FOOD GLORIOUS FOOD

Revisiting Family Farms—Mississippi’s First Economic Engine

As Mississippi’s leading industry, agriculture pumps $7.4 billion into the state’s economy. The MS Department of Agriculture estimates that 37,100 farms encompassing 10.9 million acres grow 16 agricultural crops. Crop yields by magnitude are: poultry and eggs, $3.22 billion; forestry, $1.16 billion; soybeans, $930 million; cattle and calves, $448 million; corn, $343 million; cotton, $245 million; catfish, $185 million; rice, $132 million; horticultural crops (vegetables, melons, potatoes, fruits, tree nuts, berries, nursery, greenhouses, floriculture, sod and Christmas trees), $112 million; hay, $105 million; hogs, $100 million; sweet potatoes, $81 million; grain sorghum, $39 million; wheat, $32 million; milk, $32 million, and peanuts, $29 million. The average farm is approximately 294 acres. (Overview)

Though horticultural crops are the state’s ninth largest crop, the interest in local food is an indicator of economic opportunity as younger people are becoming interested in growing food as their livelihood. Mississippi’s heritage as an agriculture state positions it as a potential leader in reviving smaller scale produce production as an attractive and lucrative vocation for young adults that want to stay in Mississippi rather than relocating to another job market. A realistic interest in being a small farmer is the first step, but getting locally grown produce into the local markets is proving to be a stumbling block in most states.

The February 9, 2017, Appalachian Regional Commission newsletter, In the Region, reprinted an article from the The Herald-Dispatch, Huntington, West Virginia, discussing the mismatch of providing locally grown food to local residents. Local residents don’t benefit from the bounty of locally grown food because there’s too much red tape for local farmers to sell their produce in their own local grocery stores. Instead of buying local food, shoppers buy food that is shipped in from across the country or outside of the country. According to the article, “Americans spend more than a trillion dollars each year at grocery stores and restaurants on food that is produced, marketed and distributed on a massive scale… (by a) system (that) provides us with incredible selection and availability at competitive prices.” (Singer) In West Virginia, consumers spend approximately $7 billion on food with a mere $1 billion of that food grown within the state. That’s a lot of lost revenue for local farmers, and a business model repeated in every state.

To counter the loss of local revenue, Food Hubs are being established to assist farmers in getting their produce into the mass market, allowing local residents to buy local food, and local farmers to pocket revenue. It’s economic development at its finest—local food
purchased with local dollars—keeping local money in the local economy. One such hub, the Wild Ramp, a non-profit organization in Huntington WV, is a year-round retail outlet selling locally produced food and goods. In 2016, its fourth year of business, the store booked $358,916 in sales, and paid 158 local producers and artisans $276,873. To offset the costs of doing business, the store raised $215,000 in grants and benefited from thousands of hours volunteer labor. As a result of the availability of local produce, consumers bought more local produce, which encouraged local production. (Singer) That’s definitely a Win-Win.

Mississippi’s Farm & Food Economy

In 2014 the Mississippi Food Policy Council commissioned a study to examine the state’s farm and food economy. The study determined that the focus on producing and exporting commodities was having a detrimental effect on local food supply. In fact, approximately 90 percent of the food consumed by Mississippians came from out of state and/or out of the country resulting in a net loss of outbound cash flow of $8.5 billion a year. That’s money that could stay in the state to finance education and infrastructure improvements. To make matters worse the health implications were disturbing. According to the Study:

“More than half of the population is overweight. 12.4% of the population has diabetes — the largest rate in the U.S. Medical costs for treating this one food-related illness requires $2.7 billion per year. This is nearly half the value of all the food commodities sold by Mississippi farms. Billions more are spent on food-related diseases that are less easily attributed to specific foods.” (Meter)

At the time, the local food movement was considered a trend and operating under the radar, and outside of the traditional farm business model. A new grassroots farming model was taking shape as young farming practitioners—described as fiercely independent and (standing their) ethical ground—started to grow local food and begin selling it through CSAs. Often collaborating and partnering with other small farmers, the CSAs began providing fresh vegetables, fruits, dairy products, poultry and eggs, as well as a variety of meats. The Study further described the burgeoning movement as existing:

“Amidst a climate that is relatively dismissive, these innovators have built strong businesses by constructing solid networks around themselves. Some have signed up hundreds of individual Mississippi neighbors as members or committed consumers, while others have primarily built networks involving other businesses. Both approaches can be effective, as long as a public interest is served.” (Meter)

As an economic initiative, the Report encouraged the State of Mississippi to provide “to formalize a comprehensive program of support that ensures that: (a) adequate infrastructure is built to create efficiencies in local food trade; (b) Mississippi grows new farmers reliably every year, and has rewarding positions they can fill once trained; (c) consumer loyalty is built so strongly that local farms can count on stable local markets; and (d) further food-business clusters, that also engage civic leaders and nonprofits, are fostered.” Such a supportive infrastructure and proper incentives is essential to developing emergent food-business clusters” When quoted one of the farmers offered, “Creation of local food systems is the only obvious option for economic development in most parts of the state. It is a way to prosperity by simply feeding ourselves.” Further data determined that “if each Mississippi resident purchased $5 of food each week directly from a farm in the state, Mississippi farms would earn $774 million of new revenue. (Meter)

Building a Mississippi Local Community Food System

An economic shift similar to West Virginia is underway in Mississippi as a Mississippi Local Community Food System (MLCFS) is coming into being to connect a network of small farmers with local Farmers Markets, making local fresh produce available to EBT recipients, and providing an interface with federally certified local food processors and distributors. The Mississippi Local Community Food System is the brain child of Mississippi State University’s Dr. Leslie Hossfeld, who pioneered a similar Local Community Food System in North Carolina. In the summer of 2015, Hossfeld became head of Mississippi State University’s
Department of Sociology and Social Work, bringing a wealth of research and experience in addressing rural hunger.

In 2006 Hossfeld, as Chair and Professor of Sociology and Criminology at University of North Carolina-Wilmington, co-founded the Southeastern North Carolina Food Systems Program (SENCFSP) with Rev. Mac Legerton, Executive Director, Center for Community Action (CCA) in Lumberton NC. CCA is a multicultural, community-based, nonprofit organization specializing in grassroots empowerment and multi-sector collaboration for social change, providing leadership in community development, policy advocacy, family support and literacy, education improvement and reform, youth leadership development, environmental justice, cultural education, legal reform, responsible and equitable governance. Established in 2010, Feast Down East (FDE) is non-profit affiliate of SENCFSP which includes “an extensive network of partnerships with public and private institutions and agencies across eleven counties in southeastern NC... the most ethnically diverse area in the state and is one of the three major regions of persistent poverty.”

Feast Down East’s mission is to create a healthy, accessible local food system to support farm businesses, distribute local produce, and increase access to healthy food across socioeconomic income brackets. FDE’s Healthy Communities Program works with the Wilmington Housing Authority to provide fresh local food to several public housing developments with limited access to supermarkets or grocery stores. Working with AmeriCorps VISTA, student interns, and volunteers, the Healthy Communities Program distributes affordable farm food, provides healthy cooking classes, establishes community gardens, and strengthens community engagement. (Local)

Work with local farmers includes assistance to local farmers, particularly those with limited resources, through a variety of educational opportunities and technical support services provided by a North Carolina statewide network of partners. The benefits of buying local food include: boosting to the local economy by supporting farm families and their businesses; and the consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables grown, raised or caught locally, which significantly reduces the environmental impact of packing, storing and transporting food. (Why)

Feast Down East maintains a database and map of Farmers Market locations as well as helping farmers distribute farm products through its Food Hub, which “provides farmers with additional income and reduces their costs of distribution.” (Resourceful) the Food Hub connects farmers with chefs interested in purchasing local produce for their restaurants, a service which nurtures “business relationships and collaborative partnerships”, as well as the opportunity for restaurants to be endorsed by Feast Down East for their commitment to sourcing local products. The Food Hub is “a USDA-designated, GAP certified aggregation and distribution center for local agricultural food products. Its purpose is to ease the burden on small to medium size farms in Southeastern North Carolina to market and distribute their products.” In addition to Farmers Markets and restaurants, the Food Hub assists farmers in making their produce available to institutions including K-12 and higher education schools and universities, retirement communities, corporate dining facilities, health care facilities, etc. (Distribute) Also working with FoodCorps/AmeriCorps and the North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service, the Farm-to-School Program works with schools “to build gardens, teach good nutrition, and bring more fresh fruits and vegetables into cafeterias.” (Farm)

By October 2015, Hossfeld had gathered a group of like-minded individuals to conduct research on food insecurity as a component of the Mississippi Food Insecurity Project (MFIP). Working with the Mississippi Food Network and food banks across the State, researchers are interviewing stakeholders including food bank operators, volunteers, and recipients regarding challenges and opportunities in an effort to determine how need has evolved from acute—
occasionally running low and food and money—to chronic, where families use food banks as a primary source of obtaining food for the household.

In the fall of 2016, Hossfeld, building on the MFIP core group, began assembling the MS Local Community Food System (MLCFS) group, a working group made up of community stakeholders including local farmers, business owners, independent farmers’ cooperatives, restaurateurs, community activists, and researchers are pulling together information to pursue funding to establish a food system that links farmers to distributors to customers to those exhibiting the most need, the hungry poor. The System not only encourages local economic development, but addresses local hunger. In 2017, MFIP continues its work with food pantries and food insecurity issues. Also in 2017, Hossfled has established the Oktibbeha County Food Policy Council and Community Food Project to pursue grant funding for a pilot project involving the Starkville Housing Authority and its residents in planting community gardens to address food insecurity.

Farmers Markets
In spite of an interest by small farmers in growing and selling local food, the scope of their endeavors is severely limited by regulations. A small farmer located adjacent to a Dollar General Store or a Walmart may see the store as an opportunity; however, large corporations operate using economies of scale. Only large vendors can compete, as they have the acreage and financial resources to meet the quotas assigned by corporate buyers. A small farmer can neither afford the initial investments costs of the equipment needed to process fresh food for distribution, nor shoulder the risk of falling short of the quota forcing the purchase of additional product to supplement his deficient yield. The existing business model limits the local farmer to Farmers Markets and CSAs.

At present most small farmers selling local produce rely on Farmers Markets. The Mississippi Department of Agriculture maintains a listing of Farmers Markets by county, as well as market specific vendor certification requirements, and state and federal regulations regarding food handling and sales. The Mississippi Sustainable Agriculture Network (MSAN), a network of farmers, consumers, and educators, works with Mississippi’s sustainable farmers interested in local food systems. MSAN provides information and resources regarding sustainable growing practices. (Sustainable)

Mississippi statistics illustrate the need for fresh food—local fruits and vegetables—to address persistent hunger. The Mississippi Food Network, an umbrella organization working hand-in-hand with many of the state’s local food pantries, estimates that one in four (1:4) of Mississippians go to be hungry each night—that’s about 690,000 people—many of them are children. (Hunger)

Community Supported Agriculture (CSAs)
Another vehicle for small farmers to sell their produce is community supported agriculture (CSA) sales of membership shares. Typically, produce is available from June through November with shares sold for weekly or bi-weekly delivery to a distribution location. A CSA share box includes a variety of vegetables, enough to feed a minimum of two people. Several farmers may form a cooperative CSA offering fruit and produce, dairy products including milk, cheese, and yogurt, as well as fresh eggs, and meat, depending upon their individual farms. Selling pre-order shares guarantees farmers an income. Members make a bulk payment purchase for the entire season, providing the farmer with the necessary capital to plan the crop selection, purchase seed, prepare the land, maintenance
equipment, etc. Online sales, predetermined pickup locations, and home delivery services may be available to CSA members.

**North Central Mississippi-based CSAs**

**Bountiful Harvest Farms** (BHF) owner, Sam McLemore, grew up working his family’s vegetable patch. He obtained a degree in landscape contracting from Mississippi State University, and worked in the landscaping business before deciding to grow vegetables full-time. By 2011, Bountiful Harvest Farms, his Starkville-based CSA, had evolved from a family vegetable garden and a new career for McLemore.

By 2015, the CSA experienced growing pains as it outgrew its original two neighborhood gardens to a larger plot before eventually settling at its current three-acre location. Bountiful Harvest Farms holds the Certified Naturally Grown certification, indicative of its National Organic Program practices without the use of synthetic fertilizers, herbicides or pesticides. Using land management and planting practices to minimize the impact of crop cultivation and insects, BHF provides certified naturally grown produce year round.

Seasonal offerings include okra, squash, cucumbers, late tomatoes, sweet potatoes, peas, beans, winter salad greens and root vegetables, including cabbage, kale, broccoli, cauliflower, swiss chard, lettuce, carrots, beets, turnips, radishes, mustard greens, and arugula. In the off season, cover crops are cultivated which improve the quality of the soil.

McLemore and his wife, Isabel, through CSA shares, provide fresh produce from late March through mid-December. In addition to being local vendors at the Starkville Farmers Market, the McLemores have served on the Market Advisory Board, and grown their business into a sophisticated agribusiness well versed in the intricacies of horticulture, weed science, chemistry, crop rotation, certifications, pest management, business administration, marketing, and social media.

**Native Son Farm**

*Mississippi is a place abundant in the natural resources necessary to grow good food with fertile land, ample sunshine and plenty of water, but paradoxically we are dying from a lack of quality nutrition...the answer to the health crisis that we are facing is to be found in the creation and proliferation of profitable, local, organic vegetable farms.*

—Will Reed, Owner, Native Son Farms

Started in 2012, Native Son Farm was one of Mississippi’s first CSA farms and, serving nearly 300 families in 2015, it is now the largest in the State. Located in Tupelo MS Native Son Farm encompasses twenty production acres spread across multiple sites. The Farm is the realization of Will and Amanda Reed’s mission to “build a community based around a naturally grown” produce. Native Son Farm is Certified Naturally Grown, guaranteeing their customers that produce is grown “without the use of synthetic substances and in a manner that promotes soil health and natural methods of pest and weed control.” (About)
The Reeds met while attending California’s Humboldt State University, a residential campus of the California State University, offering an array of programs and activities that promote understanding of social, economic and environmental issues through interdisciplinary of environmental and natural resources studies. Humboldt is well known for its social and environmental responsibility studies, which promote individual citizen action towards the greater good, motivated by good conscience and informed action. The University educates a diverse student population to act as community stewards of learning to make a positive difference. (Humboldt)

Upon completion of his degree, Will Reed, a Tupelo native, returned to Tupelo to establish Native Son Farm and begin sustainable farming. As part of his ongoing stewardship, he is Board President of the Mississippi Sustainable Agriculture Network (MSAN) and “is one of the State’s leading practitioners of organically minded vegetable production.” Amanda works side-by-side with Will and the Farm’s full-time crew growing sustainable, local produce.

The Naturally Grown certification ensures customers that “produce is grown without the use of synthetic herbicides, pesticides, fertilizers, or genetically modified organisms”, a commitment Native Son Farm has made to growing produce that is safe and healthy. Respectful of seasonality and local climate, Native Son Farm meets the demand for and provides its CSA members with local food by utilizing crop diversification, deep water wells, greenhouse growing, and multiple outdoor growing sites as safeguards against crop failures. (About)

**Beaverdam Fresh Farms**

Beaverdam Fresh Farms is an on-line fresh food buying club. Beaverdam, through its partnerships with other producers, brokers perishable produce to a broader market, is a buying club offering pick-up in six locations—Starkville, Columbus, Tupelo, Oxford, Meridian, and Jackson MS. Club members place orders online,

Photos Source: http://www.nativesonfarm.com/
designating the preferred location for pick up. The difference between purchasing from a buying club and purchasing a share of a CSA is with the former, there is no upfront investment at the beginning of the growing season. Customers make weekly purchases, buying what they want from the available selection. Unlike a CSA, buyers can leave town (go on vacation) and not forfeit a box of food during the season.

As owners of Beaverdam Fresh Farms, Dustin Pinion and Ali Fratesi mimic natural grazing patterns to raise their livestock for butcher and resale. The Farm, established in 2010 is biologically operating “on the principle that healthy soils create healthy foods and in turn healthy communities.” Farming practices, which involve regularly rotating livestock onto fresh pasture, build organic matter and preserve the land for future generations. Vegetables are grown without the use of pesticides or herbicides and livestock are healthier without the use of antibiotics, vaccinations, or added hormones.

Beaverdam Fresh Farms are on the cutting edge of brokering fresh produce as well as small scale poultry processing to meet Mississippi’s regulations for handling and processing fresh and frozen food.

As part of their vision to be stewards of the land, grow healthy food, and support other local farms, Beaverdam Fresh Farms partners with other farmers around the north central Mississippi region, delivering dairy products, honey, fruit, vegetables, and meats to members of its buying club. Partners include: Amorphous Gardens (produce), Canton, Mississippi; Bean Fruit Coffee Company, Yirgacheffe Coffee Farmers Cooperative Union, Gedeo ethnic region of Ethiopia; Beaverdam Fresh Farms (poultry, eggs, pork, and produce), Cedar Bluff, MS; Bountiful Harvest Farm (produce), Starkville MS; Cherry Creek Orchard (fruit, berries, tomatoes, purple hull peas & local honey), Pontotoc, MS; Delta Blues Rice, Ruleville MS; DeRegio’s Whole Grain Crackers, Starkville MS; Dolly Farms (vegetables, cut flowers and eggs), Vicksburg MS; Grit Girl (com products), Oxford MS; High Heeled Hippie (produce) Clinton MS; J and M Fresh Blueberries, Crystal Springs MS; Klein & Sons Farm (pecans, herbs, and seasonings), Edwards MS; Landers Livestock (beef), Kosciusko MS; Lazy 91 Ranch (lamb), Winona, MS; Marble Creek Farmstead (duck and eggs), Sylacauga, AL; Mississippi Bees Honey, Flora MS; Native Son Farm (produce) Tupelo MS; Progress Milk Barn, McComb MS; St. Bethany’s Fresh (hydroponic tomatoes) Pontotoc MS; Sweet & Sauer (fermented foods and beverages), Jackson MS; T&R Diary Milk & Cheese, Liberty MS; Two Dogs Farm and Salad Days (produce), Flora MS; and Yokna Bottom Farm (produce), Oxford MS.

In 2014 their use of the online business model lead Pinion and Fratesi to turn to the internet for funding, initiating a kickstarter campaign to build a poultry processing facility to accommodate their growing business.
towards large scale agri-businesses earning significantly higher revenues. Successful completion of the poultry processing facility for The Farm would have served as a model for the small poultry farm sustainability. Small scale farmers offer little competition to the large agribusiness poultry producers. Selling locally is an entirely different market than interstate and overseas exports.

The Role of the Food Hub

As previously discussed, an integral part of a successful Local Community Food System is the Food Hub, which serves as a go-between for the small local farmer and the US Department of Agriculture in meeting federal regulations regarding the processing of local food for sale to the public.

In 2015, Up in Farms Food Hub (UIFFH) received a $315 thousand investment from Delta Regional Authority to establish a food hub “on land owned by the University of Mississippi Medical Center, a spot that was the original Mississippi Farmer’s Market.”

Up in Farms Food Hub is a subsidiary of Soul City Hospitality, a consortium of businessmen and restauranteurs, focused on expanding the role of small farmers in fruit and vegetable production “to reignite the economies of the small towns of Mississippi from Collins to Clarksdale.” (Up in Farms) One component of the Up in Farms mission is to determine their fruit and vegetable needs. The hub’s role is then to bring guaranteed demand to Mississippi farmers to ensure there is a market for Mississippi-farmed produce.

The Food Hub coordinates production schedules with farmers based upon the demand by regional buyers, serving as the liaison between farmers and large quantity buyers—grocery stores, restaurants, schools, and commercial distributors. At its Jackson-based warehouse, UIFFH receives produce directly from farmers within a 40-county area of central Mississippi. Once in the warehouse, fresh produce is washed, graded, packed, cooled, and stored. These federally mandated processing activities are prohibitively expensive for many individual farms preventing them from participating in the larger retail food market. In addition to providing farmers with
processing services for their fresh, perishable produce, the Hub provides farmers with support and training for timely product delivery at a sustainable price. (1Million Cups)

Up in Farms envisions creating a transferable program incorporating producer capacity, food safety, financial sustainability, conservation practices that can be used to establish other food systems—a continuous loop of farmers, processors (including value-added), buyers, and consumers. UIFFH is interested in assisting small farming operations (5 to 15 acres) in obtaining microfinancing to increase capacity. Current USDA funding targets larger growers to fund specific activities that support Department missions such as improving irrigation or cover cropping. By expanding capacity, small farms improve their likelihood of making a sustainable living growing food. Though many small farmers have achieved training for food safety, the cost of improvements are too expensive if they don’t enhance capacity. Unfortunately, training in food safety, conservation, and farm-business practices are secondary concerns to small farmers trying to make a living. The role of the Food Hub is providing small farmers with logistics, marketing, and aggregation. (Watkins)

Up in Farms initiatives being considered include: leasing reusable plastic containers for distribution to producers to reduce costs of corrugated cardboard packaging; initiating a GroupGAP program through the hub that will oversee the food safety Quality Management System documentation; developing a “Mississippi Farmed” branding campaign as an umbrella brand to collectively promote producers; working with distributors and their customers to pre-sell goods through set-priced contracts; coordinating just-in-time production with market demand; developing multiple strategies to provide more consistent, more efficient, and better trained labor for harvesting; and meeting the demand for fresh-cut product, while maintaining food safety requirements and competing foreign imported products. Addressing demand, food safety, and competition require substantial food Hub investment in capital, training, staffing, and product development; however, it also opens up significant sales channels for producers, as well as a much higher potential revenue ceiling. (Watkins)

The Up in Farms Food Hub considers itself to be “a small group with big ideas hoping to forge strong links for a sustainable food system. We need to learn from others who have been there. And we need to find ways for groups such as ours to collaborate in solving these complex problems.” (Watkins)

**Other Community and Regional Food Initiatives**

In January 2017, Mississippi State University, as part of its Interdisciplinary Lecture Series on Race in America, which is co-sponsored by the Myrlie Evers-Williams Institute for the Elimination of Health Disparities, Local Food Systems Research Interest Group, and the MSU Department of Sociology, hosted Dr. Samina Raja, Principal Investigator of the Food Systems Planning and Healthy Communities Lab in the Department of Urban and Regional Planning at the University at Buffalo, The State University of New York.

Dr. Raja’s presentation, Building Food Systems Policy from the Ground Up, included research on the use of policy and planning to promote health and food equity and case studies of initiatives underway in other states. Of particular interest was the work being done in Cabarrus County NC. Farmers in Cabarrus County NC, which borders the City of Charlotte, engage in commodity crop production and livestock production, with a growing segment of fruit and vegetable production. With a local population of approximately 184,500 residents, small-scale farmers are able to sell their produce through the county’s robust farmers’ market system of five seasonal markets and one year-round market. Farmers have access to food safety and value-added processing through “three food businesses that provide aggregation, distribution and wholesale services for beef, poultry, dairy, produce and other foodstuff produced in the county.” (Whittaker)

Obstacles to starting a small farming operation in the area include: affordable, available land for purchase...
and/or long-term lease; purchasing equipment; small farm business education/training; and access to institutional markets (schools, hospitals, etc.) and/or large commercial organization that purchase fresh food-- Cisco, Aramark and US Foods. (Hodgson)

Between 2008 and 2014, in an effort to address food insecurity and provide food pantries with high quality proteins and fresh produce, as well as support locally grown food as an economic initiative, the Cabarrus County government “took important steps towards institutionalizing and funding local food systems policy and programmatic work.” Initiatives included updating the County’s Comprehensive Plan to incorporate Food Systems Policy; establishing the Cabarrus County Farm & Food Policy Council; creating a special fund, the Trust Fund Supporting Local Food Economy, to use present-use valuation deferred tax penalties to support sustainable agricultural projects; conducting a Food Systems Assessment Study; and creating a local food system program coordinator position to oversee the food system assessment, coordinate the food council, and manage other food-related projects. (Hodgson)

In 2014, as part of a $3 million budget reduction, the County implemented “significant and unexpected budget cuts”, which adversely affected financial support for the Food Systems programs, including funding for the Farm & Food Council, and eliminating some $400,000 for a planned the Elma C. Lomax Incubator Farm, and discontinuing the food system program coordinator position. (Hodgson)

The Farm was developed as a partnership between Cabarrus County and NC Cooperative Extension before operations were transferred to the Carolina Farms Stewardship Association in 2014. The Farm lets “individuals interested in starting a business as a farmer enroll in the program which provides classroom instruction on the business of farming in Cabarrus County.” (Elma)

As a result of the budget cuts, the Farm & Food Council realized that need to diversify its funding streams: by developing of new partnerships including one with the Carolina Farm Stewardship Association (CFSA), which assumed temporary operations of the Elma C. Lomax Farm through December 31, 2015; and private philanthropist, Scott Avett, musician and founder member of The Avett Brothers, which raised about $25,000 in a Barnraiser funding campaign. Also in 2015 the Cabarrus County board of commissioners authorized $25,000 from the County’s deferred tax fund to match funds raised by the Barnraiser funding campaign, funding the Lomax Farm until June 30, 2015. The Farm & Food Council became a 501c not-for-profit corporation in order to solicit charitable contributions, and plans to develop a long-term, 10-year food security plan, addressing: fresh food supply issues related to food emergency agencies; the use of mobile markets and programs to distribute healthy foods into neighborhood grocery stores; and explore a farm to school program to benefit local growers and provide access to healthy food within the school system. (Hodgson)

Food Farming as a Vocation—
Both a Family Livelihood and Food FOR Families

Each of the families discussed herein are committed to preserving the land, and either establishing and/or continuing their role in preserving Mississippi’s agriculture legacy of small farming.

It’s not easy. There may be no lifestyle more demanding than farming. Labor intensive, farm yields, especially fresh produce, have a very limited lifespan. Getting produce through the regulatory process for sale to the public is daunting. CSAs eliminate some of the regulatory requirements, but limit the amount that can be sold— not the amount that can be grown.

From an economic development perspective, small farming is an opportunity to stave off Mississippi’s brain drain and create jobs as young professionals,
particularly those in the applied sciences, opt to pursue stay in Mississippi and pursue small farming as a vocation. Becoming a farmer is a serious commitment, just as becoming a parent is an even more demanding life commitment. Making the choice to be both shouldn’t be mutually exclusive because young families can’t live on small farming revenues. Mississippi has longstanding traditions based in family farms—farms that provide a living to our families.

As demonstrated by the willingness of farmers to work together to achieve mutual benefits, farming brings communities together to work towards common goals including feeding our own.

Photos Source: http://www.nativesonfarm.com/

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Elected to the United States Senate in 1947 with the promise to “plow a straight furrow to the end of the row,” John C. Stennis recognized the need for an organization to assist governments with a wide range of issues and to better equip citizens to participate in the political process. In 1976, Senator Stennis set the mission parameters and ushered in the development of a policy research and assistance institute which was to bear his name as an acknowledgment of his service to the people of Mississippi.

Created as a service and research arm of Mississippi State University, the John C. Stennis Institute of Government was established on February 9, 1976. Announcing its formation during a two-day Forum on Politics honoring U.S. Senators John Stennis and Margaret Chase Smith, MSU President William L. Giles outlined the Institute’s mission and goals.

According to Giles, the Institute would seek to integrate research, service, and teaching activities to improve government in the state, as well as promote the training of students who seek careers in public service.

Decades later, the Stennis Institute of Government has remained true to that initial charge. By providing meaningful, applied research to both local and state units of Mississippi government, the Institute brings a wealth of experience and knowledge to bear on real-world issues. Through its executive development programs, training opportunities, and technical assistance programs, the Institute provides support for today’s policy-makers from the courthouse to the classroom. And, by playing an active role in the development of tomorrow’s governmental leaders, the Institute is working to ensure that Mississippi’s future remains strong.

Like the majority of public servants in the State, the staff of the Institute are generalists, bringing the wide range of their experiences and talents to bear on a diverse range of issues. From political analysis and commentary to economic development activities, the topics delineated on any list of ongoing Institute projects clearly illustrate this diversity. Likewise, projects range in size and scope from specific work with Mississippi’s smallest towns to federally-funded grants with multi-state application.

Mission

The John C. Stennis Institute of Government performs a threefold mission: (1) to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of Mississippi state and local governments through basic and applied research, training, technical assistance, and service; (2) to provide technical assistance and research for both rural development in Mississippi and regional activities in the Southeast; and (3) to promote civic education and citizen involvement in the political process.