

TOWARD THE RIGHT TO FOOD IN WEST SIDE CHARLESTON

A NOURISHING NETWORKS REPORT
OCTOBER 2025



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Sponsors





INTRODUCTION

On October 6th, 2025 Charleston, WV Nourishing Networks Workshop brought together people from different backgrounds and expertise to explore the state of food access in West Side Charleston. The group shared in laughter, learning, and listening to deepen our understanding of what limits access to food and quality nutrition, and what can be done about it.

The workshop advanced two stages:

- Five teams were assembled with a **mix of Phat Daddy's staff; Center for Resilient Communities staff; local agency and state employees;** to conduct an assessment of the barriers to accessing food.
- The teams worked to **identify community assets and food resources** which could be mobilized to improve food access.

Over the course of 4 hours (10am-2pm), **our 15 participants** and 1 facilitator collectively identified **90+ barriers to food** access, 48 assets that improve food security in the area, and discussed strategies to build on these findings. In this brief reflection of the workshop, we present the results of these discussions.

The intention of the document is to provide a record of the meeting and provide a framework for the next phase of consultation among those who wish to continue working together to advance the Right to Food in West Side Charleston. Our hope is that it will offer a resource for continued organizing and policy change to improve food access at the local, county, and state level.



PHAT DADDYS ON DA TRACKS

Established in 2021 on Charleston's West Side, Phat Daddy's on Da Tracks is the family-founded, worker-owned cooperative of chefs Cameron and Octavia Cordon and their daughter Azelah. After Cameron's long tenure in the kitchen and the family's relocation from New York, the business was launched with a mission to weave soul-food roots, BBQ finesse, and a cooperative ownership model into the heart of the community. Facing setbacks—including three denied city grants—the team persevered, securing patient, non-extractive capital from Seed Commons and technical support from New Economy Works WV.

Originally operating in a modest open-air setting "on the tracks," the restaurant later expanded to a full brick-and-mortar location at 1634 6th Avenue. Today, Phat Daddy's stands as both a culinary destination and a local economic anchor—serving mouth-watering fare and advancing inclusive worker-ownership in Charleston's food scene.



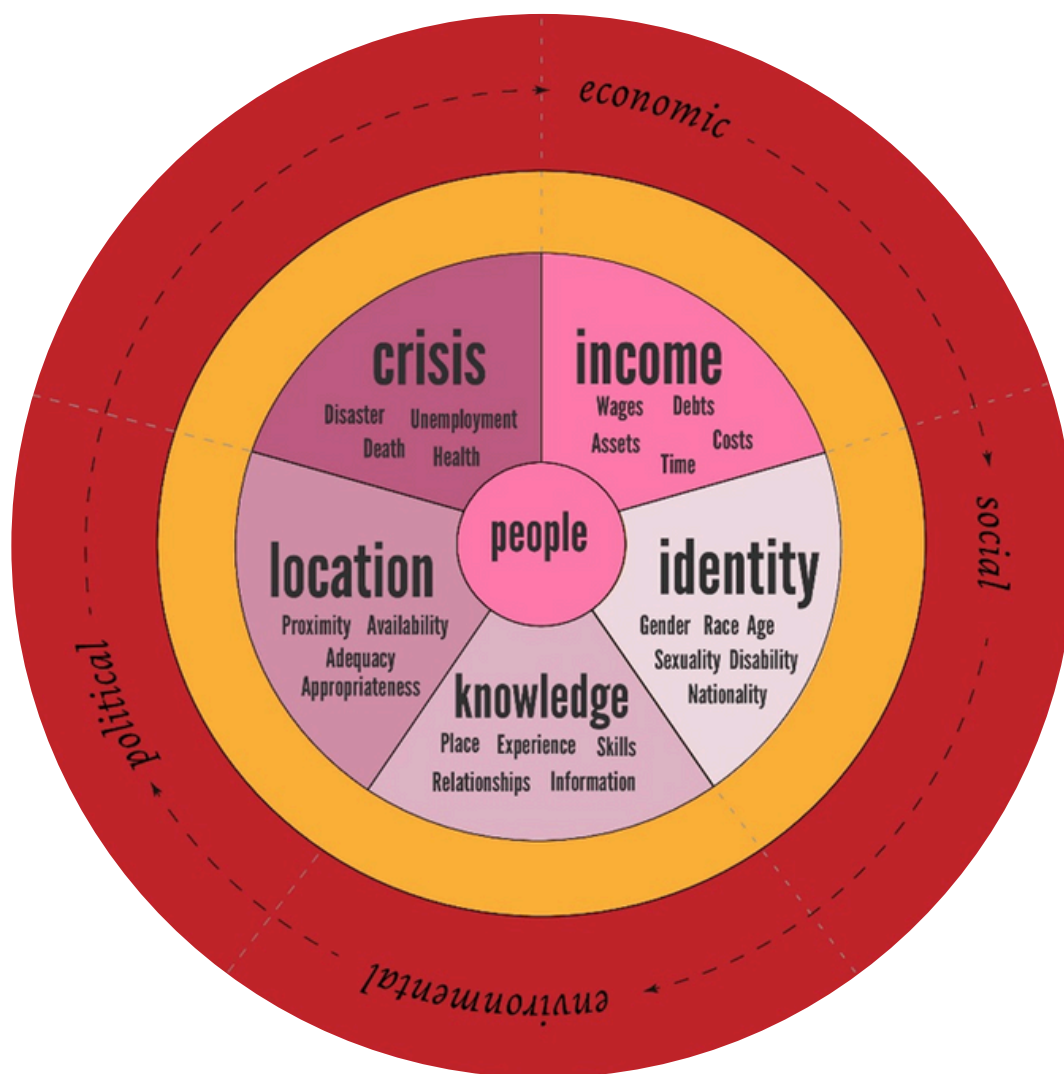
DETROIT- BLACK URBAN GARDENERS

Attending the Black Urban Gardeners Conference was a deeply inspiring experience that reminded the team that attended of the power that lives within community, land, and agency. Being surrounded by growers, educators, and visionaries who are reclaiming food sovereignty in their communities assisted in sparking a purpose in our team towards the cultivation of a West Virginia Black Food Sovereignty Network. Each workshop, conversation, and shared story illuminated how taking part in leadership in agriculture is not about just growing food - its also about resilience and opportunity.

The conference highlighted how healing our land can also heal people, families, and generations to come, it reaffirmed that our belief in collective work truly matters! Witnessing the unity and brilliance that filled every space, seeing elders pass down sacred knowledge, and the youth interest in shaping food systems. Throughout our team conversations during the conference we left the BUGs conference feeling more grounded, more motivated and committed towards action of a West Virginia Black Food Sovereignty Network in our communities.

FOOD ACCESS BARRIERS

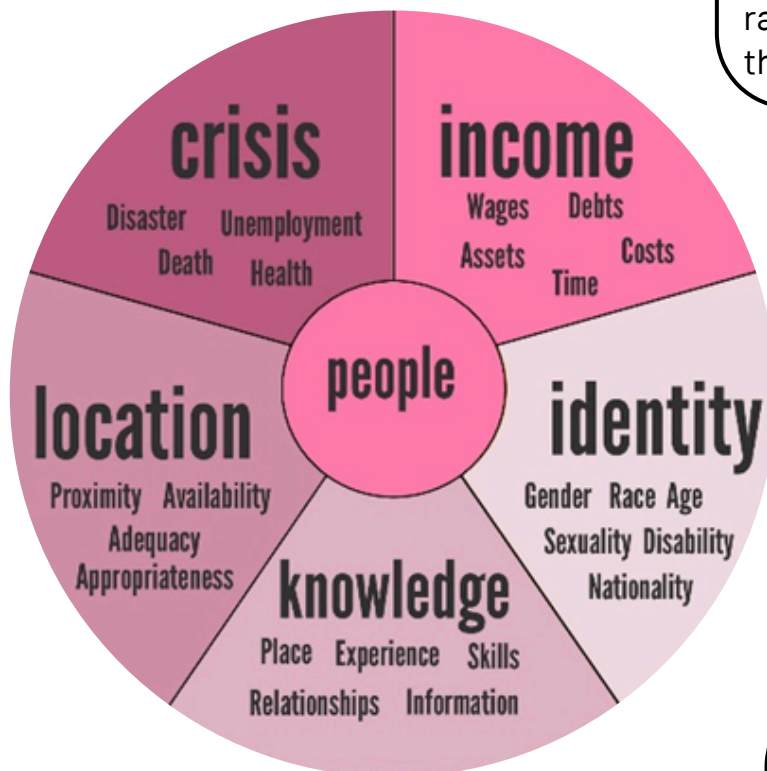
The center of our concern about healthy food access is **people**. Across West Virginia, many people confront significant barriers to accessing affordable, adequate, nutritious foods. Some of the forces that affect people's ability to access healthy food are represented in our food access barriers wheel below. The inner circle is composed of a series of social constraints that have the most direct impact on the ability of an individual, a household, or a community to access food.



FOOD ACCESS BARRIERS EXPLAINED

Crisis: refers to disasters, unemployment, health issue or death that can undermine food access for an individual, household or community.

Income: refers to the effect of someone's resources in wages or assets as well as the costs of food, debts carried, and the time limits placed on those who work rather than growing food for themselves.



Identity: refers to the way someone's gender, race, disability, sexuality, nationality or age affects their ability to access food.

Knowledge: refers to what people know, what experience or skills they have, their place-based understanding, and the relationships they have with others.

Location: refers to people's proximity to healthy food outlets, the availability of particular foods, as well as the ability to grow food.

COMMUNITY IDENTIFIED BARRIERS

The participants of the workshop identified many barriers to food access in their community:



Crisis

Identified Crisis Barriers

- Access to resources
- Self agency
- Cultural differences
- Safety nets
- Individual ability
- Location
- Mental health capacity
- Social networks

Identified Income Barriers

- Minimum wage
- Unrealistic guidelines (SNAP)
- Price increases
- Competing utilities
- Seasonal employment
- Certain groups access
- Deliberate attempts towards blocking resources
- Cost of living > pay



Income

COMMUNITY IDENTIFIED BARRIERS



Location

Identified Location Barriers

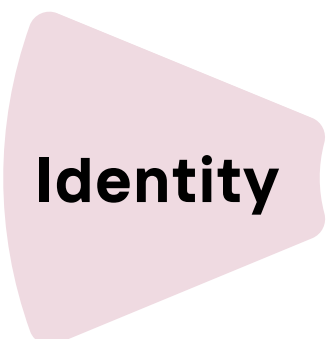
- Population makeup
- Policy
- Transportation
- Zipcode
- Grocery Store Redlining
- Income
- Zoning
- Access to land (Rural vs Urban)
- Education
- Production

Identified Knowledge Barriers

- Food knowledge
- Cost of food
- Knowing your body
- Food preparation
- Food stretch
- Knowing where to shop
- Knowledge of food spaces
- Self efficacy
- Cultural



Knowledge



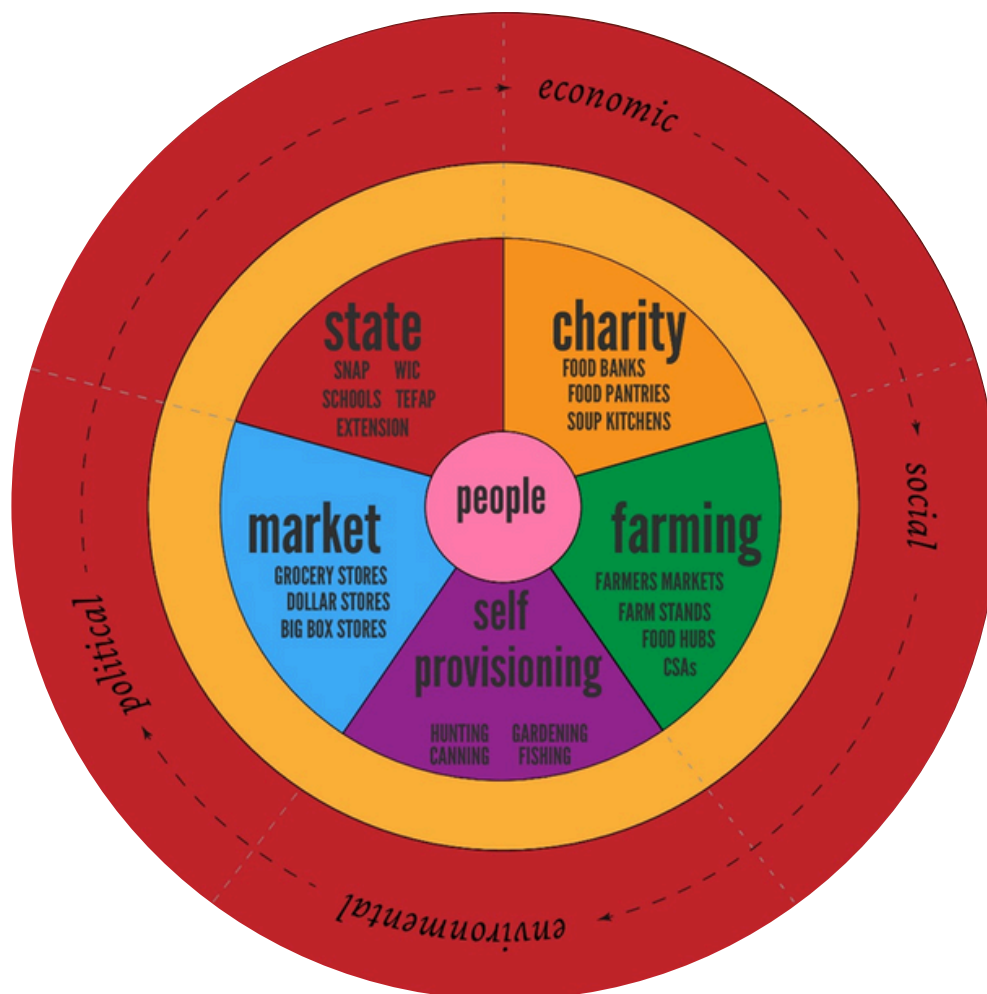
Identity

Identified Identity Barriers

- Community
- Consumers
- Vary depending on table
- Youth
- Minorities
- Statistics
- Expertise
- Absence of cultural
- Experience

FOOD ACCESS ASSETS

People access healthy food through various mechanisms. Some access healthy food by spending their wages in a grocery store or through the farming sector (local farmers market) many other individuals, households and communities cannot afford to access food only in this way. Some of the strategies and initiatives to improve people's access to healthy food are represented in the food access strategy wheel below. As this wheel demonstrates, the retail marketplace is not the only way in which people access food.



FOOD ACCESS ASSETS EXPLAINED

State: refers to government programs such as SNAP, WIC and School programs that provide direct subsidies to offset the cost of food for individuals and households (especially children) who lack the money to access food in the market.

Charity: refers to free food rations provided by food banks, food pantries, and soup kitchens that is funded by donation.



Farming: refers to grower-based initiatives to sell produce through farmers markets and other mechanisms.

Self-Provisioning: refers to practices of hunting, foraging, fishing or growing your own food.

Market: refers to grocery stores, convenience stores, restaurants, dollar stores and the like where people exchange wages for food.

COMMUNITY IDENTIFIED ASSETS



The participants of the workshop identified many assets to food access in their community:

Market

Identified Market Assets

- Krogers
- Gas stations
- Dollar tree
- Miss Ruby's

Identified State Assets

- SNAP/ SNAP Stretch
- WIC
- Head Start

State

COMMUNITY IDENTIFIED ASSETS



Charity

Identified Charity Assets

- Manna Meal
- Westside Together
- Mountain Mission
- Covenant House
- Phat Daddy's
- BREAM

Identified Farm Assets

- Keep Your Faith Corporation
- WVU Extension
- WVSU Agriculture Program
- KISRA
- Mear Mae Meadows



Farming



Self-Provisioning

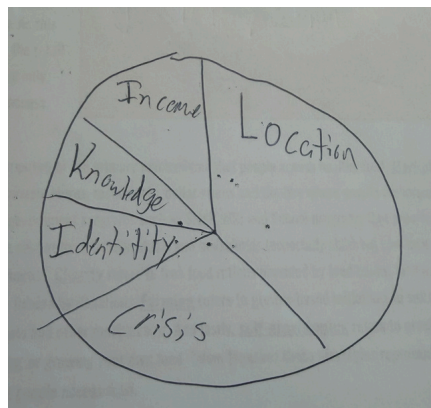
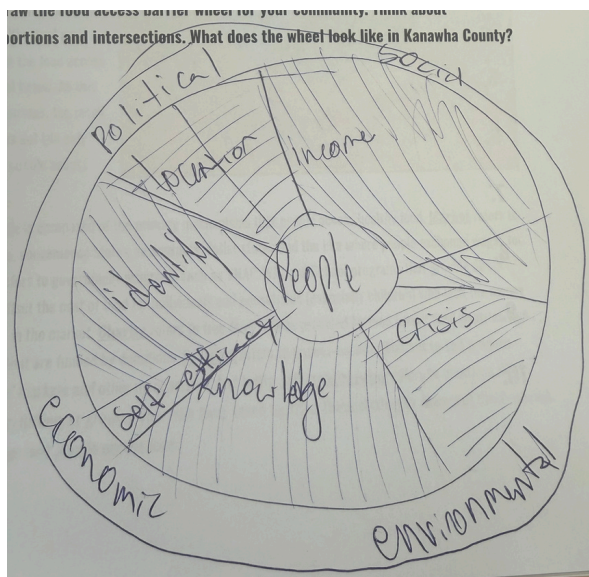
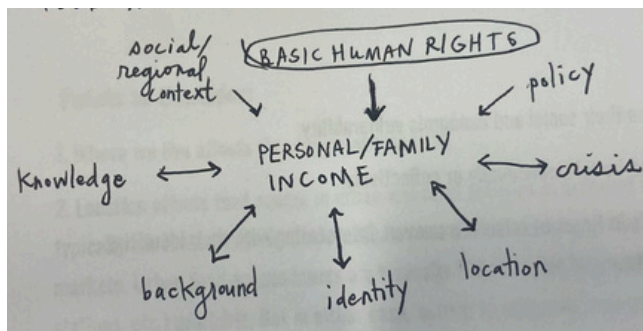
Identified Self-Provisioning Assets

- Farming
- Hunting
- Fishing
- Fermenting

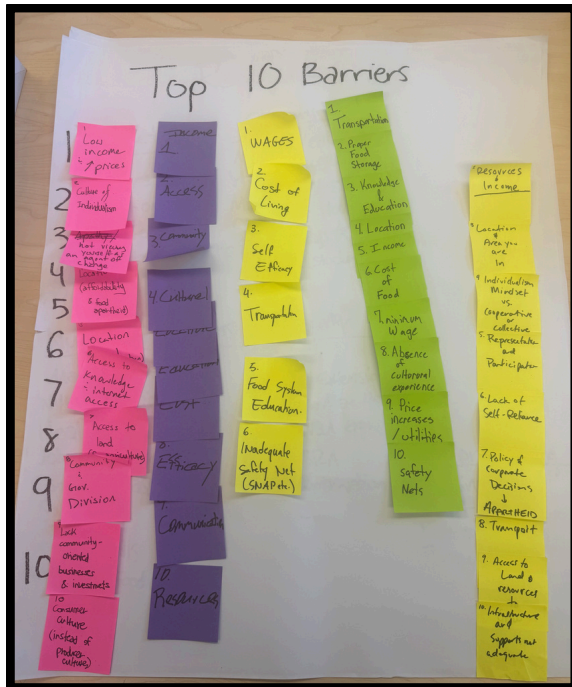


BUILDING CONSENSUS

After identifying so many barriers and assets, it can be overwhelming to begin taking action. It is important that we practice the process of consensus building to **begin distilling these in a manner that can address these barriers through policy or programmatic interventions that leverage the resources available.** Groups came together to identify their top ten barriers to food access



TOP FIVE BARRIERS TO FOOD ACCESS IN WEST SIDE CHARLESTON



Group One: Low income & increased prices, Culture of individualism, Not viewing yourself as an agent of change, Location, Access to knowledge

Group Two: Income, Access, Community, Cultural, Location

Group Three: Wages, Cost of living, Self efficacy, Transportation, Food system education

Group Four: Transportation, Proper food storage, Knowledge & Education, Location, Income

Group Five: Resources & Income, Location, Individualism mindset, Representation & participation, Lack of self reliance

THE RIGHT TO FOOD

Agency is a central concept because those who access food, particularly those who struggle to access food, must have the freedom and autonomy to shape the conversations, political processes and food environments that comes to structure that access.



Adequacy ensures that food is safe for consumption, culturally responsive and nutritious at all developmental stages of life. The food available does not put anyone else at risk of harm, nor does it require forfeiting cultural or religious standards of living.

Accessibility ensures that people do not go hungry at the expense of other basic needs, and that one will not have to choose between eating and other essentials such as housing, healthcare and transportation.

Sustainability includes ensuring the long-term well-being of our health, our environment, our communities and creating systems that are valuable for future generations to have available, accessible and adequate nutritious foods.

Availability means well-functioning food systems including access to the means of producing, processing, transporting and distributing food, or the means to purchase food.

RIGHT TO FOOD ASSESSMENT

Agency Assessment

- How many people vote in municipal, county, state, national elections?
- Is there an opportunity for individuals or groups to have a meaningful voice about local, regional or national food system and nutrition support development? If so, how?
- How might you go about improving agency for the Right to Food in your organization or your community?

The averages from the participants' ratings have been highlighted.

Adequacy Assessment

Rate the following statements on a scale from 1-10 with 1 being low and 10 being high:

Food is safe for consumption, culturally responsive, and nutritious at all developmental stages of life: "You have enough of the foods you want and need to eat to support a healthy lifestyle."

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

The food that is available for consumption does not put anyone at risk of physical harm (from food sensitivity or allergies) and does not require forfeiting cultural or religious standards of living.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Think back to your conversations with those in your group. Has your Adequacy Assessment changed since attending the Nourishing Networks? If so how? What changed your mind?

RIGHT TO FOOD ASSESSMENT CONTINUED

Accessibility Assessment

Rate the following statements on a scale from 1-10 with 1 being low and 10 being high:

People do not go hungry at the expense of other needs.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

People don't have to choose between eating and other basic needs like paying rent, medications etc. People can access food even if they don't have a car.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Physical accessibility: Food is accessible to people vulnerable to physical challenges (elders, infants, differently abled, terminally ill, mentally ill, victims of natural disasters, etc.)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Economic accessibility: The cost of food does not compromise other standards of living. Community Based and State level social contract supports negate the tradeoff.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Think back to your conversations with those in your group. Has your Accessibility Assessment changed since attending the Nourishing Networks? If so how? What changed your mind?

RIGHT TO FOOD ASSESSMENT CONTINUED

Availability Assessment

Rate the following statements on a scale from 1-10 with 1 being low and 10 being high:

When directly sourced from land and natural resources or by a well-functioning system of market and distribution: "The food you want to eat is produced sustainably and is stocked consistently."

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Access to productive resources, such as natural resources or growers and basic agricultural resources for food growth. At minimum food is available for purchase.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

At the most basic level, food can be transported from point A. to point B.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Think back to your conversations with those in your group. Has your Availability Assessment changed since attending the Nourishing Networks? If so how? What changed your mind?

RIGHT TO FOOD ASSESSMENT CONTINUED

Sustainability Assessment

Rate the following statements on a scale from 1-10 with 1 being low and 10 being high:

Our food system is sustainable for the environment with minimal negative impact to the environment.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Our food system is sustainable for our health. Food is nutritious for current people and future generations.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Our food system is sustainable for our communities. Local production and distribution infrastructures are supported and encouraged.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Our food system is sustainable for future generations. Nutritious food will be available, accessible and affordable beyond my own lifetime.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Think back to your conversations with those in your group. Has your Sustainability Assessment changed since attending the Nourishing Networks? If so how? What changed your mind?



MOVING FORWARD: FOOD SOVEREIGNTY NETWORK OF WEST SIDE CHARLESTON

In the weeks and months following the October 6th gathering of representatives at Nourishing Networks, we hope that these connections and conversations sparked a need for continued efforts in addressing the concerns highlighted during the six hour time frame. **In recognizing that systemic change doesn't happen in a day, we invite participants to consider forming what is loosely defined as a "food policy council"**. This working group can be made up of elected officials, people with lived experience of hunger/poverty, social service workers, healthcare employees, senior services employees, school staff, and really anyone with a vested interest in the food security of the northern panhandle. Some examples of people to consider involving in the Food Policy Council are listed in the next few pages. **Some elected to take a leading role in the development of a group to discuss these subjects.**

MOVING FORWARD: KANAWHA COUNTY CONTACT INFORMATION

DHHR Office

(304) 746-2360

Family Resource Network

Darynaan Washington executivedirector@regionalfn.org
Executive Director (304) 539-9511

WVU Extension

(304) 720-9573

Kerri Carte
Extension Agent - Kerri.Wade@mail.wvu.edu
Family and Community
Development

Jocelyn Crawford
Extension Agent - 4-H Jocelyn.Crawford@mail.wvu.edu
Youth Development

Farmers Markets

Capitol Market (304) 344-1905

Community Centers

Phat Daddy's (304) 982-5020

Step By Step mfarmer@stepbystepwv.org

More Excellent Way Church amewlcc@gmail.com

Trinity Church (304) 342-5212

Health Right (304) 340-1555

Covenant House tchapman@wvcovenanthouse.org

Mountain Mission info@mountainmission.com

WIC Office

(304) 746-7880

Kanawha County Schools Child Nutrition

Diane Miller
Executive Director dmmiller@mail.kana.k12.wv.us

Mountaineer Food Bank

Chad Morrison info@mountaineerfoodbank.org
Chief Executive Officer (304) 364-5518

Locally Owned Grocers

Ms Ruby's Market (304) 382-6698

Pacific International Market (681) 205-8942

M&M Mart (304) 925-0112

The Purple Onion Fruit & Veggie Co. (304) 342-4414

Spice Of Life (681) 265-3834

Day & Night Market (304) 345-7460

Johnnies Fresh Meat Market (304) 342-0224

New Asian Market (304) 720-2338

West Side Market & Deli (681) 265-9190

CONCLUSION

Today, networking efforts are being made to encourage continued meeting and conversations on food access and realizing the Right to Food in West Side Charleston.

It is our hope that Nourishing Networks events such as the one in West Charleston will foster the formation of local food policy council as well as a food sovereignty network that can continue to advance advocacy and programmatic interventions that can meet the food access needs of all the people in the area. **Food system change doesn't happen with just one individual or one idea. All of the participants and the communities in Kanawha County are integral to forming food systems that value nutrition, regional food economies , and self-sufficiency and food sovereignty.**



**For further details about Nourishing Networks in West
Side Charleston, and organizing toward the Right to
Food, please contact:**

**Heaven Smith
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hs0075@mix.wvu.edu**

Thank you Phat Daddy's for your hospitality!

