



Shaping the Region's Aggregation & Distribution Future: Strategy Session for Producers & Partners (90 Minute Session)

This facilitated working session brings together the WV Regional Food System Partnership participants, farmers, aggregators, buyers, and local food organizations to dig into the region's current Aggregation & Distribution (A&D) challenges and opportunities. Participants will identify needs, share experiences, and help outline priorities that will shape a regional A&D strategic plan. This session is ideal for producers, buyers, and organizations already involved in value-chain development or anyone ready to influence how food moves across our regional system.

Thanks to our funders and partners!



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"Any opinions, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in this presentation are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the view of the U.S. Department of Agriculture."



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Appalachian
Regional
Commission

**Mountains to Metropolis:
Connecting West Virginia
Value-Added Products to Regional
Markets**



Meet the Panel

Facilitator



Cyndi Kirkhart-
Facing Hunger
Foodbank



John Riggs-
West Virginia
University-
Parkersburg



Jennifer Brown-
Appalachian
Cellar



Sierra Cox-
West Virginia
Food and
Farm Coalition

Current Regional Food System Partnership Partners

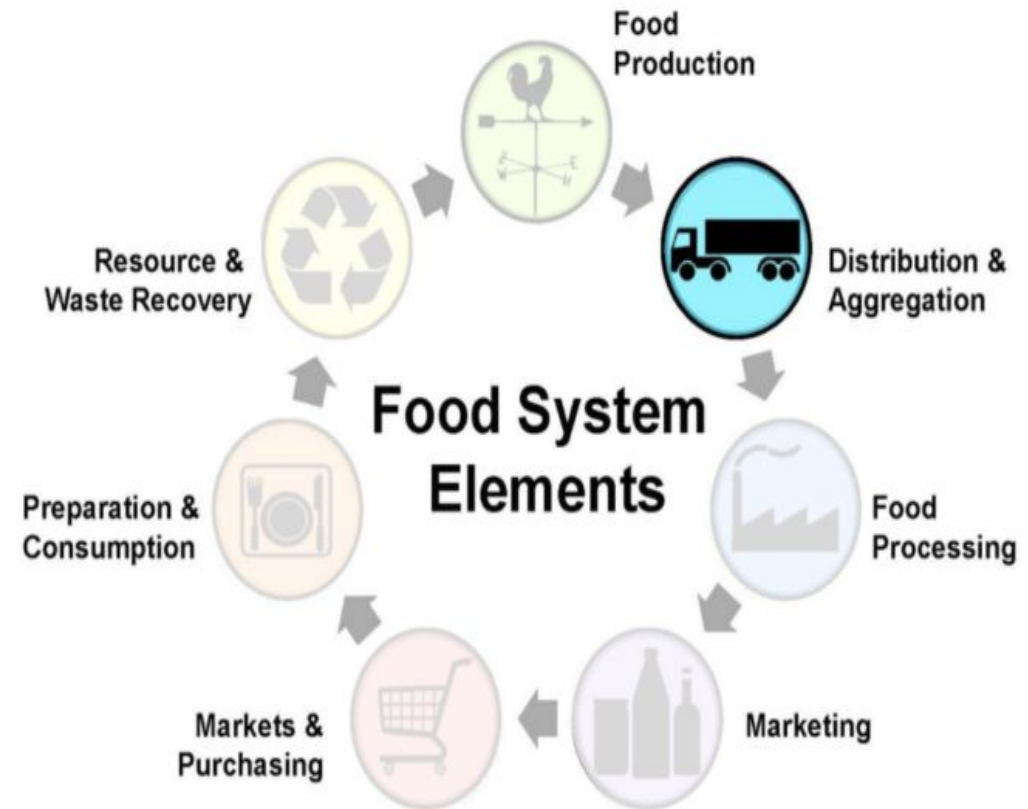
- West Virginia Food & Farm Coalition
- Mountain State Co-Hop
- Facing Hunger Food Bank
- Garrett Growers Cooperative
- Project Healthy Kids
- West Virginia University – Institute for Community & Rural Health
- WV Maple Syrup Producers Association
- West Virginia University-Parkersburg
- JarHead Farms

Presentation Roadmap

- Project Overview
 - Understanding the Current Aggregation & Distribution Landscape in West Virginia
 - Exploring Current Operations: How Food Moves Today
 - Streamlining and Coordinating Logistics Routes
 - Strategic Thinking: Building a More Efficient Statewide System
 - How You Can Join Our Efforts!
-
- Housekeeping
 - 90 minute session
 - 3 minutes per answer
 - Parking Lot

What is Aggregation & Distribution (A&D)?

- **Aggregation** refers to the process of collecting products from various producers into larger quantities.
- **Distribution** involves the logistics of delivering these aggregated products to retailers or consumers.



Adapted by Christy Shi, Center for Environmental Farming Systems.

From: Wilkins, J. and Eames-Sheavly, M. *Discovering the Food System; An experiential learning program for young and inquiring minds.* Cornell University, Departments of Nutritional Science and Horticulture. <http://www.discoverfoodsys.cornell.edu/>

Regional Food Systems Partnership (RFSP)

The purpose of the RFSP program is to support partnerships that connect public and private resources to plan and develop local or regional food systems.

Planning and Design projects support partnerships in the early stages of bringing together people and organizations, envisioning a shared future, setting goals, and finding strategies for developing local or regional food systems. Specifically, these projects support food system's efforts to build connections between public and private groups in their regions. This allows the region to discover and promote opportunities for collaboration within the food system.

Mountains to Metropolis: Connecting West Virginia Value-Added Products to Regional Markets

This project brings together food and agriculture businesses, non-profits, and charitable food organizations to address a pressing need for small-scale value-added producers in West Virginia: aggregation and distribution. As the demand for West Virginia-made value-added products grows throughout the state and region, a gap in mid-tier value-chain coordination has been identified. This project's goal is to improve the economic viability and sustainability of small-scale value-added producer businesses by establishing robust partnerships and planning an efficient distribution system that increases the reach and competitiveness of value-added products from West Virginia to the broader Mid-Atlantic region.

Aggregation & Distribution in WV

Understanding the Current Aggregation and Distribution Landscape in WV

How would you describe the current aggregation and distribution environment in West Virginia?

What's working well and where are the biggest gaps?

Aggregation & Distribution in WV

Understanding the Current Aggregation and Distribution Landscape in WV

What logistical realities or constraints most impact how food products move across the state today?

Aggregation & Distribution in WV

Understanding the Current Aggregation and Distribution Landscape in WV

From your perspective, what types of products or markets face the biggest distribution challenges in WV?

Aggregation & Distribution in WV

Exploring Current Operations: How Food Moves Today

Walk us through what a typical distribution week looks like in your organization—who you serve, how product moves, and where the pinch points are.

Aggregation & Distribution in WV

Exploring Current Operations: How Food Moves Today

How do geography, rurality, and travel times shape your logistics decisions?

Aggregation & Distribution in WV

Exploring Current Operations: How Food Moves Today

Where do you see duplication of routes or missed opportunities for shared transport across partners or sectors?

Aggregation & Distribution in WV

Exploring Current Operations: How Food Moves Today

Appalachian Cellar

How is MSCH currently coordinating pickup, storage, and delivery for producers, and what scaling challenges are emerging as demand increases?

Aggregation & Distribution in WV

Exploring Current Operations: How Food Moves Today

Facing Hunger Foodbank

What lessons from charitable food distribution could be directly applied to strengthen commercial or cooperative distribution systems?

Aggregation & Distribution in WV

Exploring Current Operations: How Food Moves Today

West Virginia University- Parkersburg

How are you preparing students and emerging producers to navigate the logistical and distribution realities of agricultural markets?

Aggregation & Distribution in WV

Streaming & Coordinating Logistics Routes

Where do you see the strongest opportunities for route consolidation or shared distribution among West Virginia partners?

Aggregation & Distribution in WV

Streaming & Coordinating Logistics Routes

What tools, technologies, or practices could most improve efficiency—from inventory tracking to route optimization?

Aggregation & Distribution in WV

Streaming & Coordinating Logistics Routes

How can organizations better coordinate timing, volume, or pickup schedules to reduce cost and increase load density?

Aggregation & Distribution in WV

Streaming & Coordinating Logistics Routes

Facing Hunger Foodbank

What backhaul opportunities or shared-route models do you believe hold the most potential for creating cost savings and reducing empty miles in WV?

Aggregation & Distribution in WV

Strategic Thinking: Building a More Efficient Statewide System

If you could improve one piece of West Virginia's distribution ecosystem tomorrow, what would it be and why?

Aggregation & Distribution in WV

Strategic Thinking: Building a More Efficient Statewide System

How do you see your organization contributing to a more coordinated statewide A&D network over the next few years?

Aggregation & Distribution in WV

Strategic Thinking: Building a More Efficient Statewide System

What partnerships or types of partners are most needed to strengthen West Virginia's mid-tier value chain?

Aggregation & Distribution in WV

Strategic Thinking: Building a More Efficient Statewide System

Appalachian Cellar

How is the cooperative preparing to support greater product volume or more complex routing as more producers seek distribution support?

Aggregation & Distribution in WV

Strategic Thinking: Building a More Efficient Statewide System

Facing Hunger Foodbank

How can charitable food distribution and commercial distribution systems learn from one another and share infrastructure without compromising missions?

Aggregation & Distribution in WV

Strategic Thinking: Building a More Efficient Statewide System

West Virginia University- Parkersburg

How can institutions like WVUP help producers grow into distribution-ready businesses, and what shifts would support that transition?

Aggregation & Distribution in WV

Closing Question

What gives you the most optimism about the future of aggregation and distribution in West Virginia?

Benefits of Aggregation & Distribution Partnerships

What Aggregation & Distribution Partners Gain

Operational Benefits

- Increased load density & reduced empty backhaul miles
- Access to pre-qualified, shelf-stable product volume
- Entry into new markets with coordinated partner support
- More efficient route optimization through shared planning tools
- Customized technical assistance in
 - inventory systems
 - food safety & regulatory compliance
 - warehouse procedures
 - interstate distribution requirements

Benefits of Aggregation & Distribution Partnerships

Why This Partnership Works

- It is cooperative, not competitive.
- Each partner retains autonomy while leveraging shared efficiencies.
- Supported by USDA funding, WVU research, technical assistance, and committed anchor partners.
- Grounded in the **Theory of Accompaniment**—we build with you, not for you.
- Partners have decades of logistics expertise (Facing Hunger, Young and Stout, Garrett Growers).

Benefits of Aggregation & Distribution Partnerships

Financial/Strategic Benefits

- Early priority for future distribution contracts
- Greater customer diversity & resilience
- Reduced overhead through shared movement of goods
- Participation in funded pilot routes
- Opportunity to help design a system that works *for your business*

Expanding Partnerships

Who are we looking for?

- We are actively recruiting **logistics providers, aggregators, distributors, food hubs, cooperatives, grocers, and regional buyers** who want to shape and benefit from this new system.
- What we need from Aggregation & Distribution Partners:
 - Insights into existing logistics routes and constraints
 - Willingness to explore route extensions or backhauling
 - Participation in planning and design sessions
 - Optional hosting of site visits
 - Input on contract models, cost-sharing, and integration

Collaboration & Cooperation

- **Interested in becoming a Mountain State Co-Hop member:** please contact Jenn Brown @ sales@appalachiancellar.com or 681.332.0707
- **Interested in scaling your product (including raw product):** please contact Audra O'Dell @ aodell@wvfoodandfarm.org or 304.669.8973
- **Interested in becoming an aggregation and distribution partner:** please contact Sierra Cox @ scox@wvfoodandfarm.org or 304.482.2214

Please Complete Our Survey



Thank you!