



July 14, 2014

Secretary Tom Vilsack
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue SW, Room 200-A
Washington DC 20250

Program: Local Food, Local Places
Project: Rural Health Innovation
Community: Williamson, WV

Dear Secretary Vilsack:

This letter prepared by Williamson Health and Wellness Center, Inc. (WHWC), anchor institution of Sustainable Williamson, with support from the Mingo County Redevelopment Authority and Region 2 Planning and Development Council is to announce our intention to participate in the Local Foods, Local Places program guided by the White House Rural Council. We request assistance of the council in enhancing development plans for our organization's rural Health Innovation HUB and for support in the implementation of plans as we continue to engage in an ongoing commitment to improve the health of residents while building a vibrant local economy.

While considerable progress has been made under Sustainable Williamson including receiving the prestigious Robert Wood Johnson Foundation "Culture of Health" prize, our organization, a Federally Qualified Health Center, is still in the early stages of restoring our local economy through local wealth generation and entrepreneurial development.

Addressing access issues in Williamson which is declared a food desert, the Health Innovation Hub is a holistic strategy building a culture of health from the bottom up. Future goals include a healthy business certification which would include healthy menu options; growing veteran and youth farmers to increase production on reclaimed mine sites; development of entrepreneurial pipeline to ensure long term sustainability; providing a kitchen for value added processing; building out Prescription Vegetable programs throughout neighboring communities to bolster local food systems with healthcare dollars; and expanding the reach of our farmers markets through mobile distribution; and using appropriate technology on agriculture sites to reduce energy and water consumption and to sustain the longevity of agriculture production.

With training from the West Virginia Farmers Market Association, Williamson Farmers Market increased sales nearly 50% in year two and this year has expanded its market to the entire county through Mingo Mobile Market, a program funded by the West Virginia Food and Farm Coalition which addresses transportation and access barriers through the Farm Fresh 4U program. In addition, community gardens located across from public housing offer agriculture workshops, and in an effort to grow youth farmers, the local high school developed an agriculture program and produce food for the school. WHWC provides patients with Prescription Vegetable vouchers that can be redeemed at the stationary and mobile market locations, effectively maximizing public health dollars by reinvesting into a local foods economy.

Alongside of the work to build a sustainable local food system that brings local food to market, we recognize that entrepreneurialism in our community should be based on the development of



healthy businesses that ensure a livable community. The Health Innovation Hub provides entrepreneurs with expert trainings from social impact coaches, support and resources for ideas ranging from aquaponic greenhouses to local foods restaurants, and from bioenergy to community kitchens that process foods for distribution. During our launch event this year, the Health Innovation Hub brought together eight entrepreneurs in preparation for a competitive “pitch” event that will reward participants who effectively develop their business plans with seed money and investors to accelerate their ideas.

This letter declares our intent to bring diverse partners together through the Health Innovation Hub including local entrepreneurs, food producers, schools and a network of talented professionals including social impact entrepreneurs and coaches, designers, and IT specialists.

Key players in planning assistance that is offered through the Local Foods, Local Places program will include representatives from our Local Foods program including growers, especially when planning efforts occurring during winter months outside of the growing season. Other local planners include representatives from the Tug Valley Entrepreneurship Group who share a focus for agriculture development, especially Bruce Curry, Director of the Appalachian Leadership Academy at the local community college and staff of the Mingo County Redevelopment Authority will host these planning meetings. Representatives from the health sector, business owners, civic organizations and educators as well as consultants will be invited to participate in planning sessions. J. Eric Mathis, Outreach Coordinator for WHWC will assist in coordinating meetings with diverse stakeholder perspective.

In an effort to increase production, our organization intends to follow through with Strikeforce representatives and Bill Stewart of the Resource and Conservation District, inviting these representatives to talk with our local producers about opportunities including season extension. We have also reached out to build relationships with veterans including members of Kentucky’s Growing Warriors Program in our effort to grow new farmers. The appropriate personnel of Williamson Health and Wellness Center, Mingo County Redevelopment Authority and Region 2 Planning and Development Council involved in this project are aware of federal policies and are prepared to establish any necessary agreement(s) consistent with administrative grant funding policies of the White House Rural Council and all partnering agencies in order to access federal assistance and funding.

WHWC intends to measure the impact of our collective efforts by tracking data from Sustainable Williamson efforts using the Livable Communities Index. The Livable Communities Index captures multiple indicators that affect community health locally and provides a way to map impact across time as we engage in multiple interventions.

Supporters of the Health Innovation Hub predict significant impact as we combine resources to not only address the needs for aggregation, processing and distribution of healthy foods, but also to offer substantial guidance and incentives for entrepreneurs, including farmers, who contribute hard work, creativity and ingenuity to drive and sustain our local foods economy.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "C. Beckett", is written over a light blue circular stamp.

C. Donovan Beckett, DO
Chief Executive Officer
Williamson Health and Wellness Center