

Appalachia Regional Food Business Center

Rural Action, Inc.

Pending Award: \$42,500,000

Lead Applicant Funding: \$6,021,389 (13%)

Partner & Collaborator Funding: \$15,203,741 (32.9%)

Business Builder/Capacity Building Awards: \$21,000,000 (54.1)

Geography: Western Pennsylvania, Western Maryland, Eastern Ohio, West Virginia, Kentucky, Eastern Tennessee (with market connections in adjacent counties and urban centers).

Appalachia USDA Regional Food Business Center Summary

Rural Action, Inc. proposes to work with a long list of regional partners (listed below) on a coordinated effort led by The Central Appalachian Network (CAN) to strengthen infrastructure for aggregation, distribution, and processing, create new markets in small, rural communities, and increase connectivity between rural producers and urban consumers. The proposal draws heavily on CAN's established 31-year history of partnerships in the region and will invest in Central Appalachia by: 1) expanding training and technical assistance resources; 2) investing in farmers, food producers, processors, and food hubs; 3) building and expanding markets both within and outside of Central Appalachia; and 4) coordinating with other USDA Regional Food Business Centers (RFBCs) to promote cross-regional support and market development. The Center's major functions will include:

- Scale up regional efforts to reach at least 10,000 food and farm businesses through Business Builder Awards, direct technical assistance, and other engagement (approximately \$4,000,000 awarded to farms and food businesses each year);
- Facilitate peer-led education and mentoring opportunities, provide business planning services, deliver whole farm planning services and support on conservation, grant writing, and land access, and offer guidance on accessing local, state, and federal resources;
- Work with stakeholders across the region to expand value chain coordination and strengthen existing connections with urban markets through efficiencies in aggregation, distribution logistics and transportation.
- Increase processing, distribution, and aggregation in Central Appalachia by strengthening producer readiness for accessing new or expanded mid-tier wholesale markets.

To ensure long term sustainability, The Appalachia Regional Food Business Center will support the scaling up of regional organizations to sustain and build on the work of the Center over the next decade. By investing at least \$20 million through the Business Builder Awards, food and farm businesses will be able to leverage private investment, venture capital stacks, grants, and local impact investing. For example, Invest Appalachia (a collaborator) has prioritized food sector investment, and this will help ensure the continuation of the work set forth by the USDA AMS funds.

Rural Action Partners and Collaborators:

Mountain Association (fiscal manager), Chatham University, Appalachian Sustainable Development, Partner Community Capital, Appalachian Center for Economic Networks (ACEnet), Kentucky Center for Agriculture and Rural Development (KCARD), New Roots Community Farm, Coalfield Development Corporation, Economic Development Greater East Incorporated, Community Farm Alliance, Agrarian Trust, Appalachian Resource Conservation and Development Council, Grow Ohio Valley, T&T Organics, Black Soil, Invest Appalachia, Dialogue and Design, Rural Support Partners, Community Food Initiatives.