



2021

ANNUAL REPORT

Committed to Our Region. Since 1985.





CONTENTS

ACENET'S MISSION	4
Letter from the Executive Director	
WHO WE ARE	6
The Board	
The Staff	
CELEBRATING 25 YEARS	8
Food Ventures Center	
SUPPORTING FARMERS MARKETS	10
Creating a Toolkit	
NAVIGATING NEW FOODSCAPES	12
Workforce Development	
ACENET'S IMPACT ON THE REGION	14
Timeline of Key Events	

OUR MISSION

ACEnet's mission is to grow the regional economy by supporting entrepreneurs and strengthening sectors. We envision a resilient economy in which all people have the resources and opportunities to prosper.



*“Commitment is what transforms
a promise into a reality.”*

-ABRAHAM LINCOLN

LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

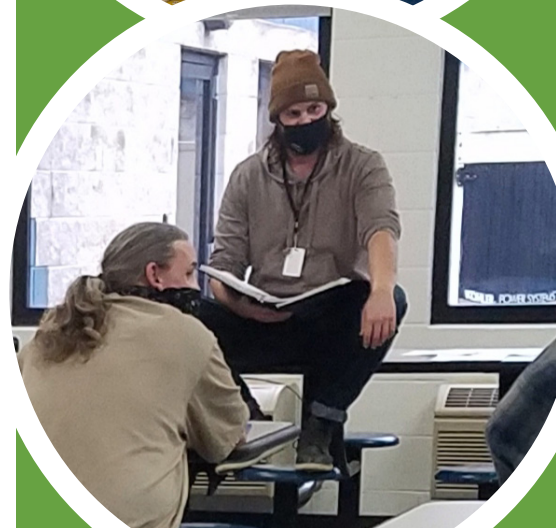
In 1996, a small non-profit in Athens, Ohio opened up a shared-use “community” kitchen that was the grounding of a commitment to rebuild our region’s local food system. The space, called the Food Ventures Center, held the promise of supporting local farmers and entrepreneurs as they developed or grew their new and existing business ventures. As we look back at 2021, another challenging year for our region, ACEnet’s commitment of the past 25 years has truly turned our promise to the region into a thriving reality.

As you make your way through our beautiful landscapes and our friendly communities, you will see many locally owned and operated food businesses— from restaurants and bakeries, to butchers and dairies. You will also see sustainable farms, bustling farmers markets, and a variety of food trucks that continue to enhance our regional food system. All of this has been supported in some small part by the presence of ACEnet’s facilities and our staff.

Looking forward, we are committed to our next challenge of developing a strong workforce for food businesses, as employee recruitment and retention is having a dramatic impact on our local food system. With targeted trainings and with outreach to members of our communities who are marginalized, ACEnet is once again investing in people— people who can support our farmers and local entrepreneurs.

As we carry on with this great work into the next quarter century, our commitment to our people, our region, and our planet will continue to turn the promise of a vibrant and healthy food system into a reality— a reality that we all can enjoy.

– Larry Fisher and the staff at ACEnet



WHO WE ARE

2021 Board Members



Kathryn Mosher
Board Chair



Sky Pettey
Vice Chair



Sarah Milligan
Treasurer



Mollie Fitzgerald
Secretary



Paul Mass



Laurie McKnight



Sean Terrell



Ric Wasserman



Staff Photo from 2022.

Staff

Larry Fisher

Executive Director

Leslie Schaller

Director of Programs

Meggan Loveland

Adam Kody

Sam Rife

Chris Quolke

Garrison Breeze

Rachel Brunot

Bailey Grenert

Delia Palmisano

Sherry Mills



CELEBRATING 25 YEARS

Food Ventures Center

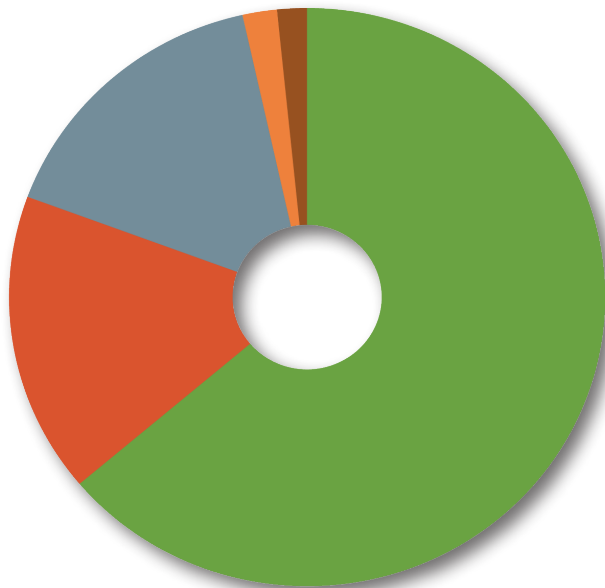
April 2021 marked the 25th anniversary of the opening of ACEnet's Food Venture Center in Athens, Ohio. The facility was one of the first rural kitchen incubators to open in the U.S. Staff and tenants celebrated the grand opening by breaking a loaf of Crumbs Bakery's Challah Bread. The planning, site selection and building renovation had been a long time in the making. That lead time allowed ACEnet to hit the ground running and the Food Ventures Center accommodated 40 food and farm businesses in its first year of operations.

The kitchen incubator model was such a new idea that it took us a bit to raise the project budget. But with grants and loans from the USDA, Ohio Department of Development, and the Ohio Department of Agriculture, the support of Hocking Valley Bank, and a linked deposit from the Finance Fund, our vision became a reality. ACEnet staff were also frugal stewards of the project budget, securing equipment from The Ridges old kitchen, Nationwide Insurance, and the OSU Food Technology program. Even an old beer cooler with glass doors on the side, served as the first walk-in cooler.

Former ACEnet founders and leaders: June Holley, Marti Zinn, Roger Wilkins, Amy Borgstrom, Jeanne Donado, and a willing Board of Directors provided the critical support to chart this new course. Designing the facility was facilitated by David Callahan of RVC Architects, and all of our contractors, who never built anything like the Food Ventures Center before.

Fast forward to April 2021; the Food Ventures Center, now coupled with our Food and Farm Enterprise Center in Nelsonville (FFEC), has assisted over 400 food and farm entrepreneurs. And let's not be modest, those food entrepreneurs have lifted Athens County and Appalachian Ohio to become one of the premier local food economies in the country.

TOTAL
INVESTMENT
through 2021:
\$1,530,000.00



2021 FVC
INVESTMENT:
\$69,930



- Walk-In Freezer
- Blast Chiller
- Tilt Skillet
- Poly Top Work Table
- Small Kitchen Equipment



SUPPORTING FARMERS MARKETS Creating a Toolkit

Farmers markets are excellent vehicles for increasing local food access while simultaneously boosting the local economy. They offer farmers an opportunity to reclaim a larger portion of the food dollar through innovative direct marketing and selling. Locally grown food is fresher, making it healthier for the people eating it, and it leaves less of a carbon footprint as it travels less distance to meet the consumer.

ACEnet staff provides support to many regional Farmers Markets Associations: including the Athens Farmers Market, the Meigs County Farmers Market, the Perry County Farmers Market, Shawnee Farmers Market, The Lancaster Farmers Market, and the Ohio Farmers Market Management Network.



ACEnet Farmers Market Toolkit

Locally, we assist market leaders to strengthen governance and financial management, design vendor policies and recruit new farmers, implement marketing plans and social media promotions, as well as initiate EBT and WIC benefits and research funding and expansion opportunities.

We have also collaborated nationally with the Farmers Market Coalition and the Project for Public Spaces to advocate for farmers markets and to build organizational capacity for markets through peer learning and innovation.

In 2021, supported by the USDA Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program [BFRDP] & the Ohio CDC Association AmeriCorps VISTA Grant program, ACEnet created the Farmers Market Toolkit for small scale agricultural producers. Available for free on the ACEnet website, this toolkit walks growers through the process, from business startup and pricing goods, to choosing the right Farmers Market and designing a market booth, to turning surplus harvest into specialty food products and marketing their products and business.



FARMERS MARKETS
we support:

- Perry County Farmers Market
- Lancaster Farmers Market
- Shawnee Farmers Market
- Athens Farmers Market
- Meigs Farmers Market





NAVIGATING NEW FOODSCAPES

Through Workforce Development

At ACEnet, we have found new, innovative solutions to help our communities and our clients at a time when jobs seem readily available and yet we lack the people to fill them.

During 2021, ACEnet began partnering with the STAR Justice Center in Nelsonville to connect STAR residents with ACEnet Food Venture clients for internships that provide on-the-job experience and potential employment opportunities.

ACEnet also began partnering with the Athens Meigs Education Service Center to look at matching students with small businesses in another series of internships. Two of our staff have worked with the Center's Business Advisory Council and we are working with an intern from the Nelsonville-York School District to get a better understanding of how this program could benefit students and small businesses.

*"Since my
internship at ACEnet,
I've learned about
nonprofits that
thrive off supporting
other businesses."*

— **JOSIAH LENT**

Nelsonville-York High School





2021 IMPACTS

29

Serv Safe Food Protection
graduates trained

68

STAR residents working with our
clients including: *Butcher's Bites,*
Crumbs, Ted's Pepper Butter, Pork
and Pickles, Seli Foods, Farm on The
Ridge, and To-Go Packs

86

Internship slots across all
ACEnet campuses

522

Hours STAR residents have
worked with our clients



*"The STAR resident who has been
working with us has been amazing;
thank you, ACEnet!"*

—TARA SLINGERLAND
Butcher's Bites

ACENET'S IMPACTS

142

**Regional Businesses Assisted
Through ACEnet Services**

127

**Low To Moderate Income
Clients Served by ACEnet**

61

**Jobs Created By
ACEnet Clients**

23

**New Businesses Started With
Support From ACEnet**

7

**Distinct Business Sectors
Represented By ACEnet Clients**

Timeline Of Key Events

1985

A small group of community members committed to economic justice and building a healthy regional economy in Appalachian Ohio created ACEnet.

1990

ACEnet established a small business incubator designed to give start-up businesses a head start by providing below-market rates for space and services.

1993

ACEnet began developing the Food Ventures Center, a sector-specific incubator focused on the needs of companies producing specialty food products.

1996

ACEnet celebrated the grand opening of the Food Ventures Center which provides licensed commercial kitchen space for entrepreneurs to develop and produce their product lines.

2006

ACEnet purchased the 100,000 sq/ft former Rocky Boots warehouse building in Nelsonville and turned it into the Nelsonville Business Center & Food Hub.

2018

ACEnet opened the Food and Farm Enterprise Center on our Nelsonville Business Campus, which offers an ODA-licensed and inspected facility to assist with value-added processing for meat. We also opened the shared-use Wood Manufacturing Center to host and assist regional wood businesses and provide equipment rentals.

2021

ACEnet expanded its Wood Manufacturing Center to include new equipment.



KEEP IN TOUCH.

✓ STAY CONNECTED



Appalachian Center for Economic Networks



ACEnetAthens



ACEnetAthens



acenetworks.org

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