



NEWS RELEASE
For Immediate Release

MEDIA CONTACT
Meghan Breen
Meghanb@voamid.org 304-707-6185

Doug Scofield
Dougs@voamid.org 502-883-8011

**Lt. Gov. Coleman, Senate President Stivers and Kentucky leaders
announce partnerships to bring investment and job creation to Clay
County and Southeastern Kentucky**

*Lettuce Grow partnership with AppHarvest and Downtown Manchester
Development project designed to grow economy, encourage tourism and
build environmental sustainability*

Volunteers of America Mid-States will take leading role in innovative, community-based efforts

MANCHESTER, KY (January 3, 2022) – Lt. Governor Jacqueline Coleman joined a range of Kentucky leaders including Senate President Robert Stivers, Eastern Kentucky University President David McFaddin and Volunteers of America Mid-States President and CEO Jennifer Hancock today at ECU Manchester to announce partnerships designed to bring investment and innovative economic development projects to Clay County and Southeastern Kentucky.

The leaders detailed the Lettuce Grow project and Downtown Manchester Economic Development Project, which are designed to increase funding and investment, create jobs, boost tourism and create environmental sustainability in the region. Governor Andy Beshear had planned to join the event but changed his schedule to direct emergency response to extreme weather conditions in Kentucky.

Lettuce Grow is an innovative and collaborative partnership between Volunteers of America Mid-States (VOAMID), AppHarvest, Shaping Our Appalachian Region (SOAR) and the City of Manchester. The project, which is awaiting grant funding and is supported by Governor Beshear, will feature AppHarvest's leadership to place two high-tech hydroponic container farm

classrooms in Y Hollow, an up-and-coming Manchester, Kentucky, tourist destination located in an historic coal mine load-out site.

These free-standing training facilities are made from shipping containers retrofitted with the latest sustainable agriculture technology including energy-efficient LED grow lights and a closed-loop irrigation system that teaches students how to use up to 90 percent less water and grow up to 30 times more food in the same amount of space compared to traditional open-field agriculture. One “container farm” classroom can produce the equivalent of three to five acres of traditional agriculture.

“VOA is thrilled to partner with AppHarvest on a truly innovative project that will put people to work and put Clay County on the cutting edge of innovative agricultural investments. I’m proud to be part of a team that is committed to growing our economy, protecting our environment and providing an employment pipeline for people in recovery,” said Jennifer Hancock, President and CEO of Volunteers of America Mid-States.

AppHarvest, based in Morehead, Kentucky, is developing and operating some of the world’s largest high-tech indoor farms designed to grow non-GMO produce with world-class technology including artificial intelligence and robotics to improve access for all to nutritious food, farming more sustainably, building a domestic food supply and increasing investment in Appalachia. AppHarvest currently has one 60-acre farm that can produce an estimated 40 million pounds of tomatoes annually and is adding three more farms expected to be operational by the end of 2022 that will expand into leafy greens and berries.

“First, I want to thank everyone who is playing a role in this partnership. This innovative endeavor can have multi-faceted benefits,” Senate President Stivers said.

“Think about the current workforce needs of Kentucky and the economic development and job opportunity needs of the Appalachian region. We cannot forget the scourge of the opioid crisis and the dire need for rehabilitation. The collaborative partnership of AppHarvest, Volunteers of America Mid-States, SOAR, and local leaders is a testament to the good that can occur when combining individual efforts into a unified vision. Today’s announcement is rehabilitation, economic development, and even local tourism rolled into one project. I join in support and look forward to seeing the partnership succeed.”

The Lettuce Grow project will be staffed full-time by AgTech educators and a rotating group of trainees and students learning sustainable agriculture through AppHarvest’s six-unit AgTech curriculum. VOA will partner in the project by working with individuals in recovery from substance use disorder to establish a treatment to education to employment pipeline.

During the proposed grant period, Lettuce Grow will train 90 individuals in sustainable high-tech agriculture. Goals of the Lettuce Grow project include developing a long-term and sustainable employment pipeline for individuals in recovery by connecting them with high-tech agriculture. Lettuce Grow partners will also work to create a new tourism destination in Clay

County as part of overall revitalization efforts, provide access to fresh produce year round and focus on environmentally sustainable agriculture techniques.

“AppHarvest believes everyone deserves opportunity, and projects like ‘Lettuce Grow’ can help accomplish that,” said Jonathan Webb, Founder & CEO of AppHarvest. “Partnering with VOA to provide hands-on educational experience aligns with our mission to bring good jobs to Central Appalachia as we expand AppHarvest’s high-tech indoor farm network and work to build a hub of sustainable agriculture in the region.”

Congressman Hal Rogers has championed \$540 million in federal funding for the Abandoned Mine Lands Economic Revitalization (AMLER) Program since 2016, of which \$130 million has been awarded to Kentucky for initiatives like the Lettuce Grow project.

“Lettuce Grow and the Downtown Manchester Development projects are about so much more than agriculture, tourism and education. Those projects will spur hope for individuals who need new opportunities in the mountains and a second-chance in life. The recovery community is changing lives and making a big difference in our communities across southern and eastern Kentucky,” said Congressman Rogers. “I applaud VOA and all of the partners on these projects who are investing in rural cities, like Manchester, and into the lives of folks who are ready and willing to get back into the workforce.”

Leaders also announced a second Clay County and Southeastern Kentucky partnership today, the Downtown Manchester Economic Development project, which is a collaboration among VOA, AdventHealth Manchester and other community-based, Clay County organizations.

This investment will create a cornerstone development for downtown Manchester revitalization through the rehabilitation of an 8,600 square foot building located at 200 Main Street.

Plans for the building include retail space that will house the Mountain Market, a VOA social enterprise that is home to artists and artisans from across Appalachia and will showcase and sell their works. The first floor will also be home to a commercial restaurant space with Clay County artifacts featured throughout. The second floor will provide two residences and affordable office space for five other businesses and nonprofit organizations.

“We know that a lot of truly transformational economic development takes place building by building and block by block. VOA and our community partners’ commitment to this building will be a real catalyst for more investment in downtown Manchester, which helps to build a stronger future for all of us,” Hancock said.

The Downtown Manchester Economic Development project will help to address timely economic and workforce development issues facing Clay County, including lack of accessible

office space, a shortage of workforce training opportunities and the need for more programs to support people in recovery from substance use disorder.

The new projects announced today by key Kentucky leaders represent continued investment and progress in Southeastern Kentucky and highlight Volunteers of America's commitment to the region. In the past two years, VOA has opened Freedom House, providing state-of-the-art care to pregnant and parenting women working to overcome substance use disorder and deliver healthy babies. VOA also opened and operates the Recovery Community Center to support individuals in recovery and has expanded Restorative Justice programs that help keep youth out of the criminal justice system.

On December 16, Hancock, Stivers, McFaddin and Congressman Hal Rogers announced that VOA had been awarded a \$1.5 million Workforce Opportunities in Rural Communities grant to place people in recovery in productive employment throughout the region.

Also attending the press conference were AdventHealth Manchester Vice-President of Operations Jamie Couch and Congressman Hal Rogers' District Director, Karen Kelly.

About Volunteers of America:

Volunteers of America Mid-States operates more than 40 programs across Kentucky, Tennessee, West Virginia and Clark and Floyd Counties in Indiana. VOA serves families overcoming homelessness, veterans in need of housing and adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities and many other individuals and families in need. Learn more at @voamid and www.voamid.org.