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# Addressing Food Justice in West Virginia

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*This post was contributed by Jessica Crum of West Virginia University.*

Food Justice is a concept that seeks to ensure that the benefits and risks of where, what and how food is grown, produced, transported, distributed, accessed and eaten are shared fairly among everyone. Food Justice is a transformation of the current food system, including the elimination of disparities and inequalities.

The West Virginia Food and Farm Coalition (WVFFC) is a statewide network of people involved in building West Virginia's food and farm sectors. The organization has four goals: youth and new farmers participate in the agricultural economy, institutions and schools buy local healthy foods, the public consumes healthy local food at a household level, and local

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farmers increase their income and are profitable. Numerous projects have been implemented in order to fulfill the set goals.

To promote the consumption healthy local food at a household level, two projects have been implemented to help people of low-income access local food. One project awarded mini-grants to five farmers' markets to test new promotional strategies designed to encourage SNAP customers to shop at farmers' markets. Some markets used the grants to host cooking demonstrations to attract more customers, others provided a "market match" that gives SNAP participants two dollars of goods for every SNAP dollar spent. Another project funds a "mobile market" that will provide local produce to low-income populations and senior centers across West Virginia. The "mobile market" can be thought of as a farmers' market inside of a bus. The bus will allow low-income populations access to farmers' market quality produce without having to worry about transportation to and from a stationary market.

Helping teachers teach using school gardens is a project that encourages youth and new farmers to participate in the agricultural economy. In October of 2013, over 50 teachers from across the state attended a School Garden Symposium, hosted by the WVFFC. The symposium was a training course in garden-based education. To further encourage the use of gardens as classroom tools, a website ([wvschoolgardens.org](http://wvschoolgardens.org)) was established. The website is filled with lesson plan ideas that are centered on the use of a garden.

The West Virginia Farm to School Community Development Group continues to build its strategy to help schools and farmers increase

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the amount of locally grown food available to students. They continue to act a middle-man, helping food service directors access locally grown food, track their purchases, and connect with AmeriCorps members working on nutrition education, local food education, and school gardens.

Access to food is at the heart of food justice advocacy. Changes in the food system are shedding light on the limited availability of fresh, local produce for low-income populations. Food justice is about overcoming inequalities in the food system. The development of new food pathways, such as the mobile market and SNAP/WIC acceptance at farmers' markets are evidence of that. The barriers to food access are slowly being broken. Each goal of the WVFFC ties into food justice, thus improving equality for all.

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