



APPALACHIAN RC&D COUNCIL

GROW ★ CONNECT ★ PRESERVE ★ FOSTER



3211 N. Roan St. Johnson City, TN 37601 // arcd.org // info@arcd.org // (423) 979-2581

What Does All That Mean? Executive Director Susan McKinney

It's one of the most frequent questions that folks ask me when I say that I work for Appalachian Resource Conservation and Development Council—ARC&D for short. I heard that question many times, long before I set foot in the door as an employee.

It has been two years since I saw an advertisement for ARC&D's Field School, signed up, and began my journey with the organization. From the get-go, friends and colleagues were curious about this "farming thing." Over the months following, I put a small portion of the old family farm into production growing fruits and vegetables; I know it sounds hard, but I had an incredible amount of support from my fellow cohorts and the leadership of the Field School. I also enrolled in the Build It Up program to learn how to grow produce sustainably, through chemical-free practices. Here, I gained an abundance of knowledge and established relationships with other growers who I still call friends. Every time I talked about my work on the farm, the Field School, or Build It Up, I explained that this was made possible through Appalachian Resource Conservation and Development Council, which inevitably led to the question, "what does all that mean?"

I could dive into the history of the RC&D Councils, how they were established, why only a percentage of them still exist, but all of that is available to you through a simple internet search. What I want to tell you is the impact that I have seen from **this** RC&D Council, first-hand. It means that a young family with a new baby just bought a farm that they will put into production over the next year. A career Washington government employee has returned home to her family's Revolutionary War farm and began a certified Organic operation. A mature couple left the city and moved to their family's farm, invested in high-tunnels and sells at three to five markets per week. A young woman who unexpectedly found herself to be the sole provider for her four children can stay close to her children by continuing to run an urban family farm. These are some of the real people that produce our local food.

It means that Farmers Markets, where you can buy locally-produced food, are stronger than ever as a result of the Farmers Market Promotion Project. Farmers and landowners throughout Tennessee can be matched through Farm Link. Folks that walk a designated mile at two Farmers Markets are rewarded with tokens for fresh fruits and vegetables through the Farmacy Fit program. A Food Forest was established in a low-income community, encouraging families to garden, harvest, and cook with the forest foods. At-risk teenagers work in local food production, learning marketable skills and earning a wage while managing school responsibilities.

It also means that stream beds in Johnson County have been restored after years of erosion to the watershed. Special wildfire mitigation work is being executed in Sevier County, which was devastated by forest fires in 2016. We are fortunate to live in a region with so many wonderful natural resources, and we will continue our conservation efforts for future generations to enjoy.

When I enrolled in the Field School, I had no idea what all ARC&D did or that my path would ultimately lead me to join the team. Two years later, as I write this note to you, I reflect on all that I have learned about the organization that I am honored to be a part of today. I hope that through sharing some of the highlights of our work, you too will have a better understanding of what it all means.

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2018 Annual Report



STAFF

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Susan McKinney

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Rachel Wheeler

Marketing & Communications Director

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2019 EVENTS

Hemp Workshop—January 14

CSA Fairs—March 2, 16, 30

AFMA Retreat—April 12

Farm Tours—June TBD

Quilt Turning—June 12

Appalachian Fusion—September 7

Summer Session Field School signups begin in January, and the session begins in May, 2019.

Find full event details online at arcd.org, and sign up for our newsletter to stay up-to-date on event announcements and other agriculture news.

Special thanks to our business partners, volunteers, and donors who made Build it Up, Sowing Seeds, Farm Tours, Field School, CSA Fairs, Farmacy Fit, and Farm Link possible. There are simply too many of you to list, but together you clocked over 1,500 hours of volunteer work, and each of you played a role in the success of our programs. ARC&D continues to be successful because of your support.

Appalachian Farm Fresh Tours: Region's First

By: Rachel Wheeler

Farm Tours, a branch of agritourism, are growing in popularity. Opening up farms to visitors gives producers a chance to diversify and increase farm revenue. Farm Tours also allow the community to develop a closer relationship with the farmer, and the foods grown in the region. This year marked the first for what we hope to become an annual Farm Tour event across the Central Highlands region of Appalachia.

The late spring event spanned two states, covering Washington County, Tennessee, and Washington, Smyth, and Tazewell counties in Virginia. Twelve farms welcomed visitors offering an inside glimpse into organic veggie and flower production, animal husbandry, grapes, and hops. The event was supported by two leading farm to table venues, the Harvest Table in Meadowview, Virginia, and The Main Street Pizza Company in Johnson City, Tennessee.

Around 150 visitors in both states were greeted with scenic mountain views and a chance to engage with farmers. The tour included multiple fruit and veggie operations, a community learning kitchen, poultry, alpacas, a vineyard, and a hops farm. With volunteers supporting the farmers, the two day long event was hit! Guests were provided with a window cling to show participation, and a booklet guiding them along the way to special events held during the tour days.

Farm Tour guests provided excellent feedback after the tours. Everyone who participated in the one or both tours and answered questions said they learned something new about our local food system and plan on purchasing more local products in the future. Most said they would be using farms' venue spaces or taking classes from the farms visited. We were asked to have more volunteer staff on site, as there was just one to two extra volunteers per farm. Guests also requested tours be held later in the year to allow access to more farm goods once harvest season has started. As we held it in the spring our farms had little produce to sell, but baked goods, eggs, meat, and alpaca wool and products were available as well as wine at the vineyard. In future years tours will be held later in the year to support more on-site sales, the ticketing process will become more streamlined, and we hope to have more volunteers on site.

For a full list of participating 2018 farms please visit our website at arcd.org/farmfresh. Stay tuned for the 2019 Farm Fresh Tours; we'll be announcing the dates and participants soon!



Civic Agriculture in Northeast Tennessee

By: Kayla Tucker

Civic Agriculture is the thought that when the residents of an area have an interest in buying their food locally, there is a positive impact on that region's social and economic development. This term was coined in 1999 by sociologist Thomas Lyson at Cornell University. Lyson later went on to publish a book about his theory. The book, *Civic Agriculture: Reconnecting Farm, Food, and Community*, criticizes global agriculture and advocates instead for the support of rural, super-localized agriculture, and farms that produce a variety of consumables.

Lyson wasn't blowing smoke. Supporting local agriculture doesn't just support the wellbeing of individual farmers; it fosters entrepreneurship by heralding farming as an economically viable practice, it creates jobs, and it keeps the production and consumption of agriculture in one region thereby making that region economically sustainable. Further, civic agriculture reconnects the consumer with the producer. Purchasing our food from a local market allows us meet the person who actually produced it. That kind of a connection fosters loyalty and trust – the kind of loyalty that won't be lost because a lower-quality product can be purchased elsewhere at a slightly cheaper price.

In our region, things are no different. The trend of purchasing one's food locally has permeated through the Appalachians, settling in deep on every hill and in every valley; it's sparked new farms while fostering the growth of established ones. Also contributing to this environment is a growing Millennial population who have a desire to support local businesses that are also environmentally sustainable and socially responsible.

These values make for an ideal economic environment in which local agriculture has the support it needs to flourish. It's tangible: interest in our Field School has grown each year meaning each year there is a new crop of farmers who want to grow their businesses. Also, farmers markets across the region are staying crowded well into fall both with vendors and customers.

Improving rural economies is the meat of our mission; it's why your support matters. It's why this work matters. The more interest we can spark in buying local the more farms we can support, and the more farms we can support the stronger our local economy will grow.

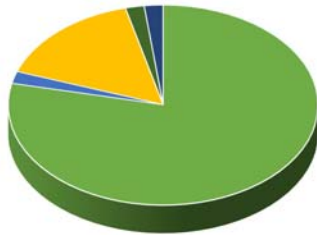
Thank you for being an imperative part of that drive.

Field School: By The Numbers

So far, we have had over 100 Field School Students. The current session of Field School kicked off on November 9th with 30 new students who are eager to evaluate whether farming is right for them. They're ready to spend the winter season developing a business plan and learning about finance and marketing for farming. Keep up with their progress on the arcd.org blog!

STUDENT ECONOMIC INVESTMENTS

Real Estate: \$400k
Hoop Houses: \$80k
Machinery: \$10k
Fencing/Irrigation: \$10k
Livestock: \$10k



DEMOGRAPHIC QUICK FACTS

Age range: 17—68 years old

Gender: 52% female, 48% male

Veterans: 4 veterans who all received full scholarships

Land Ownership: 60% currently own, 40% looking to buy

Geographic Dispersion: Students hailed from Sullivan, Washington, and four USDA StrikeForce counties: Carter, Greene, Hawkins, and Johnson.

"Through Field School, I found out about the NCRS High Tunnel program and got one installed this year. I also signed up for several other programs: forest management, pollination, and the Conservation Stewardship Program."

- Billie Anderson,
Fiddlehead Farms

A Note of Thanks From the TN Division of Forestry: Wildfire Mitigation Assistance

In the fall of 2016 wildfires destroyed 2,500 structures and took 14 lives in Sevier County. Gatlinburg, Pigeon Forge, Pittman Center and Wears Valley all had structure losses. The Tennessee Division of Forestry (TDF) helped suppress those fires and has been involved in helping the county residents recover and prepare for future wildfires.

In 2017, TDF was awarded a special \$220,000 federal grant to help residents in and around Sevier County to decrease their wildfire risk in future wildfires (structures are lost to wildfires most years in TN). Grants were awarded to 15 communities or county offices to take action to reduce the amount of flammable vegetation around homes, educate homeowners about keeping leaves and pine needles off of structures, provide training about wildfires for community planners so it can be considered in planning documents, and to provide training to fire departments to help them make more informed home wildfire risk assessments.

Further, the grant will be used by communities to buy chainsaws, leaf blowers, wood chippers and rakes for homeowners to thin out flammable vegetation near homes- one of the most important things to make a home safer from wildfire! A conference will be held next March for community planners and governing officials to learn more about the various options that can be considered to make communities safer. Lastly, a two-day course will be held next year to train firemen how to make detailed home wildfire risk assessments; this information will allow homeowners to take action to make their homes safer.

TDF has been partnering with Appalachian RC&D for about 15 years to help administer its Wildfire Hazard Mitigation Grant Program. It wants to thank ARC&D for helping make the awards, and for administering all the purchasing in association with this special Sevier County grant funding! Please contact your local TDF office to obtain information on how to make your home safer from wildfire; you are welcome to contact me, too.

Leon Konz
Wildfire Mitigation Specialist
Buffalo-Duck River RC&D
leonkonz@gmail.com

3211 N. Roan St. Johnson City, TN 37601

