

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **FARMacy WV Comes to Tyler County**

(Wednesday, June 8, 2022, Wheeling, WV) –

Grow Ohio Valley is teaming up with local farmers, the West Virginia Department of Agriculture, WVU, WV Farmers Market Association, Sistersville General Hospital of Memorial Health System, and many others to bring the FARMacy WV program to Tyler County.

This year-long program combines education in lifestyle change principles, healthy cooking classes, guided exercise programs, and a summer of fresh, weekly, doctor-prescribed produce for participants. FARMacy WV targets chronic diseases and their risk factors such as diabetes, prediabetes, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, overweight, and obesity.

**WHEN:** The Kickoff is slated for June 15th from 10: 30 a.m. - 1 p.m.

**WHERE:** First Presbyterian Church, 801 Chelsea Street, Sistersville, WV

**WHAT:** This is the first of 15 weekly produce distributions and activity sessions. Participants will visit with partners, meet other participants, and pick up prescribed produce. FARMacyWV, Memorial Health System, Grow Ohio Valley, the West Virginia Department of Agriculture, and other partners will host activities that include a cooking class, group movement sessions, and more. Produce distribution begins at 11 a.m. with education sessions to follow.

**WHO:** This program is a collaboration led by the Memorial Health System Sistersville General Hospital, in partnership with:

- FARMacy WV
- Grow Ohio Valley
- Ohio University
- Prodigy Wellness Center
- WVU Extension Family Nutrition Program
- WVU School of Medicine: Exercise and Physiology
- WVU Office of Health Services Research
- WV Health Connection
- WV Farmers Market Association
- WV Department of Agriculture
- The Wellness Bridge
- Sistersville Presbyterian Church

Funding is being provided by The Memorial Health System Foundation, Sisters Health Foundation, and the West Virginia Farmers Market Association.

**PROGRAM HISTORY:** The original FARMacy Pilot Program was initiated in the summer of 2016 as a collaboration between Wheeling Health Right Clinic in Ohio County, WV, and Grow Ohio Valley, a Wheeling-based nonprofit focused on cultivating regional food sovereignty. The collaboration was born from a joint concern for the health of the population of West Virginia, which leads the country in chronic diseases such as high blood pressure, diabetes, and obesity.

Since 2016, FARMacy WV has spread to Barbour, Boone, Cabell, Greenbrier, Lincoln, Mercer, Mingo, Roane, and Upshur Counties. This movement seeks to prove through tracking health indicators (weight, blood glucose, lipids, overall well-being) that "food is medicine," and that the first method of both treatment and prevention of chronic disease should be with a healthy diet.

**BACKGROUND:** Cardiovascular disease, causing heart attacks and strokes, continues to be the number one cause of death in the United States. Many of its major modifiable risk factors: diabetes, high blood pressure, overweight/obesity, and high cholesterol, are all responsive to lifestyle changes focused on a healthy diet and physical activity.

Compared to the other 50 states, West Virginia ranks number 2 in Type 2 diabetes, number 1 in hypertension (43.5%) and number 1 in obesity (39.5%). As of 2018, West Virginia has the lowest life expectancy compared to every other state in the United States, at an average of 74.8 years. According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), the state's high rates of heart disease, obesity, and type 2 diabetes, contribute to this low life expectancy. These chronic lifestyle related diseases all share a common cause: poor diet and sedentary lifestyle.

Compounding the problem, many of our state's least healthy live at or below the federal poverty line and struggle to put food on the table.

The increasing rate of food insecurity and dietary intake of processed foods high in fat, sugar and salt in the U. S. population have contribute to West Virginia's ranking (15.7%) in the top three states for food insecurity prevalence behind Louisiana, Mississippi and New Mexico. (United Health Foundation, 2020).

Multiple studies have demonstrated that a plant-based diet is successful in prevention, treatment and even reversal of many chronic lifestyle related diseases. The goal of the FARMacy WV program is to educate patients and provide access to healthy foods. Provided with these tools, as well as with the continued support of their provider and community, they will be empowered to make the lifestyle changes that are necessary to help control and prevent chronic lifestyle related disease over the long haul.

This program is formalized as a research program to be monitored and in compliance with an Institutional Review Board (IRB) for future publication. The WVU School of Public Health will take the lead on this process. The goal is to quantify the results of the program in order to prove that it is a viable program to improve the health of patients.