

2017

# ANNUAL REPORT





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## APPALACHIAN CENTER FOR ECONOMIC NETWORKS





# ACENET'S 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.**



## LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

*"If you can't fly, run. If you can't run, walk. If you can't walk, crawl. But by all means, keep moving."*

*- Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr*

"Keep moving." What a great pair of words to encourage every person as they journey through life, especially those persons who have decided to begin their own business. From farmers to business women, from producers to therapists, ACEnet has been in the region for 33 consecutive years, supporting the entrepreneurs that are the movers of our economy.

At the beginning, when the entrepreneur starts to crawl, the ACEnet team is beside them with business planning or financial assistance. Then as they begin to walk, we are there to help them with marketing and distribution resources so their first steps will be on a solid foundation. And when the small business is ready to run, ACEnet is still with them, providing support for expansion and growth, while watching them take flight.

As you journey through these pages, you are invited to experience some of the moments of crawling, walking, running, and flying that our clients have taken this past year. You will also experience some of our work in strengthening the economic foundations that enable our clients to "keep moving."

We encourage you to continue to follow your dream and to join ACEnet as we "keep moving" so that everyone in our region can have the opportunity to prosper from their dream.

Keep moving and keep dreaming,

Larry Fisher

## THE BOARD

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*Secretary*  
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Leslie Schaller  
*Director of Programs*  
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Barbara Volsko  
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Josh Waddell  
Kyle Verge  
Madelyn Brewer  
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# REGIONAL FOOD ECONOMY

## ACENET CLIENTS IN REGIONAL FOOD CATALOG

As part of a larger effort to increase regional food distribution along the I-68, I-70 and I-81 interstates, and to better support ACEnet Food Ventures tenants like **Casa Nueva** and **Vino de Milo**, ACEnet and regional partners created the *Central Appalachian Food Product Catalog*. Inside its pages are various high-quality products produced by regionally-based businesses. Aimed at wholesale food buying businesses, this effort builds market connections between buyers looking for more opportunities to source local products and regional mid-sized food and farm businesses interested in expanding into new markets.

To promote participation in this catalog, ACEnet and regional partners organized a variety of Meet & Greet events in 2017 between farmers, restaurateurs, grocery operators and food and beverage service providers. The events featured producer showcases and product sampling from eastern Kentucky, Ohio, West Virginia and Virginia. The inaugural *Central Appalachian Food Product Catalog* was released in September of 2017 and showcases 24 regional businesses, with 14 being ACEnet clients. ACEnet also hosted a series of webinars and workshops focused on cottage food laws, specialty retailers, wholesale distribution and meat processing opportunities in support of the new catalog.



*"It was an unreal feeling when the corn left my farm. After all my corn sold and delivered in the same day, I was able to shift my focus on marketing other value-added products I create, like my high-quality goats-milk soap."*

- Rhonda Dortch  
Owner, Bluestone Mountain Farm



## THE CENTRAL APPALACHIAN ENTERPRISE CORRIDOR PROJECT

**SUPPORTED**  
**35 REGIONAL**  
**BUSINESSES**

**\$12 MILLION**  
**IN REGIONAL**  
**GROSS SALES**

**AIDED IN THE**  
**CREATION OF 74**  
**REGIONAL JOBS**

ACEnet continues to work with regional retail partners to promote local and regional products in order to support producers and strengthen our partners. Today, products can be found in Ohio at Nelsonville Emporium, Keller Market House, Tuckerman's, Coonskin Crossing, and in West Virginia at Point Marketplace, and The Wild Ramp.



# FOOD & FARM ENTERPRISE CENTER

## LOCAL MEAT PROCESSING RETURNS

Athens County has not seen a federal or state licensed facility for meat processing in years. As a result, area farmers must travel a minimum of 45 miles one way to have their animals processed and packaged in a limited way, based upon the processor they use. This system not only limits creativity, but it also effects the product quality of many local meat producers who are looking to improve their businesses.

After a meeting with state inspectors and local farmers, ACEnet launched an initiative to return value-added meat processing to the county and the region. With support from the **USDA Rural Development Program**, the **Appalachian Regional Commission** and the **Osteopathic Heritage Foundation of Nelsonville**, ACEnet began construction in October 2017 to open an Ohio Department of Agriculture licensed Food & Farm Enterprise Center within our Nelsonville Business Campus.

This center, anticipated to open in the summer of 2018, will include a dedicated room for meat processing and a separate room to handle fresh produce, which will benefit local produce farmers and local

food access programs, such as the **Farm to School** initiative. In addition to the support for building and equipping the facility, ACEnet has received a commitment for 2018 from **Farm Aid** to provide outreach support and education to area farmers who are interested in the project.



*“ACEnet’s Food and Farm Enterprise Center is incredible and it is designed specifically for what we’re doing, which will make the efficiency so much better. We’ll be able to produce a lot more products in a timely manner. When this facility opens, I’ll be able to sell wholesale instead of only being able to sell direct to consumers or to restaurants under a monetary cap. We can really amp up.”*

*– Becky Clark, Owner, Pork & Pickles*



## ENTERPRISE CENTER PROJECT

### ENTERPRISE EQUIPMENT

- Biro 3334SS Meat Band Saw
- Biro 922SS Meat Grinder
- Hobart 60 QT. Mixer
- F. Dick Sausage Stuffer
- Ultravac 500 Single Chamber Vacuum Packaging Machine
- Reach-In Blast Chiller
- 96” Poly-Top Work Table
- Meat Prep & Wash Sink
- Access to:  
Warehouse Storage, Cooler/  
Freezer Space, & Loading Docks

**\$74,480 ACENET  
INVESTMENT**

**\$240,557 PARTNER  
INVESTMENT**

**\$315,037 TOTAL  
INVESTMENT**

**The Food & Farm Enterprise Center will allow farmers to have the opportunity to expand into wholesale markets which will increase access to their products. This will give their business the opportunity to run or maybe even fly!**





# WOOD MANUFACTURING CENTER

## STRENGTHENING LOCAL WOOD BUSINESSES

Our region is experiencing a resurgence of small businesses within the wood products sector, capitalizing on our rich traditions and natural resources. In order to strengthen these small businesses, ACEnet opened the **Wood Manufacturing Center** within its Nelsonville Business Campus during 2017.



Setting aside more than 1,200 square feet of secured space, the center hosts regional wood manufacturing businesses that were in need of space and expensive equipment. By providing this space and shared equipment, woodworkers can start up or expand their businesses without the large initial cost of equipment while they operate in the low-

cost environment of our business incubator. Additional plans are underway with **Hocking College** to connect their wood working programs to our facility, so that their students can gain access to the equipment that can help jump start their businesses.

The creation of the center was possible through a grant from the **U.S. Department of Agriculture's Rural Development Office** and our matching general revenue funds.

*"Without the ACEnet investment in the woodworking center, I would not have been able to efficiently produce the products that I do today. It has increased our productivity, output and allowed us to expand into new products and reduce some price on items that we produce for other businesses and individuals."*

*– Tim Martin, Red Tail Design Co  
& Ohio Is Home*



## CARPENTRY EQUIPMENT

SawStop 10" Industrial Table Saw

Laguna Band Saw

Jet 20" Planer

Grizzly 37" Drum Sander

Jet Belt Sander

Dust Collectors

Steff Power Feeder

Apollo Sprayer

Access to:  
Warehouse Storage, Loading  
Docks, & Garage Entrance

## WOOD CENTER PROJECT

**IDENTIFIED 3 NEW  
RETAIL MARKETS FOR  
WOOD PRODUCTS**

**INVESTED \$24,688  
IN NEW EQUIPMENT**

**DEDICATED 1,200  
SQ. FT. OF SECURED  
SPACE FOR TENANTS**

To better strengthen the wood products sector, ACEnet has partnered with two maker-spaces, the Athens Maker-space and the Epi-Center in Marietta. This partnership is through the Regional LIGHTS Program, part of the Innovation Center at Ohio University.



# WOMEN IN BUSINESS

## SUPPORTING WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS

In 2015, the United States Census Bureau reported that nationally women-owned businesses are growing at a faster rate than male-owned. Women-owned businesses have increased at a rate of 26.8% versus a 6.8% increase in male-owned during the same 5 year period. In our own state, women entrepreneurs account for 1/3 of the total businesses. With this in mind, ACEnet saw the need for targeted resources supporting women-owned businesses and the inaugural **Women in Business Conference** was held in 2017 at the Lodge at Hocking College in Nelsonville.

This event united over 70 women entrepreneurs in all stages of business development for a one day conference focused on three main objectives: professional development, personal development, and networking with other women who own and operate small businesses. Workshops were designed around starting and growing small businesses, financing insights, and a passionate keynote speech by Amber Runyan of Eleventh Candle Company.



*"In addition to time, energy and money, I needed support, guidance and encouragement when opening the Nelsonville Emporium – ACEnet has what was needed and more! The conference is a chance to understand how others breathe and grow in small business. We can learn from our peers and supporters. Together we can do so much more!"*

*– Jen L'Heureux, Nelsonville Emporium  
(We Did It So Can You Panel)*

In addition to speakers, there was a small trade show and curbside consulting with established business owners. The conference also included a "We Did It, So Can You" panel of four business women, each with their own unique contributions to the economy in Appalachia Ohio. With the success of this first conference, ACEnet is planning a second conference for the spring of 2018.

## ACENET'S WOMEN IN BUSINESS PROJECT

SUPPORTED 68  
WOMEN-OWNED  
BUSINESSES

STRENGTHENED  
15 START-UP  
COMPANIES

ASSISTED WITH  
14 NEW JOBS  
FOR WOMEN

Evaluations from the 2017 Women in Business Conference highlighted two important points; attendees were most interested in peer-to-peer networking and the specific focus given to women-owned businesses.





# ACENET'S IMPACT ON THE REGION

TRAINED 365 INDIVIDUALS

PROVIDED TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE  
TO 174 BUSINESSES

SUPPORTED THE CREATION  
OF 46 JOBS

ASSISTED 39 START-UP BUSINESSES

CONNECTED 11 BUSINESSES  
TO FINANCING

## 2017 FUNDERS



ODSA Micro-Enterprise Program



USDA Rural Development



U.S. Small Business Administration



United States Department of Agriculture



Appalachian Regional Commission



Osteopathic Heritage Foundation  
of Nelsonville

## PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS

OU SBDC  
Innovation Center  
Rural Action  
Community Food Initiatives  
SPICE  
Athens Farmers Market  
Nelsonville Farmers Market  
Foodworks Alliance  
Commonweath Kitchen Incubator  
OU Food Studies Program  
Ohio's Hill Country Heritage Area  
RCBI Marshall University  
Athens County CVB  
Sunday Creek Associates  
Keller Market House  
Natural Capital Investment Fund  
Refresh Appalachia  
City of Athens  
Athens County Foundation  
Central Appalachian Network





## STAY CONNECTED



*Appalachian Center  
for Economic Networks*



*ACEnetAthens*



*ACEnetAthens*



*acenetworks.org*