

# Yes! We Rise Podcast EP 52 Building an Inclusive Future for Farmers and Workers in Appalachia with Hannah G

## Transcript

### **Christine Gyovai 00:34**

Welcome to the We RISE Podcast, where we are building collective resilience. I'm your host Christine Gyovai, business owner, wife, mother of 2, paddle boarder, and I love working with communities across the nation. Join me as I share stories and strategies to inspire action to build resilience and community transformation. From the Navajo Nation to the Mountains of Appalachian. Incredible work is being done by community members and leaders. I'm excited to share more on the podcast today. Welcome.

### **Christine Gyovai 01:15**

Welcome back to the Yes We Rise Podcast All. So glad that you're here I'm excited to share this conversation with Hannah G with you. Hannah is the workforce development program manager and farmer pride coalition coordinator at Appalachian Sustainable Development which is based in Southwest Virginia and serves central Appalachia. Hannah is an eastern Kentucky native with personal roots in Kentucky, Virginia and West Virginia and has a deep passion for the future of the region. Hannah completed her bachelor's in environmental studies at Center College and her masters of public affairs in sustainable development at Indiana University in 2021.

### **Christine Gyovai 01:20**

Hannah is a delight to talk to and I can't wait for you to hear about the tremendous work that Hannah's doing across the region. Welcome back off the We Rise podcast. Hope all of you are well today. I am delighted to have Hannah G joining me today. Hannah, when you introduce yourself, so folks knew who I have the delight of speaking to today.

### **Hannah G 01:43**

Hi, my name is Hannah G. I use She/Her pronouns. I work at Appalachian's Sustainable Development, Senator Inn East Tennessee in Southwest Virginia with their workforce development program groundwork.

### **Christine Gyovai 01:56**

Tell us a little bit about what you do at Appalachian Sustainable Development, and then would love to you to tell us more about your story. So, feel free to start with your story or what you're up to now. How'd you get to, you know, be doing what you're up to today? Yeah.

## **Hannah G 02:28**

I think maybe it might be best to start at the beginning.

I'm from eastern Kentucky originally from London, Kentucky.

More specifically, and we've got family kind of all over the eastern part of the state.

So the Appalachian Mountain part of Kentucky, if you're not familiar with Kentucky.

I have family who, you know, his proper history, I guess, of teachers, and then my dad was a public defender, so a lot of work centered on the realities of Eastern Kentucky, which is an area that has experienced a lot of intergenerational and historical poverty as a result.

## **Hannah G 03:02**

The coal mining industry coming in and leaving, a lot of environmental devastation in the region that I didn't realize I don't think had impacted me to the scope that it had until I went to college.

Mhmm.

My first semester of college I went to Center College in Danville, so it's a little school in the central Kentucky, and I went there in my very first semester I went with the expectation of being a lawyer at the end of 4 years.

I wanted to go to law school.

That was really the goal, major in political science, maybe take some classes in environmental studies because seem interesting.

## **Hannah G 03:29**

But I took environmental studies my first semester.

I had an extra really extraordinary experience and an extraordinary professor at the time who helped me realize that the parts of environmental studies that were really impactful to me that I hadn't realized were considered parts of environmental studies because always emphasized as environmental science.

Mhmm.

We're really the stories of people.

So when I think of home and when I think of Eastern Kentucky and I think about the story of eastern Kentucky.

## **Hannah G 04:08**

It's so much of identity tied back to coal and identity tied back to the landscape in the mountains.

But it's all centered in the people of Eastern, Kentucky, which is really just the cornerstone of my own identity, you know, and my family's identity I think about my mother's history and everyone emailing me.

When I think about all of that happening and all the pieces of things that make me, myself, and have led to this story, I realized really in that very first class that that's what I wanted to be doing.

I wanted to be doing work for and in Appalachia -- Mhmm.

-- which was homed to me and which had given me so much.

## **Hannah G 04:28**

Mhmm.

And I wanted to be able to come back and really make a meaningful impact So I knew that I needed more information.

I needed to know what I was doing.

There's a lot of harm that's been done in Appalachia for folks trying to change things without having. A lot of strong backing and knowing what's going on or having external influences that may not have the best interest of the region.

## **Hannah G 04:48**

In mind.

So I went to school change my major to environmental studies fully.

New pretty quickly I didn't want to do law school, then I wanted to do something else.

I couldn't really place what that was if of time.

And kind of move through, did a lot of work environmental policy studies, did a lot of the science side, which was Interesting?

### **Hannah G 05:09**

It's never been my strong suit, but I learned to love it.

Really got a lot of development and a lot of interest in talking about transportation systems, housing systems, all the things that are in crisis in a lot of parts of Appalachian.

Yeah.

Where are the things that interested me, and I don't think that's a coincidence at all.

You know, when you see the social problems, it becomes an awareness.

### **Hannah G 05:48**

Got a pretty robust as well, you know, social justice involvement.

Through the Bonner scholars program, which is an income based scholarship program that the college offers.

It started actually at Barrieta College also in New Jersey, to provide opportunities for students to go to school, but the curriculum through Bonner is very centered on social justice on, you know, development personal and professional development for people so that you're able to make a better, more effective, and more equitable impact in the work that you do.

So I was finishing school center.

We had done kind of a culinary project my senior year of a whole year of events related to Eastern Kentucky and Appalachian.

### **Hannah G 06:01**

That I was facilitating.

So we'd had speakers come in.

We had done a series of workshops.

The really fantastic team that I was able to work with and done.

So much investment back into where I was from.

### **Hannah G 06:09**

And I knew also where I wanted to go.

Right?

I wanted to go back.

The question about Appalachian always is where are the jobs.

Right?

### **Hannah G 06:34**

And I I couldn't really answer that question.

At the time, in East Kentucky, there's a lot of economic devastation.

So it's difficult to imagine a future in a place where 1 is hardly ever talked about by people who are discussing it.

So my thought at the end was I feel like I still need something more.

So I applied and actually was accepted to teach for America for their apalachic core.

### **Hannah G 07:17**

And almost became a teacher for a couple of years.

My mother was actually a teacher for more than 30 years in Eastern, Kentucky.

Than a principal as well, and had done a ton of great work.

But it didn't feel like necessarily the right fit and I really wanted to center myself in the sustainability world because that's where I moved to.

Talking about not only impact of coal mining, but of global climate change and everything else that was really coming to a head, you know, all the conversations at that time, and then also looking at

how socially, a lot of the blame for things like climate change received on, appalachia, and the coal industry and coal mining, and where I mean, there's total a lot of validity in that.

### **Hannah G 07:45**

You know, coal is devastating on the environment the burning of coal.

But at the same time, on the back end of that, are huge numbers of people, you know, the entire region, family members, and friends, and my whole community who were left behind, you know, talking about transition.

So it's like, yes, we're moving away from coal, but we're not investing back in Appalachia.

Mhmm.

So being able to consider that really complicated dichotomy, I think, all this going.

### **Hannah G 08:16**

So I'm I've decided to go to graduate school, and I went to Indiana University, their school of public, and environmental studies and pursued a degree action public administration with an emphasis on sustainable development and sustainable finance.

I started there in 20 19.

Really enjoyed the class.

It gave me a really formal structure for being able to do a lot of things looking at you know, investments in particular, what does a strong investment look like?

How do you build a project to make it appealing to folks?

### **Hannah G 08:42**

Do you want to invest in?

And not only money, but you know, their time, their interest, and their capital.

And looking at eastern Kentucky, when you've had a lot of folks come in and then leave, and take advantage of the people who were there or their profit farming in a lot of different ways.

Mhmm.

And then pull out without leaving, you know, that investment behind, that can be a hard sell, and it's an important 1 to acknowledge that kind of historical legacy and easter contract.

### **Hannah G 09:10**

But graduate school gave me a lot of opportunity to really dive deep into my interests, in eastern Kentucky, talking about food systems in particular, every class I checked my last semester of graduate school, which was fully online because of the pandemic.

Oh, yeah.

It was about food systems.

Mhmm.

So that was wild, learn a lot about food policy, and how we get to where we are, and the sort of lack of infrastructure that exists for communities.

### **Hannah G 09:29**

Mhmm.

And for Eastern Kentucky and the rest of Appalachian, which are hyper rural communities -- Mhmm. -- in a lot of ways, that's just exacerbated every problem.

You know, that comes through and it's like, this is a broken piece of the food system.

And then you get to, you know, certain urban areas and then certain very rural areas, and it's just extreme.

Because of the problem that starts small just continues to grow with a lack of access in every way.

Mhmm.

So that was No.

I knew then, I wanted to wanted to come home.

I was ready to be working Appalachian.

### **Hannah G 10:17**

It was the middle of the pandemic, and I didn't really know the best way to approach it. And so I spent some time kind of job searching and that wasn't getting me a ton of places, because I didn't really know where to look.

And I didn't really know what organizations to work with because, again, like I've mentioned earlier, that's something you really do have to be careful with, I think a lot of times.

So I was looking at Americorp, and that's actually how I found where I am currently.

I started a Vista position with Appalachian and Sustainable Development as their sustainability and equity vista for the workforce development program.

### **Hannah G 10:52**

So groundwork is what I'm doing now.

It's a long winded road, but groundwork is the workforce development program for Appalachia and sustainable development.

And what groundwork does is provide paid on the job skills training for people with barriers to employment.

And so what that means is that folks who are coming through the program are folks who are experiencing any manner of things.

And that can be 1 of our most common, for example, is past criminal justice involvement, substance use disorder recovery, we've had folks who haven't worked you know, in 40 years, they've been out of the workforce or folks who've never had a job before at all.

### **Hannah G 11:14**

Mhmm.

So we've got the range of stuff.

We have mental health barriers.

We have this disability barriers, whatever those look like for folks who are coming to the program and might be keeping them from pursuing employment.

Provide paid skills training for, and a pretty robust professional development curriculum to get them back into the workforce in whatever direction they want to be headed.

### **Hannah G 11:45**

You know, if that's education, if that's future work, if that's family relationships, whatever they're looking for, we try to help provide support for that in the program.

Mhmm.

So I started ASD as A Vista worked for a year in that role.

I'm looking at our sustainability programming, looking at our diversity equity and inclusion programming, doing a lot of build up there, and then transition into a full time position at the end of my Vista term, doing training and professional development support, for trainees who were in the program.

So I met a lot with the trainees individually.

### **Hannah G 12:05**

We're able to talk through, you know, what are your goals?

Where you wanna be?

At the end of this program, where do you wanna be in 5 years?

You know?

And sometimes, far folks, and for in reality, a lot of people across Appalachian who are facing These kind of intergenerational barriers are really extreme barriers to not only employment, but other pursuits.

### **Hannah G 12:22**

That's not a question folks are asked a lot of this 1.

Yeah.

And that was that was the realization I had a long time ago with, you know, the children at my mom's school when she was teaching.

You know, it's Not that they didn't think college was important, it's that it wasn't ever considered an option.

Mhmm.

### **Hannah G 12:46**

You know?

And same thing with work or same thing with jobs, it's Again, it's hard to imagine a future when no 1 really talks about having 1 or what 1 could be.

Yeah.

So that's that was what I did all last year, and then now in January, my amazing supervisor announced her retirement, So I applied for her position and was hired -- Mhmm.

-- to be the program manager.

### **Hannah G 12:58**

Yeah.

So I'm I'm now our manager of our groundwork program.

So this is our my first season in -- Mhmm.

-- this kind of role, and I am just ecstatic.

We actually onboard folks in a couple of weeks.

For our summer cohorts in our gardens and in our warehouse.

In addition to that, My other role at ASD is really involved in our diversity of being inclusion initiatives, helping with that committee, but also was able to start with a lot of fantastic support from the organization and from community members, our former pride coalition.

So that is a coalition for LGBTQ plus farmers, growers, gardeners, agroforesters, whoever might be involved in ag in the Appalachian region.

### **Hannah G 13:52**

We didn't have really a great support network for our farmers to identify as LGBTQ plus.

Mhmm.

And for myself, that's every community that I'm a part of, you know, is part of the LGBTQ plus community, part of the app watching community, part of the agriculture community.

That was a really vital thing for me.

So that's actually we launched on January 1 of this year.

### **Hannah G 13:55**

So I'm the coordinator for that coalition.

That's awesome.

### **Christine Gyovai 14:04**

That's awesome.

And is that particular program here across different organizations?

Or how do folks learn more about that program and get involved?

I love that you you know, there wasn't a place for people to gather.

You've created 1.

Now how do they get involved?

### **Hannah G 14:37**

That's a great question.

Thanks for asking.

So it's house under ASD as 1 of our offerings, and what we do is really try to link in folks with all of our programming, and then all of our support organizations that we have connections with across the region.

So we have an active website, and then it's all present on our ASD social media, which is at AS develop everywhere.

And I'll share as well the link to the website so the folks can see upcoming events because we'd love to have folks out.

**Christine Gyovai 14:46**

Yeah.

I love that.

Love it.

That's happening and you're 2 months in and that's so cool.

So I want to go so first of all, thank you for sharing your story.

**Christine Gyovai 15:21**

The grounding, the awareness, the change, you talked a couple times about something that is just so, I think, essential about imagining a future.

And you talked about in Eastern Kentucky that didn't necessarily happen a lot.

You know?

People talk about jobs but, you know, being able to envision what's there as you've already said, Hannah, is really a key part and being able to envision your place in it.

And in my work with communities often it's needing to have that place to come together, that feels safe, that feels inclusive, that feels also open and generative, and that new folks can come to the table.

**Christine Gyovai 15:55**

That space is really an essential place for people to envision what their future looks like, build those connections, and then start to move towards possibility.

So you talked about it in your own life and then you also talked about it with the community members that you're working with the ground works program.

Can you talk a little bit about what what in your experience, Hannah?

What does it allow that envisioning to happen?

Where do people, you know, there's kind of a when people especially are struggling to put food on the table, it's hard to then think about what do I want the future of my community to look like in 20 years.

**Christine Gyovai 16:08**

Or in 50 years.

What does that process look like in your experience in your own life or in community members you work with?

To imagine that future.

**Hannah G 17:04**

So thinking about what makes the most impact from the groundwork program and I think maybe non framing, but I think it's really the place to start, is not necessarily the hard skills development that we do, because we do train folks to, you know, how to garden and grade produce, they might, you know, graduate with different certifications and different things.

And all of that is phenomenal and helps them, you know, be employable.

But I think the biggest thing that it does is what our staff is able to do by working directly with folks 1 on 1, is provide information on what the process can look like for building a future.

I think there's such a gap in knowledge because it's not emphasized.

If you, you know, if you are in the public education system from a very young age in art, doing exceptionally well, you know, or if someone if you've been identified as probably not going to college, you know, if that's however that looks and it looks different in every state and every school system.

**Hannah G 17:18**

Then a lot of the times, the emphasis becomes, okay, you need to graduate high school. And that seems like the end of the line -- For learning.

Mhmm.

-- and so then that becomes the model -- Mhmm.

-- for learning that folks have.

### **Hannah G 17:36**

It's not you know, when you're 18, you're done.

And that's that's the future.

Right?

After that, you know, it might look like a job or it might look like something else.

So being able to talk through process and being able to say, here's what someone's always wanted to do, and being able to build rapport to get to the answer to that question.

### **Hannah G 17:58**

You know, and for a lot of our folks, it's gardening.

They want to be able to grow their own food, or they want to be self sufficient, or they might be interested in market gardening, you're farming.

And being able to figure that out and then being able to say, okay.

Here are concrete steps that need to happen.

You know, in order for this to be successful, and that might look like higher education, or that might look like finishing, you know, a GED.

### **Hannah G 18:32**

Where that might look like being enrolled in you know, we had some folks who did a therapeutic quarter culture course online because that's really what they're interested in.

And giving people a foundation to stand on, a support system to come back to, and the language around what they need in order to succeed.

And for everything, for everybody, that's such a huge disparity between folks who know that already, Right?

You come in because maybe your parents have experienced or you've got an older sibling.

And then the folks who aren't as aware of those things from the start.

### **Christine Gyovai 18:43**

So it sounds like the relationship is also kind of a core element of it within the groundwork program.

It sounds like it's that 1 on 1 relationship building.

That is taking place?

### **Hannah G 18:57**

Mhmm.

Yeah.

So all of our trainees have a supervisor, so we have trainees are folks in groups of 3 to 4, sometimes 5 with a direct supervisor that's based on their site.

Look patients.

So -- Mhmm.

### **Hannah G 19:20**

-- for example, we have a guardian in Avenue, Virginia.

And we have a site supervisor there and currently 3 people enrolled in that program.

So they work directly 4 days a week with their site supervisor, they're on-site.

And then 1 day a week, they also work with our personal and professional development manager.

To really work through all of those kind of questions and maybe that's helping folks get enrolled in school or whatever that looks like.

### **Hannah G 19:41**



And that was my position last year.

Mhmm.

So it was a real honor, I think, and privilege.

And honestly, a great time to get to work with folks regularly 1 on 1 and get to know the people in our program and their visions and hopes for themselves in the community and their families and everything else.

That they're really tied into.

### **Hannah G 19:42**

Mhmm.

### **Christine Gyovai 20:07**

So essential.

So I hear that 1 on 1 relationships.

You also it sounds like had a a sense of joy working 1 on 1 with folks and getting to know them.

And then you also talked Hannah about what it looks like to be able to just have that continued lifelong learning.

And how important that is with with not even the cultural expectation that maybe stops at age 18 or yes college or no college, but it's it's this culture of openness you almost.

### **Christine Gyovai 20:23**

It it sounded you didn't use that language, but it's that what framing things in the realm of possibility.

What do you wanna do?

How do you, you know, grow your ideas and the skills and resources around that?

So it sounds like you're creating opportunity.

Both within and externally.

### **Christine Gyovai 20:45**

Can you talk a little bit about where you see that framing of possibility, either with farm or pride or with, you know, folks you're working with, what is your vision more for the region, Hannah, in terms of how to bring that realm of possibility or imagine if you What are you?

Where are you hoping the region's gonna go?

### **Hannah G 20:53**

That's a big question, but kind of along a similar trajectory.

Yeah.

Oh, I love that question.

Thinking about the future of Appalachian is is 1 of my favorite things.

I'm gonna say Mhmm.

### **Hannah G 21:29**

So that's lovely.

But I think 1 of the big things for me is thinking about the celebration of all the beauty that has existed in Appalachian in the past -- Mhmm.

-- that is often not talked about I mean, even I've been talking about it and framing it, like, there's a lot of damage that's been done to Appalachian it's people.

But at the same time, there's so much joy here in the mountains, you know.

The community have prevalence towards mutual aid, I think, is a great example for both, specifically, the LGBTQ plus community.

### **Hannah G 21:45**

Mhmm.

And the Appalachian community at large.

Like I think about my grandfather grew a garden for years, and we fed tons of people out of that garden.

But he had the land and a little bit of time to do it.  
And it was able to make such a difference so that folks, you know, could have access to fresh food or food.

### **Hannah G 22:18**

You know?

And just be able to engage with that and be able to build community and to meet people's needs in a place that didn't have a lot of external support.

So I think that When places like that exist, in Appalachian, I think is a good example, when there's a lack of support externally or otherwise, that's when the community has really come together.

There's an idea of family and a flat show you you have your family that you're related to, and I've got a large 1.

But you also have your family, which is your community.

### **Hannah G 22:42**

You know, that you're able to build.

That's an idea, I think, really prevalent in the Appalachian LGBTQ community thinking about mutual aid in food and agriculture kind of at its roots is, when you have access to food or maybe it wasn't safe, you know, to go to certain places, you had your community.

Right?

That could keep you fed or could keep you in clothes or whatever that looked like, you know, to meet basic needs and to meet social needs.

Right?

### **Hannah G 23:20**

For folks to have that structure of support.

It's similar for groundwork, being able to provide a support structure for people that's dependable and that can be relied on when things get difficult, I think, is extremely necessary for everyone.

And that's what the future looks for me, a bright future for Appalachian is 1 that's rooted in that really ingrained value of what community can be.

Which is centered on love and centered on joy and centered on the abilities of the people here to support 1 another.

Which I'm very proud to be a part of and happy very happy exists.

### **Christine Gyovai 23:38**

Building collective resilience looks different in different places.

What stories and strategies inspire you?

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### **Christine Gyovai 24:08**

What I also hear to some degree in that, you know, you talked about that.

Your family is is the family you grew up with or or inherited in some way, but it's also your your community.

And there's kinda 2 elements of that.

And being able to feel that, and that is a felt body sense, at least in my own experience when you can really depend on that community and rely on that community.

And know when you fall because we all will inevitably fall.

### **Christine Gyovai 24:41**

There's that support system there to catch you.

And I love the way you brought that in with LGBTB QIA plus community as well as within ground work.

And then just across Appalachian.

So you talked about it's an ingrained value of love and joy, but feeling that system of support seems like would really help grow a sense of trust to be able to move out in the world and do what people wanna do, if that makes sense.

Can you talk a little bit more about the ways that you're hoping to continue to grow.

### **Christine Gyovai 24:49**

You know, there's so much joy in the mountains.

You said, what is continuing to grow?

Those values of love and joy?

And and what you're seeing in the future of Appalachian.

### **Christine Gyovai 24:50**

How how do you see the region moving towards that?

Yeah.

### **Hannah G 25:25**

That's a great question.

And I think talking in the framework that's used a lot of times, Napelachio, which is just transition, or the transition from a coal based economy in a justice centered way to the future of Appalachia.

And thinking about ASD, the approach that AST is taking, and I'm very grateful to be at ASD, and that I found the organization.

Is an agriculture centered approach because at the core of agriculture is self empowerment.

You know, and that's what that's what ASD does.

### **Hannah G 26:01**

So finding you know, those not industries is not the right word, but finding those pathways for folks.

To develop pieces of self empowerment and community empowerment.

You know, for every every tomato plant that's planted, you know, that feeds a family or that feeds a group of people.

You know, we donate a lot of our produce to the food pantry that's nearby 1 of our gardens.

But looking at that future, that future of self empowerment that's rooted in agriculture when I think of the future of Appalachia, that's what's there.

### **Hannah G 26:37**

It's that All the licensing and all the restrictions that have been placed on the region, because of the environmental loss or because of just the change that's occurred economically speaking.

Mhmm.

That those are rectified through things that emphasize self empowerment.

So that's education, that's agriculture, that's autonomy, you know, related to being able to make choices about health care and being able to make choices about family and being able to do these things for ourselves, but also ingrained in just a part of our community.

Mhmm.

### **Hannah G 26:44**

You know, there's a lot of power in being able to feed yourself and your street, I think, is a good framework for it.

### **Christine Gyovai 27:05**

Absolutely.

Absolutely.

And and it's it's so foundational in so many ways.

Yeah.

So when you think ahead about, so you're creating places of belonging through farmer pride, through your work with ground work, What are some of the things you're hoping to work on in the

next couple years, broader years to continue to grow that sense of belonging and joy throughout Appalachia?

### **Hannah G 27:25**

Well, that question.

We right now, we're exploring, you know, how do we address 1 of the biggest barriers for our folks to be involved in agriculture?

And kind of reach that stage of self actualization, you know, or self satisfaction with what they wanna do with ag.

And 1 of the big barriers is land access.

Mhmm.

### **Hannah G 28:03**

So making sure that the folks who wanna be involved in ag have the space to do it, you know.

And our meeting you know, the regenerative practices that help our environment at the same time.

So that's 1 thing is we're looking at how to expand land so that when folks graduate from the groundwork program, if they need that support for their next steps, then maybe they've got land, you know, that they can go to, and they can start gardening with our still existing support structure, you know, for the education pieces, because our program is phenomenal, and I will I will never say anything but amazing things about it.

But hard to learn to farm, you know, in a short period of time.

It takes years of learning.

### **Hannah G 28:26**

There's a constant learning curve in new things that are being developed.

And I think that's part of what most excites me about agriculture is that it is kind of the stage of constant learning.

But -- Mhmm.

-- you know, in order to do that, folks will need support.

So being able to transition and provide that space for folks on such a just a basic level, you know, have the land to grow.

### **Hannah G 28:53**

Is a big piece of what we're looking for moving forward.

Being able to emphasize education in a formal or non formal setting, is a big next step for us, you know, making sure that folks know what the options are.

You know, what do you need a degree for?

What would you want a degree for?

And what does that kind of reality look like, or maybe it's not a degree, maybe it's a certification or just a class enrollment that you might want to know in order to be more successful.

### **Hannah G 29:44**

And then for farmer pride, I think being able to expand and be more inclusive of folks from across the region so that more folks know what we're doing.

And they feel like there is a space that's accessible for members of the LGBTQ community to come and gather that there is an acknowledgement of the contribution of the LGBTQ community to agriculture in the region.

Which is not emphasized, really, but I think is very important to acknowledge and think about.

And To consider, you know, when thinking about building systems for support, how our farmers and farmer pride can support other members of the LGBTQ plus community who maybe have never considered agriculture as an option because they've never seen themselves reflected in agriculture.

### **Christine Gyovai 30:24**

So huge to be able to, you know, see the other folks.

Just like me are doing this, I can do this as well.

Yeah.

Can you talk a little bit about what that looks like to drill down into the agriculture level a little bit more, and regenerative agriculture, regenerative farming practices, land you know, we've seen in the last couple decades since there's been this real resurgence around a focus of local foods in a couple different ways and people who have gotten engaged in farming.

And then the support mechanisms aren't necessarily in place to be able to, like, sustain their bodies or to continue to earn a wage or to, you know, continue to recognize the true cost of growing food.

### **Christine Gyovai 31:04**

So that longevity in agriculture is hard for some people.

At least that's what, you know, I've seen in in my work and in in communities.

But, yes, it's such an essential thing, and it's really 1 of the most everyday relatable things that people can do to grow a more sustainable future is to grow or purchase locally grown sustainably raised food.

So what does that look like in terms of can you talk a little bit more everyday level about how your work with ASD or where the groundwork program helps?

Connect create connections for land access, and how to support people over time over the arc of growing.

### **Christine Gyovai 31:09**

And then, lastly, the regenerative places.

Tell us a little bit about what those growing practices look like.

### **Hannah G 31:31**

Yeah.

So ASD has a couple of things I think that are extremely relevant this question, because you're absolutely right.

You know, being able to do something sustainably is the only way to do it.

You know, having someone being able to farm for 5 years and then having to stop is not sustainable for the land or for the people.

So ASD's kind of core social enterprise is our Appalachian and Harvest Food Hub.

### **Hannah G 32:07**

And the way it works is we have farmers from across the region who bring their produce to Appalachian harvest, and then we're able to store and ship and sell it at higher prices.

So for a basic model, if you've got 1 farmer who can grow 20 boxes of squash, that's not enough to sell to a place like food city or -- Mhmm.

-- Walmart, you know, for sale or retail sale.

But if you've got 30 farmers, We've each got 20 boxes of squash.

You can aggregate that produce and sell it wholesale retail price, which is a much higher value, right, than you would get selling it like a farmer's market or something else.

### **Hannah G 32:20**

And allows for agriculture to be an actual career.

You know?

So if you're able to get the right price for your produce, it allows you to stay in business.

Right?

And make enough of a profit to sustain yourself and your farm -- Mhmm.

### **Hannah G 32:53**

-- not in your enterprise.

So that's what our Apleasure harvest food hub does.

Is it centers the family farm, and centers agriculture in Appalachian by providing a mechanism for our farmers to be able to support themselves, sustainably, through our purchase of produce.

So that's kind of the big thing, and then ASD also operates what's called our producer pathway, so that identifies the education levels for agriculture producers and agroforestry producers from beginning all the way to mentor level.

So if you're and you can identify yourself along the pathway.

### **Hannah G 33:17**

We have a couple mechanisms for that on our website.

So if you're just gonna start in farming or you're even just considering growing your garden for the first time.

You might be at that very beginning level.

If you've been at it for a couple of years and you're thinking, okay.

You know, maybe I've done tomatoes are pumpkin farming, I wanna do no till or other, you know, conservation practices, then you might be an intermediate farmer, and then we've got identified resources for that stage as well.

### **Hannah G 33:48**

If you've been doing this for 30 years, you've expanded.

You've got, you know, livestock for small ruminants and plants, and you're wanting to really be able to support the agro community.

You might then be a mentor, and you could be a mentor on our farmer and ranch for mentoring program you could have there's still resources, right, that you're gonna need as an experienced farmer, so we have access to those for folks as well.

But building in that framework of the producer pathway really provides support for folks at all stages of agriculture.

And groundwork is the same.

### **Hannah G 34:23**

When we have folks who come in, who maybe they have gotten before, and this is what they want to do, yeah, they might start at an intermediate level on our producer pathway, but for a lot of our folks in groundwork, they start at that beginner level.

The producer pathway.

And our goal is really to get them to that intermediate stage, so then provide the resources they need at that stage to keep moving forward.

And that includes the pieces like land access that we were talking about, which press, if we don't have land, it might mean identifying partners who do.

You know, we have folks in Abingdon who might want to grow a garden, or maybe there's someone in Duffield who needs someone on their herb farm.

### **Hannah G 34:49**

Or people who need agroforestry support, who might have, you know, limited physical ability due to age or other related things.

And then we're working right now.

This is kind of our third framework for diversity equity and inclusion.

Building in frameworks for addressing what limitations might exist for people to engage in agriculture.

So what I just mentioned, you know, talking about age limited mobility, There's a lot of an aging population in Appalachian.

### **Hannah G 35:12**

So being able to provide support for those folks who might be aging being able to provide support for folks who might have physical disabilities because the physical disability rate in Appalachian is almost, you know, 3 or 4 times the national average depending on where you are.

So being able to provide direct support for those folks through groundwork, along our producer pathway, and then in their own enterprises.

## **Christine Gyovai 35:33**

So it sounds this idea of a pathway as an arc, meeting people where they are, but also knowing where they wanna go.

And then having the resources in place to really you know, help grow both the food and people in in the ways.

And you talked about 5 years is not sustainable.

Totally hear that.

So that's a way to help grow the person as a producer.

## **Christine Gyovai 35:43**

How about the land?

Talk a little bit about what those regenerative practices are on the land and help how you help people engage with those if that's something they wanna do.

## **Hannah G 36:12**

Thinking about regenerative practices and how we build that in, it comes in at a couple of stages.

So for groundwork, our groundwork gardens, that for us can also be a testing site for some of those practices.

1 of our supervisors, for example, is exploring the concept of circular buffer strips as a natural pesticide, control as a natural water buffer, And what that is is planting native pollinator vegetation in between your rows of regular vegetables.

Mhmm.

And so what that allows for is native plant growth.

## **Hannah G 36:44**

It allows for the soil.

To get new to fix nutrients back into it that's vital for plant growth, and it allows for native pollination, it allows for supportive native pollinators, and it provides support for the plants themselves in that it reduces pests among other things and controls water.

As we move, you know, through the consequences of global climate change, flood control in Aqualatch is going to be a significant issue.

Yeah.

So the steps that we can take to protect farmers against the damage from flood control.

## **Hannah G 37:16**

It's huge, but we're able to use those as a kind of testing and demonstration site And then I think, honestly, some of the best models of work that we've gotten are from our farmers who are part of our network.

You know, when we're looking at a hundred acre, no till pumpkin farm, that someone has done.

You know, outside of our organization, we're able then to take people there on our field school or our business intensive or the learning programs we offer, and show them what that can look like.

Here's how you can match production in a place that does no till.

And no till is means you don't till the land.

## **Hannah G 37:52**

It's less damaging to the soil.

But it takes a lot of practice to do it, and not everything grows well in a no till system full disclosure, but It can be really beneficial for the environment to do no till systems.

But what we do then is we partner with the farmers who are doing it best, you know, who have those grown practices that are regenerative for land and soil and people.

And we showcase those, you know, with our support for our other farmers and our network.

And then we help them identify maybe potential funding sources or potential partners or we pair them up with through our farm and ranch of entering so that they are able to learn what those practices can look like on their own land.

## **Christine Gyovai 38:25**

I love that connection point with the mentoring as well, continuing to find sources of support in an ongoing way.

That's awesome.

Before we move into some questions more about joy in your own life, Hannah.

I did wanna ask you, you know, you talked about diversity equity and inclusion and your own work you know, initially as a sustainability and equity vista position with ASP.

Can you talk a little bit about how you're working to grow equity with folks you're working with, diversity equity inclusion within the organization of Appalachian and Sustainable Development or broadly in the region.

## **Christine Gyovai 38:37**

Can you talk a little bit about what your hopes are there?

You know, and and what you feel like needs to happen to grow equity in a in a way that's really gonna be lasting, knowing it's hard work.

## **Hannah G 39:03**

So at ASD, the chair of our equity committee, our diversity equity inclusion committee, and we host a monthly meeting, or it's really a facilitated conversation that's based on self learning.

And I don't know there's no way for me to say that that's the most effective model for equity.

Vinyl means an equity expert.

You know, my background for equity work is a lot in the LGBTQ plus community and in the disabled community.

So being able to work from those mindsets.

## **Hannah G 39:50**

But being able to draw to the forefront, the education piece, the importance of self education, that for marginalized groups, you know, in Appalachian and Beyond Appalachian.

For a long time, the equity burden has been placed on people who identifies members of those marginalized groups to educate folks who are not.

And so for me, my goal is always for our organization and for the region, to emphasize important so that self education is.

And then be able to provide resources to do it.

You know, making sure that we're you know, setting aside funding for equity educators, making sure that we're, you know, doing readings, that we're doing trainings that are involved that we're communicating the importance of these pieces and all of the work that we do.

## **Hannah G 40:30**

And then have had some really phenomenal support at the organizational level to build equity programming and practice into the grant applications that we write, for example, or to build those pieces into our programming.

You know, so when talking about farmer pride, if someone comes in and does our producer pathway tool, for example, farmer pride is identified as a research set every level of that pathway.

Mhmm.

So if you're, you know, if you're an l to b to q plus person who's just maybe considering looking at herb gardening, you know, that's still shared with you as a resource.

If you're a person who's been doing this for 45 years, you know, and you're chicken farming, that's shared with you as a resource because that's still able to anchor some of that support.

## **Hannah G 41:11**

Mhmm.

And then looking, you know, to really provide a basis where people can come and have a conversation I like to use the term learning spaces because I feel like I mean, a lot of folks use safe space, and I feel like That's difficult?



Because you can't guarantee for the folks who have been marginalized in some capacity that a space is ever going to be safe.

But being able to present it as a learning space so that folks who may have less experience and folks who may have a lot of experience with the topic are able to come and engage, and everyone's able to learn something.

Whether it's about where other folks are at or it's about to learn something about the topic itself, I think is a really vital piece of knowledge.

### **Hannah G 41:38**

Yeah.

Absolutely.

And I also heard you say earlier something, you know, so essential of not placing additional burden on people who identify as being from marginalized communities to, you know, educate others.

But really, you know, creating a greater sense of norming that people need to take the initiative to learn, you know, talked about self learning and learning spaces.

And also, you know, 1 of my mentors talks about brave space too.

### **Christine Gyovai 41:54**

Those brave learning spaces.

So safe space, absolutely.

You can't guarantee a safe space for other people, but we can create spaces where you know, there are agreements in place where people can show up to bring their whole selves and it and be brave together and learn together.

### **Christine Gyovai 42:02**

So, yeah, so important.

So to get ready to wrap up, Hannah, I wanna bring it back to you and your your own life for some of our quick roller questions.

You've talked a little bit about this, but tell us, tell us what brings you joy.

### **Hannah G 42:14**

Honestly, I think this is This place in my life is definitely the happiest place I've been.

A really long time.

I'm back home.

Mhmm.

### **Hannah G 42:28**

So I'm not not an eastern Kentucky.

I actually live in Tennessee.

But I'm in Appalachian, right, being able to do really meaningful work.

Here.

I'm able to, you know, I have my family that I love dearly and bring me love support.

### **Hannah G 42:52**

I have some phenomenal friends.

I have my community, I've got my LGBTQ plus community, for example, which really am able to engage with on a really deep level here, which has been phenomenal.

Mean, the little things that bring me joy are like being out in our garden and seeing what that's gonna look like, you know, now in the spring when Nothing looks particularly joyful.

It looks like a lot of dirt.

You know?

### **Hannah G 43:24**

And looking at the end of the fall when we're doing harvest, you know, and we've got a field of flowers, and we've got, you know, 6 months of hard work behind it, and you're able to see just the impact that that's made.

On a maybe a sillier level.

You know, scented candles, like, I'm here -- Mhmm.

-- for the scented candles, and I'm here for you know, the good books and the kind of just being out in the trees, going for a walk every Sunday down on the green belt by the river is just a phenomenal. Used to be because I think it's a very centering thing.

**Christine Gyovai 43:27**

Mhmm.

Yeah.

Absolutely.

Yeah.

Love that.

**Christine Gyovai 44:06**

You know, I started to ask people this because I realized in my own life the importance of focusing on what brings me joy.

You know?

It's really easy to work really hard and to work a really long time and to get really burned out.

And then I found that I didn't have the energy to bring my best self forward, and my family, and my community, and people I work with, and really realize that prioritizing the things that bring me joy just brings so much energy to other parts of my life, but also for me, in my heart, and in my body and in myself, and just realized the importance of it, but it took me a long time.

Took me on 45 now.

**Christine Gyovai 44:12**

It took me like 43 years to realize that I need to just enter that more.

**Hannah G 44:22**

Hey.

I love that question.

I think that's a really fun question.

Yeah.

And again, you know, throwing it back to what we were talking about earlier, I think that it's not a question people are asked all the time. And so just the power in asking a question, I think is really -- Yeah -- receiving.

**Christine Gyovai 44:40**

What keeps you moving forward on the days you struggle?

You know, that's something that we don't talk about a lot a culture, but I think is a really important part of that shared sense of community of of doing the work of growth together.

Individually are together.

**Christine Gyovai 44:42**

What does that look like for you?

**Hannah G 44:58**

It's a hard question.

And I think 1 of the things that this may sound like an odd answer, but my grandfather who would pass away, you know, my first year of college, but really 1 of my favorite people ever.

Mhmm.

He's a little Appalachian man.

Great guy.

## **Hannah G 45:17**

So he 1 time.

Now I remember this.

It was I was, like, 7 or 8 years old, and I won't get the full contact support.

But essentially, he said, you know, you ought to be happy hanarones.

You know, there's no good reason to be sad.

## **Hannah G 45:41**

And then I was a little angry about that -- Mhmm.

-- at the time.

And then some other things happened, and we went down and he clarified a little bit.

And he said, you know, there's no good reason to be sad, but there's lots of good reasons to be angry.

And so I think that transition and what he meant by it wasn't really a, obviously, justice context.

## **Hannah G 46:18**

I don't think, you know, he was thinking about it too deeply at the time.

But thinking about how that's centered like joy and vitality can be an internal thing.

Right?

That can come from internal, that can come from, you know, gratitude for the things that I have in my life and coming from the love that I see from other people or the love that I'm able to build for myself, you know, in my own whatever I'm doing at the time and the own things that bring me joy and the hobbies and interests that I have.

While still, I can be angry or I can be upset or I can be charged to action.

## **Hannah G 47:03**

I think is really what he meant.

Thinking about all of the things that are injustices.

And all of the things that need to be worked on.

And I think that creates a real drive, you know, in that there are things to be angry about, you know, thinking about appletching context, there's a lot, you know, that when you think about a gift, you about Mullen, as people say.

But at the same time, all the things we've talked about here, the joy that's come from the community and the sense of community that I really feel here and the amount of love that's been shared for myself, for folks in our program, for members of our enterprise, for everybody else, in our region, you know, seeing that kind of support, like, That is such an empowering thing.

## **Hannah G 47:18**

And then using that to keep your cup full, you know, having those pieces to keep yourself motivated and keep yourself joyful, and being able to take breaks when you need it, and be yourself still, and then being able to address all of that injustice.

## **Christine Gyovai 47:39**

Absolutely.

Keeping the awareness, not sugar coating things, but also keeping your cup full.

I love There's a speaker and a writer.

I love Lisa Nichols, who talks about keeping your cup full and overflowing and only giving from the saucer.

You know, it's just to me like that analogy just resonates so much.

## **Christine Gyovai 47:46**

So, yeah, thanks for that.

Yeah.

And I I love the grandparent My my grandma was a real special person in my life.

And I had a dream about her a couple of nights ago, so she's been like a real present part of my life this week.

Feel like we've been hanging out this week a little bit, which has been pretty cool.

I like that. Yeah.

So Hannah, tell us what you know, what key lessons learned when you share with others who are really trying to create change in their communities and region?

You know, what would you share out with folks?

You've shared a lot of goodness already.

### **Hannah G 48:41**

I think well, I think, honestly, the biggest thing for any person who's looking looking to enact change in a community is the first step has to be to listen to the community that change has got to come not from yourself.

You can be, and that's, I think, where damage gets done, you can be highly motivated to do something or think you you know the problem.

Right, at its core.

And then if you're not asking the community what's wanted, or needed, or seen as a need, then you're missing the biggest piece.

Right?

### **Hannah G 49:02**

Then you're only creating a further divide, then you're not building in the support structure that's really needed to build sustainable change.

Might fix the system, but you won't build a sustained system in the process.

Mhmm.

So I think listening is twice as vital as speaking.

And being present can sometimes make the biggest difference.

### **Christine Gyovai 49:16**

Oh, good words there.

Yes.

So as we get ready to wrap up today, it's really such a beautiful conversation.

I wanna just, you know, open up for any other thoughts or reflections you'd like to share Hannah and tell us a little bit more about how people can learn about your work.

You mentioned some links earlier, which will include, but anything else you wanna share out, we welcome it.

### **Hannah G 49:30**

That's pretty much covered it.

I've really enjoyed opportunity to talk today.

I really appreciate you having me on.

Always, we'll talk about Appalachian and just the phenomenal folks here.

### **Hannah G 49:52**

In the work that's being done.

I think, if folks want to ever engage with ASD directly, we've got Gardens in Taszone Avenue.

Folks are welcome to come out to those anytime.

And I'll share, as you said, the links to our website or our webpages, and folks are welcome to engage their online as well, and reach out with questions to whatever programs they might be interested in.

We'd love to love to talk.

### **Christine Gyovai 50:09**

Well, thank you for such a a wise and also, you know, really, the the sense of of growth, both within gardens and people on land, you know, it's just so evident the work that you're doing, Hannah is just growing amazingness.

So thank you for taking the time today.

Really appreciate it.

Oh,

### **Hannah G 50:12**

Thanks so much for having me.

I really appreciate that.

### **Christine Gyovai 50:39**

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### **Christine Gyovai 50:39**

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