Since 1993, the Central Appalachian Network (CAN) has been dedicated to working for a more just and sustainable Appalachia. We work to advance the economic transition of the region by fostering the development of enterprises, organizations, and policies that promote and protect the health of our local economies, communities, and environment. For almost 20 years, CAN member organizations have been coming together to learn, build relationships, and collaborate to build capacity and impact on a regional scale.

Current CAN member organizations include:

- Appalachian Center for Economic Networks (ACEnet) - Athens, OH
- Appalachian Sustainable Development (ASD) - Abingdon, VA
- Center for Economic Options (CEO) - Charleston, WV
- Mountain Association for Community Economic Development (MACED) - Berea, KY
- Natural Capital Investment Fund (NCIF) - Shepherdstown, WV
- Rural Action (RA) - Trimble, OH

In a larger sense, CAN is a network of networks, led by the member organizations listed above. In each of the five sub-regions where CAN’s work is focused, we build and support networks of diverse partners, including producers, consumers, landowners, entrepreneurs, local government officials, non-profit organizations, social enterprise businesses, schools and universities, students, youth, and other members of rural communities. CAN connects these sub-regional networks at the regional level to facilitate the development of a shared understanding and voice for sustainability in Central Appalachia.

CAN believes that by working as a network, we can increase the depth and effectiveness of our work in Central Appalachia. Networks, as we see them, go beyond “networking” to bring diverse groups of people together to work toward true collaboration. By working together to develop a shared analysis of the challenges and opportunities facing the region, we can align our efforts to bring about change that is larger than what any one individual, group, or organization could achieve alone.
The CAN Sub-regions

In order to work more deeply in Central Appalachian communities, CAN divides the region into five smaller sub-regions. We are currently working in:

- Appalachian Ohio
- Eastern Kentucky
- Southwestern Virginia & East Tennessee
- West Virginia, with a focus on the Greenbrier Valley and the WesMonTy District

CAN’s Vision and Analysis

CAN believes strongly that locally rooted, regional sustainable development can take advantage of our abundance of natural resources and human capital to generate wealth for people in need and protect important natural systems. We have a bold vision of a more just and sustainable Appalachia.

CAN recognizes that historically, a complex set of economic, social, environmental, and political factors have prevented the Central Appalachian region from reaching its full economic potential. A lack of economic diversity and the out-of-state ownership of industry, coupled with a lack of investment in the region, have led to a scarcity of economic drivers and a highly uneven distribution of wealth. An undervaluing of education, a lack of local control, continued outgoing migration, and a learned sense of helplessness have led to weakened community capacity and the disenfranchisement of many rural communities. This disenfranchisement, as well as a lack of connection between people and government, has led to the consolidation of political control and ineffective governance in many areas. And finally, the exploitation and short-term valuing of natural resources have led to a degradation of the region’s valuable environmental assets.

Despite these challenges, CAN sees many opportunities for working towards an Appalachian economy that creates wealth that stays local, improves the livelihoods of rural communities, and protects and sustains the natural assets of the region. These opportunities are supported by recent shifts in the public’s understanding of the reality of climate change and other long-term consequences of our unsustainable use of natural resources. More people today understand that centuries of environmental degradation have or will have very real impacts, many of which will be felt most strongly by the most vulnerable, low-income populations. In addition, the recent economic downturn has led many consumers to think more closely about the ways in which they spend money and choose to support their local economies.

This emerging shift in public perception represents an opportunity; it also indicates that the timing is right to promote sustainable economic development in a number of economic sectors. CAN’s position as a regional network allows us to influence the public discourse and capitalize on recent “local” and “green” trends to encourage more long-term awareness and investment in sustainable economic development efforts. In addition, new and emerging markets for sustainable, local products and services provide an opportunity for triple bottom line entrepreneurship, which takes into account economic, social, and environmental factors.
CAN’s Approach

CAN’s approach to sustainable economic development work is informed by the idea of collaborative work to create multiple forms of wealth that build on existing assets and remain under local control.

CAN believes that our collaboration allows us to be more than the sum of our parts. CAN member organizations have diverse strengths and areas of expertise, which we each put to use in support of a common vision.

We believe that by continually learning from each other, developing a shared agenda and evaluation system, and lending our support to reinforce each other’s activities, we can create a collective impact that far outweighs anything we could do individually.

We also believe that sustainable economic development efforts should go beyond increasing the financial wealth of a region. We use the Wealth Creation in Rural Communities approach to work toward communities where multiple forms of wealth, including knowledge, social relationships, and political influence, are accessible and strong.

In addition, sustainable economic development efforts should be deeply rooted in the history, assets, and interests of the communities they seek to benefit. We have a deep respect for the work that our partners across the region do, and work to build their capacity and access to resources while they retain ownership and control over what happens in their communities.

CAN’s Work

CAN member organizations approach sustainable economic development through a variety of sectors, including energy, forestry, waste and recycling, and green business development. CAN recognizes the importance of all of these sectors; we also believe that our collective impact will be greatest if we focus our collaborative efforts on one sector of the economy at a time.

To this end, CAN is currently working to support the development of local food economies. Ultimately, the goal is to bring together businesses, nonprofits, and individuals to think and act together across a region in order to develop a sustainable agricultural system that will eventually operate without CAN’s support. This vision of collective impact offers tremendous opportunity to address the causes of persistent poverty in Central Appalachia. Thriving local food economies can support the development of diversified and resilient economic bases, increase local control of wealth, empower local individuals and communities, increase self-sufficiency and decrease dependence on government benefits, and help to protect natural resources such as soil, water, and air quality.
Concretely, CAN is working toward to support the development of local food economies and the broader economic transition of Appalachia through the following strategies:

**Building Wholesale Value Chains:**
CAN works to develop and strengthen value chains, which we define as supply chains infused with the triple bottom line values of promoting financial, social, and environmental goals. In each of the five sub-regions, CAN works to develop infrastructure, make connections, and build capacity of value chains that allow local producers to access wholesale markets such as grocery stores, restaurants, schools, and hospitals. Access to wholesale markets is key to developing established, self-sustaining local food economies that provide full-time jobs and reliable, predictable income to farm and food entrepreneurs, as well as broad community access to healthy local foods. In order to achieve these objectives, CAN provides small grants, technical assistance, training, and planning and assessment support to partner organizations and local farm and food businesses in each sub-region.

**Ensuring Strong Anchor Organizations:**
CAN provides its members, all of which are core regional sustainable development organizations, with learning opportunities, technical assistance, and capacity building support in order to deepen the impact of their sustainable economic development work and increase their capacity to collaborate for broader regional change.
Informing the Rural Development Field:
CAN is committed to documenting and sharing successes and lessons learned, and to engaging in mutual learning with others working to move people and places out of poverty across Appalachia and throughout the country. In addition, CAN conducts and sponsors research on issues related to sustainable economic development in the region.

Creating Policy and Systems Change:
On the regional level, CAN works to facilitate and develop strategic partnerships, identify and communicate opportunities to advance Appalachia’s economic transition, and advocate for policy change in Central Appalachia. Our specific policy and systems targets are those that remove or reduce barriers to wholesale market access for sector-based entrepreneurs, as well as those that increase significant and diverse investment in Central Appalachian economies. CAN brings together important sustainable development actors from each sub-region to learn, build relationships, and eventually create a unified voice for Central Appalachia in the national dialogue.

Recent Outcomes

CAN’s recent focus on local food economies has already led to significant and concrete improvements for individuals and communities within Central Appalachia. In 2009, CAN established a comprehensive data collection and evaluation system based on the Wealth Creation in Rural Communities approach to track the on-the-ground impacts of our work.

- The number of producers CAN worked with increased to 149 in 2011, a 55% increase from 96 producers in 2009.

- Total gross revenue for producers from value chain sales increased to $6,031,527.60 in 2011. This represents an increase of $2,463,074.99 (or 69%) over 2009 revenue.
The number of wholesale buyers purchasing local foods increased to 70 in 2011. This represents a 37% increase over the 51 buyers engaged in the value chains in 2009.

The purchase total of value chain products from wholesale buyers increased to a total of $4,667,321.24 in 2011. This total has increased from $1,794,000.00 in 2009 (a 160% increase).

The average value of annual purchases per buyer has increased from $35,175.00 in 2009 to $66,676.02 in 2011. This represents a 90% increase over the past two years.

Wholesale buyers made significant changes in their business practices to accommodate or feature local food products in 2011, including menu modifications, local food brunches, advertising local foods, purchasing local foods in season to process for later use, changing retail displays to highlight local food options, and even providing a CAN organization with maintenance for their distribution vehicle.

The number of acres of farmland contributing to value chains increased from 2,178.3 acres in 2009 to 2,939.55 acres in 2011, an increase of 35%, or 761.25 acres.

For More Information

Central Appalachian Network: www.cannetwork.org

From the Ground Up: Growing Healthy Food Systems in Appalachia Video Series: www.vimeo.com/channels/can

CAN Member Organizations:

- ACEnet: www.acenetworks.org
- ASD: www.asdevelop.org
- CEO: www.economicoptions.org
- MACED: www.maced.org
- NCIF: www.ncifund.org
- Rural Action: www.ruralaction.org

CAN Member Projects and Collaborations:

- Ohio Foodshed: www.ohiofoodshed.org
- Green Business, Green Jobs Accelerator: www.thegreenaccelerator.com
- Appalachian Transition Initiative: www.appalachiantransition.net

Sign up for Quarterly Newsletters and monthly Policy Updates at www.cannetwork.org!
This document highlights a few aspects of the growth of wholesale sustainable agriculture value chains in Central Appalachia between 2009 and 2011. Value chain measurement was conducted by the Central Appalachian Network (CAN) and reported to the Ford Foundation’s Wealth Creation in Rural Communities Initiative in February of 2012.

The following charts show the growth of the CAN-supported value chains according to several key measures. All measures are calculated in relation to 2009 data; that is, 2009 numbers establish the baseline, and subsequent growth for each measure is compared to the 2009 number.

**Individual Capital**

- In 2009, CAN worked with 96 producers who sell into wholesale sustainable agriculture value chains. The total gross revenue to these producers from value chain sales was $3,568,452.61.
- In 2011, CAN worked with 149 producers. Total gross revenue to these producers from value chain sales was $6,031,527.60.
- This represents an increase of $2,463,074.99, or 69%, over 2009 revenue.

**Intellectual Capital**

- In 2009, CAN worked with 51 wholesale buyers who purchased a total of $1,794,000.00 in value chain products.
- In 2011, CAN worked with 70 buyers, who purchased a total of $4,667,321.24 in value chain products.
- This represents an increase of 37% in the number of buyers engaged in the value chains over the grant period, and an increase of over 160% in the value of their annual purchases. In addition, the average value of annual purchases per buyer has increased from $35,175.00 in 2009 to $66,676.02 in 2011.
Natural Capital

- In 2009, 2,178.3 acres of farmland contributed to CAN-supported value chains. 130.8 acres were certified organic, 689.5 acres were chemical-free but uncertified, and 1358 acres were unspecified or conventional.
- In 2011, 2,939.55 acres of farmland contributed to CAN-supported value chains. 255.25 acres were certified organic, 789.3 acres were chemical-free but uncertified, and 1775 acres were unspecified, conventional, or certified in a different sustainability practice.
- This represents an increase of 761.25 acres, or 35%, over 2009 acreage.

Built Capital

- Over the past two years, CAN has worked to address several of the gaps identified by our baseline assessments of built capital needs in the value chains.
- Some of these gaps were in processing, aggregation, and distribution infrastructure; CAN supported improvements through our Small Grants Program.
- In other cases, the infrastructure needed was on-farm; CAN members and partners provided training, financial support, and support in accessing additional capital to build and improve season-extension equipment and other on-farm infrastructure.

Financial Capital

- In 2009, 37 organizations, agencies, and philanthropies, as well as an unspecified number of community members and farmers, invested in the development of the value chains. The approximate value of these investments totaled $1,475,601.00, which came in the form of grants, equipment, space, volunteer time, and training.
- The majority of this investment, approximately $1,371,098.00, came from external sources, including philanthropy, federal agencies, and state Departments of Agriculture. $104,503.00, or 7% of the total investment, came from internal sources, including value chain buyers, producers, local extension services, and community members.
- In 2011, 49 organizations, agencies, philanthropies, and individuals invested in the development of CAN-supported value chains. The approximate value of these investments totaled $1,360,532.33.
- While this total represents a slight decrease from previous years, we believe that this is an indication of the increased financial independence of the value chains. In 2011, $265,950.00 of investment came from internal sources in 2011, including value chain buyers, producers, local extension services, and community members. This investment represents almost 24% of the total investment in the value chains this year.
ENGAGING PARTNERS IN MEASUREMENT:
A BRAINSTORMING TEMPLATE

What is the measurement CHALLENGE you are working to address?

Are there PARTNERS who might be able to help with this challenge?

What would be the benefit TO THEM of working with you?

What would be the benefit TO YOU of working with these partners?

HOW would you like to engage with these partners?

What RESOURCES are needed to make this partnership work?

Is there a potential DOWN-SIDE to this partnership?

What are your NEXT STEPS?