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# Can we expand fresh food production in Appalachia and what would be the impact? A Report from West Virginia.

by [afpblog](#) • May 19, 2014 • 0 Comments

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*This post was contributed by Cheryl Brown:*

Many folks, when they think of the mountains of Appalachia, don't think of a place of significant agricultural production. As demand for locally grown fruits and vegetables has increased, the ability to supply this produce from Appalachian farms has been questioned. Answering this question was the goal of a report released in West Virginia in January of 2012. For those of you who missed it, I would like to recap the findings of this report here.

To figure out the pounds of fruits and vegetables

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needed by West Virginia eaters, we used the [U.S. Food Market Estimator](#). Based on national averages, we made calculations for twenty-nine vegetables and melons and seven fruits that have been produced in WV to determine how much production would be needed from WV farms. (On a statewide basis we already meet the WV demand for pumpkins, sweet corn, apples and peaches and export these products out of the state.) We took into account the length of the West Virginia growing season for the fruits and vegetables for which there was a local shortage and decided we would only try to meet the demand for these products during that limited time period. These products would be provided in their fresh form, in season, such that no processing infrastructure would be required (except that used in the home). Assumptions regarding per-acre yields were based on the best information available from West Virginia or nearby states.

Our calculations found that West Virginia would need 7,121 acres to meet 100% of the production needed for the 29 vegetables, and 1,276 acres would be required to meet 100% of the needed production of the seven fruits under consideration. According to the 2007 US Department of Agriculture's Agricultural Census, WV had only 857 acres of vegetable production and 431 acres of fruit production. Thus, 6,264 vegetable acres would need to be added along with 845 acres of fruits. This means that 7,109 additional acres would need to be producing fruits and vegetables to meet 100% of the local shortage of these products. Next, we used Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) farmland classifications, along with ruling out land that had a slope greater than or equal to 2%, to find that there are 166,500 acres of current or potential farmland that could be used for fruit

People  
North  
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Tech West  
Virginia  
University  
Whole Measures  
YES!

and/or vegetable production. So there appears to be enough land suitable for production onto which expansion could occur to meet demand for fresh seasonal fruits and vegetables in West Virginia.

Using farm gate prices from best available sources we calculated that \$32.75 million in additional revenue could be obtained from meeting the local shortage of vegetables along with \$2.96 million for fruit. When West Virginians buy fresh seasonal West Virginia produce instead of importing it from outside the state their dollars circulate multiple times throughout the local economy having an even greater impact. Considering this “multiplier effect” the overall economic impact of this expansion would be \$120.8 million in increased output, 1,723 additional jobs, and almost \$41 million in increased labor income.

In conclusion, all seasonal consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables could be met by growing this produce in WV. Season extension facilities such as greenhouses and high tunnels could fill even more of this gap. In addition, increased fruit and vegetable production can bring jobs and income to a region, but in order to do so, low-slope, prime farmland needs to be protected from non-agricultural uses. Over 10,900 acres of prime farmland with slope less than 2% have already been lost to development in West Virginia. And, expanding production will require new fruit and vegetable farmers, equipment, knowledge and distribution infrastructure. So to get back to our initial question, it appears that we can expand fresh food production in Appalachia and have a significant impact on local economies in this region.

[The full report is available here from Downstream Strategies at their website](#) (Look under Food

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There is a Season on SustainFloyd Offers Updates on Pocket Farm Classes, Working Model Farm

Systems Assessment) or at the [West Virginia Food and Farm Coalition website](#).

*This post was contributed by Cheryl Brown, Associate Professor of Agricultural and Resource Economics at West Virginia University and Co-Project Director and West Virginia State Lead for the Appalachian Foodshed Project.*

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