

Mississippi Food Policy Council Annual Report June 2013 - May 2014



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1. Letter from the Chair

The Mississippi Food Policy Council continues to play an important role in improving Mississippi's food system. During our third year of membership, the Mississippi Food Policy Council achieved a series of programmatic and policy successes that we will continue to develop and expand upon to promote effective food policy in the state for years to come.

A couple of our more noteworthy successes include:

- In 2013, The Mississippi Food Policy Council hosted its 2nd annual Farm to Cafeteria Conference with approximately 200 farmers, food service directors, and other key local stakeholders in attendance. The conference also successfully expanded upon its programming to include a larger range of public institutions such as pre-schools, hospitals, and universities.
- With funding from the Wallace Center, the Mississippi Food Policy Council partnered with the Crossroads Research Center to draft a report on Mississippi's local food systems entitled *An Overview of the Mississippi Farm and Food Economy*. The Council used this report to develop a policy brief on local food systems and will use its research to develop legislative proposals for the 2015 legislative session.

The Mississippi Food Policy Council looks forward to continued growth and development in the realization of our vision of healthy communities and strong local food systems. We are now

well positioned to improve the state food delivery system and implement food and farm policies that will build a healthy Mississippi.

These accomplishments are the direct result of a vibrant and diverse network of people throughout the state dedicated to improving our food system. I would like to thank the organizations, state agencies, and individuals that attend our meeting, join our subcommittees and support our initiatives. It is these collective efforts that have made the progress and success of the Mississippi Food Policy Council possible and I want to thank all members for their continued dedication and support.

Sincerely,



Roy S. Mitchell
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 (MFPC). 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 affect 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 third year of membership, from June 2013 to May 2014, the Mississippi Food Policy Council achieved a series of programmatic and policy successes. These successes are described below in the following six sections, which detail each of the six 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 and Chair: Judy Belue

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Farm to Institution Programs take many forms, but the primary goal is to connect local producers with institutions in order to expand access to fresh, local food through an equitable approach that supports growers and strengthens local communities and economies. The Farm to Institution Subcommittee seeks to promote and expand Farm to Institution programs throughout the state and increase the amount of local food procured by institutions such as hospitals, prisons, universities, and schools. The Subcommittee also provides resources to farmers, food service directors, educators, and other Mississippians interested in Farm to Institution programs and facilitates connections between local growers and buying institutions.

In December 2013, the Farm to Institution Subcommittee hosted its second annual statewide conference on Farm to Cafeteria programming. The conference was attended by over 200 farmers, food service directors, and other key stakeholders within Mississippi interested in and/or involved in the Farm to Cafeteria movement. Building on the success of last year, the 2013 conference focused on expanding Farm to Cafeteria programs to include a larger range of public institutions such as pre-schools, hospitals, and universities. Programming included presentations by local Farm to Cafeteria advocates as well as national leaders, training sessions for growers and institutional officials on how to implement Farm to Institution programs in their area, and regional networking sessions for participants and speakers to connect and build projects going forward. Miles McMath, Director of Food Services for St. Jude's Hospital, provided an inspiring keynote address and an excellent meal of locally sourced food was enjoyed by attendees.

The Subcommittee has already begun planning for the 3rd annual Mississippi Farm to Cafeteria Conference, scheduled for November 7th, 2014. The conference will be part of a two-day statewide event focusing on local foods in Mississippi and will include an emphasis on strengthening existing regional Farm to Institution leaders and working groups across the state. The Subcommittee submitted a grant proposal to the USDA to fund the conference and expects a response on the proposal by the end of this summer.

In May 2014, several members of the subcommittee attended the 7th annual National Farm to Cafeteria Conference held in Austin, Texas. Committee chair Judy Belue was part of a team that presented a workshop on how Farm to School efforts can strengthen Mississippi communities.

The Subcommittee also monitored the progress of the Mississippi Farm to School Interagency Council, which was created by legislation last year (HB 718) supported by the MFPC. Members of the subcommittee attended Interagency Council meetings, identified priorities for feedback, submitted comments on behalf of the MFPC, and engaged in stakeholder meetings organized by the Interagency Council.

The Subcommittee's goals for the upcoming year are to sponsor another successful Farm to Cafeteria Conference. The Subcommittee also intends to provide workshops and trainings for interested growers and institutions as well as build and strengthen Farm to Institution programs across the state. Finally, the Subcommittee will work to propose and support policy changes at the state level that further support Farm to Institution programs in Mississippi.

Market Subcommittee

Chair and Board Liaison: Judy Belue

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In 2013, the Farmers Markets Subcommittee was renamed the “Market Subcommittee.” The Market Subcommittee works to promote and support the growth of retail markets for Mississippi grown food, including farmers markets, CSAs, and buying clubs, and expand general access to Mississippi grown food through training, education, and policy development.

The growth of farmers markets statewide has created a demand for food from Mississippi growers that often exceeds current supply. In response to this issue, the Subcommittee will focus its efforts during the upcoming year on researching policies and programs capable of increasing the number and capacity of farmers interested in selling local produce within the state.

Another goal of the Market Subcommittee is to increase the use of SNAP benefits in farmers markets. The MFPC was instrumental a few years ago in ensuring that farmers markets would be allowed to utilize EBT machines. However, the use of these benefits in Mississippi remains low in comparison to other states, leaving a large segment of state’s population without access to fresh, healthy food and preventing federal SNAP (food stamp) dollars from supporting local growers and local economic development. The Subcommittee is specifically looking into increasing general sales and SNAP redemption at farmers markets through programs that promote the use of electronic payment methods. The expansion of SNAP benefit redemption at these markets could provide a larger, more diverse customer base that could boast sales for local growers and provide them with the necessary capital to reinvest in their businesses and increase production. Further, increased use of SNAP benefits at Mississippi farmers markets would provide greater access to nutritious fresh foods for many residents.

The coming year presents a great opportunity to promote retail market expansion for local produce throughout the state. The Subcommittee is looking to attract active membership and aggressive leadership to further these goals. They will also pursue partnerships with other subcommittees such as the Food Safety and Food Access Committee in order to provide stronger support for direct-marketing local food sales.

Food Safety Subcommittee

Chair and Board Liaison: Samantha Cawthorn Newman

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The Food Safety Committee was originally created to promote policy that would allow home processors in Mississippi to sell their non-potentially hazardous foods to the public. After having successfully achieved this goal in 2013 with the signing of Senate Bill 2553, which exempted producers with annual sales below \$20,000 from permitting requirements, into law, the

Subcommittee continues to expand its work to ease burdensome permitting and processing restrictions on local growers and producers.

This year, the Subcommittee wrote, circulated, and submitted comments to the FDA regarding the Food Safety Modernization Act. Specifically, the Subcommittee commented on the FDA's Proposed Rule for the Standards for Growing, Harvesting, Packing, and Holding of Produce for Human Consumption, and its Proposed Rule for Current Good Manufacturing Practice and Hazard Analysis and Risk-Based Preventive Controls for Human Food. The Subcommittee's comments focused on:

- Expanding the exemption from the proposed rule for operations with less than \$25,000 in annual sales
- Recommending more robust processes for exempt operations in order to ensure that they would have more procedural protection against losing their exemptions
- Expanding and outlining the proof that would be required before withdrawing an exemption from qualified farms/facilities
- Advocating for the use of warning letters prior to starting withdrawal proceedings
- Advocating for including a process for reinstatement of qualified exemptions
- Defining CSAs, farmers markets, and roadside stands as Retail Food Establishments and expanding these definitions to also include private buying clubs.

After collectively working together, the Subcommittee and other partners submitted comments with a variety of co-signers including Judy Belue, Brooke Smith, Mississippi Roadmap to Health Equity, Inc., Mississippi Sustainable Agriculture Network, Mississippi Farm Bureau Federation, Windmill Farms, LLC., William Winter Institute for Racial Reconciliation, Rainbow Natural Grocery Cooperative, Mississippi Health Advocacy Program, Nancy Woodruff, Johnny Wray, and Beaverdam Fresh Farms. In response to these and other comments, the FDA agreed to issue revised proposed rules for Food Safety Modernization Act in 2014.

In the upcoming year, the Subcommittee will undertake a comparative study to research food safety laws across the country and search for positive policy innovations that could be successfully replicated in Mississippi. The Subcommittee also remains dedicated to monitoring the implementation of the Food Safety Modernization Act and its impact on Mississippi growers and producers, and will continue to provide comments on the law as opportunities present themselves.

Legislative Liaison Subcommittee

Chair and Board Liaison: Mark Leggett

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The mission of the Legislative Liaison Subcommittee is to develop legislative proposals responsive to the needs of the MFPC and to work with the Legislature to make these proposals

a reality. For the 2013-14 year, the Subcommittee decided to focus its efforts on supporting a single piece of legislation, HB 1328: The Small Business and Grocer Investment Act, which encourages the sale of healthy foods and vegetables in underserved areas, while monitoring other food-related bills during the legislative session.

HB 1328 creates the Small Business and Grocer Investment Act and establishes a public-private partnership with the Mississippi Development Authority to:

- Provide grants and loans to healthy food retailers operating in underserved communities in Mississippi, in both urban and rural areas;
- Increase access to affordable healthy foods in order to improve diets and health;
- Promote the sale and consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables, in natural and/or frozen form, particularly those grown in Mississippi; and
- Support expanded economic opportunities in low-income and rural communities.

The program may also provide technical assistance and/or funding opportunities for such projects as new construction of healthy food retailers, renovations or upgrades in order to improve availability or quality of fresh produce, and farmers markets and food cooperatives. The bill was signed into law on April 23, 2014 and will become effective July 1, 2014.

In the coming year, the Subcommittee will continue to track legislation that relates to food issues and will develop legislative proposals to support MFPC's policy priorities.

Food Security and Food Access Subcommittee

Board Liaison: Roy Mitchell

Chairs: Christine Coker & Alicia Landry

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The Food Security and Food Access Subcommittee was formed as a new subcommittee in 2013 with the goal of creating policy recommendations and implementing initiatives designed to increase access to healthy foods in underserved communities. The Subcommittee also works to connect local food systems in Mississippi to programs aimed at increasing food security, such as food banks and Federal food assistance.

Committee co-chair Dr. Landry recently completed a nutrition environment survey in a southern Mississippi county which found that only seven stores in the county stocked groceries, of which only three had fruits, five had vegetables, and only two stores offered more than one or two fruits and/or vegetables. In all stores, the price for healthier items (low-fat milk, lean beef, etc.) was higher than the price for regular items. From this study, the Subcommittee concluded that healthy food access disparities exist throughout the state, even in less rural, more economically diverse areas.

The Subcommittee is undertaking follow up research related to increasing fresh fruit and vegetable access and availability using Farm to School and School Gardens. The Subcommittee

is also interested in the implementation and impact of HB 1328 (the Small Business and Grocer Investment Act) and how it will affect food access in Mississippi. The Subcommittee plans to be involved in helping to obtain funding, setting benchmarks, and evaluating outcomes of the program. The Subcommittee also plans to further expand its goals to include assessing barriers and motivators of fresh fruit and vegetable access in the state to quantify food access/food security problems in Mississippi as well as undertake a systematic evaluation of healthy food access initiatives in order to inform future state policy initiatives.

Local Food Systems as Economic Development

Board Liaison/Chair: Jody Holland

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The Local Food Systems Subcommittee was formed last year in order to address a priority by council members for the Mississippi Food Policy Council to educate “government agencies, civilians, and other organizations about the potential to use local food system development” as a tool for economic development. This year, the Subcommittee focused on developing action steps to highlight opportunities and barriers within local food systems in Mississippi. Through this work, the Subcommittee discovered a strong need to undertake a comprehensive state-wide analysis of Mississippi’s food systems.

Through funding from the Wallace Center, the Subcommittee was able to partner with Ken Meter and Megan Phillips Goldberg from the Crossroads Resource Center to conduct research on Mississippi’s local food systems. This fruitful partnership culminated into the drafting of a report, *An Overview of the Mississippi Farm and Food Economy* (<http://www.crcworks.org/msfood.pdf>), which was completed January 2014. The interviews and data collected from this report provided valuable information on Mississippi’s local food systems and helped the Subcommittee further frame the direction of its future actions.

The Subcommittee also used this report to develop a policy brief on local food systems. The intent of the brief was to provide legislators, stakeholders, and interested parties with important and informative literature on how current policies and existing and developing programs interact and support local food systems. The Subcommittee partnered with Crossroads Resource Center and the Harvard Food Law and Policy Clinic to analyze and apply the study’s findings as well as highlight potential policies and programmatic designs that could enhance Mississippi’s local food economy.

In the coming year, the Subcommittee will use its research to develop legislative proposals for the 2014 legislative session. Additionally, it will continue to develop strategic partnerships and identify other opportunities to increase demand for local food and the awareness of local food production and an important tool for economic development.

4. Revenue and Expenditures

Revenue

In the 2013 – 2014 membership year, the Mississippi Food Policy Council collected \$17,756.32 in revenue.

- \$4,288.32 in MFPC funding was carried over from the previous 2 membership years.
- \$11,530.00 was collected to host the 2nd Annual Farm to Cafeteria statewide conference in December 2013. \$230 was collected in registration fees for the conference, and \$11,300 in sponsorships for the conference was raised by the MFPC.
 - \$3,500 was allocated by the MFPC for the conference
 - \$500 was donated by the Mississippi Farm Bureau Federation
 - \$500 was donated by the Partnership for a Healthy Mississippi
 - \$4,000 was donated by My Brother's Keeper
 - \$2,800 was donated by Delta Fresh Foods
- \$1,748.00 was collected by the MFPC for membership dues in the June 2013 – May 2014 membership year. The MFPC charges \$50 for organization membership, \$35 for individuals, and \$20 for students. Prorated memberships were also offered following the February 2014 membership meeting. 21 organizations and 23 individuals joined or renewed their memberships in the MFPC during the 2013 – 2014 membership year.
- The MFPC also benefited from donations from members to help provide lunches for the MFPC's quarterly public meetings. During the 2013-2014 membership year, the MFPC raised \$190 to help pay for lunches.

Expenditures and Liabilities

The Mississippi Food Policy Council expended and/or obligated \$14,881.68 during the 2013 – 2014 membership year.

- \$9,646.65 was expended on the MFPC's 2nd Annual Farm to Cafeteria conference.
 - \$2086.50 was expended on meeting space.
 - \$2,137.10 was expended on speakers' travel and accommodation.
 - \$884.31 was expended on meeting materials.
 - \$2038.74 was expended on transportation stipends.
 - \$2,500 was expended on catering and table cloth rental.
- \$3,500 allocated by the MFPC to help pay for the Farm to Cafeteria Conference.
- \$1,735.03 was expended on 4 general membership meeting lunches.

Remaining Budget for the MFPC

The MFPC has a remainder of \$2,874.64 for the upcoming 2014 – 2015 membership year.