



## CAN Tank Briefing 2013: Expanding Market Access for Rural Enterprises

A **CAN Tank** is an exploration of a key economic development topic affecting Central Appalachia. Through research, shared analysis and learning, and identifying best practices, these events and publications help to advance the understanding of effective economic development work in the region. Stay tuned for exploration of more key topics in 2014 and beyond.

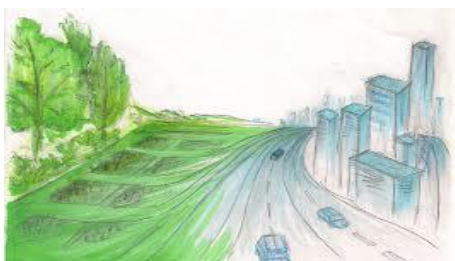
### CAN Tank 2013: Expanding Market Access for Rural Enterprises

The [Central Appalachian Network \(CAN\)](#) and its members believe that entrepreneurship and small business form the foundation of a resilient rural economy. CAN also recognizes that a rural-based economic sector such as local food, wood products, or manufacturing needs connections to growing consumer demand to drive its development. CAN chose the issue of market access for rural enterprises as the focus of our 2013 CAN Tank research project and gathering. This briefing paper summarizes the findings from this research and gathering, highlighting some of the most promising strategies for expanding market access.

**Research:** To inform and ground the CAN Tank gathering, CAN commissioned a research study by Brian Dabson of the Institute of Public Policy at the University of Missouri. Click here for the full research report: [Seven Steps to Increasing Rural-Urban Economic Connections in Central Appalachia](#). You can find an overview of Dabson's findings and recommendations [here](#).

**Gathering:** Framed by this research analysis of the rural-urban continuum in Appalachia, over fifty economic development leaders representing six Appalachian states and more than forty different organizations, agencies, and businesses gathered on August 26-27 in Roanoke, WV to share their experiences and ideas ([see full participant list](#)). Building on Dabson's research, this group set out to collectively define a set of strategies to increase rural-urban connectivity and expand market access for rural enterprises. This "CAN Tank Briefing" summarizes those strategies.

Central  
Appalachian  
Network



**CAN is a regional network of non-profit organizations** that develop and deploy targeted sustainable development strategies that are market-oriented and community-based, across the five-state region of Central Appalachia.

Our member organizations are:

**ACEnet – Ohio**  
**ASD – Virginia**  
**CEO – West Virginia**  
**MACED – Kentucky**  
**NCIF – West Virginia**  
**Rural Action – Ohio**

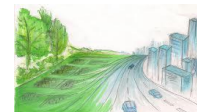
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For more information: [Cannetwork.org](http://Cannetwork.org)

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## Strategies for Expanding Market Access

Participants identified the following big picture strategies, as well as concrete steps that actors such as researchers, funders, policy-makers, lenders, and economic development practitioners can take to help expand market access for rural enterprises.



### **Strengthen Intermediaries and Anchor Organizations**

- ❖ **Support and connect anchor organizations** that serve as enterprise support hubs in rural areas, by increasing philanthropic investment and encouraging cross-sector collaboration and resource sharing. As government services are cut back, these organizations provide much of the services and capacity-building necessary for a healthy rural economy.
- ❖ **Replicate current intermediation approaches** from one part of Central Appalachia to others, such as the Regional Flavor concept in Ohio. Anchor organizations and intermediaries develop umbrella programs and projects that benefit large groups of rural businesses, which can be shared with other organizations to inform similar efforts elsewhere in the region.
- ❖ **Track impact and tell the story** by identifying metrics that show the progress of value chains and rural enterprises. By supporting efforts to communicate these impacts, intermediaries can help build more support among consumers, funders, government officials, and local development practitioners.

### **Increase Investment in Physical Infrastructure**

- ❖ **Support physical infrastructure development** by having place-based organizations identify gaps in rural communities and articulate those needs to regional and governmental actors that are well-positioned to influence policy and investment that strengthens rural infrastructure.

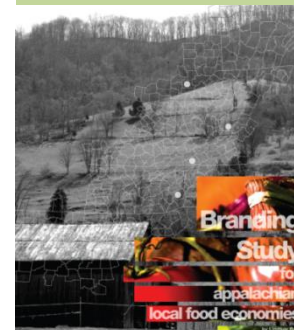
### **Strengthen Rural Capacity**

- ❖ **Increase the economic capacity of rural communities** through improved public education outcomes and access to technology. By facilitating collaborations between public school systems, community colleges, universities, and workforce development programs, we can strengthen the foundation of our region's economic competitiveness.
- ❖ **Support the development of rural entrepreneurs** by providing peer learning opportunities, business coaching and technical assistance. New and expanding rural entrepreneurs need support during each phase of development, and existing support actors can improve their services by connecting their ongoing efforts.
- ❖ **Expand access to capital for rural enterprises** by aligning existing funders and lenders in the region and brokering connections.
- ❖ **Capitalize on the transfer of wealth and new wealth** in the region by collaborating with community foundations to engage the newly wealthy in improving their communities.

### **Expand Marketing and Branding Efforts**

- ❖ **Broaden regional branding efforts** by sharing best practices and lessons learned from current efforts. Convene sector-specific gatherings to explore regional branding potential and build support for current and proposed brands.
- ❖ **Capitalize on origin and quality** by exploring "short supply chains" for products and services in sectors where a product's geographical identity can provide a competitive advantage. Build on established trends like "locally produced", "hand-made", "traditional", and "sustainable."

Interested in learning more about place-based branding in our region? Read the report: "[Branding Study for Appalachian Local Food Economies](#)", produced for CAN by MIT's Keeping Wealth Local Clinic, or check out the [Executive Summary](#).



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### Capture Regional and Urban Markets

- ❖ **Expand regional markets** by exploring major urban demand centers and conducting market development research through regional business schools. Build on the evolving understanding of rural-urban economic interdependence.
- ❖ **Connect to urban buyers** by developing connections with purchasers in urban-based businesses and by collaborating with urban-based economic development, financing, and TA agencies interested in rural products. Look for urban champions and “gazelles” - large established businesses motivated to help rural products reach markets where they have identified demand.
- ❖ **Explore new external consumer demand and urban markets** by identifying competitive advantages for rural products and enterprises that build on the unique strengths and assets of our region. Figure out what Appalachia has that others want.
- ❖ **Convene business-to-business gatherings** within specific sectors to develop collective outreach and market development strategies. Move beyond competition to “coopetition” that benefits everyone involved.
- ❖ **Focus on exports and import substitution** by encouraging institutions, businesses, and consumers to source and purchase Appalachian products whenever possible. A change in a hospital’s food purchasing policy, for example, has ripple effects in the local economy that help more wealth stay within the region.

During the CAN Tank, we heard from several rural enterprises that rely on successful connections to urban markets. Learn more about them here:

- [Appalachian Harvest](#)
- [Gat Creek Furniture](#)
- [WoodRight Forest Products](#)

### How CAN is Using These Findings

These strategies were developed by a diverse group of regional development leaders, and we believe they can help guide anyone wanting to grow rural economies in our region. CAN, our members, and our partners are already working to implement many of these strategies, and we’re collectively focusing on several key strategies across the network.

- ❖ **We are building cross-sector collaborations**, making connections between non-profit, business, philanthropic and government actors around shared economic values and strategies. In 2014, this includes a joint Food Systems Working Group with the Appalachia Funders Network, and efforts to network local and state-level Entrepreneurship Support actors to share lessons learned and best practices.
- ❖ **We are developing sector-specific strategies**, going deeper in connecting expertise and exploring opportunities for increasing market access in sectors like energy, food, forestry, manufacturing, and health. CAN is sharing our collective experience around the food, entrepreneurship, and forestry sectors, and is looking for ways to expand knowledge exchange in sectors like energy, manufacturing, health, and waste stream recycling.



For more information: [Cannetwork.org](http://Cannetwork.org)