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Food mapping venture underway

By Glynis Board

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January 31, 2013 · Several organizations are working together to put farms and potential farms on the map, so to speak. The West Virginia Food and Farm Coalition is teaming up with WVU Extension Services and experts at the environmental consulting firm, Downstream Strategies, to create an interactive food mapping application.

The goal is to have an interactive map identifying the various food production and distribution potential throughout West Virginia by November. Principal at **Downstream Strategies**, Fritz Boettner, explains that organizations have been assessing local food production to understand what is being produced, how it's being produced and distributed, and what the economic value is.

"There's lots of land in West Virginia," Boettner says. "It's very fertile. It's very good farmland. Even with the terrain there's still plenty of land available to grow crops. So I think a lot of our work is with the notion that this could be an expanding, economic boom for the state."

Boettner says research demonstrates a high demand for locally produced food from both individuals and institutions. He says the food map is geared toward producers and potential farmers. The goal is to help them make informed decisions.

"For example, if I did have a farm what could I sell and where could I sell it? Who are the people that I need to contact? And what is the landscape like? Everything from, is it flat, does it have good soil—all those types of information we're able to map and they're able to zoom in and determine if it would be a good spot. We're trying to really encourage people to either purchase farms or turn less productive land into food production."

Boettner says the map will be user-friendly for not only producers but also consumers and policy makers. He says in this modern age of farming techniques, more can be done on fewer acres and that translates to significant potential economic growth.

"All the different folks across the country are now growing in high tunnels and extending the season and doing very sort of compact farming, as well as rotating crops and being more thoughtful about how they're farming to get more production out of their land without stripping it of its nutrients or causing any sort of issues like that. So it doesn't take a lot and our reports are able to quantify that."

He says some of the data used to create this map may surprise folks.

"So, for example, what if West Virginia farmers grew enough vegetables and fruit to meet 75% of the fresh seasonal produce needs of all West Virginians? And this isn't everything, this is just meeting those seasonal needs like tomatoes in the summertime.

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By Dave Mistich

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By Glynis Board

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By Clark Davis

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By Cecelia Mason

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By Glynis Board

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"A percent increase by acreage would mean you would be looking at a 212 percent increase in vegetables, and 11 percent increase in fruit. So that calculates out to an additional 5,000 acres in vegetables and fruits would need to be used, creating something around 1,300 new jobs—519 in farming and 398 in food and beverage retail—with additional sales of \$93.9 million."

Boettner says in a country that has encouraged and supported the development of "Big Ag," WV is better suited to cultivate a diverse, small farm economy and that, with some planning and support, agribusinesses could be sustaining.

"I would love to see families supporting themselves on it and I think it's very possible. I think it's going to take a combined effort—like if we had ways to help folks through value-added because there's so much cost involved with trying to do it on your own.

"If, for example, you had five or six dairy cows producing 100 gallons of milk every two days, but you don't have the money to process it or do all the things that are required in order to sell your milk. But if there was a place you could take it with other folks who could work together and have this central facility, sort of like community kitchens or any of these other facilities that help that along.

"I think the potential is very big."

Boettner says the food map will be made available on the [West Virginia Food and Farm Coalition](#) web page by November.

