



LOCAL FOODS, LOCAL PLACES

Technical Assistance Program



Strengthening the
Local Food System and
Downtown
Revitalization:

Actions and Strategies
for the City of Hazard
and Perry County,
Kentucky

September 8, 2015



Community Story

The City of Hazard, population 5,432, is an Appalachian community in the mountains of eastern Kentucky and is the county seat for rural Perry County. Hazard was incorporated and laid out in 1824, and was named after Commander Oliver Hazard Perry—hero of the war of 1812. The City remained a relatively small, isolated rural community with a population numbering in the hundreds, along the North Fork of the Kentucky River, until the railroad arrived in 1912. The railroad ushered in an era of coal mining that transformed both the economy and landscape of the region. With the railroad and the coal-centric economy Hazard’s population grew to its peak of 7,397 in 1940, and has declined steadily since then.¹

Perry County ranks last amongst Kentucky’s 120 counties in terms of health indicators. The area is a USDA-classified food desert. Local residents struggle with health issues, including high rates of obesity, diabetes and heart illness.² The County’s median household income is \$32,538, and 26.4% of the population lives below the poverty level. Over a third of the County’s children live in poverty. The primary contributing factor to these trends has been the decline of the coal industry and the slow process of economic diversification and recovery that has been an emphasis of community leaders in recent years.

Hazard and Perry County’s strengths are in its proud people, its Appalachian heritage and traditions, the landscape and natural resources. A number of citizen-led groups have been busy collaborating to address the challenges of poverty, health and economic decline. In recent years, there have been a number of positive efforts. Eastern Kentucky is currently energized through Shaping Our Appalachian Region (SOAR), a regional initiative of Governor Beshear and Congressman Rogers. Perry County is a USDA Strike Force county and is within a federally-designated Kentucky Highlands Promise Zone region. Thus there are local, regional and federal efforts underway to transform health, economic and community vitality. It is within this context of transformation and economic revitalization efforts that the Foundation for Appalachian Kentucky (FAKY) and a coalition

LFLP Partners and Key Stakeholders

Foundation for an Appalachian Kentucky’s mission is to be a catalyst for community collaboration and charitable giving; to create permanent endowment funds as a sustaining resource to improve quality of life and place in Eastern Kentucky. <http://appalachianky.org/>

InVision Hazard, a downtown revitalization group and program of the FAKY.

Perry County Farm to School, which received USDA funding in 2014 and now seeks to develop a model for other school systems in the region.

Community Farm Alliance, a grassroots organization that works to ensure opportunities for family-scale agriculture in Kentucky. <http://cfaky.org/>

Hazard Community Technical College, which is helping to implement projects including a community food gardens in Hazard’s downtown River Arts Greenway.

KEY STAKEHOLDERS/INVITEES

- Kentucky River Area Development District
- Perry County Cooperative Extension
- Perry County Farmers Market
- Mountain Association for Community Economic Development
- Appalachian Center at the University of Kentucky
- Kentucky Food Policy Network
- Shaping Our Appalachian Region Initiative
- Promise Zone
- Jackson Community Kitchen
- Grow Appalachia
- Hazard Perry County Tourism
- Kentucky Mountain Health Alliance
- Chamber of Commerce
- Eastern Kentucky Concentrated Employment Program - Eastern Kentucky Food System Collaborative
- Appalachian Regional Hospital
- Appalachian Arts Alliance
- Area restaurants and businesses

Figure 1 - Key LFLP Partners and Stakeholders

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hazard,_Kentucky; <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/21/2135362.html>

² <http://kentuckyhealthfacts.org/data/location/show.aspx?cat=2%2c3%2c8&loc=97>

Local Foods, Local Places Technical Assistance Workshop

of community partners (see top half of Figure 1) in Perry County submitted an application for technical assistance from the federal Local Foods, Local Places (LFLP) program. Sponsored 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), this program supports the principles of livability and aims to help existing communities expand access to healthy local foods, improve walkability of main streets and diversify the local economy.

The application for LFLP assistance centered around the recognition that food, health and economy are interconnected. FAKY and its partners have been collaborating to establish a regionally focused, sustainable food system for all residents. Though Eastern Kentucky is economically distressed, Hazard currently is a regional employment and retail hub for the area around it, and as such there are opportunities for the City to play a larger role as the focal point for an improved local food system for the region. The application letter outlined



Figure 2 - Downtown Hazard, Kentucky. Image Credit: Jason Espie.

three primary areas where the partners needed assistance: assessing the status of agriculture within a 50-mile radius of Hazard, developing a local food marketing plan to stimulate a vibrant culture around food, and creating a business plan for the proposed Eastern Kentucky Food and Farm Hub and resource center.

FAKY was awarded the LFLP technical assistance in the fall of 2015 and the technical assistance process began thereafter. The remainder of this report documents the engagement process, the workshop activities, and most importantly the action plan and follow-up next steps. The action plan started out with the three assistance requests above, but evolved into the five goal areas shown later in this report and in Appendix A.

Engagement Process

The technical assistance engagement process conducted for LFLP has three phases, illustrated in Figure 3 below. The Assessment phase consisted of three preparation conference calls with a local workshop planning committee that worked to articulate the workshop goals and agenda, logistics and stakeholder invitation lists. The Convening phase included the effort's keystone event—a two-day workshop to help the community articulate goals and actionable next steps for enhancing local food and downtown revitalization. The next steps phase was also characterized by a series of three follow-up conference calls and reporting and documentation.

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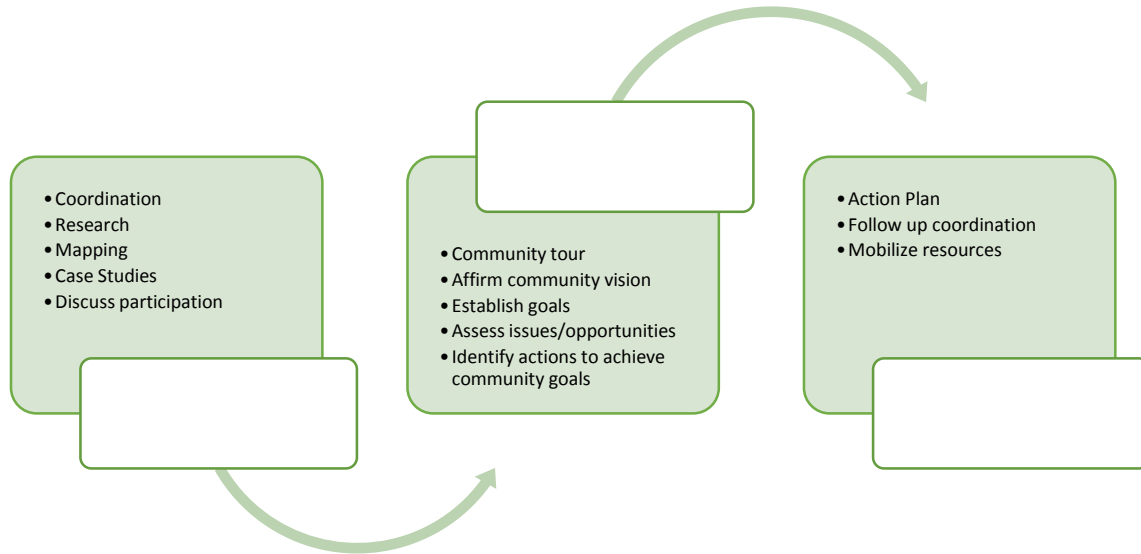


Figure 3 - Local Foods, Local Places Technical Assistance Process Diagram

The workshop was held April 7 and 8, 2015 at the Kentucky River Area Development District (KRADD) in Hazard. Federal agencies participating in the workshop included the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), and the United States Federal Highway Administration (FHWA). The workshop was well attended by many key stakeholder groups listed in Figure 1 (bottom half). Sign in sheets from the workshop are included in Appendix C.



Figure 4 - Panorama of the workshop attendees on day one, in the Kentucky River Area Development District meeting room. Image Credit: Jason Espie.

The Community Tour

Local planning committee members lead a tour of the community on the first day of the workshop. The consultant team from Renaissance Planning Group, several federal officials and other stakeholders and the local steering committee visited a number of key community assets and places of interest. The tour included the current farmers market site, a drive and walk of Main Street and downtown Hazard, the LEED-certified regional library, a local farm, and a number of potential locations for a future local food store/farm hub in the downtown. A number of the locations visited are shown below as well as in the

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workshop photo album in Appendix E. What was apparent from the tour of the area is the steepness of terrain and the number of reclaimed mining sites where much of the newer commercial development is located. The tour also afforded the the local planning group the opportunity to demonstrate and discuss why it is so difficult for local residents to access fresh and healthy foods if they live in hollows or communities in the county that are not located near grocery stores. Additionally, the tour revealed some of the potential opportunity in downtown Hazard, especially relating to the empty storefronts.

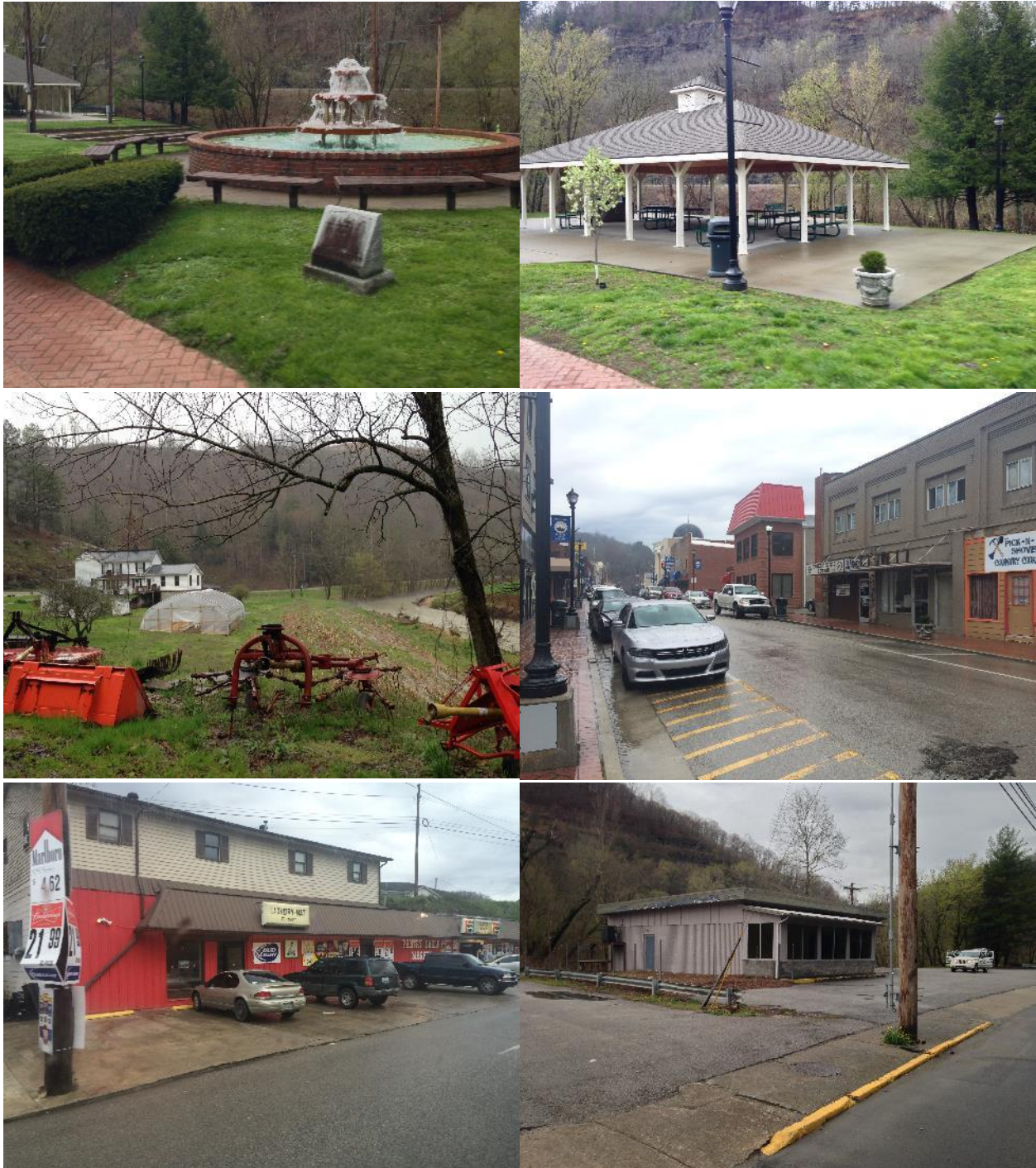


Figure 5 - Tour images. Top right and left: Hazard River Arts Greenway and community garden. Middle left: Holiday Farm. Middle right, downtown Hazard. Bottom left, Pantry Shelf (retail downtown). Bottom right, a potential store/hub location near downtown. Image Credit: Jason Espie.

The second exercise involved a story telling exercise where groups were tasked with drafting a headline of something positive that has happened in the area 20 years from now. They were to draft a headline and describe to others what had happened. The headlines are shared in Figure 8, and reveal many of the group's aspirations for economic revitalization, improved health, a more robust local food system, local food in schools and restaurants, community pride, increased activity and events, and more sustainable agricultural practices. It is against this positive, forward thinking backdrop of values and visions of the future that the remainder of the workshop was built. Day one concluded with a review of the workshop goals and discussion about the direction for action planning to follow the next day. These goals would be further refined and evolve into the action plan implementation tables that are summarized further below and are shown in detail in Appendix A. In addition to producing the action plan, day two of the workshop included a number of presentations and case studies by the consultant team covering food hubs, farmers markets, farm incubator programs and other food system related technical information. The slides for the day one and two consultant presentations are in Appendix D. The group also spent some time on day two doing a mapping exercise of key assets and features of the local food system, including farms; existing and emergent farmers markets; institutional markets; and regional initiatives, partners, and programs. The results of the asset mapping exercise are shown in Appendix B.



Figure 9 – Food system asset mapping. Image Credit: Jason Espie.

Storytelling Exercise: Headlines from the Future

- *Summer 2035 Farmers Market Summer Concert Series; People are coming to activities, there are more producers and market is year round.*
- *Sustainable agriculture cited as main factor in achieving lowest unemployment in 50 years; Median income is in line with national average.*
- *Northfork Local Foods—20 year anniversary. Schools get 50% of food locally, farmers market adds new location downtown, revitalizing the downtown core; Reclaimed mine sites are transformed into model farms.*
- *Junior chefs (farm to school project) opens a restaurant downtown.*
- *Bourbon distillery opens and wins prize.*
- *People in Hazard celebrate 80% increase in overall health. There is a decrease in diabetes, obesity, and other poor health indicators.*
- *Land reclamation is happening, through strategic succession planning and mining tourism.*
- *Southeast KY is a regional player in local food movement; Addresses distribution challenges in food system.*
- *Food hub has a second location—aggregation point needs more space.*
- *Small KY community overcomes “Hazardous” food shortage. Sustainable food provides healthy food and income, strong work ethic, non-reliance on SNAP.*
- *City-County schools go 100% local food, which means they are using their land more wisely.*

Figure 8 - Headlines from future stories

The Community Action Plan

The primary product of the workshop is a strategic action plan to guide implementation. The plan is composed of five goals, with actions the participants brainstormed at the meeting and during follow up calls, that are designed to achieve progress toward those goals. Another purpose of the workshop was to further clarify, prioritize and define roles and responsibilities for moving forward on these actions. The goals and actions that are part of this plan are summarized below and are contained in their full detail in Appendix A.



Figure 10 - Completing the action planning tables, day two. Image Credit: Jason Espie.

GOAL 1: Develop the non-profit “host” organization, “Northfork Local Food, Inc.”

Discussion during the workshop indicated that there was a need for an organization to serve in a coordinating capacity—developing cross-sector collaborations and serving as a fiscal host to launch community-identified food system projects. This goal also builds upon the community’s desire to conceptualize food system development as a regional initiative, crossing town and county boundaries and bridging communities with different needs, goals and capacities. The Community Farm Alliance and the Foundation for Appalachian Kentucky have held preliminary discussions about forming this new organization, and are on their way to identifying stakeholders and formalizing the new non-profit.

- Action 1.1: Develop the mission and vision statement.
- Action 1.2: Define the geographic service area, including what “local” means in the context of the organization’s work.
- Action 1.3: Gather an advisory board and an initial governing board.
- Action 1.4: Develop an organizational structure, draft the by-laws and articles of incorporation, and submit paperwork to the Secretary of State and the IRS for approval.
- Action 1.5: Develop an action plan, work plan, and implement projects.

GOAL 2: Complete a community food system assessment for the North Fork Region.

A community food system assessment is a participatory research project to help define what issues are priority to promote healthier soils, healthy people and healthy local economies. Using surveys, community asset mapping, key stakeholder interviews and analysis of food and farm policies, a report is compiled that helps tell a community’s food story with recommendations for action. In addition, community food system assessment processes provide important opportunities for education and engagement on the topics of professionalizing and scaling up existing farmers and inspiring new food entrepreneurs to build the local food market supply base.

- Action 2.1: Recruit and name key stakeholders that will be involved in the community food system assessment process.
- Action 2.2: Locate funding to offset staff time required to coordinate assessment process.
- Action 2.3: Conduct a thorough literature search on current assessments from a variety of sectors.

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- Action 2.4: Complete the community food system assessment.
- Action 2.5: Disseminate the community food system assessment, and ensure that the findings are publicly accessible and understandable by all food system participants.

GOAL 3: Create a local food retail store: The Northfork Market.

A local food retail store would contribute to several identified community goals: improving access to fresh local foods, revitalizing downtown Hazard, and developing new markets for growers. The local planning group had many fruitful discussions about this opportunity at the workshop, including the necessity of connecting a new market to existing retail outlets, and conducting the research essential for creating a thorough marketing and business plan.

- Action 3.1: Research and complete a full business plan, testing the feasibility of a retail market that will achieve fiscal sustainability within 3-5 years.
- Action 3.2: Build retail capacity and supply of local food utilizing the community food system assessment to identify gaps and opportunities.
- Action 3.3: Define the link between the Perry County Farmers Market and the Northfork Market.
- Action 3.4: Assess the funding landscape for the development of this retail market store.
- Action 3.5: Develop a site criteria matrix to help assess properties compatible with the business plan.
- Action 3.6: Secure a lease for the market store site and obtain necessary equipment.
- Action 3.7: Develop a marketing plan for the retail store.
- Action 3.8: Identify a manager and staff.

GOAL 4: Support supply-side development of the local food production capacity through farmer recruitment and development.

Workshop participants pointed to research and personal experience that indicates a limited amount of current local food production in the Hazard area. Discussions centered around both the obstacles that new farmers face (access to capital, market opportunities, horticultural knowledge, etc.) as well as the many opportunities afforded by the need for supply-side development, such as new employment for former coal mine employees and economic growth through new, ancillary farm business development.

- Action 4.1: Create a consortium of stakeholders and a method of communication to ensure that efforts are coordinated over time.
- Action 4.2: Conduct a policy scan specific to financing for new farmers.
- Action 4.3: Focus on cultivating farmers market vendors that sell high-profit foods, creating solid examples of farming as a profitable enterprise.
- Action 4.4: Develop prospectus statements for potential entrepreneurs, in addition to other methods of education about business opportunities in local foods.
- Action 4.5: Host a job fair for potential agricultural entrepreneurs.

GOAL 5: Create a regional food hub.

Discussion at the workshop revealed that a more mature, functional regional food hub was a longer-term goal, and that the local food store and other goals for Northfork Local Food organization and assessment were more short-term priorities. A timeline exercise that was used during the workshop identified that a regional food hub might be implemented in 2020 or beyond (see timeline photos below). The local food store and the efforts of Northfork Local Food could start small with some targeted food hub aggregation projects, directed at specific products and markets, like the school

system. Eventually, as these smaller scale aggregation and distribution efforts grow, the community may wish to pursue the actions under this goal to create a larger food hub facility. Actions to create a food hub would be similar in scope to the actions listed for creating and fostering a retail store, with the following suggested activities to be initiated when the community is ready to undertake the development of a food hub:

- Conduct a market analysis of current suppliers and buyers to better understand the opportunities for local food in institutional food purchasing.
- Utilize that market analysis to identify a small number of products that are conducive to testing a brokering and aggregation project, and that are relatively easy to store and distribute.
- Research and develop a logistics and distribution plan, to include the cost analysis of a refrigerated truck, its maintenance, and a driver.
- Develop a business plan that responds to demonstrated market needs and capacities, and that addresses an existing gap in the local food system.



Figure 11 - Stephanie Bertaina, EPA (left) and Sandi Curd, Promise Zone (right). Sandi Curd also participated in the 2012 Whitley County Farmers Market Sustainable Communities in Appalachia technical assistance and was able to share stories from their similar experiences Image Credit: Jason Espie..

Implementation and Next Steps

Three post workshop conference calls were held in May through July following the workshop. During these calls, the local planning committee refined the action plan and added clarifying language.

- Northfork Local Food, Inc filed for incorporation with the Kentucky Secretary of State on June 10, 2015 with an incorporating Board of Directors of four community members. The organization adopted bylaws shortly thereafter. Northfork’s mission is “to increase access to locally-grown and -produced foods within communities along and around the North Fork of the Kentucky River.” Northfork is the managing body of the Perry County Farmers Market. A Market committee informs the day-to-day decisions of the Market Manager while Northfork Board approves expenses and leads visioning. At the time of this report, Northfork is actively seeking new board members and creating an organizational workplan and timeline.
- With fiscal sponsorship from the Foundation for Appalachian Kentucky and a cost-share arrangement with Community Farm Alliance, Northfork hired a Market Manager for the Perry County Farmers Market. Community members held a dinner featuring all local food with profits benefitting Northfork and the Perry County Farmers Market. Northfork also received a generous sponsorship from the Foundation and received a grant from the Community Foundation of Perry County to assist with Farmers Market costs and in filing with the IRS. The Farmers Market via Northfork also received a sizable anonymous donation supporting the Double Dollars program at the Market. In June 2015, the Farmers Market totaled gross sales of approximately \$20,000 with over 30 vendors signed up to sell.
- Northfork Local Food, Inc. also submitted via the Foundation for Appalachian Kentucky a Local Food Promotion Program proposal to USDA to support conducting a community food system assessment and market/hub feasibility study in the North Fork area. In conducting these

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assessments, Northfork would partner with Community Farm Alliance and Kentucky Center for Agriculture and Rural Development. Award notifications will be released in September 2015.

- Northfork is working closely with Perry County Farm to School, Community Farm Alliance, the Foundation for Appalachian Kentucky, and others to develop a proposal for the Investing in Kentucky's Future funding opportunity centered on reducing childhood obesity through increasing access to fresh, healthy, local foods and physical activity.



Figure 12 - Group photo of several workshop participants at the end of day two of workshop. Image credit: Jason Espie.

Appendices

- Appendix A – Implementation Action Plan Tables
- Appendix B – Workshop Maps
- Appendix C – Workshop Participants and Post Workshop Planning Group
- Appendix D – Presentation Slides
- Appendix E – Workshop Photo Album
- Appendix F – Funding Resources
- Appendix G – References