ARC APPLICATION GUIDANCE
Local Food Systems Projects

For general guidance on how to develop a complete and competitive application for ARC project funding, all applicants should refer to the application framework and instructions detailed in the *Checklist for ARC Non-Construction Project Applications* form or the *Checklist for ARC Construction Project Applications* form, as appropriate, available at www.arc.gov/forms. Applicants should also consult their state's Appalachian Development Plan and Annual Strategy Statement for additional information.

This document provides more specific guidance for applicants whose proposed projects are in the area of **local food systems development** or include **local food systems development activities**. As projects may incorporate a range of types of development activities or investments, ARC encourages applicants to consider all of the elements of a project's proposed scope of work and refer to any specific guidance for each type of activity included.

All application guidance is grounded in the goals and principles of ARC's 2016–2020 Strategic Plan, which emphasize strategic focus, collaboration, sustainability, and measurable impact in ARC investments.

ARC investment helps Appalachian communities develop local food systems to create new economic opportunity, spur job creation and entrepreneurship, and improve public health and quality of life. These investments are diverse in both size and scope. Supported projects may involve both construction and non-construction activities and are often multi-faceted, incorporating a range of business incubation, health, tourism, and downtown revitalization activities, as well as activities in land acquisition, workforce development and training, and technical assistance and other support for new or existing businesses. Generally, ARC categorizes local food systems development activities under Goal 1 of its strategic plan; however, other goals may be relevant.

Examples of eligible local food systems projects include, but are not limited to:
- Equipment purchases and/or building renovations for local food hubs, value-added processing facilities, shared-use kitchens, farmers markets, or other related aggregation/distribution facilities
- Equipment purchases and/or building renovations for a university-based agricultural research facility
- Creation of farm incubator programs whose objectives include providing training, business planning, and equipment/land leasing assistance and apprenticeship opportunities
- Youth-focused educational programming intersecting with STEM activities and farm operations
- Health-focused programming and services in USDA-designated food deserts, including mobile grocery stores or farmers markets that also provide wrap-around healthcare services or vegetable prescription programs
- Planning and development of a local food–focused "trail" for tourism development purposes
- Feasibility study of a locally-owned cooperative meat processing facility

Key Principles of ARC Local Food Systems Investments
As outlined in ARC's strategic plan, activities should be strategic, collaborative, sustainable, and impactful.
Strategic:
- Applicants should consider how the proposed scope of work fits into broader regional planning activities and ongoing community and economic development efforts.
- Applicants should also consider how their efforts can connect to, or leverage, existing local food system development in/around the project service area.

Collaborative:
- Local food systems projects are often multi-faceted. Applicants should consider convening a diverse group of project partners, including non-traditional stakeholders such as faith-based groups, community schools, local food pantries, or other organizations that support underserved populations, veterans' organizations, retirement communities, and, in some cases, correctional facilities (as local food systems development can provide an opportunity for productive workforce reentry).
- Where possible, applicants should connect with university extension programs, state departments of agriculture, and USDA state offices to ensure that ARC-funded investments are complementary to other state and federal programs.

Sustainable:
- Depending on the type of project, applicants should have completed pre-application planning and assessment of the proposed scope of work through efforts including (but not limited to) comprehensive business planning, detailed work plan development, and/or technical assessments or feasibility studies that support project implementation.
- Applicants should also describe the project team's capacity to accomplish the proposed scope of work, its ability to continue the work past the project's period of performance; and its ability to leverage diverse sources of capital.

Impactful:
- Local food systems development efforts can benefit from an understanding of rural wealth creation and the long-term "community wealth" impacts these investments can generate. Additionally, an impact investment approach, which considers not just the direct return on investment but also the socioeconomic and environmental impacts, whether implicit or explicit, is particularly relevant to local food systems projects.
- Performance measures will vary depending on the project's proposed scope of work and scale. Some examples are included below, but all applicants should refer to the Guide to ARC Project Performance Measures for more information.
    - Improvements to food hubs and other processing/aggregation facilities will include businesses served/improved, jobs created, revenues increased, and leveraged private investment (LPI).
    - Agricultural training programs are more likely to result in students, workers/trainees, or participants served/improved.
    - Local-food–related planning and feasibility assessment projects typically result in plans/reports developed or programs implemented.

Other Considerations
- If a project proposes to construct or renovate a facility, a federal or state basic agency must administer the project on behalf of ARC. Contact your ARC State Program Manager for more information.
- If a project involves purchasing equipment or property, or procuring any third-party services, applicants must follow federal procurement regulations and should have an updated procurement policy that adheres to the stated requirements in 2 C.F.R. 200.317-326 (*Procurement Standards*).
- If a project involves acquiring property, an MAI (or similar) appraisal is needed.

Helpful Resources
- ARC Website: *Local Food in Appalachia*
- ARC Research Report (2012): *Assessing the Landscape of Local Food in Appalachia*
- U.S. Department of Agriculture Toolkit (2016): *The Economics of Local Food Systems: A Toolkit to Guide Community Discussions, Assessments, and Choices*
- Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis Report (2017): *Harvesting Opportunity: The Power of Regional Food Systems Investments to Transform Communities*