

Greenbrier Valley Grown Feeding Thousands

On a cold winter morning, Alex Ogrinz from Sprouting Farms, located in Talcott, pulls up to the old Greenville Elementary School in Monroe County. He's dropping off lettuce to the Greenville Farm Kitchen.

"It kind of all just happened at once," said Ogrinz. "We all just realized we were doing a lot of the same things."

The Greenville Farm Kitchen and Sprouting Farms are two of the four small businesses that make up Greenbrier Valley Grown (GVG). The other two are Alderson Community Food Hub and Monroe Farm Market Cooperative.

"Our region consists of Pocahontas, Greenbrier, Monroe and Summers Counties," said GVG Logistics Manager Douglas Koenig.

Koenig's job is to coordinate the different businesses inside GVG. The main objective is to give farmers a place to sell their produce and put fresh food in stores and on dinner tables.

"Every week we have a CSA (Community Supported Agriculture), an online farm market, and our wholesale distribution," said Koenig. "Every week farmers are getting orders."

The farmers bring their food to the Greenville Farm Kitchen or to distri-

bution hubs GVG has set up.

"This area of West Virginia is pretty rural," said Koenig. "We don't want our farmers driving all over the place to drop off their food. Instead, we have certain places they can drop it off and we drive it here for them."

GVG received grants to turn part of the old Greenville Elementary School into their farm kitchen. It's a Food and Drug Administration (FDA) compliment facility, meaning the kitchen can process, wash, cut and bag all the food that comes their way. The kitchen is the first of its kind in West Virginia.

"There are other farm kitchens in the state, but they aren't licensed by the FDA," said Kitchen Manager Brooke Williams as she showed two new employees how to chop lettuce.

GVG has food in stores and restaurants as far south as Blacksburg, Virginia and all the way to Huntington.



Another initiative GVG has started is getting fresh food in schools. Right now, they provide food to Greenbrier and Monroe Counties and some schools in Summers County.

“We’ve had good feedback about the food coming from the kitchen,” Williams said. “It takes a lot of stress off the school cooks because when our food leaves this kitchen, it’s ready to eat. All the cooks have to do is set it out.”

Both Koenig and Williams believe farming is going to lead to a brighter future in West Virginia, and farm kitchens, like the one in Greenville, are going to lead the way.

“If farmers know they have someone already willing to buy their crops, that takes a huge burden off them. Hopefully that can get more people out farming,” Koenig said.

Next up for GVG is supplying food for senior apartments being built next door to the farm kitchen.

“We’re growing fast. We’re also starting to get interest from other people around the state who want to start a similar business,” said Williams. “Farming is coming back.”

