

Mississippi Food Policy Council Annual Report June 2011-June 2012



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1. 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, such as Mississippi Association of Cooperatives and the Mississippi Center for Justice. State agencies such as the Mississippi Department of Health and the Mississippi Department of Agriculture also regularly participate in MFPC meetings.

The Mississippi Food Policy Council's first membership year, from June 2011 to May 2012, has been an exciting time of growth for the Mississippi Food Policy Council. The Council elected its first board and has taken several important steps to reach a wider range of constituents and to increase its capacity to effect policy change. These developments will be highlighted in Section 2 of the annual report, "Organizational Developments." Each of the Council's four subcommittees also has accomplishments to report, which will be detailed in the following four sections. The annual report concludes with an overview of the Council's finances.

2. Organizational Developments

The Council's ability to impact policy and reach a variety of stakeholders within the state's food system has greatly expanded over the last year. Last summer, Council members elected the organization's first board of directors, creating a core group of members dedicated to helping the group fulfill its mission. At the same time, it adopted its first logo and established a webpage, providing Mississippians with resources, updates, and information about the Council. The Council also began to apply for grants to support its work in early 2012. It has secured two grants at the time of this writing, allowing it to perform much-needed research and organizing.

Creating the Board of Directors

In the spring of 2011, the Council organized an election to create its first board of directors. Only dues-paying members of the Council are eligible to run for the board or vote in the election. During its June meeting, the ten candidates gave presentations explaining their interest in serving on the board, their background in food-related issues, and their involvement with the Council. After the meeting, a ballot was created with information about each board candidate and sent to members for them to cast their votes. The elected board members are: Judy Belue (Delta Fresh Foods Initiative); Beneta Burt (Mississippi Roadmap to Health Equity); Rickey Cole (Cole Farms); Charles Houston (North Delta Produce Growers Association); Rhonda Lampkin (Partnership for a Healthy Mississippi); Mark Leggett (Mississippi Poultry Association); Dita McCarthy (Real Food Gulf Coast); Roy Mitchell (Mississippi Health Advocacy Program). Emily Broad Leib (Harvard Law School Food Law and Policy Clinic) and Samantha Cawthorn (Mississippi Farm Bureau Federation) were appointed by the board as ex officio, or non-voting, members of the board.

The eight-member board was quickly organized after the votes were tallied. In accordance with the MFPC by-laws, each board member is assigned to represent a particular type of stakeholder group (eg, growers, farmers markets, etc.) and two board members are "members-at-large." Additionally, the board elected its own officers, including a Chair (Roy Mitchell), Vice-Chair (Judy Belue), Secretary (Rhonda Lampkin), and Treasurer (Mark Leggett). Further, each subcommittee of the MFPC was assigned a board member liaison to keep track of the subcommittee and report to the board on the subcommittees' activities. Judy Belue is the board member liaison for the Farmers Markets Subcommittee, Mark Leggett is the board member liaison for the Legislative Liaison Subcommittee, Dita McCarthy is the board liaison for the In-home Processing Subcommittee, and Beneta Burt is the board liaison for the Farm to School Subcommittee (she is also board liaison for the Food Access Subcommittee). The board meets monthly, in person or on the phone, and to work together to coordinate Council meetings. The general membership is invited to quarterly public, in-person meetings.

Developing the Council's Logo and Website

At the June 2011 general meeting, several logo options were presented, and attendees voted for their preferred logo. Later that summer, two volunteers worked with the Council to develop its website. The website contains news, events, meeting minutes, publications, and other

information about the organization. It can found at the following address:
<http://www.mississippifoodpolicycouncil.com>.

Securing Grant Funding

In order to increase the Council's capacity, and to ensure its long-term sustainability, the board has made a concerted effort to receive funding to support the organization's work. The Council has successfully applied for two grants, which are detailed in turn below.

Project Change

Grantor: My Brother's Keeper

Time line: March 1, 2012 – August 31, 2012

Amount: \$8,500

My Brother's Keeper, Inc. (MBK), a Jackson based organization, received a Community Transformation Grant from the Centers for Disease Control. In turn, MBK is using its grant money to provide sub-grants to organizations supporting healthy living. The Council was awarded a grant to conduct policy scans on two different areas: farmers markets (including mobile farmers markets) and efforts to increase offering of healthy foods at retail outlets such as grocery stores and convenience stores. Nate Rosenberg, a joint fellow at Mississippi State University and Harvard Law School, will conduct the policy scans on behalf of the Council with the assistance of Emily Broad Leib and the Harvard Food Law and Policy Clinic. Nate will receive the majority of the funds to support his salary. Ten percent of the funds will be used by the Mississippi Health Advocacy Program for grant management, and some of the funds will be used to pay for travel to Mississippi by the Harvard Food Law and Policy Clinic staff/students.

Healthy Farms, Healthy People Statewide Meeting Grant

Grantor: National Network of Public Health Institutes (NNPHI)

Time line: May 1, 2012 – December 31, 2012

Amount: \$7,500

The Council was awarded this grant to convene and facilitate a statewide meeting that focuses on the intersection between agriculture and human health. Much of the meeting will focus on farm-to-school and farm-to-institution programs due to their potential to positively impact health and educational outcomes and strengthen regional food systems. The meeting will serve as a much-needed opportunity for farmers, schools, nonprofit organizations and government officials to share ideas, discuss best practices and build relationships.

The Council plans to hold a daylong meeting with approximately 150-200 in attendance. There will be a plenary session to educate participants about the basics of food policy and farm-to-institution, but the Council will also hold more specialized workshops targeted to educating different audiences – growers, schools, community members and state agencies. The meeting is tentatively scheduled for Friday, October 5, 2012. The funds for this grant will be used to pay for the meeting facility, meeting materials, speaker fees, meeting promotion, and transportation stipends.

3. Activities of the Subcommittees

Farmers Market Subcommittee

Board Liaison: Judy Belue

Contact Information: jwbelue1@gmail.com

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 early 2011, the subcommittee focused on facilitating and promoting the use of SNAP (formerly known as food stamps) at farmers markets. Prior to the work of the MFPC, the state was not going to give wireless EBT machines (needed to process SNAP payments) to farmers markets, but the MFPC was able to get a commitment from the state to give these machines to markets in addition to individual farmers. As of June 2011, the state has distributed sixty-seven EBT machines to farmers and seventeen to farmers markets. The MFPC is working with farmers and farmers market managers to make sure the machines get out across the state as efficiently as possible to help provide access to healthy foods for Mississippi consumers of all income levels.

During fall 2011 and the 2012 legislative session, the subcommittee also worked to draft and promote legislation to ensure that city and county governments are authorized to make donations to local farmers markets. The Council worked with Representative Toby Barker to introduce House Bill # 535, which amended the Mississippi State Code to clarify that county and municipal authorities may fund farmers markets. The bill was signed into law by Governor Phil Bryant on April 24, 2012. This is exciting legislation, because prior to its passage, cities and counties in the state were not authorized to donate funds to farmers markets. Many cities and counties want to support farmers markets, due to their impacts on increasing access to healthy foods and improving local economic development, and now they will be able to do so.

In order to identify other specific barriers and opportunities for policy change to aid farmers markets, in 2012 the subcommittee compiled information on more than 70 markets throughout the state designed a six-page survey for market managers, which was distributed to all of these markets through the postal service and email.

The subcommittee enjoys a strong working relationship with nationally know market consultant Darlene Wolnik, who provides advice and input based on more than a decade of experience with the Market Umbrella operation in New Orleans. Wolnik made a presentation to the MFPC in May and will continue to provide guidance once the survey data is received and compiled.

The subcommittee is also pleased to have engaged additional market managers as members of the Council over the past year. In the upcoming year, it will endeavor to increase the participation of market managers in the Council and it will foster and support regional farmers market councils and alliances. In doing so it will facilitate networking, sharing best practices, and broaden the reach of farmers markets in Mississippi. The Farmers Market Subcommittee

welcomes members who have an interest in furthering the impact and success of markets throughout the state.

Farm to School Subcommittee

Board Liaison: Beneta Burt

Contact Information: benetaburt@bellsouth.net

Farm to school programs take many different forms, but the primary goal is to connect local producers with schools so that the schools can have access to fresh, local food and can also help to support local growers and the local economy. The Farm to School Subcommittee seeks to promote and expand farm to school throughout the state and to provide resources to farmers, food service directors, educators and other Mississippians interested in the program.

During the summer of 2011, the subcommittee conducted a survey of food service directors in order to identify food service directors' interest in, and opportunities and barriers to, implementing farm to school programs. In the fall, subcommittee members worked with Harvard Food Law and Policy Clinic and stakeholders across the state to identify actions that the Mississippi Legislature could take in order to utilize state policy to encourage farm to school programs. The legislative recommendations resulting from their research can be found on the MFPC website at: <http://mississippifoodpolicycouncil.files.wordpress.com/2011/10/fts-legis-recs-final-12-5.pdf>

During the 2012 session of the Mississippi Legislature, the Council worked with Representative Toby Barker to draft and introduce two pieces of legislation: a farm to school bill and a farm to school resolution, both of which came out of the Council's fall 2011 legislative recommendations. House Bill # 828 would have created an Inter-Agency Farm to School Council with representatives from the relevant government agencies, schools, farms, and other stakeholders. It was designed to work on efforts such as assisting farmers and schools in starting commercial relationships, applying for financial grants, and providing food safety and regulatory information to schools in order to facilitate local purchasing. Unfortunately, HB #828 died in committee, but the Farm to School Subcommittee hopes to reintroduce similar legislation next legislative session. On the other hand, the farm to school resolution, House Concurrent Resolution #112, was signed by the governor on May 3rd and establishes the first week of October each year as "Mississippi Farm to School Week." (The first Mississippi Farm to School Week will be held October 1, 2012 – October 5, 2012.) The resolution encourages schools to incorporate at least one locally-grown food into schools meals. It also clarifies that farm to school initiatives are legal in Mississippi, demonstrates that the Legislature values using local farm produce in schools, and encourages schools to start initiatives.

The Council is currently working 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 will be published this summer, will include 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. Designed to clarify the complicated process of purchasing food from local farmers, it will provide food service directors and school administrators with the knowledge they need to develop robust farm to school programs.

The Farm to School Subcommittee also wishes to report on the progress that two of its institutional members, the Mississippi Roadmap to Health Equity (MRHE) and the Delta Fresh Foods Initiative (DFFI), have made with their farm to school programs. In 2011, MRHE was chosen as a Host Site for FoodCorps. Its FoodCorps program has developed over 80 school and community gardens and conducted more than 200 hands-on nutrition education sessions. FoodCorps also helped to get locally-grown produce into Jackson schools in a pilot in spring 2012. DFFI organized a coalition of groups to create two part-time positions focused on farm to school: a Delta Farm to School Coordinator and a Delta Grower Liaison. Both the Coordinator and the Liaison provide programs with technical assistance and help create opportunities for sharing resources, funding, and innovative approaches to farm to school programs. The Liaison's focus on growers serves to facilitate relationships between farmers and food service directors, which had previously held back farm to school efforts in the area. As result of their new farm to school program, several schools in the Delta plan to begin farm to school initiatives during the 2012 – 2013 academic year.

The subcommittee's goals for the upcoming year are to provide networking opportunities and greater access to resources to new and growing farm to school initiatives across the state and to seek grant funding for farm to school initiatives that target schools in Mississippi where a high percentage of students are eligible to receive free or reduced meals. Additionally, the subcommittee will seek to pass further legislation strengthening farm to school in the state. As farm to school continues to gain attention from schools, farmers, and public health officials in Mississippi, the subcommittee looks forward to another productive year.

In-Home Food Processing Subcommittee

Board Liaison: Dita McCarthy

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With the recent growth in farmers markets and the demand for local, fresh foods there has been a push to allow individuals to produce and sell foods made in their own homes. Research conducted by the Harvard Food Law and Policy Clinic in 2010 on behalf of the MFPC found that 31 states (not including Mississippi) allowed in-home production and sale of certain low-risk or non-potentially hazardous foods like baked goods, jams, jellies, and dried herbs.

The In-Home Food Processing Subcommittee 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. After meeting with members of the Subcommittee, the Mississippi Department of Agriculture and Commerce (MDAC), and the Mississippi Department of Health (MSDH) took administrative action allowing Mississippians to be able to process low-risk foods at home if they take certain food safety courses.

Following the first round of courses in July, 2011, the MFPC received feedback from several persons attending the courses who complained that the course material was hard to understand and that they perceived certain labeling requirements as being unreasonably burdensome. As a result, a number of attendees were discouraged and decided not to pursue the certification. In response, the MFPC sent a letter to MSDH and MDAC expressing concerns with the in-home food processing classes and information that was being provided by the state. The letter also included several suggestions for improvement. The agencies were very responsive to the MFPC's suggestions for improvement of the in-home processing course presentations and materials and implemented several of the key suggestions immediately. The Council is working with stakeholders from around the state to ensure that the new home-processing license program continues to be implemented in a way that allows this beneficial economic activity for small food producers.

In the upcoming year, the Subcommittee intends to continue to track statewide participation in the in-home processing program. The Subcommittee also plans to study the efficacy of promulgating a "best practices" food safety guide for home processed foods. Some non-profit organizations in other states, such as Louisiana, have developed voluntary "best practices" in order to avoid additional regulation by state agencies tasked with protecting the public. The Subcommittee will consider such a program and make recommendations to the Council based on its analysis.

Legislative Liaison Subcommittee

Board Liaison: Mark Leggett

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The Legislative Liaison Subcommittee was created in response to House Bill (HB) 1170, which was passed and signed into law during the 2011 legislative session. HB 1170 created a six-month task force comprised of 15 members that studied access to healthy foods in low-income communities throughout Mississippi. In order to convey the Mississippi Food Policy Council's policy priorities to the task force and to assist the task force in its research, the Council established a Legislative Task Force Liaison Subcommittee.

As the task force was being developed, the subcommittee drafted a letter to its organizers explaining the Council's role and offered to help the task force fulfill its mission. Roy Mitchell, Chair of the MFPC Board, represented the subcommittee on the task force. Through the Subcommittee's efforts, the task force adopted many the Council's legislative recommendations for the 2012 legislative session.

After the task force disbanded in December, the Council decided to keep the subcommittee active and rename it the Legislative Liaison Subcommittee. The Subcommittee was tasked with developing legislative proposals for approval by the MFPC Board and working with the Legislature to make them a reality. During the 2012 legislative session, the subcommittee focused on four pieces of legislation. One of them, House Bill (HB) 828, which would have created an interagency farm to school council, died in committee. The three remaining pieces

of legislation, however, were pass by the Legislature and signed into law by Governor Bryant. HB 535 clarified that county and municipal governments can contribute funds to farmers market. HB 540 permits local school boards to allow the public to use school property during non-school hours for recreation and sports. Finally, House Concurrent Resolution 112 established the first full school week of October as “Mississippi Farm to School Week.”

In the 2013 legislative session, the Subcommittee will track legislation that relates to food issues, particularly those concerning food access and local food systems. It will also continue to push for legislation to create a farm to school task force of state agencies, farmers, businesses and non-profits, as well as pushing for other legislative initiatives that further the Council’s objectives.

Food Access Subcommittee

Board Liaison: Beneta Burt

Contact Information: benetaburt@bellsouth.net

Due to interest from members, the Board Chair established a new subcommittee in June 2012 that will focus on issues related to food access. The subcommittee will begin its activities in the fall of 2012.

4. Revenue and Expenditures

Revenue

In the 2011-2012 membership year, the Mississippi Food Policy Council collected \$17,270 in revenue.

- \$8,500 was awarded to the MFPC by My Brother’s Keeper, Inc. for the Project Change Grant. \$772 dollars will be used to pay the Mississippi Health Advocacy Program for the fiscal management and other expenses related to this grant. \$628 will be used to pay for travel. The majority of the grant funding, \$7100, will be used to pay a researcher for policy scans on farmers markets and healthy food access in retail locations.
- \$7,500 was awarded by the National Network of Public Health Institutes to the MFPC to host a Healthy Farms, Healthy People statewide meeting. \$2500 will be used to pay for the meeting space, \$1,000 will be used to pay for speakers, \$1,500 will be used to pay for meeting materials, \$500 will be used to pay for promotional materials, and \$2,000 will be used for attendee transportation stipends.
- \$1,270 was collected by the MFPC for membership dues in the June 2011-May 2012 membership year. The MFPC charges \$50 for organization membership, \$35 for individuals, and \$20 for students. 18 organizations, 10 individuals, and 1 student joined the MFPC during the 2011-2012 membership year.
- The MFPC also benefited from donations by member organizations to help provide lunches and meeting space for its quarterly public meetings. During the 2011-2012 membership year, the Mississippi Farm Bureau hosted three meetings (including sponsoring lunches for two of them), another meeting was held at the MSU CAVS

Center, the Mississippi Poultry Association sponsored lunch for one meeting, and Delta Fresh Foods sponsored lunch for one meeting.

Expenditures and Liabilities

The Mississippi Food Policy Council expended and/or obligated \$16,086.83 during the 2011-2012 membership year.

- \$50 was expended on speaker fees.
- \$694.36 was expended on meeting meals.
- \$114.47 was used to pay for 3 board meeting conference calls.
- \$7,728 has been obligated to pay for expenses related to the Project Change Grant.
- \$7,500 has been obligated to pay for expenses related to the Healthy Farms, Healthy People statewide meeting.

Remaining Budget for the MFPC

The MFPC has a remainder of \$1,183.17 prior to receiving membership renewals for the 2012-2013 membership year.