



Dear Partners, Stakeholders, and Friends,

Subject: Reflecting on 2023 and Charting Our Course for 2024

As we approach the conclusion of 2023, I am honored to share with you the incredible journey we at Refresh have undertaken together and the monumental achievements we've witnessed throughout the past year. Our collaborative efforts have not only defined the course of the previous year but have also set the stage for a transformative future in Appalachia.

In the face of unprecedented challenges, we have proven that resilience and collaboration can drive positive change. Our commitment to revitalizing the agriculture sector in Appalachia has remained steadfast, leading us on a journey beyond mere development—it's about creating a sustainable and vibrant future for the region.

Celebrating the success of 2023, I am pleased to announce that we have experienced one of our most prosperous years to date, marked by significant milestones:

- 1. Establishment of the Appalachia Regional Business Center Food Center:** A collaborative effort involving twelve organizations including Refresh, led by Rural Action on behalf of the Central Appalachian Network, has been awarded 42.5 million dollars in funds by the USDA to establish the Appalachia Regional Food Business Center. These centers are instrumental in providing coordination, technical assistance, and capacity building to empower farmers, ranchers, and other food businesses. They serve as dynamic hubs, closing gaps to success and fostering collaboration. Further information on this opportunity will be rolled out in 2024.
- 2. Workforce Development and Training:** Through the support of a USDA Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production Grant, An Appalachian Regional Power Grant, and numerous foundations, we have provided training experiences to over 225 individuals and supported 10 Coalfield trainees and crew members in agriculture with direct training and hands on experience. Witnessing the transformative journey of our crew members is a testament to the power of second chances and the impact of our programs on individuals with diverse backgrounds and those who are just seeking to have an opportunity to do better.
- 3. Farm to School:** We have made huge strides with our work around Farm to School. We understand that this work is vital to the health of our communities now and in years to come as we nourish the next generation. We have engaged students across numerous counties with one-on-one educational programing which has reached more than 2000 students and supported five WV school systems in procuring more local food. We plan to expand this greatly in 2024 and continue to build upon the success of 2023 by launching our new Farm to School Institutes training series.

"Rebuilding the Appalachian Economy from the Ground Up."

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4. **Farm Pride:** Successfully launched Farmer Pride Coalition in WV, our Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) initiative modeled and in partnership with Appalachian Sustainable Development (ASD) based in Virginia. This was kicked off with a series of DEI virtual trainings which was followed by a larger event with vendors, games, workshops, and space for conversation with over 120 people in attendance. Farmer PRIDE Coalition is a grassroots-based networking and education coalition designed to provide business and educational opportunities for farmers, ranchers, growers, gardeners, agroforesters, livestock producers, and others in the food system who identify as LGBTQ+. We look forward to working with ASD on this initiative throughout 2024 and hosting our event again in June of 2024.

As we set our sights on 2024, your involvement remains pivotal to building upon these achievements. Join us in forging new partnerships, exploring innovative avenues, and championing sustainable agriculture in Appalachia. Together, let's navigate challenges and unlock the full potential of the region.

How to Get Involved:

- Follow us on social media to stay updated on all things Refresh Appalachia.
- Sign up for our email list to receive general updates on trainings and opportunities by emailing us at Refresh@coalfield-development.org
- Consider making a tax-deductible donation to Coalfield Development with the subject "Refresh Appalachia" to support our ongoing work.

In closing, I want to share a poignant reflection from one of our crew members Kayla: "Since I started working at Coalfield Development last September, I've come so much further in just over a year than I could have possibly dreamed before starting this journey." Their journey, emblematic of many, reinforces the impact of our collective efforts. Coalfield Development is not just a workplace; it's a family, and together, we are shaping a brighter future.

Thank you for your unwavering support and dedication.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Adam Hudson".

Adam Hudson

Senior Director of Agriculture

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