



THE ALABAMA
SUSTAINABLE
AGRICULTURE
NETWORK

ASAN UPDATE

Winter 2014-2015

Published Quarterly

EMERGING OPPORTUNITIES IN ALABAMA AGRICULTURE SERIES:

PART 2: SHIITAKE MUSHROOMS

By Michael LaBelle

My wife and I LOVE mushrooms, especially shiitakes. We often joke that if we could make our own mushrooms and Cabernet, we'd be nearly self-sufficient. I had been reluctant to



Inoculated shiitake logs

take the plunge to try growing mushrooms — I think it was a simple lack of knowledge that was holding me back. Then I discovered a

WEALTH of easily accessible information and a generous nature

among experienced growers who are more than willing to share their passion.

My goal here is to encourage Alabama farmers to consider mushrooms as an addition to their

This is Part 2 of a series on niche market opportunities well-suited to Alabama growers. More on the series on page 4.

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THOUGHTS FROM A VISIT FROM JOEL SALATIN

By Natilee McGruder

Folks who have seen *Food, Inc.* or read *The Omnivore's Dilemma* generally have strong opinions on Joel Salatin and his work. Joel is a chemical-free farmer and charismatic author who, in addition to speaking around the world, runs Polyface Farm in Virginia.

Joel visited Alabama over Labor Day weekend, where he spoke at 'A Seat at the Table — Farm to Feast,' a dinner which served as an introduction to Selma's local, sustainable food sources. The next day in Marion Junction, Joel joined Chip Spencer in leading an informative tour at Spencer Farm, speak-

(Continued on page 4)



Joel Salatin (left) and Chip Spencer co-led a tour of Spencer Farm in Marion Junction on Labor Day.

FARM-TO-SCHOOL SPOTLIGHT: DOTHAN

By Michael Jackson

"Farm to School" can mean a lot of different things. It means schools buying and featuring locally produced, farm-fresh foods such as fruits and vegetables, eggs, honey, meat and beans on their cafeteria menus. It means schools integrating nutrition-based curriculum and providing students with learning opportunities through hands-on exposure to "real food" in school gardens, visits to local farms and programs to teach, entertain and inspire. Ultimately, students are given access to fresh, local foods and farmers have access to new markets through school sales.

One such program is employed by Dothan City Schools. In a recent conversation with Ms. Tonya Grier, the Child Nutrition Director there, we talked about their long-standing

relationship with Glyn Holmes and the New North Florida Cooperative (NNFC) to deliver fresh greens (already cut and cleaned) to 16 elementary and middle schools. Ms. Grier grew up on a farm and understands the challenges faced by small farmers. She has been cultivating a trusting connection and kinship with NNFC since 2000. NNFC, based out of Marianna, FL, is a co-op of African-American farmers formed in 1995. The goal of the cooperative is to provide marketing services, and collectively sell high quality produce to local school districts, and ultimately increase the quantity of produce being sold. Sales have expanded dramatically, growing to a total of fifteen school districts in Florida, Georgia, Alabama and Mississippi. All cooperative members go

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LETTER FROM THE ASAN BOARD OF DIRECTORS



It's been a productive year for ASAN! Here's a quick look at just some of what we've been up to in 2014:

- Organized four Regional Food & Farm Forums with a combined attendance of more than 200
- Enabled 30 Alabama farmers to benefit from the amazing learning and networking opportunities at the 2014 SSAWG Conference (and we're sending 25 more in 2015!)
- Hosted nine potlucks around the state in the spring and summer
- Attended/exhibited at countless events big and small (where we met many of you!)
- Shared event information, resources, news, articles, and more via our online and print communications
- And much more!

ASAN Executive Director Alice Evans and I recently visited with our friends

in the Mississippi Sustainable Agriculture Network (MSAN). We were chatting with a consultant who has been working with MSAN and she said something that really caught my attention. Having worked extensively in the northwest, she made an interesting and encouraging observation about northern Californians' general awareness of the importance of sustainable agricultural practices: "They get it. You don't have to convince anyone there that nutritious food and responsible growing practices are really important."

Do you look forward to the day when we are no longer in the minority with regards to real food awareness? ASAN members envision a time when folks throughout the Deep South embrace the healthy food movement. This is part of our mission, to create a strong network with tendrils in every community, so that the average Alabama farmer, teacher, parent, teenager and toddler "gets it."

We need your help in achieving this mission. I make two simple requests of you that will help ASAN grow as we move into the new year:

First, please **pass this newsletter on** to someone who doesn't know about ASAN. Right now, please think of someone who might find one the articles interesting, or flip to the events page and circle an upcoming event they might like to attend. Then **pass it on!**

Second, **become a member of ASAN** or renew your existing membership. You can do this by mail (see pg 15) or online at our newly refurbished website, still at www.asanonline.org.

Paid members will once again be invited to a fun and scrumptious "members only" wine tasting and dinner on Friday, January 16, 2015 at Red or White Wine during the Southern SSAWG conference in Mobile.

As the year closes, all of us at ASAN would like to thank you for your support. With your help, we will make 2015 the best year yet, for real food growers and eaters in Alabama!

Sincerely,

Anne LaBelle
Board VP and incoming President

CONTRIBUTORS: WINTER 2014-15

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

Michael LaBelle co-owns Mighty Grow Organics, based in Fruitdale.

Natilee McGruder is part of the River Region Food Policy Council and the Alabama Food Policy Council, and a regular volunteer at EAT South in Montgomery.

Michael Jackson is the Executive Director of the Dubois Institute and leader of Aunt Katie's Community Garden in Dothan.

George and Becky Rogers own Pecan Point Farm in Hurtsboro.

LaTanya Millhouse is a member of the Emerging ChangeMakers Network and Executive Director of The Alpha Omega Group in Birmingham.

Michael Wall is a 7th generation Georgian who grew up in Ozark and graduated from Auburn, and is the Program Director for Georgia Organics.

Anne LaBelle is ASAN's incoming Board President and the co-owner of MightyGrow Organics in Fruitdale, AL.

Alice Evans is the Executive Director of ASAN.

ASAN BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Jen Barnett, Bottle and Bone (Birmingham)

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Jodie Powell, Sweet Home Organics (Leroy)

Deborah Thomas, Southern Rural Black Women's Initiative, and the Federation of Child Care Centers of Alabama (Montgomery)

Gene Thornton, Sneaky Crow Farm (Roanoke)

Andrew Williams, The United Christian Community Association, and the Deep South Food Alliance (Safford)

Randal Wilson, Southern Oak Wines (Anniston)

Myles Wright (Montgomery)

CHECKING IN ON THE 2014 ASAN REGIONAL FOOD & FARM FORUMS



October 14—Linden



We'd be wrong to do a "wrap-up" of this year's Regional Forums, since the series has not (as of this newsletter going to print) actually "wrapped up" just yet! The final Forum of 2014 will be held in Foley on December 4, but here are a few photos from the first three events.

We hope you enjoyed them as much as we did! Not only did we host an additional Forum this year (4 instead of 3) but each region's attendance grew from 2013 to 2014. We were thrilled to see not only some old friends but some new

faces as well!

These events are a LOT of work to pull together, and would not have been possible without the help of many co-hosts and partners, including: The United Christian Community Association (TUCCA),

the Deep South Food Alliance (DFSA), Auburn University Real Food Challenge, Randle Farms, the Tune Farm Incubator, Heron Hollow Farm, Harvest Roots Farm & Ferment, the Coastal Alabama Farmers and Fishermen's Market, and Faulkner State's Gulf Coast Culinary Institute.

Thank you to Michelle French (www.michellefrenchdesign.com) for the beautiful flyers she designed for us, and thank you to all the volunteers who managed chaos in order to keep the wheels turning smoothly. And lastly, thanks to all of you who attended and shared your knowledge and gifts, without which these Forums would be meaningless.



October 28—Auburn



November 10—Falkville



A HUGE thank you to our wonderful sponsors:

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Blackbelt Benefit Group

Bay Area Food Bank

Good to Go—Wind Creek Hospitality

Food Bank of North Alabama

Alabama Mountains Rivers and Valleys RC&D Council

Help ASAN move local, sustainable agriculture forward in Alabama!

ASAN is a grassroots nonprofit organization, and support from our members goes a LONG way towards enabling us to do the work we do, all across Alabama.

Do you enjoy reading this newsletter every three months? Have you learned something or met someone valuable at an ASAN event? Do you stay plugged into local happenings through the ASAN emails and Facebook page?

If so... Please consider joining ASAN as a member today!

Help us do what we do, and **help ASAN grow!**

Join online at www.asanonline.org or join by mail using the form on page 15.

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www.facebook.com/ASANonline

SALATIN (CONTINUED)

(Continued from page 1) ing about sustainability on the modern farm.

Spencer Farm is a family homestead that offers hormone and steroid-free pork, goat's milk soap, skincare products, beeswax candles, and free-range eggs. They will soon offer grass-fed beef and free range chicken as well.

The weekend's events were organized by the nonprofit Blackbelt Benefit Group (BBG) as a fundraiser for their project Grow Selma. Grow Selma is "growing a community around healthy lifestyles through education and sustainable food production in our future community garden & food park" which will be called the Mill Village Community Garden & Food Park.

George and Becky Rogers and I attended the weekend's events thanks to ASAN, who made several free tickets available specially to members.

A FEW TAKEAWAY POINTS

By Natilee McGruder

Joel shared much of his considerable knowledge over these two events and made several statements that really made me think.

Shift In Mindset

- We need to bring the food system closer to us—segregation creates ignorance and fear. We need to integrate the system. Integrated food systems bring about knowledge and seasonality. There is a spiritual element to celebrating the seasons.
- The earth is not a reluctant partner—it is a benevolent friend. It wants to

shower us with abundance. We should not model ourselves after the conquistadors—the pillagers and rapists. We should be a mass-use of the natural world. The earth is just asking for a little support and when we do support it, humility and accountability follow.

Valuing Farmers and Their Craft

- We need to change our idea of who the farmer class is and what they are worth. People think, 'well, I would never farm, but those dark people, they can go and farm.' What high school counselor would direct their best and brightest student to be a farmer or to study soil or water protection?
- What kind of car do you want your farmer to drive? Do you really want them to have a white collar-salary?
- People will visit the farm and complain, refusing to pay \$4 for a dozen eggs all while drinking a \$1.50 nutritionally devoid soda. The US has 35 million acres of lawn and 36 million acres for feeding recreational horses.
- We must return to the idea of the Jeffersonian Intellectual Agrarian. We will make sure that our best and brightest farm if we want this world stewarded well. Food security, food production, and working in the soil are just as important as being a doctor, lawyer, or engineer.

Preparing for the Future

- In the next 15 years, 50% of American agricultural equity is going to change hands, which has never happened before in any civilization. We need to ask ourselves where is it going to go? To foreign, harmful companies OR could it be stewarded by a new crop of young farmers?
- We need models that young people can get started on land that they don't go into debt to own. By separating land capitalization

from the farm we can move towards multigenerational partnerships. The average farm manages \$4 of depreciable infrastructure to turn \$1 in annual growth sales. Polyface Farm has a ratio of \$.50 depreciable infrastructure to \$1 in annual growth sales.

- If you transition to portable farming techniques that don't necessarily anchor the farm to the land, you don't have to own the land. After all, the equity on the farm is not on the land, but in the management and knowledge put into the land—information.

INTERVIEW

By George and Becky Rogers

This fall at the Farm to Feast gathering in Selma, we had a chance to share food and conversation with Joel Salatin. Joel offered insight into common challenges farmers face, the shortcomings of organic certification, and why fair pricing for good food is so important. Below is a summary of our conversation.

George and Becky Rogers: *To be sustainable, in all senses of the word, a farm needs to be profitable. We have all heard stories of energetic, bright people who work very hard to make a living in farming, but give up after a few years. What are some of the reasons these farmers fail?*

Joel Salatin: Spousal and/or partner's disagreement is a major cause of beginner farmers' failing. One party may have a vision of and passion for what farm life really is, which is simply not shared by the other. Relationships really can break a farm; each partner's efforts need to be coordinated so that things head in the right direction. For example, one member may be a starter and the other a finisher, which can work. But when both people look to start a project, there isn't anyone to finish it. Oftentimes, disagreements can be avoided if there's a clear, concise mission statement that's already in place. Even one sentence can help provide a road map for where the farm should be headed.

(Continued on page 5)



Natilee McGruder (R) and Joel Salatin (C) share a laugh when one of Chip Spencer's (L) goats joins the farm tour.

SALATIN (CONTINUED)

(Continued from page 4)

Not bringing collaborators aboard early enough in the farming enterprise can also lead to failure. Many farmers are independent in nature, and so are reluctant to form a team of people who can shore up weaknesses. For example, one may be a gifted and talented horticulturist or livestock expert, but may not have the necessary accounting or marketing skills to run a successful farming operation. Farmers really need to build teams who will help out in areas where they aren't proficient or available.

A third reason that farms fail is a lack of efficiency in operations. Time and motion studies are very important. Farmers should have a benchmark of production levels, timing each step of a task to increase efficiency. Farm duties should be conducted in a business-like manner. We need to be constantly looking for ways to save time and steps.

GBR: *Several years ago, we read an article in which a Whole Foods representative asked you if your farm products were certified organic. You responded that the food produced on Polyface Farm was "better than organic." Can you explain what you meant by this?*

JS: Certified Organic does not begin to address all the variables and special considerations that are important to those of us sensitive to our food production methods. For instance, just because a piece of fruit is labeled organic, doesn't mean that illegal and exploited labor wasn't used to grow it. Fair treatment of workers is not guaranteed by organic certification.

Also consider the fact that 95 percent of organic eggs are raised in typical, crowded chicken houses with limited opportunity for outdoor feeding and chicken-ness. This obviously does not fit the image that most of us have for what organic egg production should be.

Remember that organic certification is pass/fail. Alt-

hough some excellent and innovative farms are organic, certification in itself does not encourage people to excel or to innovate; it only requires enough effort to pass. Finally, some organic practices can be damaging to farm productivity. Raising compost to 140 degrees F, for example, can be harmful to microbes, and is not recommended.

GBR: *Many of us have a bit of a guilt complex when it comes to charging a high price to consumers for the food that we produce. How would you respond to that?*

If you're not getting complaints from at least ten percent of your customers about price, it may be that you're not charging enough. For our posterity's

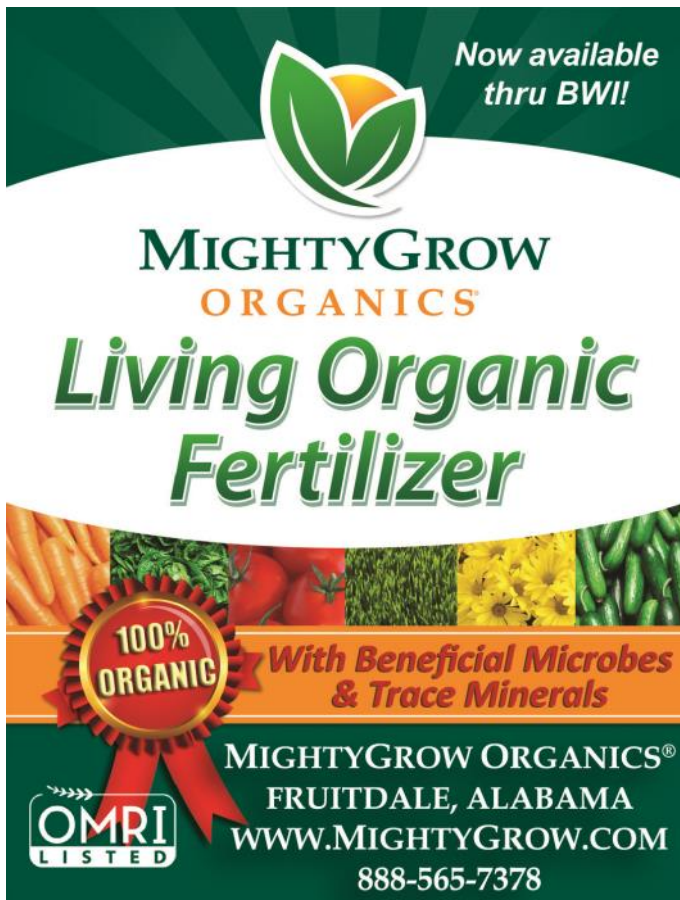
sake, we need the very best and brightest managing the air, water, and soil. If consumers don't think their farmers deserve to drive a BMW, simply put, we are not going to attract the best talent to manage the nations' resources.

"Many farmers are independent in nature, and so are reluctant to form a team of people who can shore up weaknesses. [...] Farmers really need to build teams."

GBR: *What are some of the trends you see emerging in the ways people view their food?*

I think we'll continue to see an interest in food safety and animal welfare. Baby boomers, as they age, may also demand more information about good food and nutrition. Internet commerce, while not new, still has a lot to offer to farmers who are willing to try it and in some cases circumvent the supermarket.

Watch for more energy and support from homeschoolers, Weston Price Foundation members, and the Paleo movement. These members are often very well informed and loyal customers.



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DOTHAN (CONTINUED)



Child Nutrition Director of Dothan City Schools, Ms. Tonya Grier. Photo credit: Michael Jackson

(Continued from page 1)

out of their way to be helpful and courteous when working with the school districts that they serve.

As interest has grown in the idea of local farmers supplying local cafeterias, the holy grail has been relationships that are profitable for the farmer while financially feasible for the schools, given extremely limited budgets. NNFC's member farms have worked through a number of barriers and have

achieved a formula for success with their school districts. They have worked out packaging, delivery needs at the backdoor and processing requirements necessary to make the program succeed.

Ms. Grier explained how the co-operative managers communicate with the cafeteria staff to evaluate the sales process from delivery to the plate. This proactive approach has allowed the business relationship to expand the list of produce delivered to the school system to butternut squash, sweet potatoes, snap green beans, and sweet corn cut in 3" inch cobs. They are currently working on offering a new product,

blackberries, served fresh or as a cobbler by the cafeteria staff.

To support local producers in building a successful relationship with school districts Mr. Grier shared that she has an open door for farmers/producers to explain the accounting requirements, billing, invoicing and state vendor guidelines, which are critical to the business relationship between the school district and local farmers.

It's not ideal, but because the school nutrition staff has little time in their daily schedule to innovate or implement new procurement or processing procedures, it can make all the difference when the farmer/producer is able to provide solutions to help surmount these barriers.

SLOW MONEY—WHAT'S THAT?!

By LaTanya Millhouse

This November, more than 700 entrepreneurs and investors convened in Louisville, KY, for "a local and global gathering on Food, Investing & Culture," the Slow Money Conference. Among them were five representatives of the Emerging Changemakers Network (ECN), which brings together inspiring leaders and innovative ideas to address issues of economic injustice in Alabama and the Deep South. ECN (www.emergechange.org) administers SOUL'utions: Community Investing with Heart and Soul, which is inspired by Slow Money, and seeks to grow new enterprises and new investors that impact historically vulnerable communities.

So what is Slow Money? When Emerging ChangeMakers Network picked five of its young professional members to attend the conference, they were asking the same thing. Slow Money looks at "philanthropy and investment through the lens of food, soil and place," applying foundational concepts like regeneration, diversity, and community to the worlds of capital investment and entrepreneurship.

Since 2010, over \$38 million has flowed from Slow Money funders to more than 350 small food enterprises. The conference boasted an all-star slate of speakers, including Wendell Berry, Vandana Shiva, Eliot Coleman, and many more. There were

town hall meetings, breakouts, entrepreneur showcases, and more, all geared towards developing a new base of community capital that will "ensure long term health and a strong, secure, restorative economy."

The five ECN members – Carmen Mays, Toni Wiley, Charity Abrams, Jessica Norwood and I – quickly embraced the movement and went to work, attending sessions, networking, and organizing investors and donors to steer new sources of capital to small food enterprises, organic farms and local food systems.

"The town hall meetings and the entrepreneur showcases were packed with powerful speakers and insightful information", said Charity Abrams, ECN's Program Coordinator. Everyone in the group agreed that Louisville Mayor Greg Fischer was one of the Conference's most striking contributors, impressive in part because of his passion for and knowledge of farming.

A New Perspective on Home

When I was a little girl, I thought my family was torturing me by going to my uncle's farm several times during



Above: Changemakers (L to R) Toni Wiley, Carmen Mays, LaTanya Millhouse, Jessica Norwood, and Charity Abrams. Left: Slow Money Conference in Louisville. Photos courtesy ECN.

the year. Later I realized that was the family business, and the visits were to assist with crop production and harvest. At this conference I realized just how much valuable information I retained from those childhood experiences. Now I am ready to apply the combined knowledge to some local efforts, and rebuild my community from the ground up!

Similarly Carmen Mays, Minority Business Development Coordinator for the City of Spartanburg, SC, says that so many of us have exposure to home gardening and understand the health benefits of growing your own food. A financial system following Slow Money's principles, that serves people in places where they actually live, could tackle a local problem African-American communities face, food deserts, by simply bringing money back down to earth!

Introducing BEETCOIN

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(Continued on page 11)

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SHIITAKE MUSHROOMS (CONTINUED)

(Continued from page 1)

current produce crops AND their bottom line. I want to show you just how simple it is to grow mushrooms and convince you that there is really NOTHING to fear.

The costs associated with growing mushrooms are not extreme, and anyone can get started right in their own backyard. Growing mushrooms is easily scalable, in that you can start small and grow as your confidence and skills improve.

Why grow shiitake mushrooms?

Demand is impressive, and most are imported: the International Trade Manager for the Oregon Department of Agriculture says the market potential for U.S.-grown shiitake "has hardly been touched." The U.S. imports the equivalent of 63,000 tons of fresh shiitake (7,000 tons dried) annually from Japan, Taiwan and Korea. This is nearly 100 times what the U.S. is currently producing. (Source: <http://www.mushroomcompany.com/resources/shiitake/shiitake.shtml>)

Why grow shiitakes in Alabama? Shiitakes are one of the easiest varieties to grow in the south, requiring only green, hardwood logs with undamaged bark. Once inoculated, the logs will fruit two times per year for up to four years, though the size of the fruiting decreases by about 50% each year. And when things don't go well, you can always use the logs for firewood.

My neighbor, Craig Kalloch, at Middle Earth Healing and Learning Center just north of Mobile, has been growing shiitake mushrooms for almost ten years. He is currently selling all he can grow to a retail outlet in Mobile for around \$8.00 per pound (retail is \$12.00 per pound and up).

How much could you earn?

If the farmer has access to hardwood trees that

need to be cut and a source of unchlorinated water, the economics work out like this:

Cost: a 6 inch diameter, 42 inch log can be inoculated with 50 shiitake mycelium wooden plugs @ \$0.05 apiece, making the cost of inoculation \$2.50/log

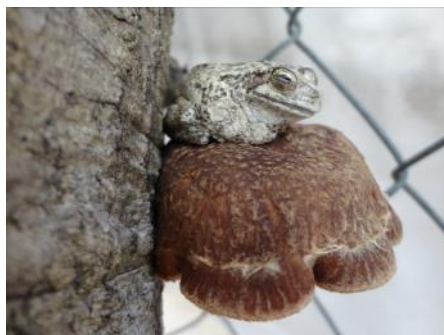
Profit per log: If everything goes as planned, each log will grow two or three pounds of mushrooms over a three to four year fruiting cycle. At a conservative average price of \$8.50/lb, each mushroom log will yield just over \$21 in average gross revenue.

A serious growing operation is usually 1000 logs or more. With a stack of logs 42"x42"x42" (36 logs), a farmer has a potential of \$750 per stack over 3-4 years, yielding a gross income of around \$20,000 per 1000 logs. Not bad for using a renewable resource that is abundant throughout the state!

Want to think even bigger? Allowing for 2 feet between stacks, a larger scale farmer could fit 1,440 stacks of 36 logs each on an acre of ground (total of 51,840 logs). At \$750 per stack, that works out to just over \$1M per acre of potential gross revenue. That's not bad for an investment of under \$200,000.

From the Mushroom Company: "The costs of producing the mushrooms vary considerably. Major items to consider are the cost of the wood, the cost of the spawn, and the cost of labor. Typically labor will be the largest consideration. Returns are also quite variable and depend heavily upon your growing climate.

"With a cord of oak which weighs 2,200-pounds and contains 300 logs and an average yield of 7%, one could expect to grow 154 pounds of shiitake over 3 growing seasons. At \$4 per pound, this cord would gross \$616 over three years. These are conservative estimates based upon the Minnesota experi-



A member of the organic bug patrol at Shroomdom in Poplarville, MS, Sir Knight Eats a Lot sits on a shiitake cap. Photo courtesy Tony and Leilani Rosenbaum

About This Series:

"Opportunities in Alabama Agriculture"

For Alabama farmers to prosper into the future, we need to look outside of the traditional crops that have been grown and sold in Alabama for generations. This series aims to highlight new opportunities that Alabama farmers can pursue with a minimum of investment in land, equipment and capital.

Each article will consist of: an introduction to the opportunity; why it appears to have a bright future; potential pitfalls to watch out for; and the market outlook moving forward. Part 1 on elderberries was featured in the Fall 2014 issue of the ASAN Update. In the next issue, we will explore adding either an exotic fruit or a VERY small vegetable to the ever-growing list of opportunities for farmers in Alabama.

ence. Higher yields, on the order of 20% of the weight of the logs, can be produced in warmer, more humid climates and with the proper choice of logs and spawn."

Shiitake production 101

There are five basic steps in cultivating shiitake on logs:

(1) Obtain good quality culture, called "spawn" or "inoculum," so that it will be on hand when needed. The mushroom that will grow from the log is the fruiting body of the whole fungus. Most of the fungus is a mat of white strands (mycelia) that grow through the log to collect the nutrients necessary for fruiting. The spawn which you will purchase is nothing more than a pure strain of living mycelia, growing either in sawdust or in hardwood dowels. Contact your County Extension Agent for help in locating a spawn supplier near you.

(2) Obtain suitable hardwood logs. Usually oak, maple, beech, ironwood, chestnut or alder are used. The logs are cut green during the winter when the sap is down and are cut to 3- or 4-foot lengths for easy handling. Diameters from 2 to 6 inches seem to work well. Be careful to avoid damaging the bark. Torn bark can allow other organisms to enter the log and compete with the shiitake for nutrients.

(3) Inoculate the logs. Inoculate the logs with the spawn one to three weeks after cutting to ensure optimal moisture content. Inoculate the log by drilling holes partway into the log. Then carefully pack

(Continued on page 11)



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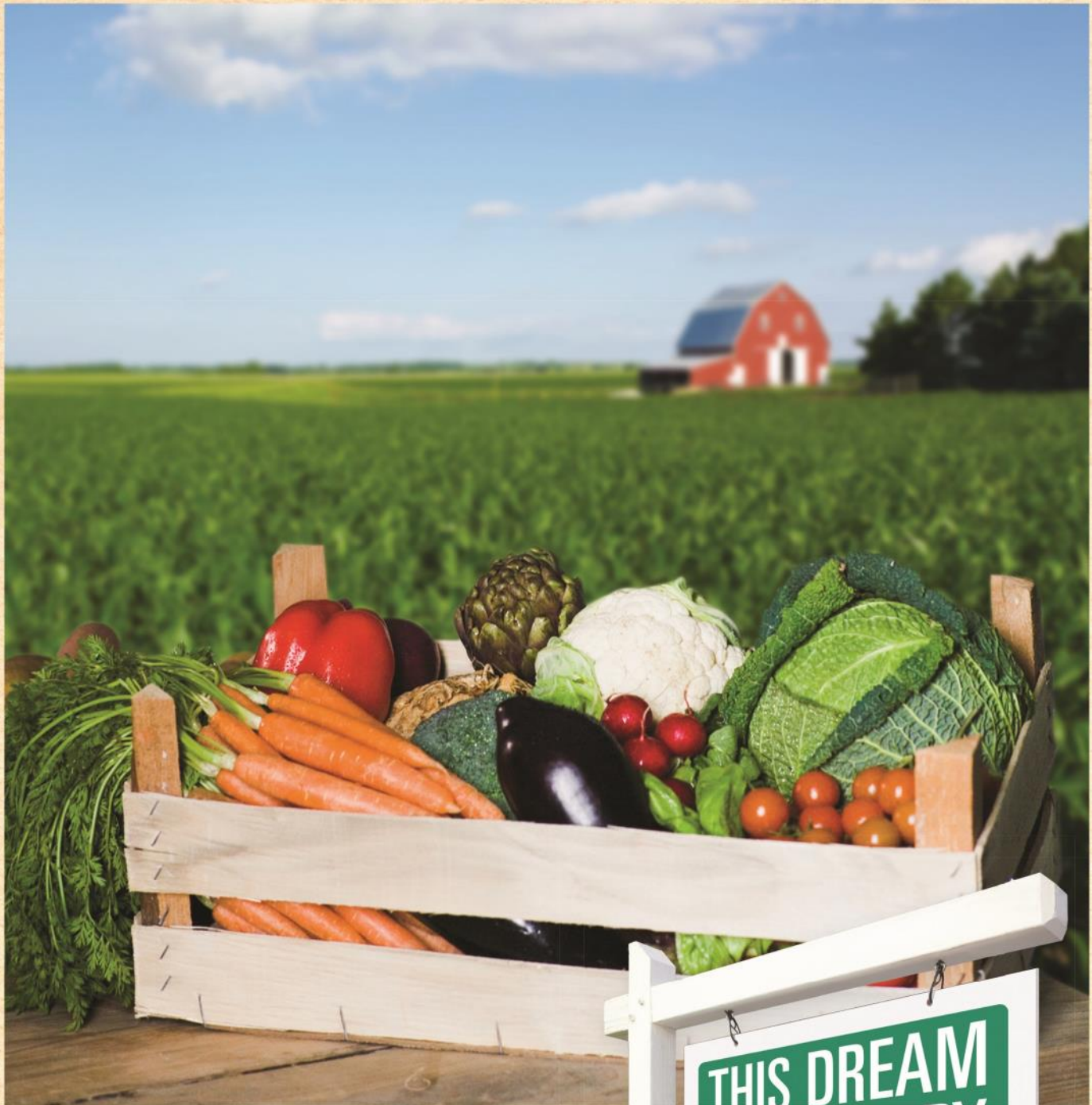


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SLOW MONEY (CONT'D)

(Continued from page 6)

ing closed for the first-ever BEETCOIN campaign, a crowdfunding campaign combined with a 0% interest revolving loan competition. Donor-investors could purchase BEETCOIN before the conference, which entitled them to a vote for the small business of their choice. The highest vote-getters won 3-year, 0% loans which, when repaid, will be loaned out again to other entrepreneurs, with a small interest rate providing a return to the initial investors.

The BEETCOIN campaign "brought the concept home for all of us," said Jessica Norwood, the Executive Director of ECN. "This is doable in Alabama." She added, "More importantly, this can open so many new opportunities for new forms of capital to go into vulnerable communities."

Norwood realizes that often African-Americans don't have a seat at the table. It was a game-changer for a group of

young African-American professionals to attend and be able to form valuable relationships at this Conference. Norwood is excited to be able to bring back so much valuable information to Alabama.

The "WOW" factor for the group was seeing how together we could impact small businesses, solve big problems like food deserts, use our assets better, and open up new streams of investment dollars. After several conversations about how we could best apply our knowledge,



BEETCOIN, courtesy Slow Money website



we concurred that an investment club provide the best benefit to our community. The concept will provide new avenues for individuals of all economic backgrounds to

participate and boost the economy through the growth of small businesses.

In the end the ECN members asked ourselves: What would our community look like if we invested 50% of our assets within 50 miles of our homes? What if there were a new generation of young African American farmers and food system business owners? What would the Alabama economy look like if there were a state collaboration for investments groups, social entrepreneurship and young farmers?

SHIITAKE (CONT'D)

(Continued from page 8)

these holes with the spawn and seal them with wax to retain moisture and keep out competing organisms.

(4) Allow the shiitake to colonize the wood. Once the mushroom has been introduced to the log via inoculation it takes 4 - 9 months, depending upon climate, for the mycelia to spread throughout the log. During this "spawn run" period, the logs are stacked and shaded to avoid moisture loss.

(5) Induce fruiting. To induce fruiting, the logs are soaked, then shaded to keep the moisture level up until fruiting begins. Yields vary. In some cases, the spawn will not run through the log and no mushrooms will be produced. The logs can be refruit several times without additional inoculation and can produce mushrooms for several years depending upon how often they are induced to fruit.

Potential pitfalls

What can go wrong? As it turns out, plenty. Just consider the following:

Variability of mushroom spore plugs. Sometimes you just get a bad batch. So you



Inoculating logs with shiitake spawn, pictured here in hardwood dowels. Photo credit: Alice Evans

buy/cut all those logs, inoculate and seal the plug holes, stack in neat piles and diligently water. Then you wait, and wait and wait and still, nothing happens. What went wrong? If you get NO fruiting, the most likely suspect is inactive spores.

Foreign Invaders. Just because you inoculate your logs with shiitake, this doesn't mean you won't get unwelcome guests, such as wild varieties of fungi. All you can do is remove the contaminat-

ed logs and start over.

Varmints. People aren't the only ones who love shiitake mushrooms. Squirrels will haunt your logs as soon as they begin fruiting. Sometimes drastic measures are necessary to protect your investment.

So, is growing shiitake mushrooms right for your operation? As always, do your homework. Check local market conditions to confirm demand. Check with high end restaurants, CSA's and farmer's markets. Is anyone else selling mushrooms and, if so, what does their customer

traffic look like? Check with local health food stores or organic markets. If they are currently selling shiitake mushrooms ask if their source is local or via a large distributor. Chances are they will give you a try if you can convince them you will be a regular source of locally grown products.

Additionally, consider how much time and money you are able to risk, and be prepared for long periods of uncertainty as to whether you are going to get ANY fruit.

For those who take the plunge, growing shiitake can be not only a rewarding financial activity, but the start of a lifelong love affair with fungi.

For more thorough information, see this market analysis from the University of Missouri, USDA and the Small Farms Research Center, Boonville, AR: <http://www.centerforagroforestry.org/pubs/shiitakeanalysis.pdf>.

I'd like to thank **Tony and Leilani Rosenbaum**, who inspired this article. I recently toured their 160 acre farm in Poplarville, MS. They discovered a passion for fungi just three years ago. The enthusiasm of these self-taught farmers is infectious.

They offer tours twice a year and are on the National Geographic geotourism guide: <http://www.usgulfcoaststatesgeotourism.com/content/shroomdom-inc/gul2E89F0A6E0630FD15>.

WALLACE STATE COMMUNITY COLLEGE TO LAUNCH SUSTAINABLE AG CERTIFICATE

The Agriculture Production/Horticulture Department at Wallace State Community College in Hanceville, AL, is set to unveil a new Sustainable Agriculture certificate option during the Spring 2015 semester.

Anthony Hilliard, department head of the college's Agricultural Production/Horticulture program, says "sustainable agriculture is growing in popularity nationwide. I'm excited we're getting ready to offer this to our students. I think it will be very worthwhile."

Wallace State is in Cullman County, one of the top agricultural counties in the state. Dean of Applied Technologies Jimmy Hodges says, "This certificate will provide future farmers in our area the



Wallace State student Beatrice Woodard examines some lettuce produced this year in the Agriculture Production/Horticulture Dept. Photo courtesy Wallace State.

training and development of skills needed in sustainable agriculture combined with hands-on basic farming operations, crop production and produce marketing."

Wallace State's Sustainable Agriculture certificate will require students to complete 60 credit hours within

the program, including 27 specifically in the sustainable field. Sustainable agriculture classes offered in the spring are HOC 115 Soils and Fertilizers and HOC 120 Plant Propagation. Those classes are also offered for a Horticulture degree. Electives for the program in the spring include AGP 281 Small Animal Husbandry and HOC 275 in either Orchid Culture or Beekeeping.

Students enrolled in the sustainable

agriculture option will be expected to develop an understanding of soils, fertilizers and growing methods; demonstrate knowledge of sustainable agriculture techniques and skills through crop production which includes planting, cultivating, and harvesting crops; and create a market plan for the sale of produce including advertising, product display and pricing.

Hilliard and his current students are already growing a small array of lettuce, satsumas and limes, among other produce items. Wallace State plans to add several new high tunnels, a hydroponics greenhouse, and a fruit orchard to campus as well, which will considerably expand those efforts.

For more information about the program contact Hilliard at 256-352-8035 or Anthony.hilliard@wallacestate.edu. For more information about Wallace State, visit wallacestate.edu.

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Learn more about this conference
at www.ssaawg.org or call
404-797-0496 for a brochure.

Sustainable and organic production, in fields and in high tunnels	Grazing and holistic livestock management	Farm and food policy
Farm2School and Food hubs	Direct and cooperative marketing	Local food systems
		Enterprise and business management

CIVIL RIGHTS AT THE CENTER OF FARM AID IN RALEIGH

By Michael Wall

For most folks, Farm Aid is just a concert, a huge party with awesome rock stars like Willie Nelson, John Mellencamp, Dave Matthews, and Jack White.

We also know that Farm Aid, somehow somehow, aids farmers. That's about all there is to it, right?

Turns out, there's a lot more to Farm Aid, as I learned when I hit the road with Alice Evans, Daniel Doyle (Mississippi Sustainable Agriculture Network), and a great farmer in Atlanta named Joe Reynolds (who also serves on the board of Georgia Organics).

We're all young, hard-

working folks who've devoted our lives to sustainable agriculture in the South.

Daniel, Alice, and I work for non-profits that represent the hope of the South's social, economic, and environmental health: farmers who grow organically. And Joe, that's what he does every day.

We didn't know much about what we were headed into. We were (and always do) look forward to rubbing elbows with our friends at the Carolina Farm Stewardship Association, Pennsylvania Association for Sustainable Agriculture, Florida Organic Growers, Certified Naturally Grown, and the Rural Advancement Foundation Inter-

national. These folks are true trailblazers, and many of them literally wrote the rules to define the National Organic Program.

We've been talking a long time about how we much more progress we could make if we worked together as region than separately in our own states.

Turns out, that was the predominant theme at Farm Aid's meeting for food and farm advocates. "Looking Back and Moving Forward, Together," was the name of the all-day session. This session was



Michael Wall (R) speaks with an employee (L) of William and Dorothy Barker's farm about their biodiesel system.

also flavored with an inspiring look at the struggle of sustainable agriculture through the lens of the Civil Rights movement, and the more recent Moral Mondays movement in North Carolina.

There were some old-timers there,

including original members of the Freedom Riders. I've been familiar for some time with the systemic racial discrimination that the USDA perpetrated in the 1970s and 1980s, but I finally heard first-hand some pretty horrible specifics from

(Continued on page 14)



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FARM AID (CONT'D)

(Continued from page 13) dairy farmer Philip and Dorathy Barker, from Oxford, N.C.

They would literally have to spend days waiting in the USDA's loan offices while loan agents worked with whites who came in hours after they did. At times, it could take months, even years, for the agents to dispense the funding for which they'd already been approved. These bureaucratic delays had real, life-or-death consequences for many farmers of color and their families and communities throughout the South. Eventually, the largest class-action lawsuit settled by the United States government, commonly referred to as the Pigford Settlement, improved things within the USDA, but actually repairing things for black farmers in the South has been a slower and more twisted road.

The fight against institutionalized racism and inequality was a thread that permeated the weekend. The Rev. William Barber, head of the North Carolina chapter of the NAACP and one of the

founders of the Moral Mondays Movement, electrified the 150 farm advocates. He linked food access, environmental stewardship, voting rights, social programs, women's rights, LGBTQ rights and more, to one simple truth — morally, what's the right thing to do. He didn't talk about Republicans or Democrats, or about the Right and the Left. He merely suggested that

we know, inherently, what the right thing to do is, and that usually the only things that get in the way of that are someone else's greed or someone else's crusade for power.

The room was filled with folks who believe they are fighting on the right side, for something more powerful than money and hate. And all it takes to win is something that we all do three times a day, every day.

Eat. Just be mindful of who's growing your food and how they are doing it.

Your food is your medicine, and your farmer is your farmicist. That's what Farm Aid is about, and I couldn't be more proud to work alongside the folks of Farm Aid, Alice, Daniel, and everybody else in this struggle.



Reverend William Barber II gave the keynote address at Farm Aid's workshop for farm advocates and organizers. Photo credit: Alice Evans

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Contact alice@asanonline.org for details

These sections appear in every newsletter and feature updates both personal and professional, on ASAN members and friends: anything from a new farm, to a new baby.

They make existing resources known to others, and help spread the word for those looking to connect. 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 something you want us to publish? Get in touch at alice@asanonline.org or (256) 743-0742.

CLASSIFIEDS & RESOURCES

JOB OPENING: Spencer Farm in Dallas County is seeking a vegetable gardener/farmer for the 2015 season and beyond to begin March 2015. This is a commissioned position to take over management of our current and expanding organic vegetable, herb and fruit production and sales, as well as educating visitors as to why local and organic food is vital to improving life in the Black Belt region. We feel our mission is an important one and are currently looking for a special person with both gardening experience and knowledge as well as a passion for growing plants. On farm housing can be provided, growing facilities are in place, tools and equipment are on hand and in operation at this time providing produce to local restaurants. Please contact Chip Spencer at 201spencer@gmail.com or 334/850/9041 for more information.

FOR SALE: 1973 Tractor, Ford 9600/Cab 135hp, good condition, in Gordon, AL. \$6500.00 or best offer. Contact 334-522-3190.

Druid City Garden Project in Tuscaloosa is opening up a slot for a new school to join their program in January. The application will open soon and information will be distributed via their e-newsletter. Sign up at www.druidcitygardenproject.org/subscribe to receive alerts, if your school is interested in applying.

Calling all North Alabama farmers: The 1st North Alabama Farm Tour is being planned for April 11-12, 2015, and we're looking for farmers interested in inviting the public out to their places from 1-5pm both afternoons. The tour will have an informal open house format—visitors will get a map of farms and visit as many or as few as they like. It should be a great opportunity to get folks out to the farm and have them start thinking about what they'll be eating in the coming season. Interested? Check out www.rositasfarm.com/farmtour, email rositasfarm@gmail.com, or call 256-520-2400.

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 PO Box 2127, Montgomery, AL 36102.

UPCOMING EVENTS

MORE DETAILS AT WWW.ASANONLINE.ORG/EVENTS AND WWW.FACEBOOK.COM/ASANONLINE

December 7-9 – Tuskegee

Professional Agriculture Workers Conference

Conference first held in 1942, theme is "Dr. George Washington Carver Lives On: Changing the World in Uncommon Ways." More at www.pawc.info.

December 16 – Auburn

Hydroponics 101

9am-2:30pm. Primer on growing and selling hydroponic and greenhouse vegetables. Cost \$20. Hosted by ACES. More at www.smcore.com/2f8a9.

December 20 – Eufaula

Peer-to-Peer High Tunnel Training

Series of free workshops held at S&B Farms, intended to help farmers develop the potential of their tunnel houses / high tunnels. Trainings cover topics including season extension, irrigation, pest and weed control, budgeting, transplant production, harvesting, and more. More at 334-687-2532.

January 14-17, 2015 – Mobile

Southern SAWG Conference

Annual conference hosted by the Southern Sustainable Agriculture Working Group

(SSAWG), "Practical Tools and Solutions for Sustaining Family Farms." More at www.ssawg.org.

January 17 – Eufaula

Peer-to-Peer High Tunnel Training

See December 20.

January 22 – online

GAP 102 Webinar

2-3pm. Follow-up to USDA-AMS's Good Agricultural Practices 101 webinar in March 2014. 101 webinar is online for review before 102. Registration required. More at www.ams.usda.gov/AMSv1.0/getfile?dDocName=STELPRDC5109884.

January 30 – Huntsville

3rd Annual Seed Celebration

6:00-8:30pm. Fundraiser for the Sand Mountain Seed Bank features dinner from local restaurants, music, seed saving info and a seed swap. Featured speaker is herbalist Phyllis D. Light. Donation of \$0-30 requested at the door. More at www.facebook.com/tennesseevalleycga.

February 3 – Jackson

Cottage Foods Training

Hosted by Kristin Woods (ACES) at the Jackson ARC. 10am-12pm, \$25 fee. Contact 251-753-1164 or woods.kl@aces.edu to register.

February 5 – Birmingham

Magic City Agriculture Project Fundraiser

Fundraiser at Rojo in Birmingham. More at www.magiccityag.org/ and on Facebook.

February 5 – Birmingham

ARISE Policy Conference

8:30am-3:30pm at Birmingham-Southern College. More at www.arisecitizens.org.

February 6-7 – Opelika

Alabama Fruit and Vegetable Growers Association Conference

Annual conference and trade show, more at www.aces.edu/departments/associations/afvga/.

February 7 – Fairhope

Baldwin County Local Food Producer Forum

1-4pm at Homestead Village, includes presentations by Craine Creek Farm, Hill-

(Continued on page 16)

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UPCOMING EVENTS (CONT'D)

(Continued from page 15)

crest Farm, and Seasons in the Sun and local food distributor Chasing Fresh. Contact Mike Healy (mjhealy@gulftel.com, 251-504-1173) or Marilyn Mannhard (marilynnmannhard@gmail.com, 251-978-9442) for more info.

February 19-20 – Tuskegee
123rd Annual Farmers Conference
The oldest conference of its kind in the nation. More at www.tuskegee.edu/about_us/outreach/cooperative_extension/farmers_conference.aspx.

February 21 – Eufaula
Peer-to-Peer High Tunnel Training
See December 20

February 27–March 1 – Guntersville
Alabama Rivers Alliance

conference
More info to follow

March 5-13 – Selma
Bridge Crossing Jubilee
50th Anniversary of Bloody Sunday, the Selma to Montgomery March, and the 1965 Voting Rights Act. More at www.bcjubilee.org.

March 9-13 – Selma/Montgomery
Selma to Montgomery March
Reenactment of historic 54-mile march first made in 1965. More at www.bcjubilee.org.

March 7 – Tuscaloosa
Container Gardening Workshop
Hosted by the Druid City Garden Project. More info at www.druidcitygardenproject.org.

March 19-21 – Columbiana
Environmental Education

Association of Alabama Annual Conference
More info to follow

March 21 – Eufaula
Peer-to-Peer High Tunnel Training
See December 20

April 11 – Tuscaloosa
Intro to Organic Gardening Pt 1
Hosted by the Druid City Garden Project. More to follow at www.druidcitygardenproject.org.

April 11-12 – North Alabama
North Alabama Farm Tour
See Classifieds.

April 18 – Eufaula
Peer-to-Peer High Tunnel Training
See December 20