



THE ALABAMA  
SUSTAINABLE  
AGRICULTURE  
NETWORK

# ASAN UPDATE

Winter 2013-2014

Published Quarterly

## AFTER THE FARM: POST-PRODUCTION CHALLENGES IN THE LOCAL MEAT MOVEMENT

By Tiffany Williams Woods

A farmer's daughter, I remember wondering throughout my childhood if the hamburger or steak on my plate was one that had been sourced from my father's farm in Oconee County, Georgia. And before the days of shopping at big box stores and supermarkets, I can remember my parents taking me to shop at the locally owned grocery store in the central, premiere location of town. But then as the times



Beef cows at Hastings Farm in Bay Minette. Photo credit: Julie Hunter

changed, our community (like many others) replaced shopping at the local grocer with strolling down endless aisles of name brand stores to pick up our grocer-

ies. Tracing the food sources and miles traveled from farm to plate seemed an impossible notion, but it wouldn't be until decades later that I would learn the importance and significance in doing so.

Farmers were famously told "get big or get out" by the U.S. Secretary of Agriculture in 1973, and so they did, paralleling the actions of the growing meat industry to meet the demands of an expanding population to feed the masses. Our economy has and will continue to rely on

large scale farms to produce huge volumes of food, which will continue to strengthen American agricul-

(Continued on page 6)

### INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

Letter from the Board President	2
Jim 'n Nick's and local pork production	7
Mobile welcomes SSAWG in 2014	12
Revolving Loan Fund Awards First Three Loans	13
Food policy updates	13
News from your Neighbors	14
Classifieds and Announcements	14
Upcoming Events	15

## CHARTING THE COURSE FOR "A GARDEN IN EVERY SCHOOL"

It's widely acknowledged and frequently lamented that each new generation is less and less connected with the beautifully complex system of natural processes, environmental factors, knowledge and wisdom, hard work, time, economics, and much more, that must come together to bring food to their tables.

Perhaps one of the more immediate approaches to reestablishing those ties is the school garden. School gardens allow kids to experience and participate in a somewhat simplified, miniaturized version of that beautiful, complex system. School gardens can be tools for teaching a whole array of subjects and skills, and for that reason, two groups in Alabama are on a mission to see a school garden in every elementary school in the state.



Students harvest carrots at one of the Druid City Garden Project's gardens. Photo courtesy of DCGP

(Continued on page 10)

## GETTING STARTED WITH CROP ROTATION

By Karen Wynne

Now that the nights are long it is a great time to sit down and think about your crop rotation. A rotation is the succession of crops grown on a piece of land. Crop rotations can play a key role in keeping down pest and disease pressure, allowing diverse plantings to better utilize soil nutrients, and improving management of weeds. Rotations are part art, part science, and developing one can be intimidating, but it can also make a major contribution to your soil and plant health and your business' bottom line. I'll try to keep it simple to get you started.

First, if you haven't already, divide your growing areas into distinct and manageable plots. Ideally you will be rotating between plots of equal size, so that if you

(Continued on page 4)

ASAN new/beginning farmer scholarships for the 2014 SSAWG Conference:  
**APPLICATION DEADLINE EXTENDED TO DECEMBER 9!** See pg. 12

## LETTER FROM THE ASAN BOARD PRESIDENT



ASAN has just wrapped up an exciting fall filled with great events and outreach. I hope you were able to participate in one of the

three Food and Farm Forums across the state or the Birmingham Food Summit. ASAN provided lots of great opportunities for farmers and consumers around the state to connect with one another and learn ways to increase the success and impact of their work.

If you didn't get to participate, or if you're still hungry for more learning, please consider attending the Southern Sustainable Agriculture Working Group conference in January in Mobile, Alabama. This conference is one of the best events in the country and we're honored to have them select Alabama as a venue for the next two years. You'll learn from the best farmers from throughout the southeast about how to have more success with your own operation and how to get started if you're new to farming. Look for registration details inside this newsletter.

As part of ASAN's efforts to continue improving as an organization and enhancing your operation, ASAN has developed a short survey that gives you the chance to tell us what we should focus on for the next few years. We'll be using your feedback to develop a strategic plan that best fits the needs of sustainable farmers and eaters in Alabama. We know there's lots of great work to do to make Alabama a

better place to live and grow – but we need your help setting our path. Please take a few minutes and complete the survey, either on paper or online, and help us help you.

In addition to the survey, please consider joining ASAN as a member or also making a tax deductible donation. You can help us support local sustainable food systems and make 2013 a great year to be a small farmer, rancher, fishermen AND consumer of Alabama produced food!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Edwin Marty".

Edwin Marty  
ASAN Board President

### Advertise your business in the ASAN Newsletter!

Distribution to 1500+ around Alabama

Print and digital formats

Diverse, informed readership of farmers, businesspeople, consumers, educators, and more

Contact [alice@asanonline.org](mailto:alice@asanonline.org) for details

### About the Enclosed Needs Survey

The enclosed needs survey is an opportunity for us to hear from you about how we've been doing on our current projects, and what you think we should be doing in the next 1-3 years.

**SNAIL MAIL:** An envelope is enclosed — all you've got to do is slap a stamp on it and drop it in the mail!

**ONLINE:** A link to an online version of the survey is at [www.asanonline.org/blog/post/needs-survey](http://www.asanonline.org/blog/post/needs-survey).

Please take the time to complete the survey, either on paper or online (please don't do both). All completed surveys submitted by December 31 will be entered into a prize drawing! (Prizes listed at the top of the enclosed survey.)

As a grassroots network, ASAN depends on the guidance of our members and partners, so thanks so much for your time and feedback!

### CONTRIBUTORS: WINTER 2013-2014

**Thank you to everyone who contributed to this newsletter, including (but not limited to):**

**Tiffany Williams Woods** works on projects involving agricultural value chains throughout the southeast for the National Wildlife Federation.

**Karen Wynne** is a soil scientist, organic consultant, and owner/manager of Rosita's Farm in Hartselle, AL.

**Edwin Marty**, ASAN Board President and Executive Director of EAT South

**Alice Evans**, ASAN Statewide Coordinator



## YOUR GROWING SEASON IS NOW.

Farmland. Equipment. Fertilizer. Seed. Herbicides. It all adds up for agribusiness enterprises. But we can help. For nearly a century, Alabama Ag Credit and Alabama Farm Credit have offered farmers a variety of lending options and financing programs.

From poultry and peanuts to cotton, cattle and catfish, we know the industry – and what it takes to make things grow. That includes flexible short-term loans, operating lines of credit, real estate loans, equipment loans, improvement loans, and financing for other crop production expenses.

It also includes some of the lowest rates in years, making now the time for refinancing. Call us today, and get ready to grow.



Land purchasing and refinancing

New and used equipment purchases

Irrigation and pivots

Harvesting costs

Livestock financing

Operating expenses

**FINANCING  
LAND & FARMS  
SINCE 1916**



[AlabamaFarmCredit.com](http://AlabamaFarmCredit.com)  
877-681-6087

[AlabamaAgCredit.com](http://AlabamaAgCredit.com)  
800-579-5471



## CROP ROTATION (CONT.)

*(Continued from page 1)*

grow a set number of tomatoes in one you can move on to the next smoothly. Right now on our farm in Hartselle, we are working with eight field plots that are each about 5000 square feet. But you can easily scale up to 80 acres or down to eight raised beds. Some crop rotations simply alternate between two crops, which is better than nothing, but a minimum of four years between crops is better if you can manage it.



Plot layout at Rosita's Farm in Hartselle, AL

A good map really helps lay out your plots. I like to use the maps on Web Soil Survey ([websoilsurvey.nrcs.usda.gov](http://websoilsurvey.nrcs.usda.gov)); you can map out your field using an aerial photograph or topographic map as the background, and you can find out about your soil types at the same time. Google maps or other online mapping sites may have a more current satellite image. A good soil map also allows you to evaluate the differences in the plots – some may be clayier or sandier, and some may be better drained or have a tendency to flood. This is part of the art of figuring out what to grow where and when.

Then look at the crops you plan to grow. First, divide them by crop family (see yellow table, pg. 5, with thanks to Jean Mills and Southern SAWG for compiling). Crops in the same family often share the same

pests and diseases- think of Colorado potato beetles on eggplant and potatoes, or downy mildew on squashes, cucumbers, and pumpkins. They also probably have similar growth habits and use nutrients in similar ways; diversifying allows for different crops to better access and utilize the nutrients in your soil.

Also look at the life cycles of the pests that are the biggest problems on your favorite crops. The Colorado potato beetle spends the winter as an adult burrowed into the edge of the field, and walks back into the field to eat your crop again. The squash vine borer larva overwinters in the field and emerges in early summer. Planting these pests' favorite crops in the same spot just makes life easier for them and harder for you. Understanding where your problem pests are coming from can help you manage the field between crops. In general, moving the crop to a new field will reduce pest numbers, but if that field is only a few feet away it will make less of an impact.

Then, think about how you manage each

*(Continued on page 5)*

Need a **FREE** outlet to market your produce?

## ALABAMA MARKETMAKER™

Linking Agricultural Markets

Register for MarketMaker and connect to new customers!



For additional details, contact:

Kenesha Allie  
[kmr0018@auburn.edu](mailto:kmr0018@auburn.edu)  
 334-324-2065

Deacue Fields  
[fieldde@auburn.edu](mailto:fieldde@auburn.edu)  
 334-844-4931

James McWhorter  
[jcm0033@auburn.edu](mailto:jcm0033@auburn.edu)

To register or learn about MarketMaker visit:

<http://al.foodmarketmaker.com>



## CROP ROTATION (CONT.)

(Continued from page 4)

crop: when it is planted, how it is grown, how it is harvested. If you can group similar crops together it will make your management and rotation easier. For example, tomatoes, peppers, eggplant, and potatoes are all in the nightshade family. But potatoes are planted, grown and harvested very differently than the other three. So you may want to plant potatoes in a different field, or a different part of your nightshade plot. Some crops are shorter season than others; many require successive plantings to have a continuous supply. Shorter season cover crops like buckwheat and sunflowers can fill in gaps in production in the summer.

Cover crops are another important part of crop rotation; they give the soil a chance to replenish organic matter, smother weeds, and capture nutrients (among other things). Some farmers build their rotation around their cover crops, and others only grow on half of their fields in a given year, allowing the other half to rebuild with cover crops. If you have a period where you won't be growing a cash crop, think about what cover crop would fit well. Cut flowers are also a great addition to the diversity of a rotation; they are usually members of a different botanical family, and many serve as hosts for beneficials and pollinators.

Our rotation for the coming season will be something like the table at right, which is color coded by family. Looking back, we grew a lot of members of the gourd family (it was a really bad year to decide to do that!). This complicates our rotation for the following year, because all but one field had some crop in that family, whether melons, summer squash, winter squash, or cucumbers. Field 1 and 2 also flooded this summer, which they do not normally do, but is something we will be more

CROP FAMILY	VEGETABLES
Apiaceae (Carrot Family)	carrots, parsnips, parsley, celery
Asteraceae (Sunflower Family)	lettuces, endive, radicchio
Brassicaceae (Mustard Family)	broccoli, Brussels sprouts, cabbage, cauliflower, Chinese cabbage, collards, kale, kohlrabi, radishes, rutabagas, turnips
Chenopodiaceae (Goosefoot Family)	beets, spinach, Swiss chard
Convolvulaceae (Bindweed Family)	sweet potatoes
Cucurbitaceae (Gourd Family)	cucumbers, gourds, melons, pumpkins, squashes
Fabaceae (Pea Family)	beans, peas
Liliaceae (Onion Family)	chives, garlic, leeks, onions, shallots
Malvaceae (Mallow Family)	okra
Poaceae (Grass Family)	corn
Solanaceae (Nightshade Family)	eggplant, peppers, Irish potatoes, tomatillos, tomatoes

aware of in the future. A lot of this is still preliminary and I can't say we've decided exactly what we'll grow next year, but at least we've got something on paper to play with and tweak.

Once you have a basic rotation in mind, you'll want to revisit it regularly. Each crop will interact with the one before and the one after in a different way. As you observe the crops and get a few years of rotation under your belt, you can improve upon your system. I once heard Alex Hitt, an excellent organic grower from North Carolina, talk at a Southern SAWG conference about his seven-year rotation. After explaining the complex interactions between crops and how he had developed the system, he confessed that he had never

actually grown through a planned seven year rotation. There are always improvements to make, ways to fine tune and revise.

If you want to do more research, try Eliot Coleman's *New Organic Grower*, a classic book that provides many more practical ideas on how to get started planning your crop rotation. If you are looking for more detailed information, the Natural Resource, Agriculture and Engineering Service worked with some of the best organic growers in the Northeast to evaluate crop rotations; the result of their efforts, *Crop Rotations on Organic Farms*, is available online at [www.sare.org](http://www.sare.org) or you can buy the book. Whether you start with a simple rotation or jump into something more complex, give crop rotation a try in 2014!

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
2013	Squash/ beans/ okra	Melons/ squash/ sunflower cover crop	Melons/ cut flow- ers	Toma- toes, peppers, eggplant	Winter squash, mulched	Winter squash, mulched	Winter Squash, mulched	Winter squash, mulched
Winter 2014	Rye/oat/ wheat/ crimson clover cover	Garlic/ cole crops	Rye/oat/ wheat/ crimson clover cover	Rye/ oat/ wheat cover	Winter pea cover	Rye/ oat/ wheat cover	Fallow (no cover crop)	Rye/ oat/ wheat cover
Spring 2014	Cover crop cont.	Garlic/ cole crops	Potatoes	Cover crop cont.	Tomatoes/ peppers/ eggplant	Beans/ peas	Greens	Beans/ peas
Summer 2014	Winter squash	Sunflower cover crop	Potatoes/ Sunflow- ers	Squash/ cucum- bers	Tomatoes/ peppers/ eggplant/ cut flowers	Beans/ peas/ buck- wheat	Sweet potatoes	Beans/ peas/ buck- wheat
Fall 2014	Cover crop	TBD	Greens/ lettuces	Cole crops	Cover crop	Garlic	Sweet potatoes/ crimson clover	TBD

## AFTER THE FARM (CONT.)

(Continued from page 1)

ture and our markets. Beef cattle production ranks second in cash receipts among Alabama farm commodities. However, there is also a place for individuals to enter niche markets to help them find economic opportunities in rural America; small scale farms and local production-distribution networks can help them achieve those means.

In the past few years, we have seen a strong shift in American consumer preferences towards purchasing meat and produce from local sources and markets. Health benefits, environmental concerns, and efforts to keep wealth “local” and in the community are just a few of the driving factors that have led to these consumer choices. We are also seeing a shift in individuals' wanting to get back to the simpler aspects of living and pursuing entrepreneurial opportunities on their land, with many seeing farming as a viable way to provide food and income for their family.

However, those of us in the agricultural community understand the many challenges that farmers face throughout the production process, especially those involved with raising, finishing and selling local meat. If you are a local meat producer and you have successfully bred, raised and kept your herd of livestock alive, then you have won half the battle. This article is not to discourage entry into local meat production; however we aim to shed light on the challenges that need to be addressed throughout the various levels of the agricultural community to provide access for farmers into local meat markets.

When discussing “local meat”, is important to define the specific niche product and market one is referring to. For the purpose of this article, “local meat” will refer to meat that travels on average 50-75 miles from farm to table, purposely excluding qualifiers like “all-natural”, “grass-finished”, “organic” and so forth.

The majority of local meat networks often depend on small-scale, family farms. To be sustainable, meat products must be transported over shorter geographic distances and processed at a central location by smaller processors. Large animals such as swine and cattle are costly to transport; the cost of fuel, “wear and tear” to vehicles, and stress

incurred to animals during long hauls can result in net losses for the producers if not pre-calculated properly, as well as opportunity costs in hours spent on the road.

### First Step: Find a Processor

Finding a local processor who is capable of meeting your needs will be an

essential first step into the planning process of your local meat operation. It has been suggested that processors in the southeast be located less than 100 miles from the farm, preferably less than 50 miles. Sadly, there are far fewer federally inspected slaughterhouses and processors throughout the U.S. than in decades past, just as there are far fewer mid-size and small farms. In 1980, there were 1,627 federally inspected slaughterhouses in the U.S. compared to 1,051 in 2010, according to the USDA.

It is important for producers to first locate a processor that has the facility with the skills, inspection status, size, and availability to prepare the meat products safely, legally, and to customer specifications. Farmers need to be prepared to schedule slaughter dates in advance with the processor, especially during busy seasons. Producers will need to understand the specific services performed by processors, and ensure that they meet the needs and standards required by the end buyer. Identifying and locating the pro-

cessor will be an important aspect of the planning process for a producer, and because many small-scale slaughter facilities depend on word-of-mouth in rural communities, reaching out to others in the field will be helpful to determine the best-fit.

When selecting a slaughter facility, it is important for producers to understand the difference between federally and state in-



Lamb leg steak, prepared as part of a Cast Iron Chef competition at the Chattanooga Market, raised at Sheerlark Farm in Flat Rock, AL. Photo credit: Sherry Johnson

spected facilities, and how it affects meat sales. Federally and state inspected processing facilities follow similar guidelines so that the meats have consistent standards and are safe for human consumption. The main difference between state and federal facilities is that state inspected meats can only be sold within the state in which the meat

was processed, while federally inspected meats can enter commerce across state lines. Online sales and mail orders processed at a state facility cannot be sold across state lines, while federally inspected internet and mail orders can be sold across state lines. State inspected meat products are packaged with a state inspection legend on the label, while federally inspected meat has a USDA inspection legend. TA plants are federally inspected plants, and the products bear the USDA inspection legend.

Custom slaughter facilities are another meat processing option in addition to state and federally inspected plants. While custom slaughter and processing facilities do not have a state or federal inspector on-site at all times, the plants are regularly inspected for overall sanitation. However the live animals and the carcasses are not inspected for disease. All meat products from custom facilities are marked “Not for Sale” and cannot be sold. Producers use custom slaughtering for individual consumption purposes.

### Marketing options

Another significant challenge facing meat producers is finding access to market entry. Traditional meat producers such have the access and ability to sell their livestock whole,

(Continued on page 7)



Large Black hog and Katahdin sheep raised at JMB Farms in Samson, AL. Photo credit: Joseph and Melissa Baxley

## AFTER THE FARM (CONT.)

(Continued from page 6)

directly at auctions. Local meat producers must address the challenges of marketing and selling all cuts of their product at various markets, all at prices that offset production costs, provide a profit margin, and are agreeable to the customer.

Two primary marketing strategies exist, direct and indirect marketing. Direct marketing means that the producer raises and finishes the product, as well as markets and sells to the end user, while indirect marketing (i.e. branded programs) requires that the producer raise and finish the product, and then sells to the branded program to complete the remainder of the process to the end user.

Direct marketing includes: farmer's markets, custom orders, buying clubs, specialty stores, and restaurants. Pros of direct marketing include: building a loyal customer base; potential to build your own brand; and potential for the largest net margin, since the producer is selling directly to the end user at

retail, with no "middle costs."

The cons are that producers must assume all risks and costs to get product to end user, and must be able to master marketing and sales, in addition to producing. The most important aspect for producers is the ability to sell all cuts of the animal without leftover product, and appropriately pricing the product.

There is a real and viable opportunity for locally raised meat producers, and this opportunity is growing. Multiple studies and reports indicate consumer preferences leaning towards local, healthier, sustainable, and farm-branded meats. Producers are learning and sharing knowledge about which breeds taste the best and how to raise them using lower

For a full list of processing facilities in Alabama (and a few just over the line), go to [www.asanonline.org/blog/post/meat-processing](http://www.asanonline.org/blog/post/meat-processing).

input costs. The production of a niche product can lead to a premium price per pound once market entry is established, providing income opportunities in rural communities. And finally, food grown, processed, and distributed at a local level can help generate jobs and stimulate the community's economy.

As an agricultural community, it will be important for all of us to embrace the local food movement moving forward; this will only add to our market share for beef producers nationwide. I started my career in agriculture unaware of the particular source of the meat products I purchased on a weekly basis. While I still find myself picking up meat from the counters of brand name stores on occasion, I can also tell you the name and location of the farmer and processor of whom I buy my locally-sourced meat products from on a regular basis. And to me, that is something worth writing home about.

## JIM 'N NICK'S SUPPORTING LOCAL, HERITAGE HOG PRODUCTION

Jim 'n Nick's, the popular Birmingham-based barbecue restaurant chain, is digging in deep. Not only have they begun working with local farmers to produce to Alabama born and raised, heritage-breed, pasture-raised pork. They have also bought a processing plant in Eva, AL, to slaughter it as humanely as possible, and plan to market it as fresh heritage pork as well as value added pork products throughout the South.

It's all part of something called the Fatback Pig Project, an effort to "put farmers back to work and essentially rebuild the farming infrastructure in the South," says Rosie McClure, who handles PR/Marketing for Jim 'n Nick's. Jim 'n Nick's Nick Pihakis and Bill Niman (founder of renowned Niman Ranch, a California-based ranch, meat processor and distributor) had had trouble finding Southern hog farmers, and realized that many of them had gone out of business or had quit farming for



Some of the heritage-breed, pasture-raised hogs Jim 'n Nick's is partnering with local farmers to raise. Photo courtesy of Jim 'n Nick's.

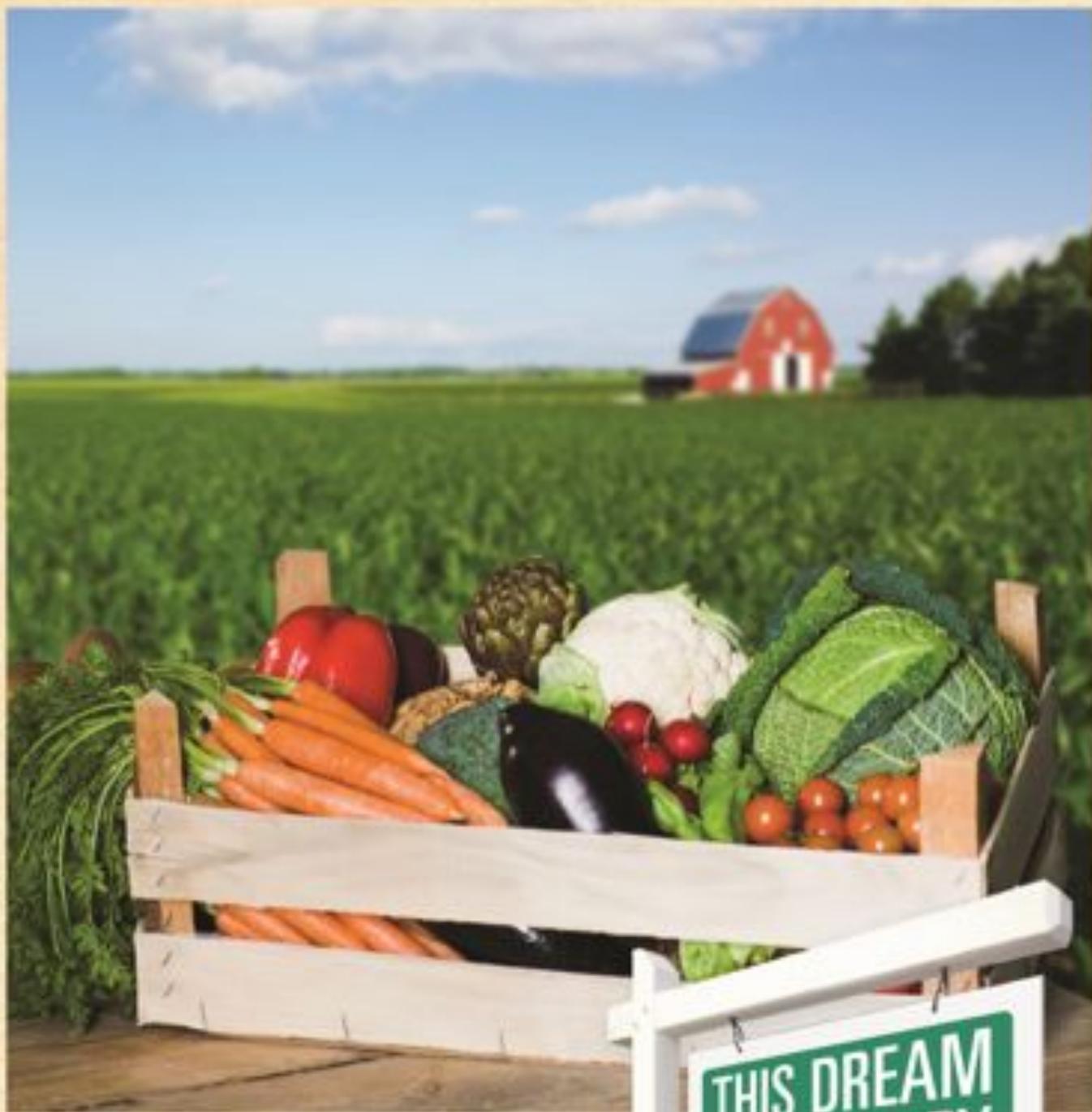
lack of a decent income.

Enter Donald Link, the James Beard Award-winning chef behind Herbsaint, Cochon, and other acclaimed New Orleans restaurants. Link uses a line of value-added pork products — such as Andouille sausage, Mortadella, tasso ham, and bacon — that he currently makes in-house. Soon, though, those products will be made at the new processing facility in Eva, using Alabama-raised pasture heritage pork. Link's

value-added products along with fresh heritage pork will be distributed for in-house use, wholesale, and if all goes well, eventually as part of a retail line. They are also working with John Currence of City Grocery in Oxford, MS, on another value-added line. If things go well, they'd like to launch a Fatback-specific line of all-Alabama pork products as well. Nick Pihakis has a long-standing commitment to local farms and sustainability. But,

says Jim Myers, the Managing Partner of the Fatback Pig Project, Pihakis also feels that in order to make real, broad-reaching change, it's critical to "deal with affordability and accessibility across as broad an audience as you can." It doesn't have to be highbrow and exclusive. Rather, Myers emphasizes that heritage-breed, pasture-raised and antibiotic-free "is just the way we used to do pork in the South."

(Continued on page 9)



First South Farm Credit, building the bridge to coordinate retail agriculture and credit opportunity. First South's mission is to provide credit and credit opportunity for young, beginning and small farmers in Alabama, Mississippi and Louisiana. The new generation of retail agriculture is supported by farmers markets, community supported agriculture and other direct to consumer marketing options. First South Farm Credit supports the continued improvement of retail agriculture and non-traditional agriculture through the First South Young, Beginning and Small Farmer Credit Program and the First South marketing plan to identify and coordinate with the new generation of retail farming.

THIS DREAM  
FINANCED BY

 **First South**  
*Farm Credit*

*Financing land, farms and dreams.*

firstsouthland.com  
800-955-1722

## JIM 'N NICK'S (CONT.)

(Continued from page 7)

The plant in Eva was, oddly enough, originally an emu processing facility. It had been shuttered, briefly reincarnated as a vegetable processing facility, and then shuttered again, before Jim 'n Nick's worked with the Morgan County Rural Industrial Development Board to breathe new life into it. When the plant first got up and running, the heritage pork production was also just getting started, so there were no heritage hogs yet to slaughter. So they worked out the kinks while processing commodity hogs from a company in Mississippi, but they've since scaled those back and are scaling up their heritage hog program.

Currently they're working only with about a dozen farmers, all within 50 miles of the plant in Eva (which is near Cullman), for ease of transportation to the processing



Photo courtesy of Jim 'n Nick's

plant. Jim Myers says that as they launch the products, and as demand begins to ramp up, they will "look farther afield" for new farmers to work with, but also that he's always open to hearing from folks who might be interested in growing for them. They require that their producers be certified by the Global Animal Partnership, and the first cohort of their farmers will go

through the certification process sometime soon.

Of the farmers they're working with, some are brand new to hog farming, some are brand new to farming period, and some are scaling back from more intensive commercial production. Some used to raise hogs, and want to get back into it. It doesn't seem to have been forgotten that the inspiration for all of this, in a way, was that so many hog farmers were squeezed out of the market years ago. Paying farmers a premium price is a central goal of the project, because, as Jim Myers says, "If it doesn't work for you, it's not going to work for us."

You can contact Jim Myers at [jim@fatbackpig.com](mailto:jim@fatbackpig.com). You can read more about the Fatback Pig Project at [www.fatbackcollective.com](http://www.fatbackcollective.com) and [www.jimnicks.com/community/fatback-pig-project](http://www.jimnicks.com/community/fatback-pig-project).



## SNAPSHOTS FROM THE 2013 REGIONAL FOOD AND FARM FORUMS

The Regional Forums were a huge success — deep appreciation goes to all of you who contributed to make them so! 125 people attended in total — more than half of those were farmers, and more than 2/3 of those were new, beginning, or aspiring farmers. We're already looking forward to next year!



If you have feedback or ideas for how to make the 2014 Regional Forums even better than 2013's, email [alice@asanonline.org](mailto:alice@asanonline.org), or write us a note at PO Box 2127, Montgomery, AL 36102. We'd love to hear from you!



Photos from Regional Forums in Thomaston (cluster at top left), Florence (bottom right), and Ramer (right).



## CHARTING THE COURSE (CONT.)

(Continued from page 1)

The Druid City Garden Project (DCGP), based in Tuscaloosa, and EAT South, based in Montgomery, came together this year to form the “Garden in Every School” program. The two groups are currently administering their coordinated school garden program in five schools in Montgomery, Tuscaloosa, and Hale counties, and are both planning to continue expanding into more schools in the coming years.

Mark Bowen is the Education Director for EAT South, and he says he loves getting to see “the entire seed to plate process come full circle.” The students do too, and it’s essential that they *live* that process in order to learn it. “They inevitably love the food that they worked so hard to grow,” he says. “If I would have walked in and fed them radish butter, they would have hated it. But because they invested so much time into caring for the food being grown, and learning about the food in so many different facets, they deeply appreciate the food in a way that they would not have before.”



EAT South Education Director Mark Bowen. Photo courtesy of EAT South

### Garden Laboratory

Not only do school gardens provide a critical entry point by which kids can come to understand the food system, but they provide a living, breathing, outdoor learning laboratory. “From a teaching standpoint, a garden provides an unparalleled opportunity for students to learn hands-on lessons in science, math, social studies and more,” says Lindsay Turner, the Executive Director of the Druid City Garden Project. “Our students learn, not by reading a text book or copying from the board, but by *doing* and *seeing*. They also connect with their food during this process and learn how healthy food affects their bodies, as all of our lessons contain a nutrition component.”



Photo courtesy of DCGP

Furthermore, the output of a school garden offer opportunities for students to learn about entrepreneurship, money management, and more. DCGP’s Budding Entrepreneurs Program has students run a farmstand where parents, teachers, and community members can purchase garden produce. Since DCGP operates entirely in

(Continued on page 11)

The grassroots alternative to organic | [www.naturallygrown.org](http://www.naturallygrown.org)

**Certified Naturally Grown's** standards and farmer-to-farmer approach are right in line with our values.

Aliza and Timothy Cummings  
The Gathering Place

**BUILT FOR A LIFETIME**

[www.bcsamerica.com](http://www.bcsamerica.com)

The Ultimate Market Farm Machine!  
Use a BCS two-wheel tractor and attachments all year round and get the performance of ALL GEAR DRIVE.

- More than 20 quality attachments
- Lifetime transmission warranty
- 12 tractor models available
- Customize BCS to fit your needs!

Brush Mower

Rotary Plow

Model 739 with 30" Tiller

**C & S Walking Tractors, LLC**  
Your BCS source in Alabama!  
334-209-1926  
[www.candswalkingtractors.com](http://www.candswalkingtractors.com)

## CHARTING THE COURSE (CONT.)

(Continued from page 10)

schools with high rates of poverty, the farmstand's subsidized prices make fresh produce accessible to families who otherwise might not be able to afford it. Plus, it allows elementary-age students to "gain practical and valuable business skills," says Lindsay, such as marketing, bookkeeping, packaging and presentation, and math skills through calculating profit/loss and making change.

DCGP and EAT South have done their research, too. Their respective Education Directors Rashmi Grace and Mark Bowen are working to sync the garden curriculum with the Alabama Course of Study guidelines, and to ensure that they're using, says Lindsay, "the best hands-on lessons we can offer." They are collaborating with a 3-year, \$2 million school garden research project based in Arkansas, a group called the Delta Garden Study (DGS), and plan to borrow their program evaluation tools. While the folks at DCGP and EAT South get plenty of anecdotal feedback assuring them that what they're doing is making a positive impact, the DGS research tools will help provide the numbers to prove it.

While the school gardens in the "Garden in Every School" program provide backdrops for countless impactful lessons, Lindsay Turner points out that "teaching students is just one facet of the program." While EAT South and the Druid City Garden Project are intimately involved in the gardens they coordinate, it's an important distinction that they do not claim ownership or ultimate responsibility for managing the garden. "We not only teach the students but we train the teachers on our curriculum, run professional develop-



Top: DCGP Executive Director Lindsay Turner and a student, planting. Bottom: Students staff the DCGP "Budding Entrepreneurs" farmstand. Photos courtesy of DCGP

ment courses, and include community development work to ensure long-term sustainability of the program when the school takes it over," says Lindsay. She says they also work hard to make integration of the garden into existing curriculum as smooth and easy as possible, since teachers, already stretched thin by "mounts of paperwork, expectations, and a packed schedule," sometimes aren't able to manage

the additional burden of reworking curriculum and managing a garden.

EAT South and DCGP spend 2-3 years building capacity in the schools and the communities that support them. After those 2-3 years, the schools become fully responsible for the continued management of the sites, at which point DCGP and EAT South move on to another school.

### Scaling Up

The capacity-building aspect will become more and more important as the two organizations expand into schools farther from their respective home cities. Right now, when DCGP or EAT South accepts a school's application for the program, they are signing on for 2-3 years of intensive, weekly programs and lessons. With more than 400 elementary schools in Alabama, the program will have to evolve in response to distance, if it really aims to achieve its goal of seeing "A Garden in Every School."

EAT South and DCGP have realized this, of course, and are busy making a plan. They will hold onto their 2- to 3-year, in-depth Incubator Program format, but EAT South is looking into diversifying the ways in which schools can enroll in the program. They are working on a "train the trainers" program limited to

just the portions of the Incubator Program that train school faculty and administration on how to build, manage, and teach out of a school garden. Lastly, they hope to offer "consulting services for schools that want to develop the infrastructure to build or enhance a school garden," says EAT South's Mark Bowen. This three-tiered package allows them to use "the same tools we use to train school faculty without having to be there long term," and to "offer more options to schools in the way that best fits their needs and capacity," says Mark.

Furthermore, as the Garden in Every School program gains momentum, DCGP and EAT South's partnership will likely expand to include more partner organizations. Mark notes that there are lots of groups across Alabama doing the same sort of work they're doing. "So," he says, "We are hoping to partner with [those] organizations so we can all move forward under one unified movement."

If you'd like to pitch in, both organizations say they can always use more volunteers in the gardens, and they also offer the opportunity for folks to join the garden committee at the schools they're working in. For schools who may be interested in applying for the A Garden in Every School program, contact Druid City Garden Project ([www.druidcitygardenproject.org](http://www.druidcitygardenproject.org)) or EAT South ([www.eatsouth.org](http://www.eatsouth.org)) for more information.



Photo courtesy of DCGP

This year, give a meaningful gift that gives back.

\* x ☆ ° \* x ☆ ☆ °

Give the gift of  
ASAN membership!

\* x ☆ ° \* x ☆ ☆ °

You'll not only be giving your loved one ASAN member perks like a bumper sticker and discounts to our ticketed events, but also, as a member they'll be underpinning ASAN's work to grow more sustainable Alabama farmers and strengthen Alabama's food system!

## MOBILE WELCOMES 2014 SSAWG CONFERENCE

The Southern Sustainable Agriculture Working Group (SSAWG)'s annual conference "Practical Tools & Solutions for Sustaining Family Farms" is coming to Alabama! The conference will be in Mobile in January 2014 and January 2015.

As most anyone who's been to the SSAWG Conference will tell you, this regional conference for sustainable farmers and sustainable food system advocates is a fantastic place to learn from and connect with the region's best and brightest. Andrew Williams of the Deep South Food Alliance says it's "like the super bowl in terms of information and practices that fit small farmers."

Karen Wynne of Rosita's Farm in Hartselle, AL, says "I tell anyone that's farming or interested in farming that if they only attend one conference a year, it should be the SSAWG conference. There is nothing more inspiring than being surrounded by over a thousand energetic, creative,

curious, and smart farmers and supporters."

The Conference will be held at the Mobile Convention Center. The general conference sessions are all day on Friday, January 17 and Saturday, January 18. January 15-16 there are several intensive short courses, and January 16 in the afternoon there are field trips and mini-courses. That evening there will be a seed swap, screening of "Eating Alabama," and lots more. Check out the full schedule of events, including individual session topics and presenters, at [www.ssaug.org/january-2014-conference](http://www.ssaug.org/january-2014-conference).

There is also a Friday evening state breakout session, which is always a wonderful opportunity to network and build community with folks from around Alabama. Being the host state this year, we should have a big showing!

### Are you a new or beginning farmer?

ASAN is offering scholarships for new and beginning farmers (in production less than 10 years) to attend the 2014 SSAWG Conference!

The scholarship application deadline (previously December 2) has been extended to December 9, so apply today!

Find the application at [www.ssaug.org/fee-waivers](http://www.ssaug.org/fee-waivers).

### ASAN Member Event at SSAWG: Stay Tuned

We are working to organize an ASAN members-only gathering at the SSAWG Conference. The event will likely be the evening of Friday, Jan 17, following the state breakout session. Keep an eye out for more details! Also, be sure to stop by our booth at the trade show, once you get to the conference!

## In Alabama This Year!



This regional conference attracts 1,200+ of the most innovative farmers and advocates in the South and provides cutting edge lessons in:

- ★ Sustainable and organic production, in fields and in high tunnels
- ★ Farm and food policy
- ★ Local food systems
- ★ Grazing and holistic livestock management
- ★ Direct and cooperative marketing
- ★ Enterprise and business management

Visit our website to learn more about this exciting event at [www.ssaug.org](http://www.ssaug.org) or call 404-797-0496 to request a brochure.

**SUSTAINABLE FAMILY FARMS PROFITABLE**  
**LOCAL FARM FOODS** **NATURAL FRESH** **URBAN FARMERS MARKETS**  
**GSA FARM 2 SCHOOL** **ORGANIC / HUBS**

Now available thru BWI!

**MIGHTYGROW ORGANICS**

**Living Organic Fertilizer**

100% ORGANIC

With Beneficial Microbes & Trace Minerals

MIGHTYGROW ORGANICS®  
 FRUITDALE, ALABAMA  
[WWW.MIGHTYGROW.COM](http://WWW.MIGHTYGROW.COM)  
 888-565-7378

OMRI LISTED

## NARLF AWARDS FIRST THREE LOANS

The North Alabama Revolving Loan Fund (NARLF) aims to increase access to capital for small businesses who create or retain jobs or locate in underserved communities, with a focus wherever possible on businesses that support the local food economy.

In October NARLF awarded its first three loans, ranging in value from \$7000 to \$35000, to Red Gingham Gourmet, Food Fighters Bustrant, and G3 Machining Company.

Florence-based Red Gingham Gourmet (RGG) produces fully cooked, frozen cornbread muffins. Founded in 2004 by Laura Hester, RGG ramped up sales in 2009 with the help of the Shoals Culinary Center. (RGG muffins were served at the Regional Forum in Florence, which was held at the Culinary Center!) The NARLF loan will purchase equipment to further increase production, and will fund a working capital line of

credit that Laura says "will greatly reduce my stress between production time and receipt of payment from my customers."

Another loan will allow Huntsville-based food truck, Food Fighters Bustrant, to purchase new equipment, including grills, so that he can expand his menu offerings. The final loan was awarded to Huntsville-based G3 Machining, which is not food-related but was selected because of its potential for impact in an underserved community.

Find out more at [www.neighborhoodconcepts.org](http://www.neighborhoodconcepts.org).



Red Gingham Gourmet jalapeno muffins. Photo credit: Alice Evans

## POLICY UPDATES

### Food Safety Modernization Act:

Comments closed on FSMA, the FDA's proposed food safety regulations, on November 22. Once the FDA has reviewed all the submitted comments, they will revise and finalize the rules, though according to the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition (NSAC), "with rules as big as these, the agency might opt to release another draft set of rules before finalizing them." THANK YOU to all who submitted comments!

### Farm Bill:

The House and Senate have selected what are called conferees, who will sync the House version and the Senate version of the Farm Bill into one unified bill. The 41 conferees include two of our Reps, Mike Rogers (AL 3rd), and Martha Roby (AL 2nd). Now is a good time to contact your representatives (especially if they're conferees) to let them know what's important to you. On the table are proposed cuts to Organic Cost-Share, SNAP (food stamps), Farmers Market Promotion Program, and a lot more. Read more at [www.sustainableagriculture.net](http://www.sustainableagriculture.net).

- Quonset or "A" Frame Design
- Available in 16' - 30' Wide Widths
- Equipped with Roll-Up Sidewall Curtains
- High Tensile Galvanized Steel Construction
- Optional "Curtain" Door or "Zipper" Door Available

## Atlas High Tunnels



Call Today for More Information!



 Natural Resources Conservation Service

800.346.9902

[www.atlasgreenhouse.com](http://www.atlasgreenhouse.com)



## NEWS FROM YOUR NEIGHBORS

Phoebe Hodges-Carter, Project Manager at Emerging Changemakers Network for the past two years, has moved from Mobile, AL, to Converse, TX, to start the next phase of her life's journey. She is excited to finally be starting her own business!

Lavona Mickler has relocated her farm, 7 Paths Farm, from Geraldine, AL, back to her home turf around Eastaboga.

Frannie Kenworthy is happy to have joined the permanent team at Hepzibah Farms in Talladega! Frannie moved south from New York City in late October.

Simon Bevis is back in Alabama, after a several-years stint in Tallahassee, FL. Former ASAN Board President and former owner of Noah Valley Farm in Jacksonville, Simon is now helping friends Collins and Elizabeth Davis get Bluewater Creek Farm up and running in Killen, AL.

Lindsay Whiteaker, Benford Lepley, and Pete Halupka have moved Harvest Roots Farm from Madison, AL, to Falkville, where they/it will be the first participants in the new Tune Farm Incubator Program. They just started a Harvest Roots Farm blog at <http://harvestrootsfarm.wordpress.com>.

Congratulations to the Greene Street Market and to the Church of the Nativity in Huntsville on the opening of the new, year-

This section appears in every newsletter and features updates both personal and professional, on ASAN members and friends: anything from a new farm, to a new baby.

Connecting people in this, the barest-bones of ways, we hope to provide a jumping-off point for folks to connect on their own in deeper ways.

Have news to add? Let us know at [newsletter@asanonline.org](mailto:newsletter@asanonline.org) or (256) 743-0742.

round, brick-and-mortar Greene Street Market Store! The store features many items normally available at the seasonal market, including produce, eggs, crafts, prepared foods, value added products, and more. More info at [www.greenestreetmarket.com](http://www.greenestreetmarket.com).

Tim and Aliza Cummings of the Gathering Place in Jacksonville, AL, are moving in December. They have not finalized their new location but they plan to stay in the area. They are going to need all the help they can get, deconstructing and moving a greenhouse, digging up plants, leveling ground, packing and moving – if you are able to pitch in, call Aliza at 205-393-3510.

The Coastal Alabama Farmers' and Fishermen's Market opened in Foley in October. This new year-round facility was largely funded by the Gulf Seafood and Promotional Fund, set up by BP after the 2010 oil spill. More info at [www.coastalalabamamarket.com](http://www.coastalalabamamarket.com).

## CLASSIFIEDS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

Eufaula farmers Russell and Jewell Bean have been hired by Tuskegee University to do farmer outreach work. Russell is the Resource Specialist for Small Farm, Agriculture and Environment. Jewell is the Resource Specialist for Food, Nutrition, Health, Youth, and Community Development. Their focus area is Barbour County and adjacent counties (Russell, Bullock, Pike, Dale, and Henry Counties). Their central task is to work with area farms/farmers to assess their assets, skills, needs, farm history, farm vision, and so forth. From there, they are able to help direct folks towards appropriate resources, to help them grow their farm according to their vision. Contact them at 334-687-2532, [russell@beanconsultants.com](mailto:russell@beanconsultants.com), or [jewelstanfordbean@gmail.com](mailto:jewelstanfordbean@gmail.com).

## UPCOMING EVENTS

Dec 3 — 2nd Annual Farm-to-Cafeteria Conference, Pearl, MS. 9:00am-4:30pm, for producers and purchasers alike. More at [www.asanonline.org/events/details/farm-to-cafeteria-conference](http://www.asanonline.org/events/details/farm-to-cafeteria-conference).

Dec 4 — Land Acquisitions and Tenure workshop, Normal, AL. Part of Alabama A&M's Beginning Farmer Rancher Development Program. Cost \$5, 10am-2pm in Dawson Bldg, pre-registration requested.

Dec 8-10 — Professional Agriculture Workers' Conference, Tuskegee. Theme: "Women and Youth: Changing the Landscape of Agriculture." More at [www.pawc.info](http://www.pawc.info).

Dec 9-10 — Carolina Meat Conference, Winston-Salem, NC. For producers, processors, food professionals and buyers, to promote local, niche and pasture-based meat supply chains. More at [www.ncchoices.com](http://www.ncchoices.com).

Jan 14 — Pike Road Young Farmers Seminar Series, Pike Road. 2nd in an 8-part series of free workshops. More

(Continued on page 15)

A HUGE thank you to everyone who took part in the 2013 Regional Food & Farm Forums, and helped to make them such a great success! We're already looking forward to next year!

We want to recognize and give another HUGE thank you to our sponsors, without whom these events would not have been possible:

The Wallace Center at Winrock International  
 First South Farm Credit  
 AARP-Alabama  
 ACES Commercial Horticulture Program  
 Deep South Food Alliance  
 Northwest Alabama RC&D Council

Help us build a better Alabama.

## Join ASAN or renew your membership today!

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Business \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_

Please send me:  monthly e-updates  
 quarterly print newsletter

If you're interested in making a larger donation to ASAN, or have any other questions, contact [info@asanonline.org](mailto:info@asanonline.org) or (256) 743-0742.

### MEMBERSHIP LEVEL

Donations and annual dues are tax-deductible.

Individual Supporter: \$25

Farm: \$50

Business or Organization: \$200

Not sure if you need to renew? Check your address label to see when your membership expires.

Please mail checks made out to ASAN to:  
 PO Box 2127, Montgomery, AL 36102.

Or you can pay online:  
<http://asanonline.org/membership-account/membership-checkout/?level=1>

## UPCOMING EVENTS (CONT.)

(Continued from page 14)  
 at [www.asanonline.org/events/details/pike-road-young-farmers1](http://www.asanonline.org/events/details/pike-road-young-farmers1).

Jan 15-18, 2014 — Southern SAWG Conference, Mobile. See page 12.

Jan 23 — Beginner Winemaking Workshop, Cullman. \$10 registration, 6-9pm at North Alabama Agriplex. More at [www.asanonline.org/events/details/beginner-winemaking-workshop](http://www.asanonline.org/events/details/beginner-winemaking-workshop).

Feb 1 — FOCAL Equal Voice Town Hall Meeting, Auburn. Open forum to talk about the issues most important to working families. More at [www.focalfocal.org](http://www.focalfocal.org).

Feb 6 — Two-Generation Farm Business Transition workshop, Headland. Free workshop, 5:30-9pm at Wiregrass Research and Extension Center. More at [www.asanonline.org/events/details/two-generation-farm-business-transition](http://www.asanonline.org/events/details/two-generation-farm-business-transition).

Feb 7-8 — Alabama Fruit and Vegetable Growers Association Annual Conference and Tradeshow, Opelika. More info at [www.aces.edu/afvga](http://www.aces.edu/afvga).

Feb 11 — Pike Road Young Farmers

Seminar Series, Pike Road. 3rd in an 8-part series of free workshops. More at [www.asanonline.org/events/details/pike-road-young-farmers2](http://www.asanonline.org/events/details/pike-road-young-farmers2).

Feb 17 — Two-Generation Farm Business Transition workshop, Belle Mina. Free workshop, 5:30-9pm at Tennessee Valley Research and Extension Center. More at [www.asanonline.org/events/details/two-generation-farm-business-transition1](http://www.asanonline.org/events/details/two-generation-farm-business-transition1).

Feb 20-Mar 27 — Annie's Project, Cullman. Risk management education program for farm and ranch women. Six Thursday evenings 5-8:30pm, registration cost \$50 for entire series. More at [www.asanonline.org/events/details/annies-project6](http://www.asanonline.org/events/details/annies-project6).

Feb 21-22 — Georgia Organics Conference, Jekyll Island, GA. Theme: "Green Acres: Saving the Planet One Bite at a Time." More at [www.georgiaorganics.org](http://www.georgiaorganics.org).

Feb 21-22 — Tennessee Organic Growers Association Conference, Nashville, TN. More at [www.tennesseeorganics.org](http://www.tennesseeorganics.org).

Feb 22 — FOCAL Equal Voice Town Hall Meeting, Birmingham. Open forum to

talk about the issues most important to working families. More at [www.focalfocal.org](http://www.focalfocal.org).

Feb 25 — Backyard Poultry Workshop, Florence. Free, 6-8pm, registration required. To be held at Lauderdale County Extension Office. More at [www.asanonline.org/events/details/backyard-poultry-workshop1](http://www.asanonline.org/events/details/backyard-poultry-workshop1).

Feb 27 — Two-Generation Farm Business Transition workshop, Crossville. Free workshop, 5:30-9pm at Sand Mountain Research and Extension Center. More at [www.asanonline.org/events/details/two-generation-farm-business-transition2](http://www.asanonline.org/events/details/two-generation-farm-business-transition2).

Mar 7-9 — Alabama Water Rally, Montgomery. Annual conference for the Alabama Rivers Alliance, more at [www.asanonline.org/events/details/Alabama-water-rally](http://www.asanonline.org/events/details/Alabama-water-rally).

Mar 13 — FOCAL Equal Voice Town Hall Meeting, Bayou la Batre. Open forum to talk about the issues most important to working families. More at [www.focalfocal.org](http://www.focalfocal.org).

## **ASAN**

*P.O. Box 2127  
Montgomery, AL 36102*

Coming to the wrong person? Email [alice@asanonline.org](mailto:alice@asanonline.org) to unsubscribe your address. Thanks!

What do YOU want to read about? Send us your ideas or suggestions for future features!

Get in touch at [newsletter@asanonline.org](mailto:newsletter@asanonline.org) or (256) 743-0742.

*healthy farms,  
healthy foods,  
healthy communities.*