

Funding Your Community Food Projects with Social Enterprises

An educational session at the 2007 Southern SAWG Annual Conference

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Presenters

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Summary and Highlights

The purpose of this session was to discuss how to develop social enterprises within existing programs that address community food security. Two presenters, Anthony Flaccavento and Erika Allen, gave examples from their work. A social enterprise can be defined as any business whose primary objective is social and whose surpluses are re-invested in the business or the community. The primary goal of a social enterprise is not necessarily to maximize profit.

Anthony Flaccavento directs the Appalachian Sustainable Development (ASD) program, which uses the concept of social enterprise to earn money and promote sustainable agricultural and forestry practices. The framework used in ASD was developed by Wendell Berry. Three questions are addressed in this framework:

1. What is already here?
2. What does nature allow us to do here?
3. What does nature help us to do?

ASD operates *Appalachian Harvest*, an organic farmers marketing cooperative, as one of their social enterprises. The 50 certified organic farmers in the cooperative meet regularly during the off-season to discuss who is growing what. Farmers sell between 25 and 40% of their goods to Whole Foods, Earth Fare, Ingles, Kroger, and other grocery stores. The remaining goods are sold at Farmer's Markets and other venues ensuring that the farmers break even on their seconds. Their motto is that "they raise ordinary food for ordinary folks." To keep organic food affordable, ASD keeps the prices fairly low and impress upon people that the majority can afford organic products.

Sustainable Woods is ASD's second social enterprise, which manages private forest land, with the goal of regenerating the forest. Flaccavento noted that using a social enterprise

model was the best way to get tobacco farmers to grow other goods. The board of directors at ASD is quite inclusive with farmers, land owners, and some board members that comprise this group.

Erika Allen of Growing Power demonstrated the wide reach of this organization by having a panel discussion with some of its partners. The work of Growing Power is rooted in communities with the purpose of providing new economic opportunities to people who do not normally have access to power. Allen says that social enterprises should be systems that are economically viable, and that actively demonstrate outreach. Most importantly, these organizations should reconnect social responsibility to economic viability. Growing power has assisted over 175 communities in the past 10 years.

Allen gave several examples of social enterprises within the work of Growing Power. The first example given was Art on the Farm, which was developed as a working farm. Through this program, members of the community grow plants that produce food and train youth. Kendall College, an urban culinary school, is also in the process of installing an urban farm. The college is paying for the infrastructure, and the cost of labor will be paid for through the sale of products. There are also a host of youth programs including the Cabrini Green Community Garden Partnership.