined to the city limits. The region, including parts of Kentucky and Ohio are experiencing similar issues and are looking for ways to address these. Recognizing an opportunity to expand their success regionally, the WHWC is working to develop a platform for regional partners to replicate Williamson's success, called the Central Appalachian Sustainable Economies network or simply the CASE network (described in detail in Appendix G). CASE is a



*The site of the future Health Innovation HUB, which will provide co-working space for entrepreneurs. The top floor will be developed into a hostel to house visitors. The startup funds come from the WHWC clinic and is under the direction of the WHWC Board, but will eventually pay for itself and have its own Board. Credit: Renaissance Planning*

peer-to-peer regional network of innovators cultivating new ideas and resources in central Appalachia for the growth of healthy communities.

In 2014, the WHWC, Mingo County Redevelopment Authority, and Region 2 Planning and Development Council requested assistance through the Local Foods, Local Places program to develop an action plan for achieving this vision. The program is supported by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT), the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC), and the Delta Regional Authority (DRA). These agencies worked with the community to develop the following action plan. Implementing the actions described later in this plan can bring several benefits to the community including:

- Better access to healthy local food, especially among disadvantaged groups.
- A revitalized downtown that is the economic anchor of the community.
- More economic opportunities for local farmers and businesses.

## Engagement

The WHWC hosted a team of federal agency staff and consultants for a two-day workshop on May 12-13, 2015. The workshop began with lunch at a new restaurant and member of the Health Innovation HUB in downtown that makes healthy fresh food called 34:Ate, much of which is supplied from the Ramella Park Community Garden. Following lunch, the group was led on a tour of Williamson to set context and further discuss the successes, issues, and vision for Williamson. The workshop included a series of visioning, brainstorming, and action planning discussions among a diverse group of citizens and local, state, and federal stakeholders. The WHWC also invited stakeholders from around the region to share their vision on farming, local foods initiatives, sustainability, and health programs in order to enrich the emerging CASE network.



*Alexis Batausa of The Mingo County Diabetes Coalition led Day Two attendees through an exercise and stretch halfway through the morning. Credit: Renaissance Planning*

These presentations and discussions helped workshop participants identify community values that underlie the action plan for their local food system initiatives. Participants identified obstacles to and solutions for expanding access to local foods and created an action plan that is described herein.

Among those in attendance were representatives from the WHWC, Sustainable Williamson, Diabetes Coalition, City of Williamson, Mingo County Redevelopment Authority, Appalachian Leadership Academy, WVU Extension Service, Mingo County Schools, local farmers, local business owners, and local teachers. While the two-day workshop is the key event that contributed to this action plan, it was preceded by several conference calls, background research, and case study development. Figure 1 lays out the steps leading to this action plan.

The Williamson workshop was formatted slightly differently than most Local Foods Local Places workshops in that it included a separate regional breakout session on the afternoon of day two of the

workshop that was led by Eric Mathis, Wendy Willis, and Hans Schaffers – supported by the Institute for Regenerative Design and Innovation, a member of the Health Innovation HUB that is being developed in collaboration with the University of Pikeville. The outcomes of the regional breakout session are also documented in this action plan as well as fully integrated into the 2015 CASE Report found on the Sustainable Williamson website.

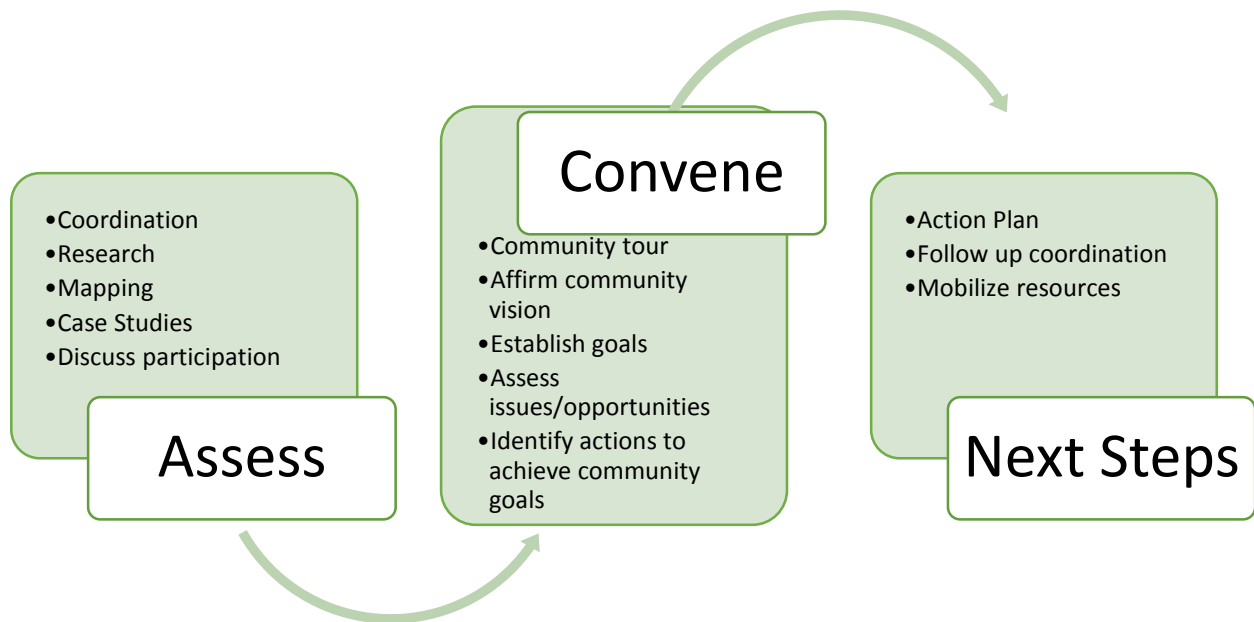


Figure 1 – Technical Assistance Process Diagram

### Challenges and Opportunities

The Williamson community stakeholders have a clear, achievable vision, but there are several hurdles to overcome in realizing this vision over time. One activity of the workshop entailed a discussion of the challenges and opportunities Williamson faces in achieving its local food system, health, business development, and regional goals. The challenges and opportunities identified by workshop participants during this activity are listed below.

### Expanding the Local Food System

#### **Challenges**

- Limited amount of empty, farmable land
- The land that is available on reclaimed mine sites requires soil remediation and additional resources than typical farm land
- Changing the mindset of residents to popularize agriculture work and entrepreneurial spirit

#### **Opportunities**

- Alternative farming methods that can work on reclaimed mine land
- Community Supported Agriculture
- Farm-to-school programs to start training youth to grow food
- Encouraging more local restaurants to use locally grown foods

- Some thought a lack of employable workforce and poor work ethic is holding Williamson back
- Knowledge sharing between older farmers and youth
- Connecting restaurants and farmers through the HUB

### Expanding Collaborative Regional Networks

#### **Challenges**

- Replicating the Williamson model in other communities and determining strategies that can be implemented in other places and are not place-specific
- Politics
- Changing mindsets of those in the region
- Garnering community support and understanding of what is trying to be achieved

#### **Opportunities**

- Connect K-12 curriculum with community development
- There is interest regionally in local foods and improved health
- Holding meetings for face-to-face time and creating connections regionally
- Using a community kitchen to educate people about local foods
- Have a local foods educator make trips to regional schools to teach kids about healthy living
- Recruiting new regional partners
- WVU extension agent for Mingo County
- Connecting with the Commission on Aging
- Replicate Sustainable Williamson's successful community garden projects at both schools as well as low-income housing

### Improving Health

#### **Challenges**

- Getting people interested and involved in health improving activities and campaigns
- Getting buy-in from local businesses
- Getting more restaurants to offer healthy menu items
- Branding local foods
- Improving access to health care providers
- Improving awareness of issues and trends in health
- Educating residents about farming practices and health
- School recess was suspended
- Motivating people to get healthy
- Working together as a community to improve health

#### **Opportunities**

- Use the Roadrunners group as a springboard to involve schools and provide support for healthier lifestyles
- There is already momentum going here that more efforts can build off of, such as the success of the WHWC
- Offer cooking demos and tastings
- Work with the University of Pikeville Medical School
- Educate children at an early age, when they are receptive to hands-on activities.
- Provide infrastructure that supports exercise, such as trails, bike paths, and is also useful for transportation; create better linkages in these systems
- Provide farmer support

- Developing a replicable model that other places can follow
- Creating a food hub
- Educating residents through success stories

### Supporting Food and Other Entrepreneurs

#### **Challenges**

- Access to capital for entrepreneurs
- Penetrating the local food distribution network
- Providing the variety people seek
- Educating residents about local foods and farming
- Getting people to step outside of the box and try something new

#### **Opportunities**

- Develop a sustainable harvesting and cultivation system for native medicinal herbs and processing/branding centers for these herbs
- There is an available workforce ready and willing to be put to work
- There is a history of local subsistence farming to build from
- There is property available for farming
- Provide support for startups
- Create an entrepreneurial network
- Involve the community and collaborate with businesses and citizens
- Develop farm-to-table and farm-to-restaurant campaigns
- Mentoring entrepreneurs through knowledge transfer to overcome challenges

This discussion helped in further defining the goals for Williamson’s local food system and the specific actions needed to achieve those goals. The goals are shown in Figure 2.





Figure 2: Goals for Advancing Williamson

Workshop participants also identified some action steps for achieving each goal. Additional actions have been added by the workshop facilitators to supplement the actions needed to achieve these goals. The goals and corresponding actions are outlined in the Action Plan section.

### Regional Breakout Session

The regional breakout session discussed ways in which the success of Williamson can be shared with other communities in the region. The goal is to create a regional collaborative network, called the Central Appalachian Sustainable Economies (CASE) network, which will be a conduit for sharing information, resources, and best practices to build a regional Culture of Health. The 2015 CASE Report – A Practitioner’s Guide to Building a Regional Culture of Health is a forthcoming document that will lay out the action steps to implement this regional network. The following documents the discussion during the regional breakout session, which will be incorporated into the 2015 CASE Report.

Some potential regional collaborations that were identified during the LFLP regional breakout session include:

### Possible Regional Collaborations

- Need to include more representation from different sects of the community. This inclusion will diversify the market sparking consumer interest. The community needs common ground and values in order to project into future. Health innovation curriculum with a specific focus on both food and native medicinal herbs at K-12 school with the purpose of developing the community-based infrastructure the proposed *Regional Open-Innovation Cluster* initiative
- Sorghum/Hemp factory; Bicycle hub; Growth center vertical farm; Fresh foods market; Farm-to-table restaurant; Eco-tourism focus to leverage area natural resources (Cave Run Lake, Red River Gorge, and the Licking River).

- Poultry production; Possible replication of Sustainable Williamson’s mobile market; Possible collaboration with regional grocery stores to sell local products as well as bringing local vendors into the mix.
- Regional model will self-replicate through peer-to-peer network; behaviors will change; mind frames will evolve to a more effective thinking method
- Pike County Health Department: we are wanting to take the successes of the Shelby Valley project and share it with all communities in Pike County. Healthier citizens in our county is the goal. Our current health trends are not acceptable. We are making the change and will be the leaders of this change.
- Scioto County Health Department: Live Healthy Appalachia; APPAPHIL; KIPDA – Area agency on aging and independent living, disability resource center; Marshall University; University Extension Offices; share your strength; community commercial kitchens.
- Rock crusher for building soils on post-mine sites.
- Community commercial kitchen.
- Greenbrier County: Community gardens linked to senior services – engage youth to learn and help; link resources and community health activities to local clinics; get clinics and health care systems to invest in community health activities in exchange for documentation of participation; produce for seniors.
- Introduce free-range poultry and eggs; freeze-dried vegetables w/15-20 year shelf-life.
- Incorporate intergenerational programs – kids/seniors focus summer/afterschool.
- Use schools for aggregation/processing/community kitchen.
- Work together on low income, housing, community gardens, wellness, market, pedestrians and ADA access.
- Nutrition in school systems and focus on parents and families.
- Integration of health and wellness across systems (Health Dept., Adult Education, Healthy communities).
- Incentives: for low income folks, farmers to produce.
- Farmers, nutritionists, etc., meet to identify needs.
- Create regional 501 c 3 and use appropriations process.
- Create coalitions across borders.
- Hold regional foodshed meetings.

The following next steps for the CASE network were also identified during the regional breakout session.

#### Next Steps

- Sustainable Williamson will build raised beds for community gardens.
- Develop an asset map for region (agriculture, diversification, etc.).
- Take these types of projects and add them into permit negotiations – permits for infrastructure.
- Establish free range grazing and processing on reclaimed mine land.
- Greenbrier County Health will contact Alan Steinbeck (Renaissance Planning) and Eric Mathis for planning and collaboration.
- Develop a resource website – clearinghouse of information and resources, create brokerage, grants, etc.; work w/EBT website to create single platform; food and farm coalition; Sustainable Williamson; state of WV.

- Develop a dashboard of community health indicators.

## Action Plan

Workshop participants identified several action steps for achieving each goal. The goals and corresponding actions are outlined in this section. The goals and action items are presented in Appendix A in their complete form, which includes a time frame, lead role, supporting cast, cost, funding sources, and near-term steps.

### Goal 1: Support a self-sustaining local food economy that is a catalyst for health and business innovations and improves the lives of residents around Williamson.

- **Action 1.1** Formalize scope of services for the Health Innovation HUB and make improvements to the facilities.
- **Action 1.2** Open a community commercial kitchen space.
- **Action 1.3** Explore cooperative model for community grocery store.
- **Action 1.4** Establish a plan to brand cross sector work including healthy food branding at restaurants and local markets.

### Goal 2: Expand the local food system to ensure that supply meets demand.

- **Action 2.1** Conduct an asset and gaps assessment of the local/regional food system to identify demand markets, supply needs, and existing assets in the community.
- **Action 2.2** Formalize the Food Link mentorship program for youth, veterans and dislocated workers to support existing aging farmers and to support new farm ventures.
- **Action 2.3** Develop agriculture sites on reclaimed lands and share lessons learned.
- **Action 2.4** Refine Ramella Park Community Garden plans including agriculture workshop series, management roles and annual production plan. Utilize service learning partners to replicate community garden model.

### Goal 3: Improve the health of Williamson residents through improved coordination among various agencies and new methods of tracking health and wellness across sectors of community development work.

- **Action 3.1** Convene with the health sector on nutrition and food access topics to promote community health. Utilize prescription veggies and success stories from community health worker interventions to engage the health sector further.
- **Action 3.2** Promote “half of my plate is filled with vegetables” messaging for healthy nutrition (Healthy in the Hills workshops, cooking demonstrations and cook-off competitions, SNAP tours, mobile market).
- **Action 3.3** Follow the concept of “collective impact” to define roles of local organizations and to agree on plans to track and measure improvements.
- **Action 3.4** Utilize technological innovations to track health and to improve community outreach (wellness tracker, text messaging, social media, e-blasts and websites).
- **Action 3.5** Take the multimodal network to the next level. Create safe bicycle and pedestrian connections to the community gardens and farmers market.

Goal 4: Build collaborative local & regional network to spread the success of local food efforts throughout the region.

- **Action 4.1** Define collective goals of organizations and communities in an effort to improve health and diversify the economy in Central Appalachia.
- **Action 4.2** Participate in face-to-face meetings throughout the region and facilitate learning exchange between communities.
- **Action 4.3** Share lessons learned for agriculture projects on reclaimed lands.

## Funding

The Appalachian Regional Commission is providing Appalachian communities in the Local Foods Local Places program to apply for \$20,000 grant funds to use toward implementation of a project (or projects) coming out of the action plan. The following represents some specific projects and corresponding livability principles for which additional grants, loans, or other funding could apply.

### Key Actions for Additional Funding and Support

- Funding to brand the local foods efforts
- Funding to complete construction of the HUB
- Funding to build certified community kitchen
- Funding to program certified kitchen, establish rules
- Funding to purchase a rock crusher to remediate reclaimed mine sites

### Selected Livability Principles Advanced by Action Plan

The Local Foods, Local Places program is supported by the Federal Partnership for Sustainable Communities. The Partnership includes EPA, DOT, and HUD. These agencies have been working since 2009 to incorporate livability considerations into their policies and funding programs. This section describes how Williamson’s Action Plan supports each of the livability principles.

#### **Provide More Transportation Choices**

One of the action steps relates to creating bicycle and pedestrians connections to the community garden and farmers market. This will make it easier for people to walk or bike around town and have the added benefit of improving health by facilitating active transportation.

#### **Promote Equitable, Affordable Housing**

WHWC is able to use funds for affordable housing. Additionally, the community garden is located across the street from a low-income housing complex.

#### **Enhance Economic Competitiveness**

The Health Innovation HUB will provide support to local and regional entrepreneurs, which will in turn help to grow the local economy. Locating the WHWC in downtown is helping to generate more activity in downtown. People are visiting downtown restaurants and businesses after their doctor appointments at the clinic.

#### **Support Existing Communities**

Reusing reclaimed mine lands to make them viable to farm will help to invest in Williamson and help them to expand their ability to grow foods locally.

### **Coordinate and Leverage Federal Policies and Investment**

The workshop efforts identified several opportunities to build on investments already made and leverage different local, state and federal funding sources.

### **Value Communities and Neighborhoods**

The actions in this plan focus on providing access to healthy, local foods, growing the local economy, and focusing efforts in downtown.

## Appendices

- Appendix A – Action Plan Details
- Appendix B – Key Health and Agriculture Data
- Appendix C – Workshop Participants
- Appendix D – Funding Resources
- Appendix E – References
- Appendix F – Presentation Slides
- Appendix G – Central Appalachian Sustainable Economies Network
- Appendix H – Key Milestones