

For Immediate Release:

Wheeling Food Hub to Host Kick-Off Meeting

Wheeling, West Virginia—September 7, 2021 Grow Ohio Valley, the Wheeling-based local food nonprofit, is continuing its mission to improve the health and small-business economy in the Ohio Valley. GrowOV is planning a new shared kitchen and processing facility in East Wheeling to help farmers and chefs start and grow their businesses. GrowOV is hosting a kick-off meeting on September 13 at 6:30PM at the Public Market in downtown Wheeling.

*“We envision a facility with leasable, shared, commercial kitchen space - food processing, baking, refrigeration, plus packaging and branding equipment, and other facilities that may be too expensive for small, local businesses to purchase outright,” says **Danny Swan, GrowOV’s director.** “Everything needed to take a farmer’s harvest or a chef’s dish and get it in regional markets and grocery stores.”*

The new facility will expand on GrowOV’s work to grow the local food economy, which has included launching youth farming initiatives and the Public Market grocery store in downtown Wheeling.

According to Kacey Gantzer, a member of the Wheeling Food Hub’s leadership team and representative of the WV Department of Agriculture, *“Our goal is to help farmers and chefs reach customers with great Ohio Valley-made products. We’re gathering together interested farmers and food-makers to help us design a facility as a tool for their business success.”*

Britney Hervey Farris, owner of Family Roots Farm in Brooke County, says that such a facility will be a boon for small farm businesses like hers.

*“This will be a huge win for local farmers and chefs,” **Farris said.** “Oftentimes the investment in commercial processing facilities to grow our businesses is unwieldy. A shared facility like this can clear the path for Ohio Valley farmers and chefs to start new businesses, or like us, to expand our business to new markets.”*

In West Virginia’s Northern Panhandle, many farmers and entrepreneurs struggle with the expensive investments required to develop products that can reach new markets across state lines.



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“A facility like this will be a real driver for the local food economy,” said the state’s Agriculture Commissioner Kent Leonhardt. “Many of our great West Virginian farmers and chefs can utilize this space to create more products, enter new markets, and expand their product offerings — all while being surrounded by a community of others doing similar work.”

The project has received planning and start-up funds from the Appalachian Regional Commission, the Hess Family Foundation, the Mills Group, the Benedum Foundation, the USDA, and Belomar.

“This Food Hub represents a major step forward for Wheeling to realize its potential as a world-class city with a thriving regional food system,” Swan adds.

The project team also requests that any person interested in using this new facility please fill out a user survey, which can be found at <https://tinyurl.com/GrowOVsurvey>.