



Rural Action

Working Together to Revitalize Appalachian Ohio

EMERGING SOCIAL ENTERPRISE DEVELOPMENT: ARC POWER Initiative 2015 Funding

Rural Action is being awarded a \$68,700, one year grant for Emerging Social Enterprise Development in sustainable forestry and other locally rooted sectors by providing technical assistance and support to nonprofits and private enterprises in idea generation, market assessment, and business modeling. Social enterprises are businesses that focus on a financial bottom line while also providing other obvious social and environmental goods. This work is needed as we get serious about the on-going transition from extractive industries and cope with changes in the Appalachian region's coal economy. Rural Action's ability to receive these funds was made in part by support from the Just Transition Fund of the Appalachian Funders' Network.

In partnership with the Appalachian Partnership for Economic Growth and Ohio University, Rural Action will:

- Support a network of over 75 southeast Ohio wood and forestry products producers with a goal of three new enterprises and six new jobs created;
- Connect forest products producers to technical and workforce support provided by APEG and research by Ohio University;
- Assist landowners through forest management and sustainable production of wood and non-timber forest products;
- Connect wood products to the tourism sector through Ohio's Appalachian Winding Road project, a marketing platform for communities in Athens, Perry, Morgan, and Muskingum counties;
- Identify business models and entrepreneurial opportunities in other key sectors including food systems, zero waste and recycling, and restoration;
- Bring together entrepreneurs within these sectors to identify market and service delivery options that help rural small businesses collaborate to increase revenues.

Rural Action currently serves a network of hundreds of Appalachian Ohio farmers and landowners who generate wealth from the assets of our region's rich hardwood forests and extensive white pine plantations. Since 1995, Rural Action has worked with these landowners on asset-based development strategies to profit from their woodlands, helping them build the needed networks and partnerships to get their products to market.

Rural Action will focus its resources on 50 Southeast Ohio producers currently locally manufacturing a wide variety of wood products ranging from local hardwood charcoal, wood flooring, wood siding, custom milled lumber, indoor and outdoor furniture, wood pallets and more. Most of these products are a result of small craftsmen, farmers, and timber harvesters, using local hardwoods and softwoods and adding value to them in home based shops using home-based portable sawmills, and marketing largely by word of mouth. Rural Action's Morgan County-based social enterprise, the Chesterhill Produce Auction (CPA), is becoming a wood products sales hub, serving increasingly as a marketing and display center for locally crafted wood products.

In 2014, \$50,000 in local wood product sales came through the CPA, drawing buyers from throughout Ohio and West Virginia. Landowners growing Non-Timber Forest Products as income sources will also become part of this network, including native medicinal herbs from ginseng, goldenseal, and black cohosh to culinary plants like ramps, and mushrooms.

Taking a wealth creation approach, Rural Action helps local businesses fill gaps in meeting regional and local demand. By engaging people, sharing new models, respecting people's experiences and ideas, building accessible and affordable infrastructure, and connecting to markets, the long term foundation of a healthy economy can be built.

Rural Action Social Enterprise Highlights:

- The Chesterhill Produce Action is selling to 62 institutional food buyers in 9 counties in OH and WV;
- From 2012-14, Rural Action trained 92 educators, 97 farmers, and 14 community members from Ohio, Pennsylvania, and West Virginia in season creation and food safety;
- Since 2005, the Chesterhill Produce Auction has generated over \$2 million in revenue in Morgan County;
- Rural Action and Virginia-based partner Appalachian Sustainable Development designed a sustainably certified wood building products platform called WoodRight which uses conservation grade wood to create StakWood modular products for sale to architects, homeowners, and designers;
- Rural Action has worked with 315 unique buyers to sell over 1,500 pounds of ginseng seed for a conservative production value of \$1.8 million to landowners in Appalachian Ohio;
- Rural Action's Zero Waste Event Productions sells services to festivals in Ohio working to reduce their carbon footprint and green their events;
- Nine zero waste entrepreneurs in southeast Ohio have been assisted by Ohio University's Voinovich School of Leadership and Public Affairs and Rural Action.

About Rural Action

Rural Action is Southeast Ohio's premier community based sustainable development organization. We have been on the ground working in communities for more than 24 years. Nationally recognized for our work in sustainable development and environmental restoration, Rural Action is an award winning organization. Our mission is to foster social, economic, and environmental justice in Appalachian Ohio. We build model sustainable development projects and enterprises and encourage broad civic conversation around Appalachian Ohio's assets in order to create sustainable development paths for the region.

Together, we envision a region of clean streams, healthy forests, thriving family farms, meaningful jobs for everyone, lively towns that remember local history and celebrate their stories, music, arts, and crafts, and people working together to make this vision a reality.

We currently operate through five sites in Appalachian Ohio and have 1,000 members in 27 states.

Learn more at www.ruralaction.org and follow our work on Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn.

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