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Looking forward at Whitlock Farm

By Matt Combs Register-Herald Reporter Mar 13, 2018



Acquired in 2016 by the Fayette County Farmland Protection Board (FCFPB), and leased to the Fayette County Urban Renewal Authority (FCURA) in February, the Whitlock Farm property offers a unique opportunity in the New River Gorge area to explore the future of farming in the Mountain State.

As part of the process, the FCURA will host a community meeting this week to educate and get the public involved in what will be happening at the Whitlock property.

The meeting is aimed at growers, restaurateurs and local food advocates interested in the Whitlock Farm, new networking opportunities for regional food distribution and marketing strategies.

“A lot of our restaurants are wanting to provide locally grown food throughout the season,” said Fayette County Commissioner Denise Scalp in a news release. “It may not happen overnight, but it offers really good economic possibilities for small businesses, farmers and communities in the region.”

The proposed use of the Whitlock property is as a farming incubator, storage location and education center as a means to grow and diversify agriculture and tourism opportunities, as well as provide support for agricultural producers.

“Low-profit margins, difficulty accessing food distribution systems and high cost of investing in farm equipment makes it difficult for beginning farmers to successfully start new operations,” said Fayette County Resource Coordinator Kelly Jo Drey in the release. “By launching these new initiatives, the

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county aims to generate more profitable opportunities for farmers, increase the availability of high-quality food, and create a more cooperative effort between agriculture and tourism in the multi-county region.”

A 2017 feasibility study produced by Downstream Strategies highlights 15 to 20 acres of the Whitlock property suitable for growing vegetables and other crops, along with 40 acres that could be used for grazing.

According to the release, the property may also be used for business coaching, collaboration, marketing and distribution for farmers of the New River Gorge region.

Staff from Greenbrier Grown and Refresh Appalachia will be at the community meeting to discuss the details of their particular projects.

Farmers will also be given additional information about opportunities for which they can sign up at the meeting.

The meeting will take place at 5:30 p.m. Thursday, March 15, at the Fayetteville Presbyterian Church.

For more information contact the Fayette County Resource Coordinator’s Office, or view the Whitlock Farm feasibility study at bit.ly/whitlockfarm.

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