



**The Local and Regional Foods Research and  
Resource Webinar Series:  
USDA Regional Food Business Centers**

**October 17, 2024**

# Upcoming Webinars



- **Oct. 17** - Regional Food Business Center Program Highlights
- **Nov. 21** - [The Local and Regional Food Systems Resilience Playbook](#)
- **Dec. 19** - Visualizing Food Systems Data: Examples from [Consumer Food Insights](#), [Food and Agriculture Mapper and Explorer \(FAME\)](#) and the [Local Food Economics Data Visualization Challenge](#).
- **Jan. 16, 2025** - [The Promise of Urban Agriculture: Courses for Grower and Planners](#)

[Register Now!](#)



# Agenda and Speakers

- Celebrating Success – The First Year of Regional Food Business Centers
  - Brittni Echols and Lacy Stephens, USDA Agricultural Marketing Service
- Center Spotlights
- Connecting With The Regional Food Business Centers

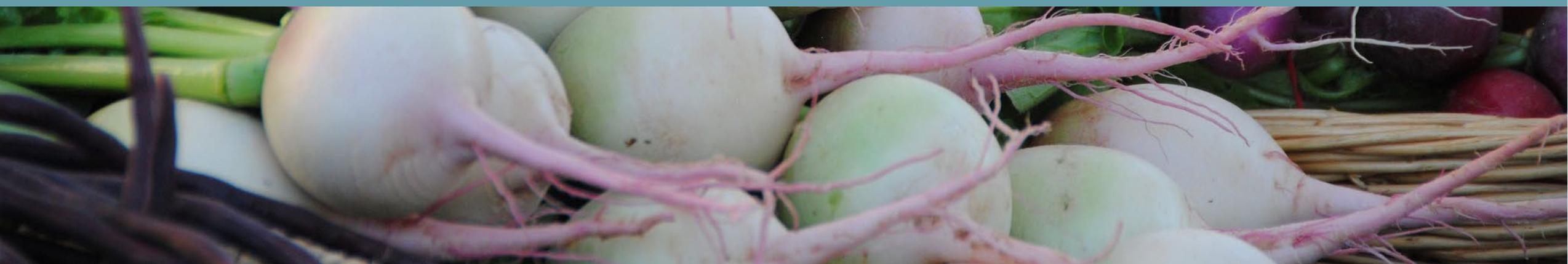


# Agenda and Speakers: Center Spotlights

- Heartland Regional Food Business Center
  - Patty Cantrell, New Growth Community Development Corporation
- North Central Regional Food Business Center
  - Sophie Johnson, South Eastern Council of Governments
- Northwest & Rocky Mountain Regional Food Business Center
  - Anders T. Van Sandt, University of Wyoming
  - Jim Auer, Montana Department of Agriculture

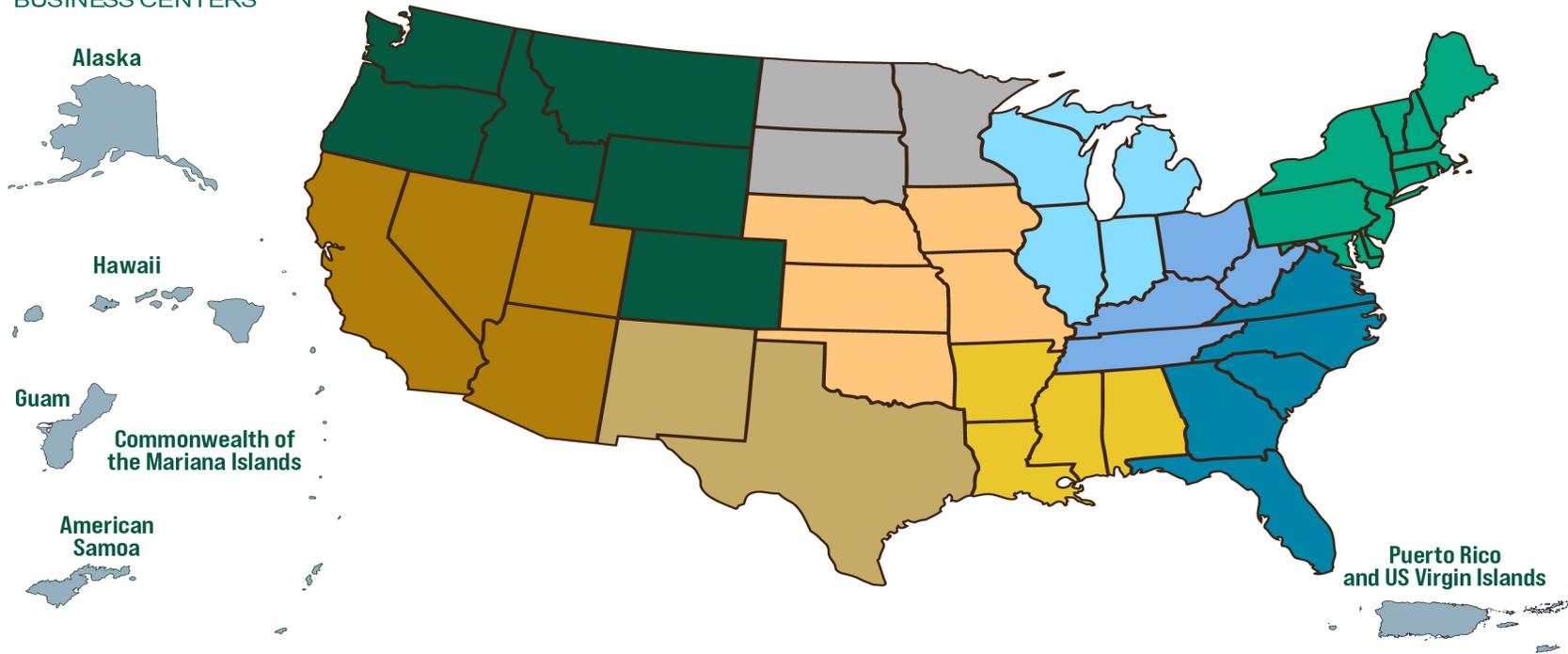


# Regional Food Business Centers





# USDA Regional Food Business Centers Geographic Regions



★ **National Intertribal Food Business Center - Intertribal Agriculture Council will serve tribes nationwide.** ★

- Northwest and Rocky Mountain**  
Colorado State University

**Southwest**  
University of California  
(This Center will serve the Colonias counties in California and Arizona.)

**North Central**  
Region Five Development Commission

**Heartland**  
University of Nebraska - Lincoln

**Rio Grande Colonias**  
Texas A&M AgriLife  
(This Center will serve the Colonias counties in New Mexico and Texas.)
- Great Lakes Midwest**  
Michigan State University Center for Regional Food Systems

**Delta**  
Mississippi Delta Council for Farmworker Opportunities

**Appalachia**  
Rural Action, Inc.

**Northeast**  
National Association of State Departments of Agriculture Foundation

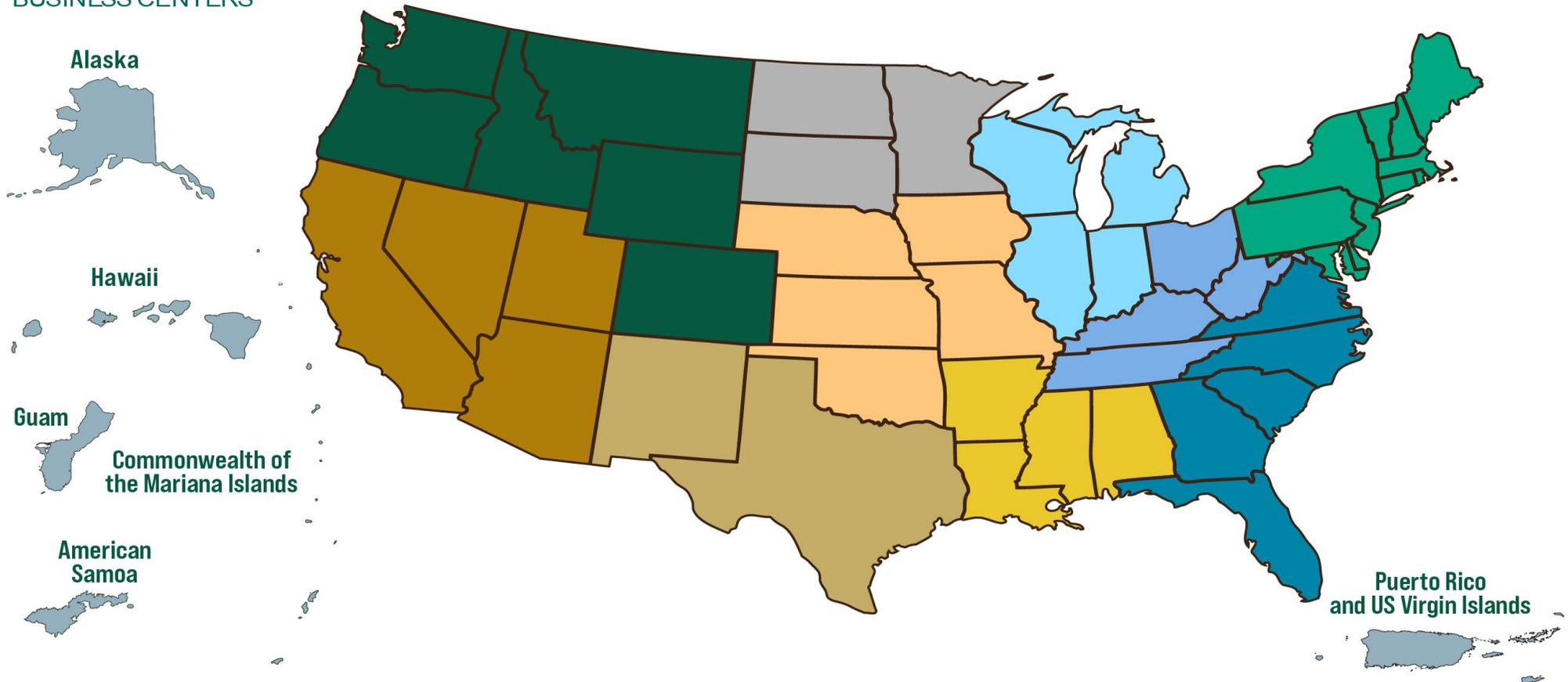
**Southeast**  
Locus/Georgia Minority Outreach Network

**Islands and Remote Areas**  
Hawaii Good Food Alliance

*\*These boundaries are not rigid but for visualization purposes only. USDA anticipates collaboration with communities across state and county lines.*

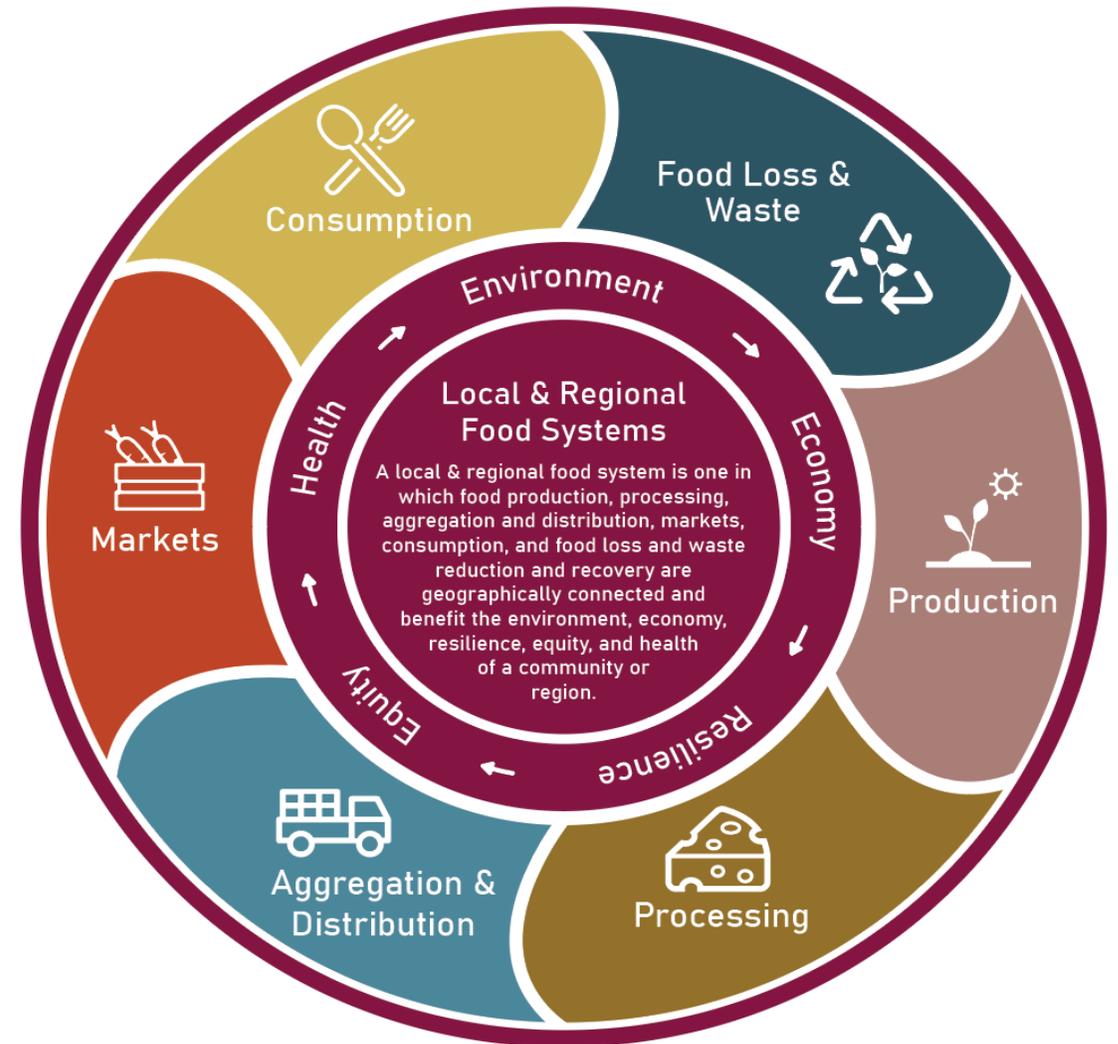
# Importance of a Regional Approach

## USDA Regional Food Business Centers Geographic Regions



# Local & Regional Foods at USDA

A role of the Regional Food Business Centers is to **increase stakeholder awareness of and access to available USDA programs** supporting local and regional food systems.



## Program Goals

Drive economic opportunities and success for small and mid-sized farm and food businesses

Develop targeted, region-specific value chain solutions

Maximize impact of locally driven investment

Collaborate with USDA team to ensure ongoing, regionally appropriate support and coordination

Complement, integrate and support other USDA programs

Foster a more diversified and resilient food system

# Center Responsibilities



## Technical Assistance

Training, consultation, and other support



## Coordination

Intentional connection to USDA and other funding and resources; deepening and broadening networks and collaboration



## Capacity Building

Direct investment in small and mid-sized food and farm business through sub award program



# Capacity Building: Business Builder Subawards

- Fund small and mid-sized farm and food businesses through sub-awards.
- Capacity building efforts focus on emerging regional needs.
- Help local businesses and organizations build capacity and execute projects.
- Regional Food Business Centers will provide Business Builder subawards up to \$100,000 (max varies by Center).





# Year 1 Regional Food Business Center Successes





# RFBC Highlights

Over **1,500**  
new  
partnerships

More than **2,800**  
individuals  
provided  
technical  
assistance

**3** Centers  
launched  
Business  
Builder  
programs

**287**  
businesses  
increased  
revenue

Over **\$4.1 million**  
leveraged for  
regions



# Center Progress & Accomplishments

Strengthening internal Center systems and coordination

- Governance structure
- Staffing
- Communication and reporting systems

Facilitating communication and coordination across the region

- Regional events
- Organizational relationship development
- Network weaving

Building awareness of the Regional Food Business Center program

- Hosting and attending regional events
- Newsletters and social media

Building relationships with underserved community partners

- In-person meetings in rural/remote areas
- Community engagement councils



# Center Progress & Accomplishments

Planning and/or launching tailored programming

- Customized and comprehensive technical assistance programs
- Business Builder Award programs

Collaborating with other Regional Food Business Centers

- Shared data collection structures
- Coordinated regional coverage
- Best practice sharing

Leveraging and coordinating with other USDA programs

- Regional Food Infrastructure Program
- Farm Service Agency

Capturing regional information to inform program planning

- Asset Mapping
- Needs Assessments

# Progress in Key Center Activities

Cumulative: As of June 2024



## Coordination

- **1,852** new partnerships/ collaborations developed
- **247** partners finalized with written agreements



# Progress in Key Center Activities

Cumulative: As of June 2024



- 1:1 training or guidance
- Group workshops or training
- Peer to peer support

## Technical Assistance

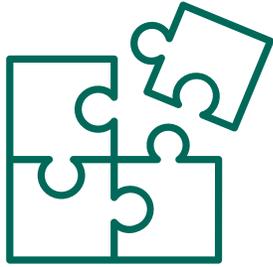
- Centers are working with **341** technical assistance providers
- **1,800** businesses/organizations served
- **2,704** individuals trained/received technical assistance

## Topics Addressed

- How to develop or maintain a direct-to-consumer enterprise
- Accessing institutional consumers
- Using new strategies to improve local/regional food processing, distribution, aggregation, or storage
- Value chain coordination
- Market development
- Navigating and managing financial resources from third parties
- Minor business development
- Business plan development

# Progress in Key Center Activities

Cumulative: As of June 2024



## Capacity Building

- **15** Business Builder Subawards awarded
- **\$607,100** awarded through Business Builder programs



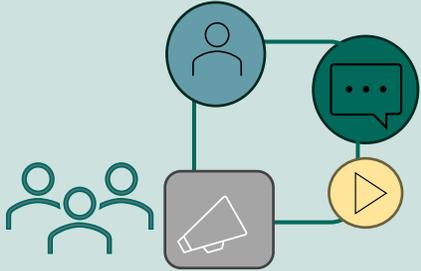


# Outcome 1: Expand and strengthen regional food systems networks and partnerships in response to hardships and vulnerabilities exposed by recent national emergencies, particularly the COVID-19 pandemic.\*\*

**474**  
Partnerships with underinvested communities



**263**  
Coordinated communications/marketing campaigns



**72**  
Increased sales of local foods



**46**  
Secured additional funding



\*\* Cumulative: As of June 2024



# Outcome 2: Create more and better markets and increase market awareness and access, ensuring small and mid-size producers and processors have the opportunity to gain access to distributors, retail outlets, and institutions.



**355**  
Partnerships between producers/processors and market access points

RFBCs also conducted other activities including:



Mapping regional gaps to develop supply chain improvements



Supporting clients in refinancing debt to more reasonable terms, allowing them to invest in infrastructure and equipment.



Increasing capacity of food hubs to serve local and regional food businesses.



Increasing footprint of food hub aggregation to allow more producers access to distribution.

\*\* Cumulative: As of June 2024



# Outcome 3: Increase food and farm business and financial acumen, increase the number of new food and farm businesses and improve viability of existing businesses\*\*

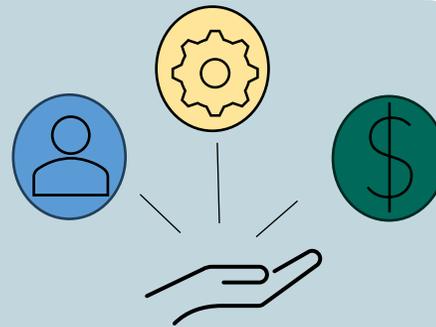


252

Business plans were developed



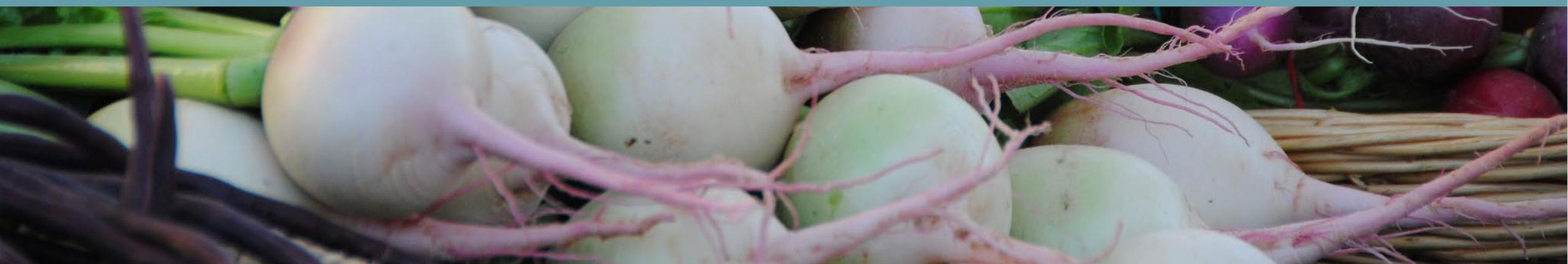
Centers leveraged approximately \$4,164,000 in additional resources for the region due to Center activities



\*\* Cumulative: As of June 2024



# Center Spotlights



# Building Local Food Business Support



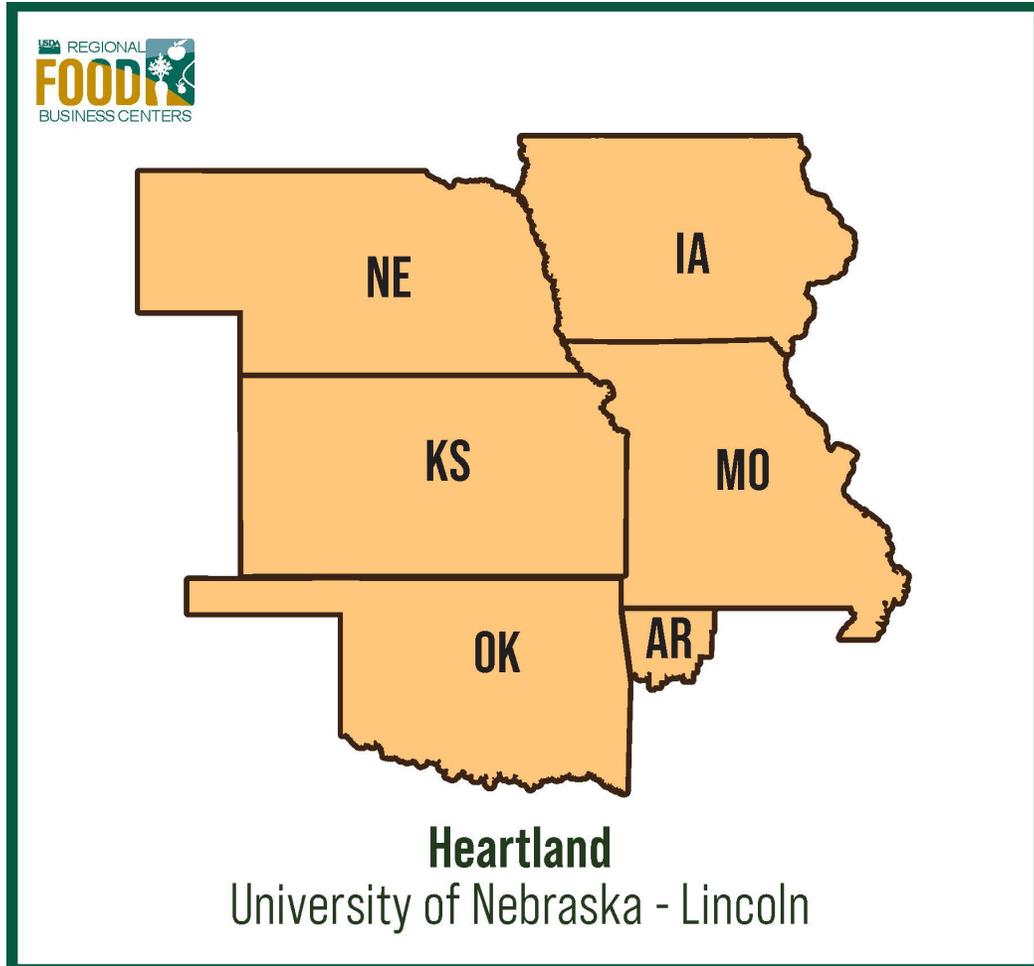
Patty Cantrell

New Growth CDC (Missouri)

USDA Local & Regional Foods Webinar

October 17, 2024

# Heartland Center Starts Up



## Heartland Regional Food Business Center

- 5 states + northwest AR
- 34 diverse partners
  - **Land grant universities**
  - **Community & economic development**
  - **Tribal Trade Coalition**
  - **Indigenous Maya community**
  - **Community-based - rural and urban**
- Co-directors: UNL + New Growth

# Vision and Mission

## As adopted by the Governance Council:

**Vision:** Locally produced food will be a major contributor to a resilient and safe food supply as regional networks make local food an easy, everyday choice, supporting healthy people, community economies, and sustainable ecosystems.

**Mission:** The Heartland Regional Food Business Center ensures small, mid-size, diverse, and historically underserved food and farm entrepreneurs benefit from the right resource at the right time on their business building journey.



# Core Values

- **Access:** We believe everyone should have access to local, high-quality, healthy, culturally appropriate, and affordable food.
- **Equity:** We are committed to providing information, resources, and initiatives that fit and strengthen small, mid-size, diverse, and historically underserved entrepreneurs and communities, including but not limited to language, culture, location, talents, and interests.
- **Justice:** We conduct restorative and regenerative food system work that builds resilient people, communities, and ecosystems.
- **Wealth Building:** We value the community wealth that resilient and equitable food systems build by increasing eight types of capital: social, natural, cultural, built, financial, political, individual, and intellectual.



# Regional Team Building

## Trust & transparency

- Consensus building
- Sustainability focused

## Counselors & connectors

- Business technical assistance
- Resource navigation
- Value chain coordination

## Topical affinity groups

- Nine areas of common interest
- Internal and external partners
- Work plan progress



# Business Builder Launch

**Business Builder Launch Event**  
8.15.2024



- Business Builder working group
- Digital media foundation building
- Informational webinar & events
- Spanish translations
- 3 x Office Hours
- Frequently Asked Questions

## Business Builder Subaward Timeline (estimated dates\*\*)

	Round 1	Round 2	Round 3
<b>RFP Release</b>	Aug. 15, 2024	Jan. 15, 2025	June 15, 2025
<b>Applications Due</b>	Oct. 15, 2024	Mar. 15, 2025	Aug. 15, 2025
<b>Award Notification</b>	Jan. 15, 2025	June 15, 2025	Nov. 15, 2025

# Making Markets. Moving Food.

## Regional value chains

- Food hub to food hub to food hub ...
- LFPA, LFS, RFBC transformation

## Shared stakeholder interest

- Relationship building
- Resource leveraging

## Asset mapping

- Resource providers
- Infrastructure





# NORTH CENTRAL REGIONAL FOOD BUSINESS CENTER

United States Department of  
Agriculture – Agricultural Marketing  
Service

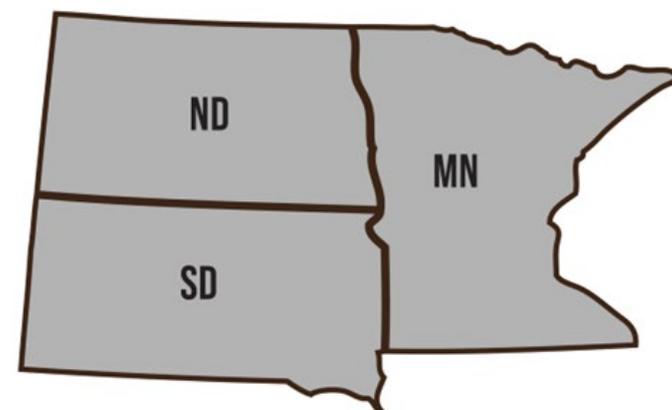
# North Central RFBC

## Priorities:

1. Centralizing efforts from 35 different partners to deliver food value chain services to underserved communities, businesses, and people
2. Helping direct culturally specific strategies and outcomes from expertise through Native CDFI's, Latino Economic Development professionals and small/mid-sized food value chain businesses
3. Learning how grassroots partners can efficiently transform an industry on a multi-state level that creates long-term system impacts

Lead Organization:  
Regional Five  
Development  
Commission (Staples,  
MN)

Partners: 35 Key Partners



# Food Systems Development through WealthWorks

## Regional Value Chains in Food Systems:

- Map out the food supply chain from production to consumption, identifying gaps and opportunities for collaboration.
- Strengthen partnerships between producers, processors, distributors, retailers, and consumers to create a resilient and locally rooted food economy.
- Identify & address bottlenecks, ensuring more wealth stays in the region.

## Equity and Inclusion:

- Engage marginalized and underinvested communities in food system planning and ownership, ensuring equitable access to resources, decision-making, and opportunities.
- Promote upward mobility and resilience by investing in small farmers, food entrepreneurs, and those on the economic margins.

## Strategic Planning:

- Use tools like asset inventories, SWOT analyses, and progress tracking to guide regional food system development.
- Align food systems planning with broader regional economic development strategies to create lasting economic growth and stability such as CEDs & Hazard Mitigation Planning

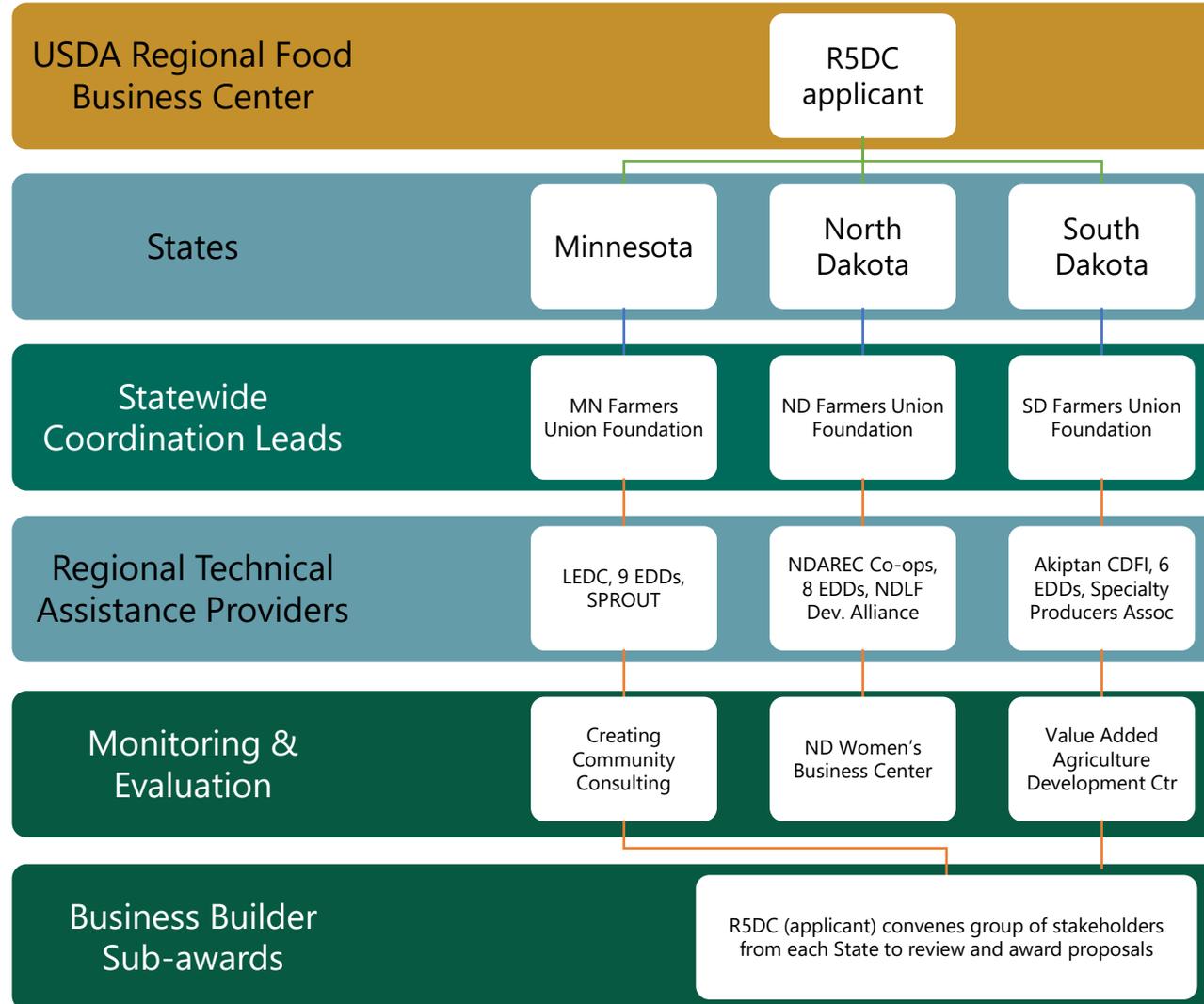
## Regional Economic Development:

- Support food-based industries as a catalyst for job creation, business development, and rural revitalization.
- Leverage public-private partnerships to create synergies that benefit the food system and the broader regional economy.

Wealth Creation



# Organizational Chart





# Technical Assistance Services

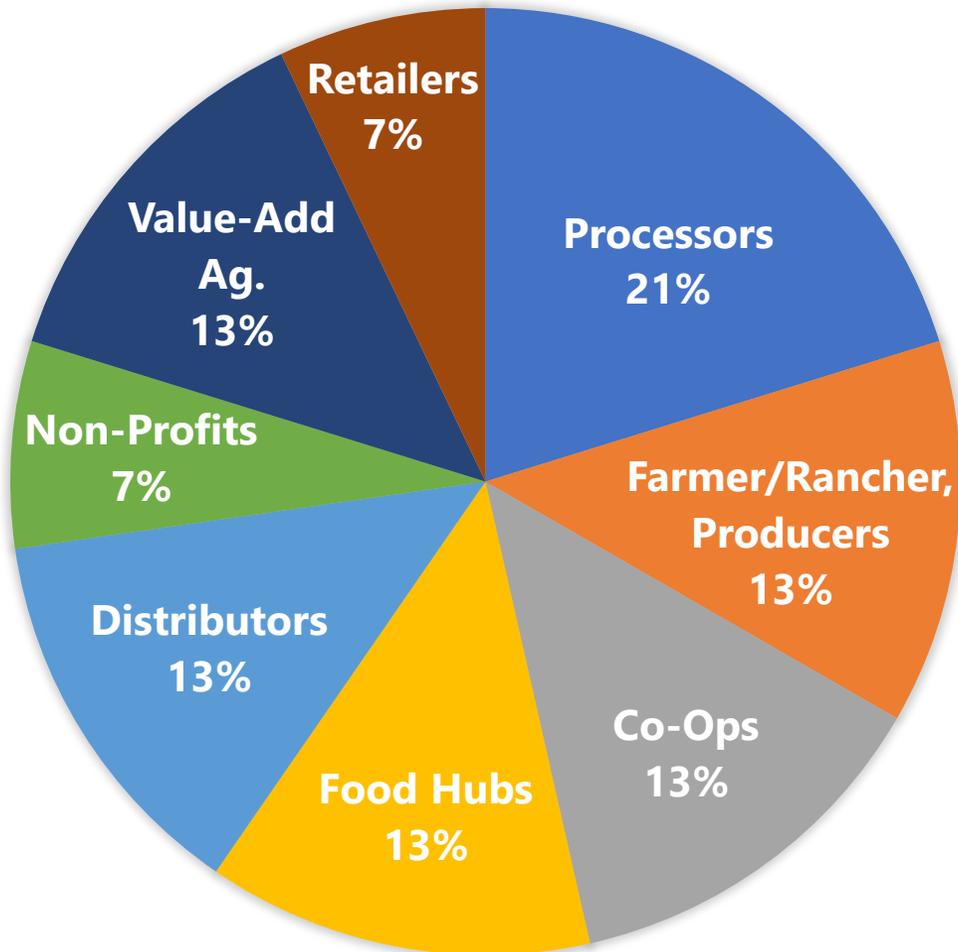
- Regional food business technical assistance providers offer direct technical assistance to small and mid-sized food and farm businesses, including grant writing services and grant administration.
- This assistance helps businesses improve their operations, access new markets, and overcome challenges in the food supply chain.
- The Center also provides support for food value and supply chain coordination, fostering collaboration and efficiency among different businesses in the food system.



# Business Builder Sub-Awards

- Once a year open application period
- Maximum awards \$50,000 (No match), 2-year implementation period
- Review committee comprised of 5 individuals from each State
- Eligible applicants: small to mid-sized value chain businesses (producers/growers, aggregators, distributors, processors, and food access points)
- Eligible uses: staff time, business planning activities (market analysis, feasibilities, EIA's) software implementation, equipment, marketing, and more.
- Priority is given to:
  - Applicants within or serving priority distressed zip codes
  - Minority or underserved applicants (Veterans, women, BIPOC, disabled, low-income, other)
  - Groups or consortiums of small to mid-sized value-chain businesses
  - Those that are receiving or have received Technical Assistance from TA providers
  - Those seeking to expand markets to institutions
  - Those meeting a specific market bottleneck or meeting ACTION PLAN goals
  - Equitable geographic distribution across each State.

# 2024 Business Builder Sub-Awards Awardees



- Just over \$600,000 announced, evenly distributed across North Dakota, South Dakota, and Minnesota
- In all, 15 existing businesses, 5 in each of the three states, were awarded funding.
- 7 of the 15 awards are directed at businesses operating or substantially serving distressed communities in the region.
- 20% to new businesses.
- 53% to purchasing special equipment (food safety, processing, storage, packaging).

# Partner Summit



In-person, two-day summit in Fargo, ND



Intercultural Development Inventory Assessment



USDA Under Secretary for Marketing and Regulatory Programs, Jennifer Lester Moffitt



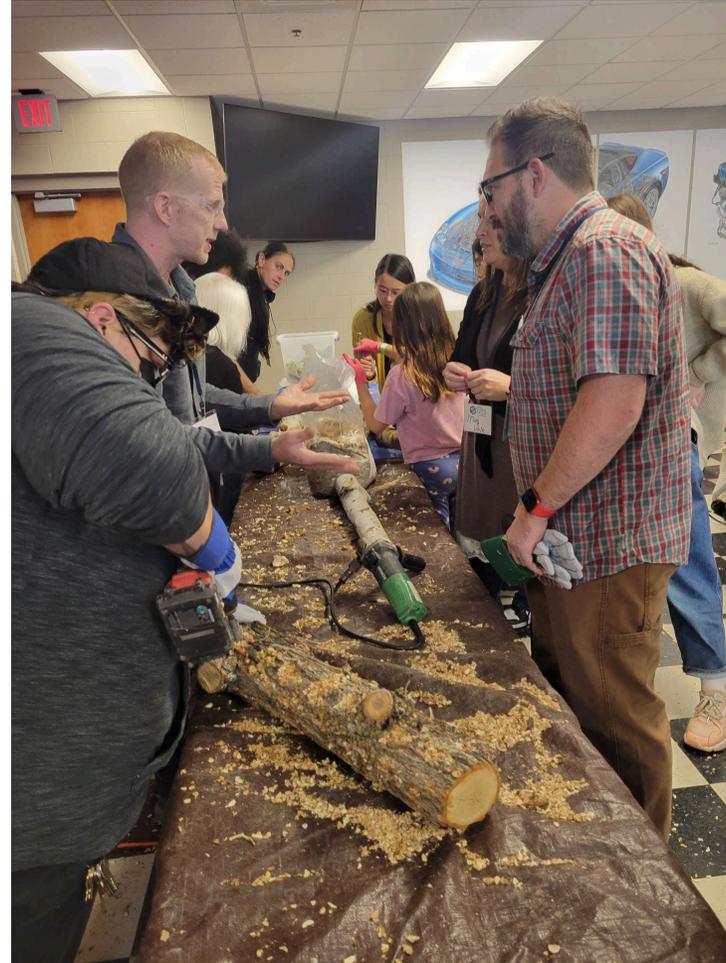
Panel Discussions



Breakout Sessions



Keynote Speakers



# South Eastern Council of Governments





**REGION FIVE**  
Development Commission

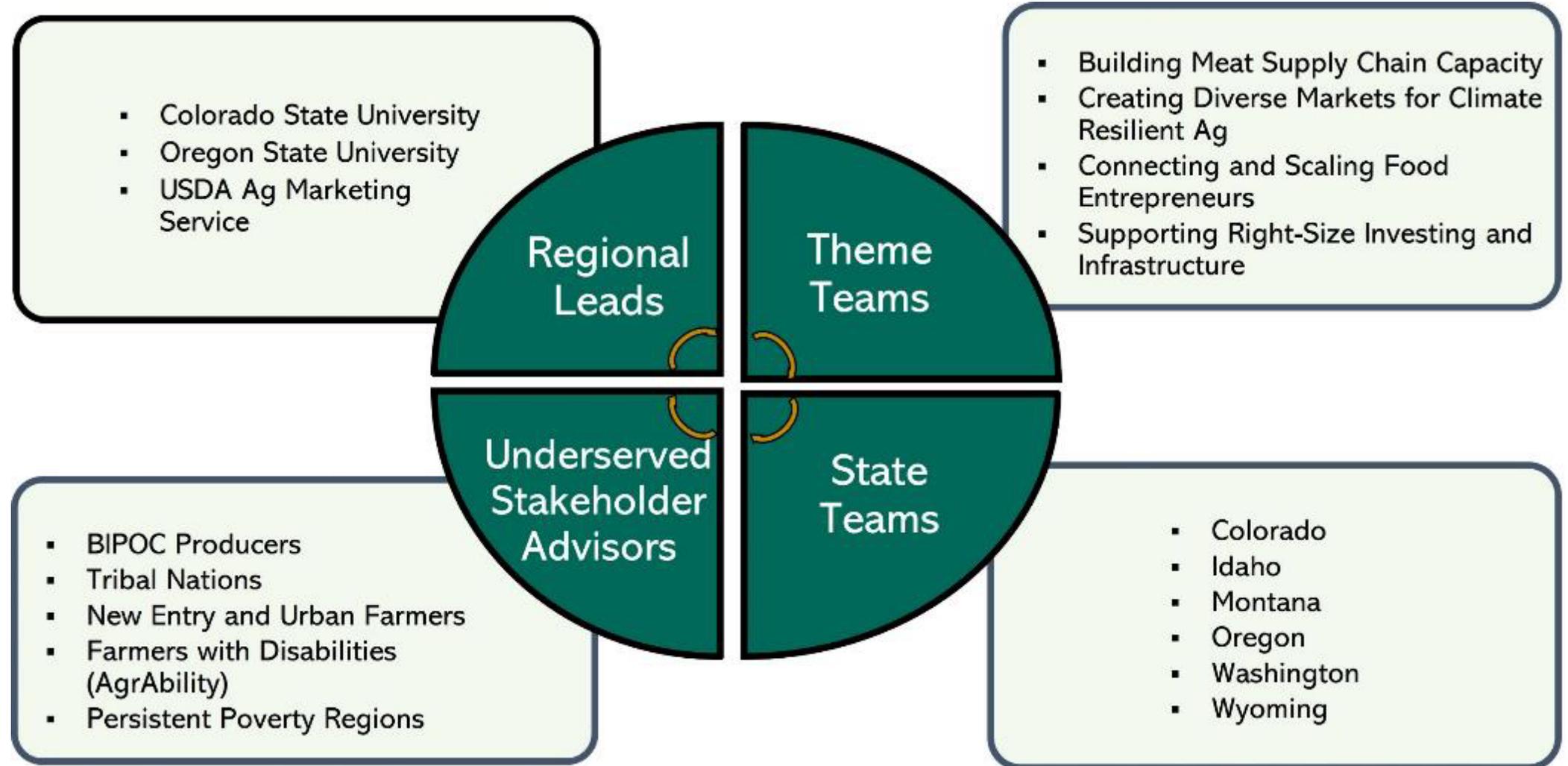
# CONTACT

**Cheryal Lee Hills** | Executive Director  
Region Five Development Commission  
Office: 218.894.3233  
Mobile: 218.270.0188



[regionfive.org/rfbc](https://regionfive.org/rfbc)

# Northwest & Rocky Mountain Regional Food Business Center



# Wyoming State Team

## Challenges

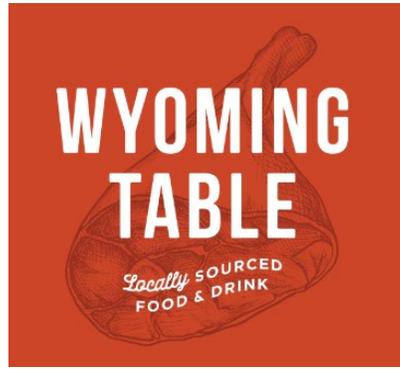
- Extremely rural
- No state-wide local foods brand
- Lack infrastructure common in other states
- Difficult growing conditions
- “Traditional agriculture” stereotypes

## Opportunities

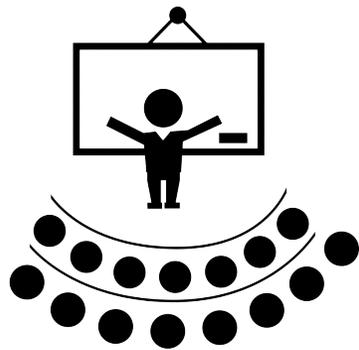
- Many examples to follow
- “Small town with long streets”
- Food Freedom Act

# Wyoming State Team

## Goals & Objectives



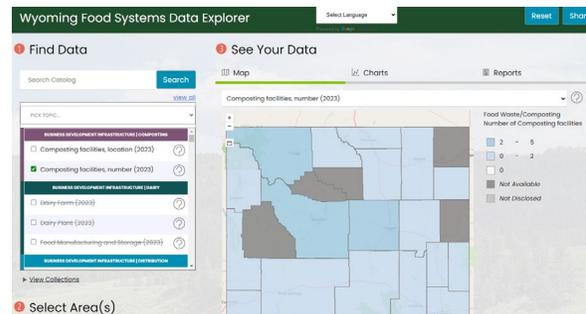
**Statewide Local Foods Brand**



**Educate communities and policy makers about local food systems**



**Invest in food hubs to decrease transportation costs**



**Food System Mapping Tool**



**Improve access to cold storage**



**Meat processing waste disposal/rendering/composting**

## Early Accomplishments

- Fancy Food Show scholarships (Theme Team)
- Get Your Recipe to Market course (Theme Team)
- Shared Kitchen Workshop
- Funded new Shared Kitchen in Lander, WY
- Needs Assessment with WDFS
- Steering committee
- Network mapping

## **Startup Business Builder Grants**

- 25 projects, \$3k-\$15k (\$250k total)
- Eligible applicants for competitive award applicants must first complete the 6-part WY Market Course

## **Food System Development grants**

- 6 projects, \$20k-\$50k ((\$250k)
- Work with WY TA provider
  - Food system infrastructure
  - Food hubs
  - Storage, transportation, and processing



 **REGIONAL**   
**FOOD**  
**BUSINESS CENTERS**  
**NORTHWEST & ROCKY**  
**MOUNTAIN**

The text is arranged in a vertical stack. At the top left is the USDA logo, which consists of the letters "USDA" in a green, sans-serif font above a stylized green and white wave graphic. To its right is the word "REGIONAL" in a bold, green, sans-serif font. Further right is a square icon with a green background, featuring white silhouettes of an apple, a carrot, and a tomato. Below "REGIONAL" is the word "FOOD" in a large, bold, yellow-orange, sans-serif font. Underneath "FOOD" is the text "BUSINESS CENTERS" in a bold, green, sans-serif font. Below that is "NORTHWEST & ROCKY" in a bold, green, sans-serif font, and finally "MOUNTAIN" in a bold, green, sans-serif font at the bottom.

# Food & Agriculture BUSINESS ENHANCEMENT PROGRAM (BEP)

*Designed for businesses in value-added agriculture and middle of supply chain food activities.*

## ABOUT

This program is specifically designed for businesses in value-added agriculture and middle of supply chain food activities (processing, manufacturing, distribution, aggregation, etc.) It can help support access to the following resources to expand or advance your business to the next level towards success, at little to no expense.

### 1. MSU Food Product Development Lab

- Up to 40 hours of R&D product development
- + Recipe development, extrusion consultation, sensory evaluation

### 2. Montana Manufacturing Extension Center

- Up to 16 hours of TA
- + Lean training, strategic planning, plant layout, HACCP training, food manufacturing, food safety training, and more.

### 3. Regional Food Business Center (RFBC) Theme Groups

- Building Meat Supply Chain Capacity
  - Supporting Right Size Investing and Infrastructure
  - Creating Diverse Markets for Climate Resilient Agriculture
  - Connecting and Scaling Food Entrepreneurs
- \*Amount of funding/services available vary by project

### 4. Other Consultant Services and Trainings

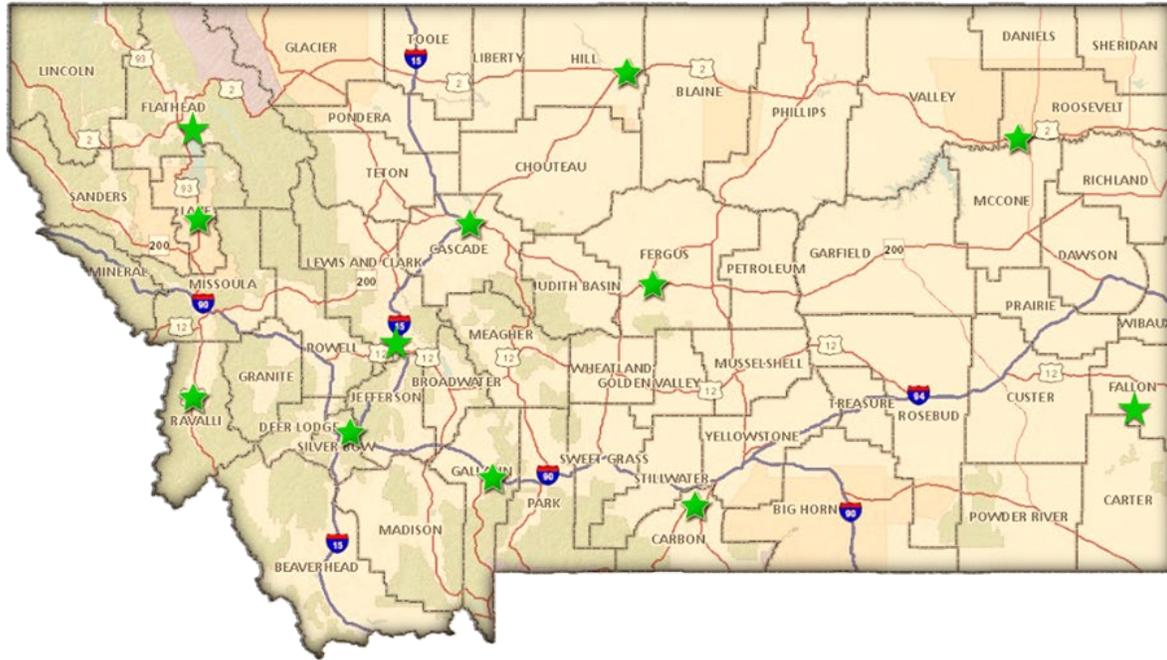
- BEP will cover up to \$2,000 worth of training/consultant fees



MONTANA DEPARTMENT OF  
**AGRICULTURE**

If you are interested in applying for the program, contact your local FADC to determine eligibility ([agr.mt.gov/Food-and-Ag-Development-Centers](http://agr.mt.gov/Food-and-Ag-Development-Centers)).  
For questions or more information, please contact Hailey Vine ([hailey.vine@mt.gov](mailto:hailey.vine@mt.gov)) or Jim Auer ([jauer@mt.gov](mailto:jauer@mt.gov)).





# MONTANA FOOD & AGRICULTURE DEVELOPMENT NETWORK



# Current Project Examples:

- Client A – 16 hours of TA with MMEC – equipment evaluation to determine what upgrades and additional equipment are needed to expand co-packing services
- Client B – 40 hours of RD with FPDL – recipe development to expand existing product line made of locally source crops and products.
- Client C – \$2,000 for OSU Food Inn. Lab – recipe development for a brand new meat snack and consulting on equipment needs to make the product in MT.
- Client D – \$825 for professional development – attend a business accelerator program to enhance business acumen, financial literacy, and collaboration partnerships.

# Connecting with the Regional Food Business Centers

[www.ams.usda.gov/services/local-regional/rfbcp/awarded-centers](http://www.ams.usda.gov/services/local-regional/rfbcp/awarded-centers)

- RFBC Website
- RFBC Contact Information/Email



# Upcoming Webinars Reminder



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