



# Transforming Healthy Food Access Through Community-Owned and Operated Food Systems

CLEVELAND, OHIO



**The Central Kinsman Wellness Collective, led by residents and community partners, is committed to bringing fresh, healthy food to predominantly Black neighborhoods on the east side of Cleveland.** With the loss of the area's last grocery store in 2019, residents face a greater risk of diet-linked diseases such as type 2 diabetes, heart disease, and various cancers. In response, CKWC piloted a healthy food Farm Stop with support from The BUILD Health Challenge® and is continuing to work toward a permanent, year-round Farm Stop with fresh, local produce to build community ownership, transform the area's food system, and make healthy food accessible to residents.

## COMMUNITY IMPACT



Developing a community-owned business model for a permanent, year-round Farm Stop to make fresh, healthy foods accessible for Central and Kinsman community members.



Strengthened integral partnerships with urban food growers in the Cleveland area to bolster the local food system.



Established enduring relationships among resident members and community partners through shared values, responsive decision-making, and a focus on personal leadership development and growth.

## IN PARTNERSHIP WITH



Walter Patton,  
Resident



## Restoring Healthy Food Access in Two Cleveland Neighborhoods

The Central and Kinsman neighborhoods located on the east side of Cleveland are some of the oldest neighborhoods in Ohio, full of history, generational knowledge, and a strong sense of community among residents, most of whom are Black. These unique strengths were on full display when the Central Kinsman Wellness Collective (CKWC), a passionate, dedicated group of residents and community partners, piloted its first-ever healthy food Farm Stop — a mix between a grocery store and a farmers market — to much fanfare in October 2025.

“We had people come out in droves,” LaQueta Worley, a Resident Member of CKWC, proudly shared. “It seemed like people from all over the state — not just the city, but the state of Ohio — came to our Farm Stop. It was advertised on the news, and we had great media for that. People came out to shop with us, converse with us, see us, and just have fun.”

The Central and Kinsman neighborhoods lost their last remaining grocery store in 2019. For the residents and partners in the Collective, the four-day Farm Stop realized their aspirations of bringing healthy, fresh food to more than 400 of their friends and neighbors. With its intentional and deliberate design, the pilot Farm Stop honored and centered the communities involved, including the local, urban growers who provided the fresh produce.

“[The urban growers] brought their friends, their families to come see their stuff on the shelves in our pilot Farm Stop,” Morgan Taggart, director of Food Access Raises Everyone (FARE) and a CKWC partner, said. “To me, that really illustrated how we center community relationships in this work and also how it has this kind of ripple effect. We didn’t just have one provider that dropped off all the food we needed. We were managing relationships with over 15 different vendors, but those 15 different vendors really felt a sense of pride and connection to the project.”

CKWC, organized by Environmental Health Watch (EHW), was recognized by The BUILD Health Challenge® (BUILD) for its commitment to creating a community-led initiative to address the lack of healthy food access in the Central and Kinsman neighborhoods. Members of the Collective attended national conferences to explore the Farm Stop business model and connected with regional partners to better understand local food systems.

Addressing this issue felt urgent. With limited access to healthy food, residents in the Central and Kinsman neighborhoods are at greater risk of severe long-term physical and mental health issues, including type 2 diabetes, heart disease, various cancers, malnutrition, anxiety, and depression. Morgan B. Parks, Program Manager at EHW, explained, “It’s about restoring what should be in any community — access to fresh produce and healthy food.”

The pilot Farm Stop was a critical first step toward the Collective’s ultimate goal of establishing a year-round, permanent Farm Stop cooperative, owned and operated by residents and community members. Parks emphasized the value of community ownership: “This is something that residents in the community can become a part of and help to make decisions around. It’s something that’s owned by the community. And something that [CKWC] talks about a lot is dignity, and dignity in the shopping experience.”



## The Harmful Effects of a Food Desert

**For Walter Patton, a fourth-generation Central resident, the decision to get involved in the issue of healthy food access in his neighborhood by becoming a CKWC partner was deeply personal.**

"I lost a friend that was only 33 years old from kidney failure, and it was due to the way that he ate," Patton shared. "Our structured environment, without having a grocery store, could cause health issues."

After the last local grocery store closed in 2019 without any warning, Patton said he was motivated to take action as part of the Collective. He knew most of his neighbors didn't drive, and public transportation was extremely limited. Residents were forced to purchase from nearby options instead, such as a dollar store, liquor store, or fast food restaurants, which mainly offered high-calorie, nutrient-poor foods. With about half of Central and Kinsman residents living below the federal poverty line — the median household income in the Central neighborhood is about \$10,400, the lowest in the state — larger grocery stores with healthier foods left and did not return.

"We have had a divestment of institutions, both public and private, from this community, and the grocery store is just one of them," Taggart explained. "I think about the systemic redlining, lack of investment, and pulling back of investment on very basic needs: education, food, retail, and employment. I think this community suffers at the hands of others. And to me, those are very entrenched systemic issues grounded in capitalism and racism. What this group is trying to do together is turn the tide."

EHW had previously participated in BUILD's first and second cohorts, engaging in collaborative, community-led efforts to ensure healthier homes by improving lead safety in lower-income communities in Cleveland. As healthy food access emerged as a critical issue in the Central and Kinsman neighborhoods, EHW and other partners leaned on years of groundwork and backed the resident-led Collective to create sustainable change in the local food system. The additional BUILD award helped solidify the local movement for food justice, supporting CKWC to become what it is today.

## A Responsive Community Collective, Led by Residents

Over the last three years, CKWC has successfully brought together residents, community partners, local growers, and local and state government, including the Cleveland Public Health Department and the Ohio Department of Agriculture. Collective members explained that achieving the cohesion they have now took time and effort — and they are extremely proud of how far they have come.

“I feel like the internal cohesion of the group and the capacity of the group to work together and to organize themselves around this project and to be so much more self-directed than they were at the beginning, and to really navigate the challenges of interpersonal relationships and figuring out what people are good at and where their passions lie within the group, I think has been really fantastic,” said Justine Lindemann, an associate professor at Penn State’s College of Agricultural Sciences and a CKWC partner.

It took time to get CKWC to jell, but resident members and partners said that this is a natural part of the trust- and relationship-building process. To help CKWC find its way, members identified a shared set of values to operate from and created a living governance document to support decision-making that can be adjusted as needed.

“Everything we do and have done, we couldn’t do it without each other,” Worley shared. “It’s just like we all need to be as one. We are one big happy family working together and making it happen.”



*“Everything we do  
and have done,  
we couldn’t do it  
without each other.”*

— **LAQUETA WORLEY**  
Central Kinsmen  
Wellness Collective



## Achieving Food Access Milestones

In carrying out its work, CKWC has faced challenges when it comes to the retail environment and food systems in lower-income communities. Taggart explained: “When I think about inflation, when I think about the interruptions of COVID and the supply chain, Cleveland has lost so many grocery stores, pharmacies, and even dollar stores. So our retail environment here is extremely challenging. The challenges of operating in a system that is really focused on consolidation and ‘bigger is better’, and trying to establish a community-sized market for this neighborhood is also super challenging.”

Despite these local obstacles, CKWC has made significant progress. Not only did CKWC pilot the first Farm Stop at Shiloh Baptist Church in the Central neighborhood, but it also runs a farmers market at Fresh Fest, an annual day-long festival celebrating arts and urban agriculture, promoting health and wellness, and showcasing fresh, local food.

Fresh Fest is hosted at Rid-All Farm, one of the largest and most popular urban farms in Cleveland, located in the Kinsman neighborhood. As part of Fresh Fest in 2025, the Resident Members of CKWC designed an installation called “Grandma’s Porch” — a large-scale replica of their grandmothers’ porches, complete with pictures of CKWC members and elder community gardeners, as well as rocking chairs and punch — to foster conversations about history, culture, and the connection between the Black community and food.

Patton said the core value of this project was resident leadership — which is reflected in the community-centered milestones the Collective has achieved along the way — and shows how both members and partners

in CKWC have grown their own leadership and deepened their understanding of what the Central and Kinsman neighborhoods need.

“[CKWC] has done a really fantastic job of integrating this [initiative] into the community and having this be something that is enacting change across the community, and bringing people into that process of transformational change within their community,” Lindemann reflected.

Leadership from community residents and partners has inspired local policymakers and health agency staff to re-examine what kinds of system-level changes may be possible in Cleveland. As Lindemann shared, “Even at the city and policy scale, there are city council people who are involved and aware of what we are doing. And we have folks from the Cleveland Department of Health who have been here from the beginning of this process, thinking through, ‘what does it mean to think about racism as a public health crisis and how do we actually operationalize that?’ Our project serves as a really excellent lesson or platform from which policymakers can learn.”

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— JUSTINE LINDEMANN

*Penn State College of Agricultural Sciences*

## Collaborating to Improve the Full Human Experience of Residents

Collective members of CKWC are working to finish their business plan to accomplish their vision of a permanent Farm Stop, and they aim to form their cooperative business model for residents to own and operate it year-round.

As they look to the future, partners see the Farm Stop as so much more than just a place for Central and Kinsman residents to access healthy, fresh food and ultimately lead healthier lives.

"It's not just about getting food in a place," Taggart said. "This really is about history, it's about culture, it's about belonging, it's about connection. I think that by virtue of being a collaboration of this diverse group of partners, it is not just a place to get food, it is a full human experience."



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**— MORGAN TAGGART**  
Food Access Raises Everyone



**The BUILD Health Challenge® (BUILD) invests in multi-sector, community-centered partnerships that transform systems and elevate community power to advance health and racial justice.**

Through learning, connecting, and amplifying these local initiatives, BUILD champions the national movement for health equity and moves attention, resources, and action upstream to support vital community conditions for health and well-being across the United States.

## The BUILD Model for Transforming Community Health



### **Bold**

Drive fundamental shifts in policy and sustainability, creating systems-level changes through a lens of justice, equity, diversity, and inclusivity.



### **Upstream**

Focus on the social, environmental, and economic factors that have the greatest influence on the health of a community, rather than on access or care delivery.



### **Integrated**

Align the practices and perspectives of cross-sector partners under a shared vision, establishing new roles while continuing to draw upon the strengths of each partner.



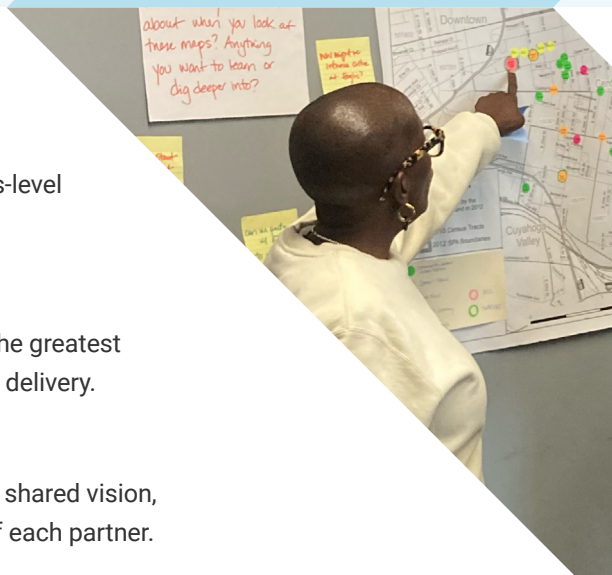
### **Local**

Prioritize the diverse lived experiences, voices, and leadership of neighborhood residents and community members throughout all stages of planning, implementation, and evaluation.



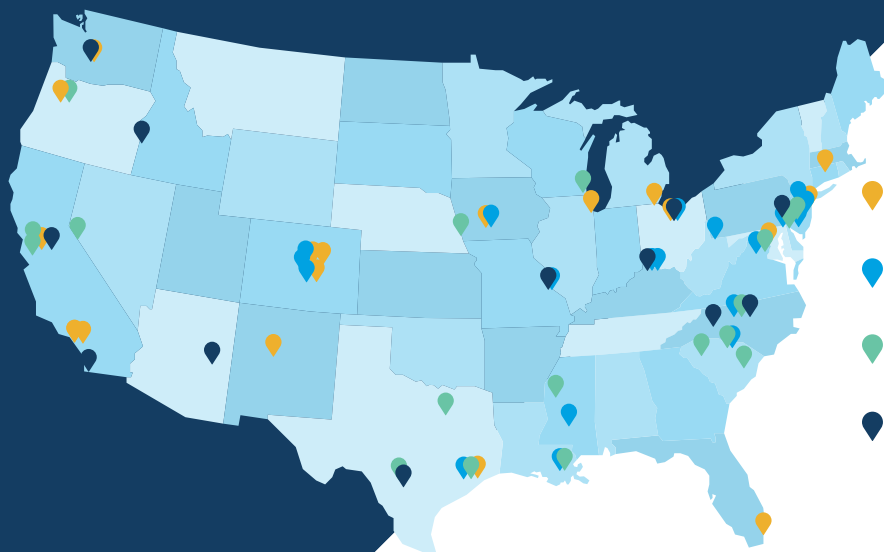
### **Data-Driven**

Use varied forms of data from both clinical and community sources as tools to identify key needs, measure meaningful change, and facilitate transparency amongst stakeholders in order to generate actionable insights.



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**BUILD 1.0**  
2015-2017

**BUILD 2.0**  
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**BUILD 3.0**  
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