We consider food policy councils that work across multiple counties or multiple states to be regional. Describe the region your food policy council encompasses.
The Appalachian Accessible Food Network (AAFN) serves the southeastern counties designated as counties that encompass Appalachia Ohio. Our primary counties include: Athens, Meigs, Washington, Morgan, Perry, Hocking and Vinton counties. The progenitor of the network began in the 1990's as the Athens Area Food Policy Council, but many of the council members observed that the council members represented a larger county population and initiated working with multi-county elected officials and community stakeholders. From this work, lead council anchors began a “theory of change” process in 2013-2014 resulting in the establishment of the network to impact regional policy, philanthropic investment, private and non-profit partnerships, and resource and replicate healthy food access programs and regional food value chains.

What does it mean for your food policy council to take a regional approach?
Since the Appalachian Accessible Food Network (AAFN) formalized in 2014, the network's approach has been to accelerate the distribution of local foods into low wealth and under-served Appalachian Ohio communities. The network represents a diverse collaboration of non-profit economic development organizations, community based partnerships, healthcare institutions, agency intermediaries, local food champions, farmers, producers and elected officials. As more representatives at the regional level began to participate, a desire to move from strictly an advocacy role to collaborative action has been implemented. Funding partnerships for programs were identified. Over the past ten years, local philanthropy has played a greater leadership and investment role. The local foundations include the Athens County Foundation, Osteopathic Heritage Foundation of Nelsonville and the Sisters Health Foundation, with the two later foundations encouraging policy change and program replication for regional impacts. Over time the primary mission of the AAFN has evolved is to focus on advocacy and actions to develop shared food economy infrastructure, coordinated systems to better leverage scarce resources, and implement a healthy food distribution network to serve three demand channels for fresh, accessible and healthy food options for low-income residents in villages and townships in southeastern Ohio. Those wholesale and direct food access demand channels have focused on farmers markets, pop up markets, convenience stores, foodbanks, healthcare institutions and farm to school programs.

Tell us why your council wants to be a part of this community of practice (COP).
Representatives of the Appalachia Accessible Food Network are committed to peer exchange and continuous learning. All the representatives have been active in the Central Appalachian Networks' Food System and Ag Working Groups. The three peer sub-working group descriptions: Beginning Farmers, Healthy Food Access and Processing, Aggregation and Distribution (PAD) have been instrumental platforms for policy change in Central Appalachia. The working groups have facilitated collaborative research, events, fundraising, and multi-stakeholder projects. The FASWG’s current focus is to leverage existing regional momentum, analysis, and expertise to solidify Appalachia’s fair food systems as an economic driver in the region. As a community of practice, CAN
representatives have recently underscored healthy food access as a priority. Since 2022, we have been working with co-creators at USDA to host 6 half day summits on creating a Fair Food System for Appalachia, Ohio. Info on the August event: https://www.cannetwork.org/a-fair-food-system-summit-2-recap/

By being part of this larger community of practice beyond Appalachia, we believe we have experience to share, but most importantly this would provide an opportunity for our AAFN representatives to bring the latest thinking, strategies and best practices back to the network from other rural and urban models. Since AAFN might not meet the traditional model of a food policy council, we also have opinions that would would love to check for consensus. And an appetite for discussion on the "theory and practice" of policy councils. As we on the AAFN have moved from advocacy to food system activation, we are extremely interested to learn from other representatives working on these similar edges of advocacy and action.

Who do you propose as your two (or three) representatives on the community of practice (CoP) and why were they chosen?

Leslie Schaller: ACEnet Director of Programs and Brianna McGuire: AAFN Coordinator were chosen to bridge the range of experience -- from established practitioner to emergent leader.

Please discuss your FPC’s commitment to equity and diversity and how your council would contribute to the diversity of this CoP.

Community engagement, cooperative development, and network formation have been critical approaches in developing programs and services for marginalized communities. An ethos of collaboration and inclusion is at the core of the AAFN mission. Appalachia is predominately white, so this questions always makes us a bit twitchy. We do have representatives who are people of color or LGBTQ identified, but to be candid the representation mirrors the area's population base which is majority white. Overall the network is representative of the stakeholders within the network. Our commitment has focused on making sure we create space for all voices to be listened to. We have also participated in the Central Appalachian Network focus on peer learning around equity though the food working groups.

One of the ways we have attempted to hone our “JEDI lens”—making sure we are aligning with our system values for justice, equity, diversity and inclusion, is through on-going convenings of Nourishing Networks events. The Nourishing Network program hosts workshops, facilitator training, and support grassroots projects designed by community collaborators in rural townships and villages. Maintain active dialogue with consumer-facing partners such as pantries, healthcare institutions, schools and private businesses to understand and respond to the dynamic local context of opportunities and challenges in food access. AAFN continues to host 2 to 4 annual Nourishing Networks workshops in communities and use them as a springboard to identify and support resulting community-led food access projects.

What skills, strategies, and/or techniques do you hope to gain from this project and how would they be applied to your FPC’s practice?

We think the strategies can be categorized in three areas: 1) engaging and empowering community stakeholders to have agency and voice; 2) connecting the dots for elected officials and policy makers to see the integration between food systems, value chains and restorative agriculture as essential for economic transition and inclusion; and 3) lifting an unified voice on the regional and national stage to formulate policy and leverage resources that solves generational food insecurity and entrenched poverty. A big order!

Within AAFN we are always exploring how economic levers can provide solutions to persistent poverty that has deprived our people and places of health and wealth. Recently we have looked to more workforce and re-entry and recovery partnership to address employment barriers within the food economy and entrepreneurship ecosystem. Attention to metrics and benchmarking are also priority methodologies for us, Within our network, we have utilized the Wealthworks framework (www.wealthworks.org) to track our impacts for investment, but most importantly act as the reality check for our internal analysis. We are interested to learn what other metrics and analysis are being used for both external and internal decision-making and strategy prioritization.

As representatives, coming back to AAFN with new skills, we would also like to see how other councils are doing outreach, promoting their objectives and telling success stories. Appalachia has been so stigmatized as a place of poverty, substance use, poor health, food insecurity, crime and population out migration. We hope to learn new messaging skills that still highlight the needs, but not as a pattern of stereotyping the people of the region. We have an incredible local food economy that has been addressing these issues. But it still seems invisible to many.
What tools can we use to get to a "glass half full" mentality?

Name(s) of individual(s) that completed this section of application.
Leslie Schaller and Brianna McGuire. The application was also endorsed at a Friday, September 9, 2022 weekly AAFN meeting.

I/we represent the council and support their participation in this CoP.
• YES

Representative 1 Information

Individual 1 Name
Leslie Schaller

Leslie Schaller Email
leslies@acenetworks.org

Leslie Schaller, Describe your role in the food system.
Since the early 1980's I have been involved in forwarding the re-localization of our food and farm economy, as a farmer, worker-owned restaurant founder/director and as the founder, board member and/or staff member of many food system non-profit organizations. I have resided in Athens or Meigs county, Ohio since 1971 and have long experience working with others to address the economic inequities of our region that impact food security, the social determinant of health and economic disenfranchisement.

Professionally, I have served on the board of the Appalachia Center for Economic Network starting in 1986 and then as a full time staff member since 1992. I was also the founding director of Community Food Initiatives in 1992, another Athens area non-profit with a mission to create a resilient region in which everyone in our community has access to an equitable, inclusive, and thriving local food system. Over the past twenty-five years, I have also served as a board member of the State of Ohio Food Policy Council (Strickland administration,) Ohio Ecological Food and Farm Association, the Ohio Food Policy Network, the Farmers Market Coalition and on a number of USDA advisory groups during the Obama administration.

Bottom-line, I am a passionate old broad, on the cusp of 70, who has no inclination to retire from journeying with my fellow travelers to create a fair food system and a just transition for Appalachia.

Leslie Schaller, How long have you been a member of your FPC? During this time, in what capacities have you served your FPC?
I was one of the early conveners and facilitators of the Athens Area Food Policy Council and a separate food system collaboration between non-profit actors: The Athens Food and Farm Network in 1997 and 1999. Over time this mission of each of these group blurred and many of the members overlapped. In the early 2000, the two councils/network merged into one as the Food Policy Council. My role in those early years was to primarily serve as a facilitators and to secure donations, sponsorship, and grants to keep the council meeting. By 2012 representatives from ACEnet, CFI, Rural Action, Live Healthy Appalachia, the Southeast Ohio Foodbank and Regional Kitchen determined that we needed a clearer sustainability pathway to support the council in a consistent and long-term manner.

In 2013, I began to seek funding for the collaborative process to plan and then publish our Theory of Change 7 year plan. As the official formation of the Appalachia Accessible Food network emerged, I have continue to secure funding to support the AAFN coordinator job position and to expand the action-oriented work plan that network representatives guide and implement. My role today, remains one of development and support for the coordinator as the administrative backbone for AAFN. The coordinator position is an employee of record of ACEnet, so I also function as their supervisor (human resources legal context) but really as the lead collator of their support and review from the network members as a whole.

Leslie Schaller, What do you hope to gain out of participating in this CoP?
I am looking to find the support from thought leaders in the field. Most peer exchange is about "going to the well"
for me. I need the lift that I get from learning from other practitioners. On a more practical note, I am looking for new messaging and communication tools. How do we use different platforms to make the invisible more visible. Whether it is about changing policy, building relationships with elected officials and other influencers, or galvanizing the folks at the grass roots level. I am very obsessed with figuring out the effectiveness of story telling strategies: instagram, tiktok, reels, youtube, podcasts, etc as new tools to create transitions/transformations in our food systems.

Leslie Schaller, What do you hope to contribute to this CoP?
I definitely come to the field with a rural lens, so I can likely be most helpful to folks doing this work in that space. I have also been at this work a long time, am a network weaver by personality, and can bring resources and connections that might be helpful to other CoP participants. And aside from finely honed discipline tactics and survivor skills, I bring a sense of humor and play to all groups I inhabit.

I would also like to share some of our processes and practices, especially what has worked and not worked. We have publications, presentations, videos and a variety of outreach materials we could share that might be useful.

Leslie Schaller, What do you want to advance in terms of your council’s regional approach?
I am attaching our goals for the next four years which illustrates the AAFN approach from 2022 through 2025. In 2021, we felt a reaffirmation and realignment of the original 2014 AAFN goals would attract new partnerships, investment, and grassroots engagement in the years to come.

The Appalachian Accessible Food Network goals for 2022-2025 will:
1. Coordinate actors and stakeholders all along the supply chain to increase access to local, healthy, and affordable food.
2. Grow the volume and variety of fresh, healthy foods in order to ensure that all consumers in the region have access to local food.
3. Expand and improve the needed infrastructure to grow, process, and distribute local and healthy foods.
4. Ensure access to healthy, local food in all communities through equitable distribution strategies and new food access initiatives.
5. Increase employment and ownership opportunities for under-served individuals to create sustainable livelihoods in low wealth communities.

In general, the north star is all about getting more diverse stakeholder buy-in. Being part of a larger community of practice beyond Central Appalachia, but for Appalachia would also ideally attract more resources and attention at the national scale as we all navigate unprecedented investment during the Biden administration. We ALL need to be good stewards at the local or regional level and hope to see others are modeling that behavior.

Leslie Schaller, As we plan an in-person meeting this fall, please share your preferences for when the meeting occurs.

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Leslie Schaller, Commitment
- I verify that I am able to commit to 6-8 hours/month for 18 months as part of my participation in this CoP.

Representative 2 Information

Individual 2 Name
Brianna McGuire

Brianna McGuire Email
briannam@acenetworks.org

Brianna McGuire, Describe your role in the food system.
I recently became the coordinator for the Appalachia Accessible Food Network this past summer. Prior to my recent hiring, I was a team member in Gallia County as an OSU Extension Educator. Also between my junior and senior year, I held a summer VISTA position with ACEnet to serve the Meigs County Farmers Market and the Athens Farmers Market.

As the AAFN coordinator, I facilitate the collaboration between ACEnet, Community Food Initiatives (CFI), and Rural Action in order to accelerate the expansion of healthy, local food access in Appalachian communities. My role builds the capacity of several different demand and distribution networks between the three partners, including CFI’s Donation Station and Veggie Van, ACEnet’s Athens Food Ventures Center and Nelsonville Food & Farm Enterprise Center, and Rural Action’s Country Fresh Stops, the Chesterhill Produce Auction, and Farm to School programming. As we build the network, I also assist with research, planning and fundraising to help the network identify and expand shared resources to more efficiently achieve greater access to healthy and local food.

In 2020, I received my Bachelor’s degree from Youngstown State University with a specialization in Marketing and Nonprofit Leadership. I am a lifelong resident of Gallia County and hold a deep-rooted appreciation for the beauty, culture, and history of southeast Ohio.

Brianna McGuire, How long have you been a member of your FPC? During this time, in what capacities have you served your FPC?
As mentioned, I am totally new in this position as of 2022. My main capacities as the network coordinator is to work with representatives from the various stakeholder groups. This summer I have continues to work with the farmers market associations, the foodbank and pantries, various farmers helping with farm to school sourcing, food businesses donating to the CFI Donation Station and the staff, VISTA, americorp members of the non-profit partners. I have also been coordinating with Dr. Jennifer Garner and her student team to host four gatherings in Athens, Nelsonville, Amesville and Coolville in September and October to release their recent study of the community members using County Fresh Stops, the Veggie Van and various pantries receiving Donation Station food.

Brianna McGuire, What do you hope to gain out of participating in this CoP?
As someone new to the field, I am interested in learning everything I can from other policy councils in the U.S.

Brianna McGuire, What do you hope to contribute to this CoP?
I look forward to sharing information from our work here in Appalachia Ohio, as well as what I have been learning participating in the food working groups of the Central Appalachian Network. I've lived in Appalachia and farming communities all my life. That experience informs my commitment to my new role.

Brianna McGuire, What do you want to advance in terms of your council’s regional approach?
I am expecting to see other programs implementing rural models, so that we can figure out how to customize them to our work in Ohio. I am also interested in learning about how other council fundraise and financially support the work in their regions. I am just beginning to share in the grant-writing activities of the network. I would like to understand how to work with a variety of funders from local foundations to USDA agencies that prioritize healthy food access.

Brianna McGuire, As we plan an in-person meeting this fall, please share your preferences for when the meeting occurs.

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Brianna McGuire, Commitment
- I verify that I am able to commit to 6-8 hours/month for 18 months as part of my participation in this CoP.

Will you be adding third representative
NO