

Mississippi Food Policy Council Annual Report June 2012 - May 2013



Contents

1. *Letter From the Chair*
2. *Introduction*
3. *Activities of the Subcommittees*
 - a. *Farm to Institution Subcommittee*
 - b. *Farmers Market Subcommittee*
 - c. *Food Safety Subcommittee*
 - d. *Food Security Subcommittee*
 - e. *Legislative Liaison Subcommittee*
 - f. *Local Food Systems as Economic Development Subcommittee*
4. *Financial Report*

1. Letter from the Chair

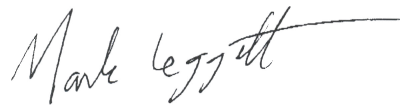
The Mississippi Food Policy Council has played a key role in improving Mississippi's food system since its creation almost three years ago. We would not be where we are today, however, without the legislators, state agencies, organizations, and individuals that come to our meetings, join our subcommittees, and contribute to our initiatives. Thank you for your support. I encourage you to read through our annual report to learn more about our accomplishments during the last year. In particular, I would like to highlight the following major accomplishments:

- In 2012, the Mississippi Legislature designated the first week of October as "Mississippi Farm to School Week." School districts across the state participated and more will hold events in 2013. The Council and its partners drafted and championed the Farm to School Week Resolution.
- Shortly after Mississippi Farm to School Week, the Council and its partners hosted the state's first Farm to Institution conference. Approximately 150 farmers, school staff, extension agents, and others participated in a series of discussions and workshops designed to build ties between farmers and local institutions.
- In 2013 the MFPC worked with legislators to pass legislation exempting cottage food production operations from certain licensing requirements.
- Also in 2013, the MFPC proposed, and the Legislature created, an Interagency Farm to

School Council that will work over the next 18 months to link producers and school food service personnel to bring more local food in schools. The Interagency Council will include members from the Mississippi Food Policy Council.

With your help, the Mississippi Food Policy Council will continue to build on these achievements and reach many more. If you have any questions, please contact Tammy Meyer at Tmeyer@msfb.org or 601-977-4226 or visit our website at mississippifoodpolicycouncil.wordpress.com. Thank you again for your continued support and participation in the Mississippi Food Policy Council.

Sincerely,



Mark Leggett
MFPC Board Chair

2. Introduction

In April 2010, a broad coalition of local organizations and agencies came together to establish the Mississippi Food Policy Council. The mission of the Council is *to advocate for food and farm policies that build healthy communities and strengthen local food systems*. The Council was created with the goal of bringing together groups from around the state that were working to increase access to fresh food and improve the state food system in order to effect policy change. The Council's membership includes representatives from produce growers, public health advocacy organizations, and a variety of other organizations engaged in food system issues. State agencies such as the Mississippi Department of Health and the Mississippi Department of Agriculture and Commerce also regularly participate in MFPC meetings.

During its second membership year, from June 2012 to May 2013, the Mississippi Food Policy Council achieved a series of programmatic and policy successes. These successes are described below in the following five sections, which detail each of the five subcommittees' progress and achievements. The annual report concludes with an overview of the Council's finances.

3. Activities of the Subcommittees

Farm to Institution Subcommittee

Board Liaison: Judy Belue

Contact Information: jwbelue1@gmail.com

The Council Board voted in April 2013 to rename the "Farm to School Subcommittee" the "Farm to Institution Subcommittee" due to the Subcommittee's interest in expanding the amount of local food procured in a range of large institutions including hospitals, prisons, and universities. Previously, the Subcommittee had focused on connecting K-12 schools to local

farmers and did not consider programs that included other institutions within its purview. Farm to Institution programs take many different forms, but the primary goal is to connect local producers with institutions so that the institutions can have access to fresh, local food while at the same time helping to support local growers and the local economy. The Farm to Institution Subcommittee seeks to promote and expand Farm to Institution programs throughout the state and to provide resources to farmers, food service directors, educators, and other Mississippians interested in the program.

The Farm to Institution Subcommittee began the membership year by working to increase awareness of Mississippi Farm to School Week. As a result of a resolution drafted by the Council and passed with the help of Representative Toby Barker in 2012, Mississippi celebrated its first “Mississippi Farm to School Week” from October 1 – 5, 2012.

The Council also worked with the Harvard Food Law and Policy Clinic to produce a step-by-step purchasing guide for schools interested in purchasing locally grown food to serve in school meals. The guide, which was released immediately prior to Mississippi Farm to School Week, includes information on how to develop a commercial relationship with a farmer, how to write food ordering forms that give preference to locally grown foods, and how to ensure that food being served in schools has been grown and handled safely. The guide can be found at: <http://mississippifoodpolicycouncil.files.wordpress.com/2011/10/mspurchasingguide-9-28-final.pdf>

In November 2012, Mississippi Food Policy Council hosted a statewide conference on Farm to Institution programming. The first of its kind in Mississippi, the conference brought together approximately 150 farmers, school officials and other stakeholders. The conference included presentations from Mississippians who have successfully implemented Farm to School programs, a training session for growers and institutional officials on how to implement Farm to Institution programs in their area, and a networking session for participants and speakers to connect and build projects going forward

During the spring of 2013, the Subcommittee partnered with Delta Directions and My Brother’s Keeper, Inc. to conduct a survey of fruit and vegetable growers in the state. The survey is designed to identify growers’ interest in, and barriers to, participating in Farm to Institution programs. The results will be published during the summer of 2013 and will be used to identify new ways for MFPC to support Farm to Institution in the state.

During the 2013 session of the Mississippi Legislature, the Council worked with Representative Toby Barker to draft and introduce House Bill 718. Signed into law on March 26th, HB 718 created an Interagency Farm to School Council. The Interagency Council will facilitate the procurement and use of locally grown and locally raised agricultural products in school meals in order to improve the quality of food served in schools and to support the state economy. Made up of nine representatives from educational and agricultural organizations in the state, it is charged with facilitating the creation and growth of Farm to School programs by studying, recommending and implementing best practices.

The Council is currently working with the Harvard Food Law and Policy Clinic to develop a step-by-step guide for farmers interested in participating in Farm to School and Farm to Institution program. The guide will address and clarify relevant legal issues and regulations to help farmers sell their crops, while being confident they are following state and federal laws. The guide will also help farmers become familiar with technical issues, like bidding processes, and will identify best practices for selling to schools and institutions.

The Subcommittee's goals for the upcoming year are to build on its recent successes by offering additional trainings and workshops and identifying new ways to strengthen Farm to Institution in the state.

Farmers Market Subcommittee

Board Liaison: Judy Belue

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The Farmers Markets Subcommittee works to promote and support the growth of farmers markets and access to farmers markets through training, education, and policy development. In an effort to assess the needs of farmers markets and to identify opportunities for future initiatives, the Subcommittee conducted a survey of farmers market managers in Mississippi in the fall. Twenty-nine markets responded to our survey out of an estimated 55 – 65 farmers markets in the state. Key highlights from the survey include:

- 32% of markets have up to 10 growers at their markets; 29% of markets have 20 growers represented.
- More than 90% of markets statewide operate between April and August.
- 55% of markets that responded operate in towns with between 10,000 – 25,000 people.
- 60% of respondents say that local regulations pose barriers to selling some of their products.
- 55% accept SNAP (food stamp) benefits; however, this is often done through EBT machines used by growers, which can be burdensome for both beneficiaries and farmers.
- When asked to identify the major burdens or challenges their markets face, respondents listed these primary areas:
 1. Legal burdens;
 2. Insufficient awareness of the market's existence;
 3. Lack of public's understanding of the importance of eating locally grown products.

The survey highlighted the need for the Council to work with state agencies to ensure that state and local food safety regulations are not unnecessarily burdensome for farmers market vendors. It also underscored the need for additional efforts to increase SNAP utilization at farmers markets in order to increase access to fresh, healthy foods for those at all income levels and to expand consumer awareness of the importance of local food systems.

The Subcommittee is networking with farmers market leaders nationwide through consultant Darlene Wolnick. Among the issues discussed with Wolnick were how to increase supply of

local food products, the future of WIC utilization at markets, and how to use incentives to create long-term shoppers. The subcommittee hopes to continue working with Wolnick during the upcoming year.

As farmers markets have grown quickly in Mississippi over the past several years, many stakeholders have expressed demand for more vendors at markets. In some cases, markets have been selling out of local produce early in the day. The increased demand for local meat and produce is an opportunity for Mississippi farmers, but presents challenges for its farmers markets. The Subcommittee is interested in researching policies and programs capable of increasing the number of farmers interested in selling local produce, such as new farmer entry programs.

Another goal of the Subcommittee is to increase SNAP usage at farmers markets. The use of SNAP benefits at farmers markets in Mississippi lags behind that of many states, leaving a large segment of the state's population unable to purchase fresh, local foods, while also preventing federal food stamp dollars from going to support local growers and local economic development. The Subcommittee hopes to approach this issue in a comprehensive way by increasing the number of farmers markets with EBT equipment, bringing additional SNAP beneficiaries to farmers markets, and increasing access to healthy cooking and nutrition classes for low-income individuals and families.

The Subcommittee will also continue to facilitate networking and sharing best practices in Mississippi in the upcoming year. The Farmers Market Subcommittee welcomes new members interested in helping bring more Mississippi residents into the local food supply chain and strengthening direct markets.

Food Safety Subcommittee

Board Liaison: Samantha Cawthorn Newman

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The Food Safety Subcommittee grew out of the In-Home Food Processing Subcommittee, which was created in order to advocate for new regulations or legislation that would permit home processors in Mississippi to sell their non-potentially hazardous foods to the public. MFPC and its partners successfully achieved this goal during the 2013 legislative session. Signed into law on April 1, Senate Bill 2553 exempts producers of non-potentially hazardous foods from permitting requirements, provided that annual sales do not exceed \$20,000. This new cottage food exemption creates a viable option for in-home production of jellies, jams and other low-risk foods. This law builds upon the Council's previous success in getting MDAC and MSDH to partner on a pilot program, launched in spring 2011, that allowed some sales of low-risk, home-processed foods.

As a result of the success of Senate Bill 2553, a goal for which the Council has been advocating for several years, the Subcommittee decided to expand beyond in-home processing and to work more generally on ensuring that Mississippi's food safety laws and regulations are scale-appropriate and do not unnecessarily burden local food systems. In April 2013, the Board

renamed the “In-Home Processing Committee” the “Food Safety Committee.” In the upcoming year, the Subcommittee will compare Mississippi’s laws and regulations affecting the direct marketing of all foods, but especially potentially hazardous foods, to those in other states. The Subcommittee will make recommendations for possible policy changes to the Council based on its analysis.

Food Security Subcommittee

Board Liaison: Beneta Burt

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Due to interest from members, the Board established a new subcommittee that will focus on issues of food security and food access. The Subcommittee will make policy recommendations and implement initiatives designed to increase access to healthy foods in underserved communities. It will also work to connect local food systems to programs aimed at increasing food security, such as food banks and food benefits.

Legislative Liaison Subcommittee

Board Liaison: Mark Leggett

Contact Information: Leggett@mspoultry.org

The mission of the Legislative Liaison Subcommittee is to develop legislative proposals and to work with the Legislature to make these proposals a reality. Its major successes in the 2013 legislative session were to help pass legislation creating an Interagency Farm to School Council and to expand the cottage food industry. The Subcommittee chose to focus on these bills due to the Council’s express priorities for the 2013 legislative session.

Council members voted on policy priorities for 2013 at the November 14th 2012 general meeting and in an online poll. The surveys asked participants to rank their top two priorities. The top four priorities based on the rankings were:

- Promoting and expanding Farm to School efforts (42 points)
- Educating government agencies, civilians, and other organizations about the potential to use local food system development as an economic development tool (41 points)
- Increasing access to healthy and affordable foods and ensuring food security (36 points)
- Expanding market access for locally grown foods (35 points)

In early December, members of the Legislative Liaison Subcommittee met with Representative Toby Barker to discuss potential legislation for the 2013 session. Rep. Barker has been an ongoing supporter of the Council and was instrumental in the passage of the 2012 resolution creating Mississippi Farm to School Week. The Subcommittee and Rep. Barker identified the following issues to collaborate on:

1. Work with the Governor to assist him with his school garden initiatives;

2. Tap into the food buying power of state government through community colleges, universities, prisons, and other state agencies;
3. Pass legislation creating an interagency Farm to School council with a small, workable group;
4. Commend model Farm to School programs;
5. Explore ways that the Mississippi Development Authority can promote farmers markets and also grow local food businesses into major contributors for local economies.

The Subcommittee subsequently worked with Rep. Preston Sullivan and Senator Billy Hudson, chairmen of the House and Senate Agriculture committees, respectively, to pass legislation Rep. Barker authored to create an Interagency Farm to School Council. The Mississippi Food Policy Council drafted a bill during the 2012 legislative session that would have created an Interagency Farm to School Council, but it died in committee. Signed by the Governor on March 26, 2013, House Bill 718 established an Interagency Farm to School Council, as described in the Farm to School Subcommittee section above. The council will report its progress and initial findings to the Legislature on or before January 1, 2015.

The Subcommittee also worked with a number of partners to help pass Senate Bill 2533, which exempts non-potentially hazardous foods from permitting requirements for cottage food operations that sell less than \$20,000 per year. In 2011, the MFPC worked to allow the sale of low-risk home-processed foods through a pilot program that was created by MDAC and MSDH. However, through this pilot, prior to Senate Bill 2533, cottage food producers had to take a food safety course in order to sell their products, which discouraged many of them from selling their products to consumers.

Board member and Legislative Liaison Subcommittee member Rhonda Lampkin also played a key role in advocating for House Bill 798, which would have increased food access by encouraging the opening of stores selling fruits and vegetables in underserved areas. The bill passed both chambers, but died in negotiations between the Senate and House.

While no legislation passed regarding school gardens or food-related economic development initiatives, the Subcommittee is developing proposals for state officials in these areas. Board Secretary Samantha Cawthorn Newman met with Gov. Phil Bryant to discuss the governor's interest in school gardens. The Subcommittee is developing additional school garden ideas for the governor to consider at his request.

During the 2014 legislative session, the Subcommittee will continue to track legislation that relates to food issues, particularly those concerning food access and local food systems. It will also develop legislative proposals after the Council's policy priorities are chosen in the fall.

Local Food Systems as Economic Development

Board Liaison/Chair: Nancy Woodruff

Contact Information: new_369@yahoo.com

MFPC members ranked different action items for the Council to prioritize during its November 14th 2012 meeting. "Educating government agencies, civilians and other organizations about the potential to use local food system development as an economic development tool" was second only to "Promoting farm to school efforts." A subcommittee was formed at the next quarterly MFPC meeting, April 10, 2013, to address this priority.

The Subcommittee commenced by identifying opportunities, barriers and potential partners. Among the identified opportunities are an increase in demand for local food, awareness of food production and marketing as a resilient economic sector, and the potential for job creation in rural communities. Barriers include the loss of infrastructure for small scale and local food production, a reduction in the number of farmers, limited consumer awareness about local and quality food, and scarce financial and educational resources for small farms. Potential partners include any state, local, academic or NGO entity that works in economic or community development within the state, such as the Mississippi Development Authority, Mississippi Economic Council, local economic development authorities, and the Stennis Institute at Mississippi State University. In order to assist with the activities of this Subcommittee, Board Chair Mark Leggett met with Brent Christensen, Executive Director of the Mississippi Development Authority, who requested input from the Council regarding the use of local food systems as a tool for economic development.

Based on its initial research, the Subcommittee will develop legislative proposals for the 2014 legislative session. Additionally, it will focus on engaging potential partners in discussion around the topic of local food systems in order to increase awareness of local food's potential to drive economic development.

4. Revenue and Expenditures

Revenue

In the 2012 - 2013 membership year, the Mississippi Food Policy Council collected \$11,990 in revenue.

- \$10,555 was collected to host the Healthy Farms, Healthy People statewide meeting in November 2012. Of that total, the National Network of Public Health Institutes awarded MFPC \$7,500 and \$3055 was collected through sponsorships and registration fees.
- MFPC collected \$1,435 in membership dues during the June 2012 - May 2013 membership year. MFPC charges \$50 for organization membership, \$35 for individuals, and \$20 for students. Twenty-one organizations and 11 individuals joined or renewed their memberships in MFPC during the 2012 - 2013 membership year.
- MFPC also benefited from donations by member organizations to help provide lunches and meeting space for its quarterly public meetings. During the 2012 - 2013 membership year, the Mississippi Farm Bureau hosted two meetings and provided members with lunch at one of those meetings.

Expenditures and Liabilities

The Mississippi Food Policy Council expended and/or obligated \$8,251.29 during the 2012 - 2013 membership year.

- \$7,986.50 was spent paying for the NNPHI Healthy Farms, Healthy People conference.
 - \$2100 was used to pay for the meeting space.
 - \$397.24 was used to pay for speakers' travel and accommodation.
 - \$1921.10 was used to pay for meeting materials
 - \$2155 was expended on transportation stipends.
 - 1413.16 was expended on catering and table cloth rental.
- \$229.79 was expended to create MFPC brochures for the annual conference of the Gaining Ground Sustainability Institute of Mississippi.
- \$35 was used to purchase a website domain for the MFPC.

Remaining 2012-2013 Budget for the MFPC

The MFPC has a remainder of \$3,738.71 from the 2012 - 2013 membership year to carry forward.