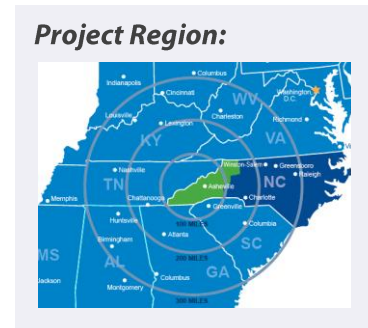


# WNC AgriVentures – Cultivating Jobs and Innovation

The WNC AgriVentures – Cultivating Jobs and Innovation Project (“WNC AgriVentures”) will measurably increase job creation, innovation and wealth retention across rural Western North Carolina through a regionally integrated platform for accelerating high-impact projects within emerging or expanding agriculture and natural resources based industries.

## PROJECT REGION

The project area consists of the 23 western-most counties of North Carolina, known as the AdvantageWest region, including: Alleghany, Ashe, Avery, Buncombe, Burke, Caldwell, Cherokee, Clay, Graham, Haywood, Henderson, Jackson, Macon, Madison, McDowell, Mitchell, Polk, Rutherford, Swain, Transylvania, Watauga, Wilkes, and Yancey.



## A GROWNC IMPLEMENTATION PROJECT

Western North Carolina is a recipient of a HUD-DOT-EPA Sustainable Communities Initiative award for the Land-of-Sky Region (covering 5 counties central to the proposed project region). This effort, called GroWNC, is building inclusive partnerships and aligning key plans to meet livability principles. Through GroWNC, the region has qualified for Preferred Sustainability Status, signifying that the region is ready to advance planning that prioritizes sustainability and inclusion as core outcomes of community development. WNC AgriVentures will be an integral driver for this initiative by supporting the launch of the private sector products and services critically needed to achieve the region’s sustainability goals.

## EXPANDING RURAL WNC’S AGRICULTURE AND NATURAL RESOURCE BASED SECTORS

As Western North Carolina experienced the economic triple whammy of the loss of traditional manufacturing, the end of tobacco price supports and the housing market collapse, the region’s entrepreneurs, community and business leaders have begun diversifying into new economic sectors, especially new sustainable industries based on the region’s wealth of agricultural and natural assets. Over the last several years, in part due to the consistent efforts of the Project partners, the region (especially the Asheville metro area) has seen some early successes in areas like local foods, natural products, clean energy and ecotourism. It has also become clear that these sustainable agriculture and natural resource based sectors are highly complementary in that success in one sector has positive spillover effects into the other sectors.



The WNC AgriVentures project is a recognition of the substantial economic and community development opportunities that will result from an integrated regional approach to i) identifying key supply chain gaps and developing critical regional infrastructure to ensure the continued expansion of these sectors; ii) clearly packaging and delivering existing regional resources in a coordinated fashion

to accelerate new startups and existing businesses within these sectors; and iii) proactively cultivating linkages between rural WNC and these industries to ensure that quality job creation is achieved regionally.

Following, are the complementary sustainable agriculture and natural resource based sectors where WNC is experiencing early success and where WNC AgriVentures will focus:

- Local, organic foods
- Value-added food and natural products
- Craft brewing
- Rural-scale renewable energy and energy efficiency
- Agritourism, ecotourism, and outdoor industry
- Other bio-based products

## ADDRESSING CRITICAL NEEDS - PROJECT OBJECTIVES

WNC AgriVentures will address critical regional economic development concerns including:

- Quality job creation in rural, economically-distressed Western North Carolina
- Creating strong linkages between expanding regional industries and rural communities:
- Filling the supply-chain gaps (i.e., creating new “infill” businesses) in growing rural sustainable industries
- Engaging youth in rural entrepreneurship to address the “brain drain” and “talent drain” affecting so many of our rural communities
- Supporting private sector innovation and new business creation to meet regional sustainability and economic goals
- Retaining wealth instead of extracting wealth in rural communities
- Creating a replicable model for regional sustainable economic development in rural Appalachia and America

## STRUCTURE & ACTIVITIES

WNC AgriVentures will be a collaborative effort across Western North Carolina cooperatively led by AdvantageWest, the regional economic development partnership serving the project region, and Land-of-Sky Regional Council, the council of governments serving 4 counties in the heart of the project region. The Program will initially focus on six strategic and interconnected activity areas to significantly expand sustainable agriculture and natural resource based industries across rural Western North Carolina:

### **Example Projects:**

#### **Example 1) Small-scale large animal processing facility feasibility study**

WNC has a growing number of local beef, bison and lamb farms and local and regional demand could support many more. However, the region lacks a large animal processing facility so area farmers have to send their cattle out of the region to be processed and then have the final products shipped back, incurring expensive and volatile transportation costs along the way. As an example, an area bison farm has to truck their bison to Colorado for processing and then back again so that they can sell their product locally. Establishing a regional large animal processing facility would help local farmers control cost, be more competitive, and support additional value-added product opportunities in the region. WNC AgriVentures could support the completion of the high quality feasibility study needed to attract private investment to this identified supply chain gap.

#### **Example 2) Fiber Shed Supply Chain Directory / Database**

The NC Department of Commerce projects that by 2016, 26,466 traditional textile-manufacturing works will lose their jobs (\$521 million annual wages). At the same time, WNC is home to a budding sustainable fiber arts cluster with 462 fiber farms and 405 fiber art professionals. To expand, Project partners have identified a need for a centralized, virtual meeting place that facilitates vertical networking throughout the region’s supply chain. A Fiber Shed Supply Chain Directory / Database will link thousands of individuals in the Fiber Shed supply chain who, otherwise, may never have had the opportunity to hear of each other, work together, buy from each other and drive business growth, sell products online, or develop a fully functional, local economic cluster.

*Building Community and Regional Capacity (USDA activities)*

- 1) **Community Entrepreneurial Capacity Building:** training for service providers (community college business advisors, economic developers, etc) to better assist entrepreneurs
- 2) **Farmers-to-Farmland Pilot Program:** helping new farmers get access to farmland

*Linking to Regional Clusters and Opportunities (EDA activities)*

- 3) **WNC AgriVentures Innovation Council:** a cross-sector group of innovators and leaders that will drive the Program's regional, integrated and catalytic approach
- 4) **Infrastructure Planning and Pilot Projects:** planning, feasibility studies and small pilot programs to identify and promote investment in major supply-chain opportunities
- 5) **WNC AgriVentures Technology Commercialization Center:** providing rural-WNC businesses access to new technology from regional universities and other R&D centers
- 6) **WNC AgriVentures Network:** to connect the businesses, entrepreneurs and investors within the WNC cluster to each other and the resources they need to be successful

*Creating Jobs through Regional Innovation Infrastructure (ARC activities)*

- 7) **WNC AgriVentures Accelerator:** to accelerate 10-20 high-impact sustainable ventures per year with strategic mentors, focused regional resources, and peer-to-peer learning

## PARTNERS

AdvantageWest, Appalachian Sustainable Agriculture Project, Bent Creek Institute, Blue Ridge Food Ventures, Cherokee Preservation Foundation, Community Foundation of WNC, EvolveEnergy Partnership, Handmade in America, Land-of-Sky Regional Council, Mountain BizWorks, NC Dept of Agriculture, NCSU Extension, NC Natural Products Association, SBTDC, Southern Appalachian Highlands Conservancy, Technology Commercialization Center, and others

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

Matthew Raker  
VP Entrepreneurship and AdvantageGreen, AdvantageWest  
[mraker@awnc.org](mailto:mraker@awnc.org)  
828-687-7234

Erica Anderson  
Working Lands Planner, Land-of-Sky Regional Council  
[erica@landofsky.org](mailto:erica@landofsky.org)  
828-251-6622

## Example Projects:

### Example 3) Integrating regional agriculture aggregation centers pilot project

WNC has several new sub-regional local foods aggregation centers that help connect growers with markets. There is an interest to explore opportunities for these centers to better collaborate in marketing and distributing WNC-grown products. These opportunities include consistent branding, combining products from multiple centers for distribution, and collaborating on export opportunities.

### Example 4) Tapping the Rising Craft Beer Industry

Combining the region's craft heritage, passion for local, and Appalachian-style entertaining, the Asheville area has become a center for craft breweries with 11 such breweries and several more throughout the region. With the addition of new major breweries by Sierra Nevada Brewing and New Belgium Brewing, the region's annual output will expand from around 50,000 barrels in 2010 to over 800,000 barrels in 2020. AgriVentures will work with industry to identify supply chain opportunities and support the startup and expansion of rural WNC-based companies to capture the supply chain impacts of this expansion. Potential opportunities include increased regional hops and specialty grains demand and new bioproducts/bioenergy opportunities from the industry's biomass rich waste streams.