

[Bluegrass Local Food Summit Non-profits by Beth Dotson Brown](#)

Monday, April 25, 2011

[Bluegrass Food Summit shares non-profit food stories](#)

Nonprofit initiatives that have a mission to help people improve their lives cannot ignore the role of food in that equation. At the Bluegrass Food Summit several nonprofit leaders shared what they are doing to help people reach food sufficiency as well as to work toward wholeness in other ways.

One story came from David Cook of Berea College who is leading [Grow Appalachia](#). This initiative began after John Paul DeJoria, founder of John Paul Mitchel Systems, contacted the college and offered money to help people in central Appalachia increase their food security. Cook identified four organizations that were willing to work with families who wanted to grow food to feed themselves. The idea was that if families received the tools, seeds and training to raise a garden, they could do it.

The first-year participants proved that to be true. This year, the project is expanding to include three additional sites. “We have hungry people in Central Appalachia in one of the richest biodiversity regions in the country,” Cook says, “This is the most direct approach to food security.”

For some families, food isn't the only area of life in which they are insecure. Their very safety is at risk. These are the kinds of people the [Bluegrass Domestic Violence Program](#) (BDVP) serves. While helping women and their children heal from violence and gain independence, they've also launched a farm initiative on 40 acres.

Jessica Ballard is the farmer leading the effort. “The single most empowering thing in my life is my connection with the earth,” she says. As a violence survivor and an AmeriCorps volunteer, Ballard wants to help those at BDVP find that same connection. Although weeding is certainly part of having a farm, she wants them to discover that farm work isn't only drudgery, there's also joy in planting, watching something grow, nurturing it and then enjoying the harvest. These activities can provide avenues to nutrition, physical activity, serenity, learning and sharing while building self-confidence.

Chrysalis House, a program for women recovering from substance abuse, is also empowering women through food. Sheila Taluskie, director of God's Closet, Inc., found it frustrating that she could help the women at Chrysalis House gain job skills but because of their criminal records and the current economy they couldn't always find employment. Her answer? Create employment for them. That's when Purple Lunch Box, a catering service, was born.

Dazurae Blankenship manages the program and worked with the [Purple Lunch Box](#) staff and local technical school students to prepare lunch for the summit from local foods. The Purple Lunchbox strives to use as much local food products as possible. The business accepts food donations from local sources and welcomes business that can help them grow.

Another nonprofit initiative is called [Faith Feeds](#). Erica Horn spoke about this initiative which connects gardeners and farmers who have excess produce with organizations that can provide it to people in need. The “gleaning” happens at the Lexington Farmers Market, Reed Valley Orchard and through those who come forward to donate. This work has become so successful that Kentucky First Lady Jane Beshear has suggested it be used as a model for the entire state.

I’m involved with my own nonprofit effort at [The Nest—Center for Women, Children & Families](#) in Lexington where I’m the Communications Director. We have a child care center where families provide lunch, which is typically something like a can of ravioli. We provide fresh fruits and vegetables as a supplement, as well as a snack. Since most of the children will say their food comes from the store, we want to grow a garden with them so they can see what it means for food to come from the earth. We’re hoping for donations of gardening tools, seeds and plants for our small plot that we’ll be planting in May.

Nonprofits play a vital role in our society today. Perhaps these initiatives can inspire others to consider the role food can play in meeting their mission.