



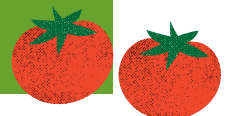
OUR STORY



LOCAL ROOTS | FOODSPHERE



**A PARTNERSHIP IN SMALL AND LOCAL
FOOD SYSTEM DEVELOPMENT**



www.localrootswooster.com / www.foodspherewooster.org



WHO WE ARE

LOCAL ROOTS

Wooster Local Foods Cooperative (Local Roots) is a vibrant, cooperatively-owned market that features seasonal and sustainably-focused foods and artisan goods from 300+ local producers. We achieve this by collaboratively operating a local food market, lunch cafe, and shared-use commercial kitchen.

COMMITTED TO SMALL & LOCAL FOOD SYSTEMS

The food industry is notoriously complex and increasingly competitive, especially for small and family-owned businesses. Local Roots and FoodSphere are working in partnership to offer our community access to a unique blend of resources that support a healthy local food economy:

- access to an exclusive, year-around and indoor market, providing engagement opportunities with active and engaged consumers
- operating space in our fully-equipped lunch café and commercial kitchen through which chefs can design, create, and share their inspired products with the world
- a network of peers dedicated to cooperation and collaboration
- training and professional counseling - for when that next step-up requires some reliable and customized support

FOODSPHERE

FoodSphere is a tax-exempt 501(c)(3) nonprofit devoted to invigorating the local foods ecosystem by providing small food entrepreneurs with access to networking, educational programming, and professional support services.



PIONEERING COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT THROUGH LOCAL FOOD



In 2009, a diverse group of community-minded volunteers (including farmers, researchers, marketers, teachers, a banker and an architect) came together with a common goal: to build a year-around local food market as a means of community development. The vision was to create a producer-consumer co-op, encouraging ownership, engagement and involvement by the community. Since that time, Local Roots has grown its base of members from 13 to 3,000 local families, making it truly community-owned and operated.

CENTRALLY LOCATED WITHIN A RICH, VIBRANT AGRICULTURAL LANDSCAPE

- Located in Wayne County, OH, a valuable agricultural and small food production business cluster, Local Roots and FoodSphere are uniquely positioned to make a difference!
- Wayne County has the largest local food economy in Ohio and ranks 3rd in total value of agricultural products sold.
- The rich soil combined with more hilly acreage encourages land use ideal for smaller, family-owned farms. 83% of Wayne County farms are less than 180 acres while 77% report less than \$100,000 in sales (NASS 2017). This extensive network of small farms within a single county reinforces a resilient local food economy.
- Located in the USDA's Growing Zone 6, where temperatures only rarely fall below 0°F, Wayne County provides a balanced climate for market produce growers.

Our geographical landscape is ripe for organizations like Local Roots and FoodSphere to further their efforts of supporting and innovating the local food economy!

According to a [National Agricultural Statistics Service \(NASS\) 2017 study](#) "Northeast Ohio (NEO) is a vibrant agricultural region with rich prime soils and is home to a diversity of businesses and farms including the highest concentration of women farmers and small and medium farms in Ohio" - *OSU's Pathways to Prosperity Project*

One of our supporting farming families, the Ladrachs from Autumn Harvest Farm



LOCAL ROOTS: A THOUGHTFULLY SUSTAINABLE MODEL

Thought: Small, private/family-owned markets often struggle competing long-term against giant, publicly-traded corporations. How can we ensure this kind of market will be sustainable long-term?

Solution: Encourage community-wide ownership, involvement, and engagement by operating as a Cooperative that is owned by both local consumers and producers!

Thought: Farm products can be sold 7 days/week, yet local farmer's markets typically operate once/week and only during peak weather months, leaving opportunity the remainder of the year.

Solution: Open an indoor, year-around market that prioritizes local farms' goods!

Thought: Small-scale food producers often cannot produce the scale of goods required to sell in large-format grocery chains, forcing producers to either operate their own "on-farm" market or sell to large distributors to be sold outside the local area.

Solution: Prioritize small-scale farmers by offering shelf space without contracts, allowing the producer to independently set their prices, production plans, and delivery schedules.

Thought: How can we ensure the market will continually represent the needs of its community?

Solution: Build the co-op's bylaws so that the Board of Directors are democratically elected by the membership to govern and oversee the health and well-being of the co-op!



LOCAL ROOTS, HUMBLE BEGINNINGS

The concept for Local Roots was formed by a volunteer group of thoughtful and engaged citizens. The first brainstorming sessions were held at the Wayne County Public Library, where, directly across the street, sat an empty yet promising building that we have called home for the last 14 years. This building, owned by the Wayne County Commissioners, was put into a 15-year lease for Local Roots to operate the new market and get its start in local food system development.

Since 2009, countless volunteer hours were put into making Local Roots what it is today. Starting with an empty building, and then growing into operating an indoor farmers market, Local Roots has now developed into a self-sufficient and modernized market that is ripe with opportunity for future growth and expansion.

**FAST FORWARD TO 2023:
A FULL & THRIVING
LOCAL MARKET**



BUILDING COMMUNITY THROUGH ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Thanks to funds from the Ohio Department of Agriculture (ODA) and the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), Local Roots' founders' vision of constructing and operating value-added commercial kitchens became a reality in 2012. Over the 10 years since, these kitchens have become a vital resource to the community by providing local food entrepreneurs with access to a fully-equipped and licensed commercial kitchen.

THE IMPACT OF SHARED-USE KITCHENS

Newfound commercial kitchen access was transformative for local farmers and chefs. While the cost of building and maintaining a commercial kitchen can be too much for one producer to afford, this burden was shared through the cooperative entity, making it a truly viable incubation space. Today, producers also find tremendous value in access to a peer network - sharing best practices and collaborating to support each other's businesses.

OUR SHARED-USE COMMERCIAL KITCHEN

Our commercial kitchen offers a unique resource to the Wooster community. It serves as a rental space for local chefs and small businesses to make, package and sell their products in a low cost environment that supports small business sustainability. The commercial kitchen sees renters anywhere from weekly, to monthly, or even seasonally. The kitchen also allows Local Roots to package, freeze, or create to-go meals with local produce we get in the warmer months. This helps us provide local produce ready to use in the winter and cut down on waste of anything that may be in excess or have slight imperfections.

OUR DAILY LUNCH CAFÉ KITCHEN

Our Café Kitchen gives local chefs an opportunity to serve food with customers on a daily lunch rotation. Each day, a different chef shares their unique menu for lunch. Additionally our Local Roots kitchen staff serves breakfast sandwiches Monday-Saturday. All café dishes are made from scratch in our kitchen and include some international flavors you can't find elsewhere in Wooster! Many of our café chefs also operate off-site catering businesses, and the lunch cafe offers them a space to promote their businesses outside of Local Roots.



Top Left: Josh Sheets (ODS Hot Sauce) and Bottom Right: David Kelly (Fox Hollow Garden Hummus)

24
KITCHEN
RENTERS

Our commercial kitchen project began with a small handful of renters and now hosts 24 small businesses.



Asinathi Day (Tanzanian Cuisine)



Katie Balas (Pierogi People)



Femi Olayinka (Lasua Nigerian Cuisine)



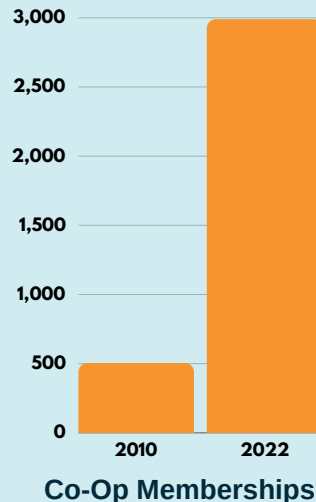
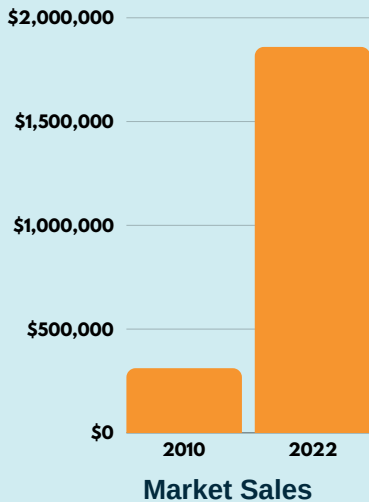
James Cary (Wootown Bagels)



MARKET SUCCESS TAKEAWAYS

Looking back on 14 years of history at Local Roots, it is clear that any market success is linked to the dedicated engagement and support provided by small, local producers. This, in kind, can be linked back to Local Roots' unique approach to how it engages with small and family-owned businesses. A few highlights of our key learnings are as follows:

- **Be helpful:** Producers often need staff's help with tasks like labeling, regulatory requirements, delivery systems, and product promotion. These small efforts can help producers in big and meaningful ways!
- **Prioritize a strong producer-consumer connection:** We make time and space for producers to engage with customers either through events or out on the market floor. This helps producers build strong customer relations, which in turn help build community.
- **Make it a great place to sell:** Local Roots strategically offers producers a minimal, low risk "cost-to-serve" model. This helps build a strong and stable network of producers, which ultimately leads to better, more reliable products and increased customer loyalty.



TAKING PRODUCER SUPPORT TO THE NEXT LEVEL

IN 2020, WE STARTED TO ASK OURSELVES: HOW CAN WE FORMALIZE OUR EFFORTS TO SUPPORT PRODUCERS?



Local Roots began as the seed of a dream of supporting local food producers that eventually grew to a full fledged market.



Through our market's success and the addition of paid staff, we began to offer more systematic support to co-op producers' budding business ventures.



Organically, these symbiotic support systems between market and producer began to grow beyond Local Roots intended function, creating both a predicament and an opportunity. Our solution was to create a separate entity, specifically designed to formalize this support.

FOODSPHERE >>> THE ENTREPRENEURIAL CENTER AT LOCAL ROOTS



FoodSphere

FoodSphere is a 501(c)(3) non-profit conceptualized, created, and operated out of Local Roots' market. Its mission is "to cultivate economic growth and sustainability through the support of local farmers and entrepreneurs of value-added agricultural products." The commercial kitchen is one of the ways FoodSphere gives tangible support to local food and produce entrepreneurs, allowing them to maintain their business, or grow and expand beyond the commercial kitchen walls.



SMALL BUSINESS INCUBATOR

Local food businesses startups such as The Curry Pot, Oma Gourd, Umami Bites, Boo Bears and Wootown Bagels have all launched new business concepts at Local Roots, working through their commercial kitchen, and then growing beyond into new and bigger spaces.

>>> GROWING BEYOND LOCAL ROOTS' MARKET

As both Local Roots' cooperative market and the business of its producers grew in parallel over the years, Local Roots saw its staff and volunteers supporting producers in a variety of ways such as regulatory guidelines, labeling requirements, marketing, networking, accounting, and new market access/creation. With this in mind, we saw the need for a more formalized, philanthropic effort to grow the support for both new and existing local food producers. In 2020, Local Roots' board and staff engaged in a strategic planning process to answer the questions, how could we most appropriately provide the support needed by budding food entrepreneurs? In 2021, FoodSphere was born and charged with the task of meeting the demand for new and innovative food-based entrepreneurship support service initiatives.



FoodSphere Board Members (Robb Stutzman, Beth Ladrach, and Tiffany Leeper)



Adam Schwieterman (Local Roots) and Seth Feikert (Boo Bears Brew)



Renoy Barua and Tania Bayer (The Curry Pot)

BUILDING A HEALTHIER, MORE SUSTAINABLE FUTURE



20+

What began as a market supported by all volunteers has now grown to more than 20 paid staff members.

34

The number of new kitchen-related businesses Local Roots has supported during startup since 2016.

200+

According to an economic impact study completed in 2020, over 200 local jobs are sustained annually by Local Roots' market impact

17

In the last five years alone, 17 of those 34 mentioned above have launched utilizing our shared-use commercial kitchen.

CAMPAIGN FOR A NEW BUILDING TO CALL HOME

Local Roots has grown substantially since its formation in 2009. Today, an expansion of the physical infrastructure is essential to fostering continued growth. In the fall of 2022, Local Roots and FoodSphere formalized a planned partnership to purchase, renovate and expand the property at 146 W. South Street, Wooster, OH 44691. The renovation and expanded footprint will provide both organizations with a new and revitalized base of operations, dedicated to furthering our local economic impact and improving the health and wellness of our community for generations to come!

WHY THIS CAPITAL CAMPAIGN IS SO ESSENTIAL

We operate under a foundational tenet that fostering support for small and local producers will, in turn, develop a stronger, healthier community. This unique approach has guided Local Roots through the years, growing it into a unique type of market model that is cherished locally and revered regionally. Despite being financially sustainable in its current model, Local Roots' market income cannot alone fund the renovation and construction needed for a new building. To overcome this hurdle, we sought external support by launching our first-ever public fundraising campaign. This large-scale fundraising effort - including bank loans, state and federal grants, and local philanthropic gifts - will not only help to minimize long-term debt, but will also enable us to sustain our commitment to our current model of prioritizing small and local food businesses!

AFTER FUNDRAISING IS COMPLETE, THE NEW SPACE WILL FEATURE:

- An expanded market space for the cafe, grocery, and artisan items to increase inventory and sales, making more room for new and existing producers.
- An expanded shared-use commercial kitchen for value-added food producers.
- Environmentally-friendly sublet tenants: Ride On Bicycles and Boo Bears Brew.
- New and expanded dedicated office space for Local Roots and FoodSphere to provide onsite business support and consulting to new food entrepreneurs.
- More seating for community programming – or just for grabbing lunch.
- Solar power, EV charging, and energy-efficient equipment upgrades.



**ON NOVEMBER 14TH, 2023
FOODSPHERE OFFICIALLY
PURCHASED THE PROPERTY
THAT WILL BE OUR NEW HOME**

WE ARE COMMITTED!

The building purchase is finalized, architectural design is nearing completion, and construction will begin in early 2024! If you would like to gift an IRS tax-deductible donation, please visit our campaign's webpage at The Wayne County Community Foundation by scanning this QRC.





Pictured Above: Wooster's downtown Farmer's Market, setup outside Local Roots. Our Farmer's Market is hosted annually by Main Street Wooster, a local 501(c)(3) committed to enhancing our community Wooster by improving the quality of its downtown business and living environment and collaborating partner of Local Roots.

NEW BUILDING 3D CONCEPT RENDERINGS >>> FUNDRAISING PROGRESS



THANK YOU TO OUR COMMUNITY!

Remaining Funds Needed to Complete Our Target Goal:
\$2,144,087

Local Roots has truly become a beloved institution in the Wooster community. We laid down our roots in 2009 as a co-op on a mission to connect our community to the people and stories behind the food and products they consume. Over the years, we have held fast to that mission, throughout all seasons. FoodSphere has become an important part of continuing this vision. Alongside our founders, farmers, producers, chefs, staff, members, customers and local community, we have grown and thank all who have come along with us on the journey! Thank you for your support!