

Shared Use Community Kitchen

To acquire specialized equipment for a planned 2,500 square foot shared-use commercial kitchen that will enable local producers to bake and process local food products including fried and baked pies, jams, jellies, and fruit butters, applesauce and dried fruit snacks, from lesser-grade fruit that cannot be sold profitably through fresh market channels.

[Final Report](#)

**PROJECT SUMMARY
and
OVERVIEW of RESULTS**

**Creative Food Ventures (formerly Kitchen Cabinet)
Jefferson NC**

Creative Food Ventures, a shared-use licensed commercial kitchen was intended to provide entrepreneurs time-share access to production facilities that would allow them the opportunity to start and expand specialty food and catering businesses without the excessive cost of establishing their own commercial kitchen. Through the use of Community Development Block Grant funds and Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) funds, renovation of approximately 4100 square feet was accomplished at the former Ashe County High School, now known as Family Central, a facility housing several non-profits. Several funders, including USDA / FMMP, provided the funding for equipment to open the Creative Food Ventures space in February 2007 with a grand opening date for the public of September of 2007.

The management of the Creative Food Ventures (originally titled the Kitchen Cabinet while under development) was initially provided by a contract employee experienced in food production. Carol Coulter, the Director of Ashe Partnership for Children at the time, originally supervised the contract employee.

This shared-use licensed commercial kitchen, for a number of reasons, never met its intended potential. Creative Food Ventures remained open from February 2007 until December of 2008. During this time, a catering business operated from the kitchen and various other individuals used the kitchen for some period of time. To our knowledge, there were no businesses actually created as entrepreneurial start-ups as a result of having the kitchen available.

The decision to close the kitchen in December of 2008 was made by the Ashe Partnership for Children, a non-profit at Family Central under whose auspices the kitchen operated. The main reason identified for closing the kitchen was the financial liability it was creating for Ashe Partnership. The 4100 sf. of kitchen space, i.e. Creative Food Ventures, was required to pay rent based on the square footage occupied. All entities at Family Central pay rent based on square footage. The fixed cost for rent and utilities for CFV totaled approximately \$2,100 per month. For a number of months, there were not sufficient revenues being generated to pay this rent and eventually, that deficit created "red ink" for the non-profit whose responsibility was to serve families and children. The needed dollars were taken from a discretionary account of Ashe Partnership and a grant from Ashe County Department of Economic Development, but that could not continue for any longer period of time. A second reason identified for "what went wrong" with this endeavor was the lack of a marketing plan and full-time kitchen director that could market and manage this entity. The original feasibility study conducted prior to development of the kitchen identified the need for marketing and management to truly

make the kitchen a success. This simply did not happen, partially due to lack of operating capital and cash flow. Additionally, there were a number of personnel changes with the Partnership and Family Central. Eventually, projects such as these cannot operate on grant funds alone. And without sufficient revenues coming in for cash flow purposes, marketing and a full time manager never was realized.

A small taskforce was created in summer of 2008 to make recommendations regarding the kitchen. They met with several groups and individuals who wanted to “save the kitchen” but who had no viable plan or funding source to do so. Thus, the kitchen eventually closed. However, the taskforce and the current Board of Directors of Family Central (where both CFV and the Ashe Partnership for Children are housed) has continued to meet and have recently (June 2009) agreed to a rental agreement with an agricultural group who hopes to develop the kitchen into an enterprise for food-related businesses and a food distribution program for local area and regional growers. The Blue Ridge Women in Agriculture (BRWIA) have the opportunity of a six-month period of time, during which they will pay the monthly rent, to develop a viable business plan for their ideas. During this time, Family Central Board of Directors will leave the grant-funded equipment and the kitchen as it is currently furnished, in hopes that BRWIA will present such a plan.

If additional information is required or desired about the history or future of CFV, you may contact the following:

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and
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