Celebrating a Day of Service in Honor of MLK

"But peace is not merely the absence of tension, but the presence of justice."
— Martin Luther King, Jr.

Rural Action AmeriCorps member Taisa Dzindo (placed at Middle Tuscarawas Watershed) reminded us of this Martin Luther King Jr. quote on MLK Day as a cadre of AmeriCorps members and friends took off on a march for justice. And that afternoon, we got to see that attitude in action as community volunteers and National Service members came together for a carnival of service activities.

Rural Action would like to thank our donors and volunteers for sharing resources, gathering together, sharing food, and volunteering last Monday in the spirit of Dr. King.

Because of the very generous donations of Rural Action members and supporters, our collective organizational talents, volunteer efforts, and cooperation, we Got Things Done in Athens County. Together, we got these items into the hands of kids who need them:

- 8 no-sew blankets
- 12 fleece blankets
- 50 Comfort Kits to distribute to Athens County kids on their first night under the care of Children Services
- More than 100 books
• 4 tote bags of books, puzzles, and art items to engage kids and parents involved in Children Services programming

Plus, we prepared activities and lent a hand to Passion Works and our friends with different abilities, wrote hopeful hellos to people who are incarcerated, and picked up two bags of litter and rehomed a pile of woody debris from invasive plants!

At the end of the Day of Service, Rural Action AmeriCorps Program Manager Meredith Hamsher led participants in a round of one-word reflections. What we heard:

Community. Camaraderie.
Reflective. Productive.
Proud.
Fun.

Handbook Offers Guide for Sustainable Forest Farming

If you’re interested in putting your woodland property to work in a sustainable way, check out The Forest Farmers Handbook: A Beginners Guide to Growing and Marketing At-Risk Forest Herbs.

The book, produced by Rural Action and United Plant Savers with funding from USDA’s Natural Resources Conservation Service, includes cultivation guides for ramps, goldenseal,
bloodroot, black cohosh, and American ginseng. It also offers information on production methods, site selection, botanical markets, and Forest Grown Verification (FGV).

“The FGV program ties together the health of the ecosystem and the demand for medicinal plants — therefore, as the herbal products industry grows, we are hoping to conserve biodiversity rather than depleting forest resources,” the book’s preface explains.

Tanner Filyaw, Rural Action’s Non-Timber Forest Products manager, edited the handbook, which was the result of nearly two years of research and a review process from a group of experts. It includes beautiful illustrations by Herbaceous Human, an extensive bibliography for anyone needing more information, and a fascinating 1912 article, “The Cultivation of Hydrastis,” which shows that even more than a century ago, people were worrying about conservation of these important non-timber forest products.

The Forest Farmers Handbook is available at Rural Action’s office in The Plains for $20. If the price of the book poses too much of an obstacle, reach out to Rural Action Director of Sustainable Agriculture & Forestry Tom Redfern to discuss other options.

Program Provides Training for Solar Jobs

Rural Action is looking for five individuals who live and/or work in Athens County for the Grow Solar Jobs Initiative, which offers training for those hoping to enter the solar field.

Solar trainees will complete a six-week online course through Solar Energy International (SEI) and attend two in-person training/networking events with local solar installers. Rural Action will cover 94% of the costs associated with SEI’s course work — which means the trainees will have to pay only $50 for the program. In addition, Rural Action will provide technical assistance
and support trainees with job placement. We’re grateful for the partnership of the Athens County Foundation in this new initiative.

Applications will be accepted until March 1 and interviews will be conducted between March 20 and April 1. To learn more and apply, please visit: http://ruralaction.org/athens-grow-solar-jobs-initiative/ or email Jon Flinn at jon@ruralaction.org.

Small Businesses, Farmers Can Save on Energy Costs

The Southeast Ohio Public Energy Council (SOPEC), a Rural Action partner, is offering two programs that could help reduce energy costs for small businesses, farmers, non-profits, and faith organizations.

1. **Solar Assessment Program (SAP)** — Small businesses and farmers in an 18-county region of Southeast Ohio can receive free solar assessments. Participants receive a free cost estimate report, and information about the 26% federal tax credit, USDA REAP grants, and low-cost financing. For details, click here.

2. **Public Pricing Program (P3)** — By bundling public, non-profit, and faith organizations together to achieve a low, public-sector price for electricity supply, this SOPEC program can reduce rates 20-25% compared with the default utility supply rate. For more information or to apply, click here.
Rural Action's Ajamian Works with Cascadia Grain Growers

Michelle Ajamian, Rural Action’s network manager for the Appalachian Staple Foods Collaborative, presented at the Cascadia Grain Conference in Olympia, WA, and visited the famed Bread Lab in Burlington in mid-January. Cascadia brought together up to 300 farmers, millers, brewers, traditional tortilleria owners, and others.

Conference organizers had asked Michelle to facilitate a session to identify the best next steps to support the region’s grain growers. “With all 300 attendees participating, our process centered around small group conversations that reported back the values, needs, and assets of the participants,” Michelle says. “Conference staff will develop a strategic plan that responds to their network.”

The Bread Lab mission and work is to “breed and develop publicly available varieties of grains …[to] benefit farmers, processors, and end-users while enhancing access to affordable and nutritious food for all … communities.”

Director Steve Jones showed off a sourdough that tasted like butter was infused in it – although it contained only wheat, water, salt, and starter – and a square whole grain loaf they are developing with The Grand Central Bakery for schools.

“Relationships with the Cascadia network give our project a leap forward towards building economic opportunities for our region’s staple seed crop growers and processors,” Michelle says.
For more information about the Appalachian Staple Foods Collaborative, contact Michelle.

Follow Us on Social Media

Did you know OhioHealth’s continued sponsorship of Rural Action’s Environmental Education program will make it possible for us to take thousands of local children and adults into the natural world this year? Or that Rural Action is looking for businesses that want to take the Clean Energy Pledge? These are just a few of the stories we ran on social media recently. If you haven’t already done so, please consider following us on your favorite flavor of social media. The more followers and fans we have, the broader our reach, the better we’re able to help make Appalachian Ohio an even better place to live and work. You can find us on Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and Instagram. Come join the conversation.
Check Out Our Upcoming Events

**FEBRUARY 4**
Pollution to Paint: Art Open House
Glouster Public Library
Glouster, OH
More Info

**FEBRUARY 8**
Winter -- A Great Time to Be Outside
Camp Oty'Okwa
South Bloomingville, OH
More Info

**FEBRUARY 19**
Sunday Creek Owl Prowl
Burr Oak Lodge
Glouster, OH
More Info

**FEBRUARY 20**
Season Creation Workshop
Grange Hall
Amesville, OH
More Info

**FEBRUARY 24**
OSU Good Agricultural Practices Class
Triple Nickel Diner
Chesterhill, OH
More Info

**MARCH 5**
An Introduction to Growing Shiitake & Oyster Mushrooms
Chesterhill Produce Auction
Chesterhill, OH
More Info

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Rural Action Inc.
9030 Hocking Hills Dr., The Plains, OH 45780