

# *Growing Healthy Food Systems from the Ground Up* Central Appalachian Network

can@cannetwork.org - [www.cannetwork.org](http://www.cannetwork.org)

---

## Markets Panelists

**Dale Hawkins**- Rock Cave IGA, West Virginia. "I love preparing delicious food. I enjoy it more when I can share it with company...or with family and friends. That is truly one of my greatest joys in life." Hawkins' ultimate mission is to use the freshest, high-quality ingredients for every component on the plate. Quite naturally his philosophy was shaped by growing up on a farm where gardening, baking breads and learning to preserve foods was the order of the day. Hawkins comes from a large family that appreciates good food. Under the tutelage of his parents and parishioners in the small community of Rock Cave, West Virginia he developed at an early age a deep appreciation for seasonality, food and traditions. Family traditions like baking pies and Sunday supper, interspersed with daily chores on the farm, fill his childhood memories. Hawkins has always been driven by his natural curiosity for food, cooking and the outdoors. Growing up, he helped his family preserve fruit and pickle vegetables, and he joined with community neighbors in the annual seasonal rituals of making maple syrup. All of this instilled a deep-rooted respect for seasonality and tradition which Dale took with him to Pennsylvania Culinary. Here it fused with an interest in building on those traditions to make ordinary food extraordinary. His success in these efforts brought him (after graduating from Pennsylvania Culinary) to such acclaimed kitchens as Victoria and Albert's at Disney's Grand Floridian Beach Resort where he spent two years honing his culinary skills. Under the tutelage of some of Disney's finest chefs, he was drawn to the diverse use of unusual culinary delights such as antelope, dragon fruit and specialty micro greens and vegetables. When asked what Dale's philosophy on food is, he replied, "My food reflects the seasons, local harvests and the world becoming a smaller place. I support local family farms but at the same time, I take advantage of the increased availability of specialty foods from across the globe. My mission is to use high-quality, fresh ingredients."

**Robin Robbins**- Appalachian Harvest, Virginia. AHN has helped local farmers transform their old rows of tobacco, once their signature crop, into thriving organic fruit and vegetable fields. And it has brought these farmers into a new distribution system with major retailers and grocers in the region. AHN values action over research and opens new economic opportunities for local farmers. "We are letting farmers know that their livelihood is still viable and can be very profitable," says Robbins. Appalachian Harvest, an organic farming cooperative, is searching for new farmers to help meet the growing demand for organic produce. "Right now, we have more demand than supply when you look at what our partners are wanting," said co-op marketer Robin Robbins. "Over the last 10 years, organic has become evolutionary because that grocery shopper wants better quality and they want to know where the food comes from. Some people are just discovering organic, while others have already made it a part of their daily diet," she said. "I don't think there's an exact science to it, but I

think more people think about what they put into the mouths of their children than their own, and with all of the health-related issues that are going on in our society, they want something that does not have all the chemicals or fillers. Something else that gives us an advantage is that nutrients and vitamins packed into those fruits and vegetables then packed in our operations are on a truck and in the store within 36 to 48 hours at the latest. That is how we operate, and it is what our market partners expect. Plus, the product is bringing a great price per pound. We cannot be more thankful for our markets. The thing is we want to help them, they want to return the favor, and we need the farmers and the dedicated acres,” said Robbins. “The opportunity is there, and we have everything the farmer needs to get started. The commitment is the only thing needed now.”

**JB King – King Family Farm, Ohio.** [www.kingfamilyfarm.com](http://www.kingfamilyfarm.com). Our hogs are grown in open buildings and lots, where they can enjoy fresh air and sunshine. When hogs are ready for processing they are taken by straw bedded trailer to our processor who is a small family operated facility here in southeastern Ohio. The hogs are slaughtered humanly and processed with care. We chose Old Village Meats as our processor because of their care and cleanliness while handling our product. Old Village is a state inspected facility and is willing to process all of our products the way we want using our seasonings and cures. We want our customers to know that they are receiving good quality nutritious pork, just like we want for our families. Our customers can enjoy the fresh clean flavor with their families. Our pork is much fresher than industrial pork as stores receive our product within seven days of slaughter. No injections are made to this pork to enhance flavor. It’s all natural and locally grown, here in southeastern Ohio!

### **Processing Panelists**

---

**Warren Taylor-** Snowville Creamery, Ohio. <http://www.snowvillecreamery.com/> Snowville Creamery was formed in response to a lack of truly fresh, local dairy products. Our Same Day Dairy® concept is to provide particularly wholesome and fresh milk for retail sale in local markets, minimizing the distribution chain. Our milk is bottled on the farm the same day the cows are milked and delivered to your local grocer within 12-48 hours. Now that’s FRESH!

**Appalachian Staple Food Collaborative** – Michelle Ajamian and Brandon Jaeger - Ajamian and Jaeger started the AFSC in 2008 to build a model field-to-table food system for Appalachia based on the production, processing, and marketing of staple beans, grains, and oilseeds. Ajamian and Jaeger’s work and interest in staple foods has gained the attention of several organizations, farmers, local businesses, and students who are now involved in the collaborative. The growing support of the collaborative has also resulted in funding to set up a prototype processing facility to assess equipment, marketing, and scale for local processing of staple crops. The facility is called Shagbark Seed and Mill Co.

**Robin Hildebrand-** Blue Smoke Salsa, West Virginia. [www.bluesmokesalsa.com](http://www.bluesmokesalsa.com). Robin says, “I’m blessed. That’s what I attribute Blue Smoke Salsa’s success to- that and my wonderful family, friends, and customers! Almost twenty years and three buildings ago, I had no idea that my life would turn into what it is today. When I created the Blue Smoke Salsa, I didn’t intend to start a company; it was just a hobby from my backyard garden.”

Blue Smoke Salsa operated and grew out of that basement kitchen for five years and in 1997 relocated to Main Street, right in the middle of town. Our building had been boarded up for a few years, so we cleaned it up and put in a large 100 square-foot kitchen, with a small retail outlet out front. Here, Blue Smoke Salsa continued to grow, and we began to receive a lot of awards for taste, quality, and business leadership.

After five years in that building, Blue Smoke Salsa needed more space once again. In 2002, I purchased the large building across the street from our old location, and it remains the home of Blue Smoke Salsa to date. We’ve added a large retail space, and we even opened our own town cafe. My staff is still the best- incredibly dependable and hard-working- and our dedication to quality always shows.

My three wonderful sons have shared this journey with me. With their support, and the dedication of everyone who’s been a part of the Blue Smoke Family, we’ve been able to create a business to be proud of. We hope to continue bringing our fresh, homemade salsa to more and more people every day. Let us share some Blue Smoke with your family- and experience the true spirit of salsa!”

### **Aggregation & Distribution Panelists**

---

**Kip Rondy-** Green Edge Gardens, Ohio. <http://www.greenedgegardens.com/index.html> Green Edge Gardens is a family owned organic farm in rural Amesville, Ohio. Kip and Becky Rondy are long time farmers who are dedicated to producing the best organic produce possible. Their 120 acres of rolling hills and fertile bottomland is tended to by hand. Water comes from a series of spring-fed ponds on the property. Seven greenhouses ensure a year-round selection of micro greens of many kinds and an abundant supply of other seasonal vegetables and specialty mushrooms. They provide the finest high quality spring green salad mixes, micro greens, vegetables, and mushrooms. All grown and harvested by hand.

**Robin Robbins-** Appalachian Harvest, Virginia. AHN has helped local farmers transform their old rows of tobacco, once their signature crop, into thriving organic fruit and vegetable fields. And it has brought these farmers into a new distribution system with major retailers and grocers in the region. AHN values action over research and opens new economic opportunities for local farmers. “We are letting farmers know that their livelihood is still viable and can be very profitable,” says Robbins. Appalachian Harvest, an organic farming cooperative, is searching for new farmers to help meet the growing demand for organic produce. “Right now, we have more demand than supply when you look at what our partners are wanting,” said co-op marketer Robin Robbins. “Over the last 10 years, organic has become evolutionary because that grocery shopper wants better quality and they want to

know where the food comes from. Some people are just discovering organic, while others have already made it a part of their daily diet,” she said. “I don’t think there’s an exact science to it, but I think more people think about what they put into the mouths of their children than their own, and with all of the health-related issues that are going on in our society, they want something that does not have all the chemicals or fillers. Something else that gives us an advantage is that nutrients and vitamins packed into those fruits and vegetables then packed in our operations are on a truck and in the store within 36 to 48 hours at the latest. That is how we operate, and it is what our market partners expect. Plus, the product is bringing a great price per pound. We cannot be more thankful for our markets. The thing is we want to help them, they want to return the favor, and we need the farmers and the dedicated acres,” said Robbins. “The opportunity is there, and we have everything the farmer needs to get started. The commitment is the only thing needed now.”

**Joe Cloud** – True and Essential Meats, Virginia. <http://www.temeads.com/> Joe co-owns True and Essential Meats (aka T&E Meats), in Harrisonburg, VA, along with Joel Salatin of Polyface Farm. T&E Meats is a small USDA-inspected abattoir, as well as a purveyor of wholesale and retail meats. Joe is also part owner of Greenmont Farm in Fishersville, VA, a significant part of the Polyface Farm land base. Before purchasing T&E in the summer of 2008, Joe had a long and successful career as a landscape architect and urban planner for an international planning firm. He has always been interested in sustainability issues, and was one of the first landscape architects in the U.S. to become LEED accredited with the U.S. Green Building Council. A life-long cook, he believes availability of quality food to be an essential component of life.

---

### Policy Panelists

---

**Don VanErden** - Community Farm Alliance, Kentucky. [www.communityfarmalliance.org](http://www.communityfarmalliance.org)  
Founded in 1985 in response to the farming crisis, Community Farm Alliance is a grassroots organization of about 2,000 members in 75 Kentucky counties. CFA is dedicated to the preservation and sustainability of the small family farm. From creating new Farmers' Markets in underserved urban communities, to developing Farm-to-Cafeteria programs that link local farmers with institutional buyers, to successfully passing more than 20 pieces of legislation in the state that protect or advance the interests of family farms, CFA provides a grassroots voice for Kentucky's citizen-farmer and non-farmer, urban and rural alike—on farm, food, and economic issues. In the past year, CFA has hired a full-time Farm to School coordinator, and are currently holding Farm to School regional training sessions around the state. A great improvement has come from the State Health Department receiving a federal grant specifically to develop Farm to School programs around the state. This all means that an explosion of local foods in lunchrooms will occur in 2010 and in the future.

**Kate Fitzgerald** - Natural Sustainable Agriculture Coalition (NSAC), Washington, D.C.  
<http://sustainableagriculture.net> Kate Fitzgerald initiated the Food Assistance Program in the Texas Department of Agriculture in 1987 with a mandate to reduce hunger while supporting a vital family-farm economy. The program's early successes included certifying farmers' markets to accept food stamps and locate in low-income communities and conducting a grant-funded Farmers Market Coupon Program for WIC participants and the elderly that became a model for national legislation.

In 1993, Kate founded the Sustainable Food Center (SFC) in Austin, Texas, developing programs whose successes continue to inform intelligent, sustainable food policy at the local state and national levels. The SFC's publication of *Access Denied* in 1995 was the first study to bring widespread attention to the crisis of food deserts in our cities and led to the formation of the Austin-Travis County Food Policy Council. Kate is now a Senior Policy Associate at the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition working on rural development, marketing, food system, food safety, and childhood health issues.

**Amalie Lipstreu** - Sustainable Agriculture, Ohio Department of Agriculture

<http://www.agri.ohio.gov/divs/FoodCouncil/foodcouncil.aspx> - Amalie received a Bachelor of Arts from Hiram College in 1991 and a Masters Degree in Environmental Policy from Kent State University in 2002. Amalie possesses 15 years experience in education, public and environmental policy and program work. She has worked for civil society organizations including those focused on farmland preservation, sustainable agriculture and local food systems

Amalie has advocated for policies that support farmland protection and redevelopment of local food systems at the federal, state and local level. This work has engaged stakeholders in the opportunity for healthy food and farming systems that create environmental, social and economic benefits. Past work and partnerships led to the development of the Ohio Food Policy Advisory Council established by Governor Strickland in August of 2007. The Council's charge is to increase the amount of food produced, processed, distributed and consumed in the state as well as to increase access to healthy, fresh foods for needy Ohioans. Amalie now manages the work of the Council, represents the Ohio Department of Agriculture on Sustainable Agriculture and manages the Ohio Specialty Crop programs.