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SPECIAL TO HNN PROVIDED BY MARSHALL UNIVERSITY

HUNTINGTON — The Robert C. Byrd Institute's (RCBI) Agricultural Innovations program and a group of statewide partners today were awarded a \$1.5 million federal POWER (Partnerships for Opportunity and Workforce and Economic Revitalization) grant to create jobs in coal-impacted communities by expanding local food production in West Virginia.



RCBI is partnering with the New River Gorge Regional Development Authority, Downstream Strategies and other area organizations on the Sprouting Farms project in Fayette, Greenbrier, Mercer, Monroe, Nicholas, Pocahontas, Raleigh and Summers counties.

Under development since 2014, Sprouting Farms is an innovative approach to enhancing local food systems in Appalachia. The goal is to grow more food locally, process it more effectively and get it to market more efficiently. Today's Appalachian Regional Commission grant will accelerate the project by providing support for:

- * A resource-sharing program that provides access to advanced technology, machinery, and tools;
- * A farm business accelerator offering new farmers access to land, production training, business development support and mentorship;
- * An education program that develops curriculum and partnerships with area educators to promote agriculture;
- * A program that provides land access through an ownership model called crofting or leasing arrangements;
- * A production program that manages wholesale farms and provides learning opportunities for participants;
- * A sales and planning program that develops wholesale markets channels for the participants.

"We're proud to be at the forefront of the new agricultural economy in West Virginia," said Bill Woodrum,

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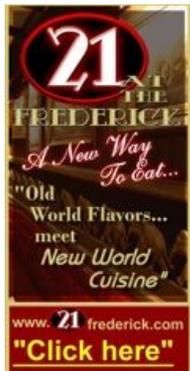
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director of Agricultural Innovations at RCBI. "By capitalizing on the tremendous demand for locally sourced food, we can tap into the transformative wealth that already exists in our communities."

West Virginians consume about \$7.3 billion of food annually yet only produce about \$675 million of that, according to Walt Helmick, state Commission of Agriculture. "That \$6.625 billion difference provides a prime opportunity for the agricultural sector in West Virginia to expand operations, produce and sell more goods, and create much-needed jobs," Woodrum said.



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