



FROM THE

GROUND UP

Inspiring Community-based
Food System Innovations

Wallace Center at Winrock International,
Common Market and Changing Tastes

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VIRGINIA FOOD WORKS

Virginia

www.virginiafoodworks.org

In the process of researching Virginia-grown products, Allie Hill discovered most food products contained ingredients from out of state. One of the primary roadblocks to getting more locally produced food into Virginia-grown products was the lack of processing facilities for value-added food products.

Allie and her team created Virginia Food Works (VFW), a nonprofit organization that supports local value-added food producers. VFW's mission is to strengthen the capacity of Virginia food producers to enter and succeed in value-added food manufacturing and sales, thereby providing Virginia residents and community organizations with access to safely processed, nutritious local food year-round. Recognizing the prohibitive cost of building a new commercial processing facility, VFW sought out existing infrastructure that was underutilized and could be revitalized.

In collaboration with Prince Edward County officials, Virginia Cooperative Extension, local producer networks and other local food stakeholders, VFW helped reinvigorate the Prince Edward County Cannery, a city of Farmville processing facility that has been



in use for community canning since 1975. In 2010, with \$350,000 in grant funding from the Virginia Tobacco Region Revitalization Commission, the cannery was retrofitted with the commercial grade equipment and infrastructure improvements necessary to become an FDA-registered commercial kitchen. The hope was that farmers, including tobacco growers, could explore other types of agriculture that could be made into value-added products in the cannery.

In 2013, the cannery opened its doors to local businesses and entrepreneurs while continuing to serve home canners during harvest season. Clients could now process locally-grown fruits and vegetables into FDA-approved and Virginia Department of Agriculture Consumer Services-inspected products. VFW provides technical assistance in sanitation and processing standard operating procedures, regulatory compliance, product development, sourcing and marketing. Clients rent the cannery on an hourly basis and make their own food products. If a client is interested in trying a new idea and creating a test batch, VFW allows them to use the facility and offers assistance in developing the business

model. For farmers who have simple recipes and are not interested or able to process themselves, VFW has a co-packing service in which experienced staff will process products for them.

The cannery provides incentives for using local foods by offering processors a discounted price if their products are made with locally grown ingredients. Clients process a variety of local products, such as berries for jam, tomatoes for salsa, apples for applesauce and cucumbers for relish. A major source of produce is the Southside Wholesale Produce Auction, operated by Virginia Cooperative Extension and Amish farmers.

Since 2013, VFW has served 48 clients and produces about 600,000 units each harvest season. Its success is the result of dedicated, active volunteers and an annual staffing budget of \$35,000. In addition to opening new markets and increasing sales for participating local farmers, VFW has provided seasonal employment to local residents. VFW is strengthening economic development in Prince Edward County and beyond while building a better local food system.