



THE ALABAMA  
SUSTAINABLE  
AGRICULTURE  
NETWORK

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# ASAN UPDATE

Summer 2014

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## KEEPING FAMILIES AND FARMS PROTECTED FOREVER

By Marie Bostick, Land Trust of North Alabama

Farmland is disappearing here in Alabama at alarming rates and the race is on to balance our urban and suburban growth with the preservation of precious greenspace, including farmland. Farmland preservation has become a hot issue all over the country, but for Alabama it is especially critical. According to a report written by the American Farmland Trust, Alabama has had the unsavory distinction of being one of the top twenty states (Alabama is actually #10) for losing prime farmland in the country and preliminary data from the U.S. Department of Agriculture 2012 Census indicates that Alabama is losing farmland at a

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Land Trust's Matthews Preserve. Photo courtesy the Land Trust of North Alabama

## WATER IS LIFE: ALABAMA NEEDS A SUSTAINABLE WATER MANAGEMENT PLAN

By Cindy Lowry, Alabama Rivers Alliance

With over 145,100 miles of streams and rivers and more types of plants and animals living in them than any other state in the nation, Alabama is globally recognized for the important biological significance of our rivers.

However, we also have one of the highest extinction rates in North America, and many of the species being lost are species that live in our rivers. From improper enforcement of environmental regulations to the lack of planning and policy to ensure enough water for the future, Alabama's precious water resources currently face many threats.

The Alabama Rivers Alliance (Rivers Alliance) is a statewide, nonprofit organization working with an alliance of citizens and grassroots organizations across Alabama to protect these vitally significant water resources.

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Alabama's rivers featured on the State Seal

## WHAT'S IN STORE FOR ALABAMA? EXPANDED ACCESS TO HEALTHY FOOD

By Melanie Bridgeforth, VOICES for Alabama's Children

Going to the grocery store is something many of us take for granted, but unfortunately that is not a reality for many of our fellow Alabamians. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, over one million Alabamians, including over 245,000 children, live in areas with limited access to purchase healthy food options such as fruits, vegetables, low-fat dairy and whole grains. These areas are commonly known as food deserts.

In some cases, families and children are placed at an increased risk for diet-related illnesses such as obesity and diabetes, because their communities are overexposed to unhealthy food options. This is why it is critically important for stores that stock healthy foods to be conveniently located for residents in all Alabama communities.

There is a solution that will make that trip to the grocery store less of a dream and more of a reality for *all* Alabamians. We can help eliminate food deserts through Healthy Food Financing, a policy initiative that provides economic incentives to healthy food retailers and small grocers to lo-

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## LETTER FROM THE ASAN BOARD PRESIDENT



Supporters of sustainable agriculture in Alabama should take note of two recent ground-shaking developments. Heeding the will of the people of Vermont,

that state's legislature recently enacted legislation that mandates labeling of all foods containing GMO (Genetically Modified Organisms). The Governor of Vermont signed the bill into law and stated he was happy to do so. The other ground-shaking development is the announcement by a large multi-national retailer of conventional food products that it plans to lower the prices consumers pay for organic food. It has acquired a Colorado-based organic and natural foods company that will provide USDA Organic food products initially to 2,000 stores operated by the multi-national retailer.

Perhaps supporters of organic and sustainable agriculture should be happy when a large retailer realizes its custom-

ers nowadays have alternative places to purchase food products that have been locally grown using non-GMO seeds and sustainable methods.

Looking ahead a few years though, I wonder if this large retailer will use the same strategy it used years ago to keep prices at its stores low. If so, American farmers and ranchers may suffer the same fate that non-food and fiber producers suffered when the production of most of the items sold in the large retailer's stores was outsourced overseas. And, will farm and ranch workers in the producing countries be adequately compensated?

This new organic initiative does make one wonder if the company simply thinks its marketing strategy of sourcing cheaply made items from outside the USA will work equally well when it comes to organic foods. It knows that most of the organic foods sold in the USA are imported. With its tremendous buying power, it probably reasons that it can buy billions of dollars' worth of organic produce from an overseas supplier and

dictate the price it will pay for the produce. If the farmers and ranchers in one country refuse to sell at the dictated prices, others in another country will, it probably reasons.

American consumers are demanding more information on all products they are buying these days. They no longer are passive and willing to accept at face value food safety claims made by agricultural producers, processors and government regulators. Vermont's landmark GMO labeling legislation is the result of consumers demands in that state for food production information. That's a good thing!

Another good thing is the admittedly unclear motive for the largest food retailer in the USA to "bring down the cost of organic foods." Its move probably has something to do with its bottom line and increasing competition from competing food retailers who make billions of dollars selling organic foodstuffs. Better late than never and may the best retailer win.

*Gene Thornton*

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**Randal Wilson**, Southern Oak Wines (Anniston)

**Myles Wright** (Montgomery)

## SHARPENING A VISION FOR GRASSROOTS ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT AT “JACKSON RISING” CONFERENCE

By Rob Burton, Magic City Agriculture Project

Fifty years ago the country was in an uproar. It was the height of what we now call the Civil Rights Movement. People in the South in particular were taking to the streets and getting involved in their communities like never before, especially in communities of color. We all learn about the famous campaigns for desegregation and for voting rights, but there was another story taking shape in the country -- many Civil Rights leaders also allied themselves with fights for economic justice, migrant rights, gender justice, and the fight for a more sustainable world.

In the South, on small, mostly black-owned farms and in rural communities, folks were working to organize producer cooperatives, an economic model which helps make small farms more economically viable. Many of these producer cooperatives then came together to create what is known as the Federation of Southern Cooperatives. The Federation has been working for over 47 years to organize cooperatives, in particular farm cooperatives, across the entire South.

Recently the Federation joined hands with a number of other organizations -- including the Fund for Democratic Communities, the Highlander Research and Education Center (famous for hosting training with the

likes of Martin King and Rosa Parks), Cooperation Texas, the Jackson-based Malcolm X Grassroots Movement (MXGM), among many others -- to host the Jackson Rising: New Economies Conference in Jackson, MS, May 2-4.

The goal of Jackson Rising, according to its website, was to “lay a solid foundation for the transformation of Jackson, Mississippi into a noted center and example of economic democracy.” The Conference aimed to provide a platform to empower people with the knowledge and training needed to launch “cooperatives and other forms of worker owned enterprises and financial institutions that will create jobs with dignity, stability, living wages, and quality benefits.”

### Why Jackson?

Jackson Rising was in many ways the brainchild of the late Chokwe Lumumba, Jackson’s former mayor, who passed away suddenly in February 2014. Mayor Lumumba was elected in July 2013, with critical support from grassroots



Chokwe Antar Lumumba, son of the late Mayor of Jackson, MS, Chokwe Lumumba, addresses the Jackson Rising Conference in May. Photo credit: Alice Evans

### What is a cooperative?

A cooperative is an autonomous association of persons united voluntarily to meet their common economic, social, and cultural needs and aspirations through a jointly-owned and democratically-controlled enterprise.

### Cooperative Values:

Self-help  
Self-responsibility  
Democracy  
Equality  
Equity  
Solidarity  
Honesty  
Openness  
Social responsibility  
Caring for others

efforts like MXGM. His vision was to leverage the City’s resources to support the grassroots cooperative movement building in Jackson. In addition to creating a cooperative incubator, a cooperative bank, cooperative childcare, and a waste management co-op, Jackson is also organizing sustainable urban farms -- with special emphasis on diversified, interdependent, sustainable approaches such as permaculture and aquaponics -- to create jobs and combat food deserts from the inside out.

A loose coalition of nine people from Alabama attended the Jackson Rising Conference to discuss how we may move forward and build

a national cooperative movement. This coalition included representation from Alabama Sustainable Agriculture Network (ASAN), Magic City Agriculture Project (MCAP), Alabama ARISE, and Southerners on New Ground (SONG). The weekend included many trainings and discussions on how we can

use cooperative economics as a tool, and how we can bring those tools back to implement in Alabama.

### Cooperatives and the Food Movement

Cooperatives have huge potential to advance the vision of the food movement. First, worker-owned and producer cooperatives, as a business model, not only make operation more cost-effective for businesses, but can make sustainable produce more affordable. Furthermore, cooperatives can serve to alleviate poverty while greatly diversifying and thus expanding the potential consumer base for local, sustainable produce.

Currently, the biggest consumers of organic produce are middle and upper class communities, which are also primarily white communities. Not only do lower income communities tend to have less access to markets for sustainable and organic food, but many times, even where those foods are physically/geographically accessible, they remain eco-

(Continued on page 5)





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## WHAT IS THE COST OF POVERTY IN OUR COMMUNITIES?

By Cynthia McKinney, BeYond Expectations Community Outreach

Everyday people in our community struggle to meet basic needs and achieve financial stability. In order to have a better, more personal understanding of the challenges they face, BeYond Expectations Community Outreach – in collaboration with Circles of Columbus and Open Door Community House – is organizing a special learning opportunity in Russell County, AL.

Cost of Poverty Experience (C.O.P.E.) is a poverty simulation exercise that allows participants to gain a greater awareness of the daily realities for individuals and families living in poverty in our communities. Participants role-play various scenarios based on real life examples, and learn by having to face obstacles, make choices and bear consequences for their decisions.

The experience is intended to inform and enlighten participants' understanding of poverty, with hopes of inspiring them to take action to help those who need it most. Elected government & school officials, human service agencies, church leaders, local business owners and any and all interested persons are encouraged to attend the event. All are welcome.

Following the poverty simulation will be a community forum to discuss possible ways to address the issues of poverty in Russell County and other communities.

BeYond Expectations is a community organization in Russell County that seeks to meet the basic needs of low-income individuals, address issues of hunger, forge innovative partnerships, and empower self-sufficiency.

The C.O.P.E. workshop will be held June 28 at Goodwill Industries in Phenix City. To register or for more info, call (334) 855-0383 or email [beyond\\_expectations\\_outreach@aol.com](mailto:beyond_expectations_outreach@aol.com).

## SHARPENING A VISION (CONTINUED)

(Continued from page 3)  
nominally out of reach.

As best demonstrated by the famous worker-owned cooperative collective Mondragon, in the Basque region of Spain, cooperatives can be an extremely effective tool for alleviating poverty. If we can follow the lead of Civil Rights leaders and use cooperatives (including industrial and service sector cooperatives) to build up our communities up and address racial and economic inequities, we will find we have a much larger and stronger consumer base in Alabama to which to sell local, sustainably raised food.

Since returning from Jackson, MCAP has been working with the Federation to launch Birmingham's first worker-owned cooperative, an urban

farm in west Birmingham. MCAP has also been building a coopera-



MCAP members Zac Henson and Virginia Ward set up drip irrigation in the high tunnel at the cooperative Southwest Birmingham Community Farm. Photo credit: Julie Hunter

tive support team to aid efforts to launch new cooperatives in greater Birmingham. We hope soon to start putting together a plan for a Cooperative Training Center that will serve as an incubator for future urban farming co-ops.

Cooperatives have a long history in the agricultural movement. If we are going to build a

### For more Information

Jackson Rising  
<http://jacksonrising.wordpress.com>

Southern Grassroots Economics Project  
<http://sgproject.org>

International Co-operative Alliance  
<http://ica.coop>

Magic City Agriculture Project  
[www.magiccityag.org](http://www.magiccityag.org)

successful sustainable agriculture movement, we would do well to learn from our history of cooperatives in the South, and

together we can build a brighter and more sustainable future.

## NC-BASED PROFESSIONAL SHEEP SHEARER VISITS ALABAMA FARMS

By Charlie Meek, NW AL RC&D

Recently over 20 farms in Alabama received professional sheep shearing services from Stuart Matthews of Ararat, NC. This is the 2nd year that Stuart has traveled to Alabama to shear.

Mr. Matthews has over 25 years of shearing experience and has sheared up to 25,000 to 30,000 sheep annually when he

traveled the Northwestern US shearing for large ranch flocks. Stuart presently shears from New York to Alabama shearing up to 10,000 sheep a year. Stuart also raises sheep on his home farm in North Carolina. Sherry Johnson of SheerLark Farm in Flat Rock, AL noted her appreciation for having such a seasoned shearer available to harvest the wool from her sheep which is an important cash crop.



Stuart Matthews shears sheep at Wehdo Sheep Farm in Florence, AL, while farm owner Charlie Meek looks on. Photo courtesy of Charlie Meek

## KEEPING FAMILIES AND FARMS PROTECTED (CONTINUED)

(Continued from page 1)

rate higher than the national average (national average is 4% and Alabama is 11%).

These agricultural areas, many of them family owned for generations, provide our communities with more than local foods. They provide attractive vistas, contribute to better water quality, stimulate the economy with farm related jobs, stabilize property taxes (farms use fewer governmental services than residential areas), and they provide food and cover for area wildlife. Unfortunately though, these beautiful farmlands are often the first areas to be developed as our urban and residential areas begin to sprawl outward.

Due to the urgency of protecting these areas, the Land Trust of North Alabama, like many other organizations across the country, is actively working with area land owners and farmers to help them find ways to protect the future of their farm land. This protection is not only about preserving the farm land itself, but also a way of life that is often central to the local community and the culture and history of an area.

By working with a Land Trust, land owners have the opportunity to ensure that the lands on which they have spent so much time and energy, and which hold fond memories and deep family roots, are never developed and even continue to operate as an agricultural property. Land owners can consider at least 5 options for land preservation through the Land Trust:

- 1) **Land Donation** – The land is given immediately over to the protection and management of the Land Trust. The Land Trust assumes full responsibility for the property and its care while the land donor benefits from substantial tax deductions.
- 2) **Conservation Easement** – In this case, the land owner can retain ownership of the land while giving away cer-



*The Land Trust's Harvest Square Preserve. Photo courtesy the Land Trust of North Alabama*

tain rights and retaining other rights to the land. For example the land owner may give away the right to build in the future on his/her land, but might retain the right to farm. If the donation of a conservation easement permanently protects conservation resources and meets other federal tax laws it can qualify as a tax-deductible charitable donation. An easement may also result in property tax savings and gives the land owner the flexibility to sell the property or pass it on to heirs. If passing on to heirs, an easement may decrease the overall real estate property value which would in turn decrease the estate tax for the heirs. The Land Trust would be responsible for enforcing the agreements of the easement now and in the future.

- 3) **Life Estate** – With a life estate agreement, the owner deeds the property to the Land Trust while living but retains possession of the land until his/her death (or sooner should the land owner choose) at which time the Land Trust would become the owner. This method of donation allows the owner of the property to continue to use the land for the remainder of his/her lifetime, allows him/her a substantial charitable tax-deduction when the gift is made and minimizes the taxes paid on his estate when he/she dies.
- 4) **Willed Property** – a Land Owner can simply write instructions in their will to have their property donated to the Land Trust in the event of their death.
- 5) **Bargain Sale** – If a land owner

would like to receive some income from the sale of their property but would like the property to be preserved through a Land Trust, the land owner may choose to sell the land to the Land Trust at a price below the fair market value. This allows the donor/seller the opportunity to receive immediate cash, may reduce some capital gains tax, and may entitle you to a charitable tax-deduction. At the same time, it allows the Land Trust to purchase and preserve the land at a reduced price.

The Land Trust currently has two agricultural properties acquired by life estate and two acquired by direct donation. We have also had the opportunity to work with an additional two landowners who have developed instructions in their will for donation of property on the event of their death. The Matthews Property, now owned by the Land Trust, is an example of one such collaboration between the Land Trust and land donor through a life estate.

Elliott Matthews, a local cattle rancher in Limestone County, had a multi-generational connection to the land that he farmed. His great grandfather moved to Limestone County in the 1820s and began acquiring land. The Matthews family's land holdings grew to 10,000 acres over the next couple of generations.

However, the stock market crash and the Great Depression brought with it the loss of most of that farmland. Mr. Matthews returned to his roots in Limestone County in the 1950s and began cattle ranching. He started re-acquiring land on his own - determined to regain some of the land that had been lost. In his own words, "I just fell in love with it (the land) when I first saw it."

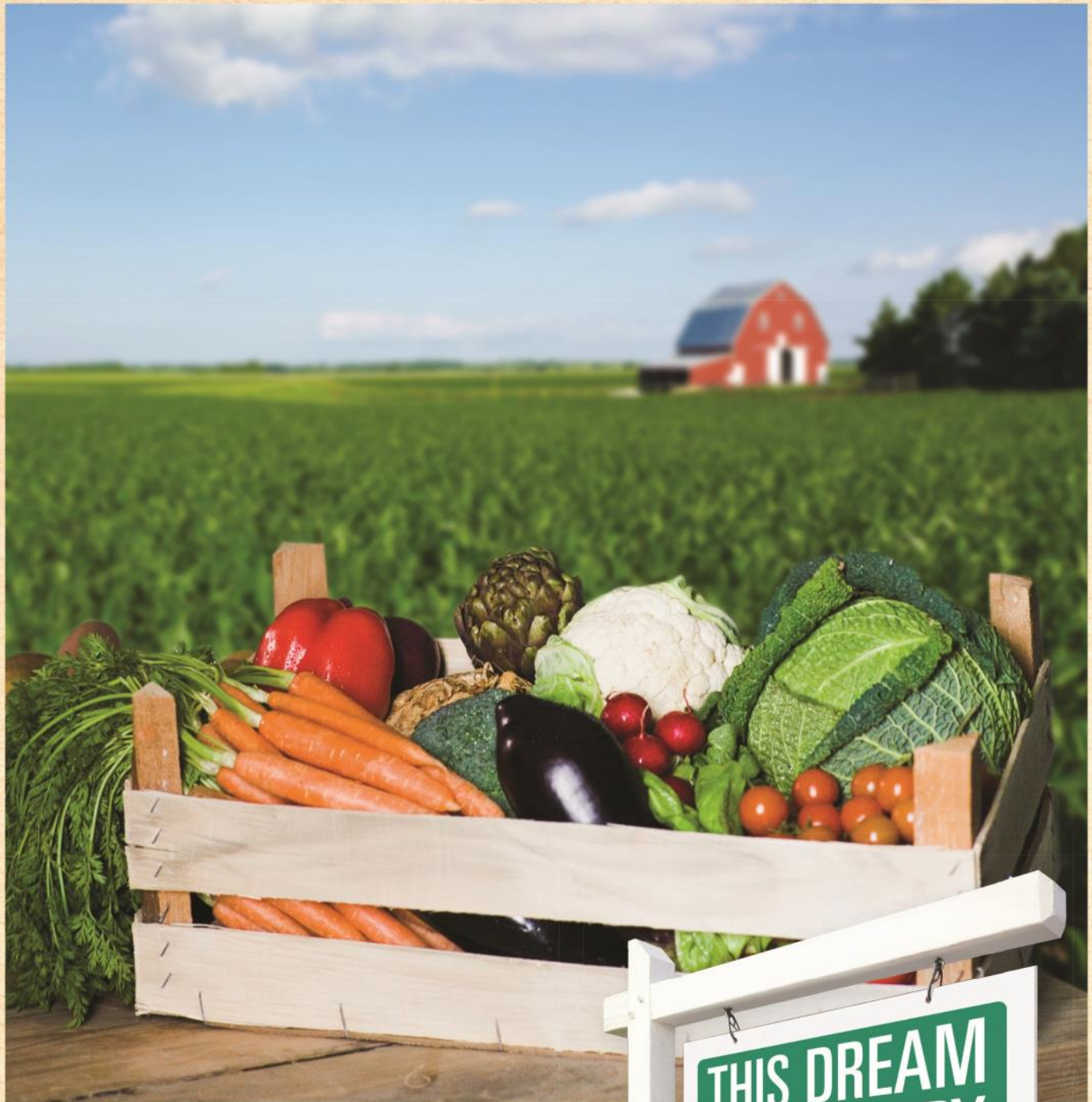
According to Wes Stroud, Mr. Matthews's neighbor and current Land Trust



*Mr. Elliott Matthews. Photo courtesy the Land Trust of North Alabama*

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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.

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## KEEPING FAMILIES AND FARMS PROTECTED (CONTINUED)

(Continued from page 6)

Land Leasing Partner, "Mr. Matthews thought long and hard about what to do with his prized possession. I knew he wanted folks to enjoy it. He didn't want to see it divided and developed."

That is where the Land Trust came in. After much conversation and thought, Mr. Matthews chose to protect his farm in 2002 with a Life Estate agreement. This agreement allowed Mr. Matthews the opportunity to get a substantial charitable tax-deduction on that years return and also allowed him to continue using the land for the remainder of his life. Mr. Matthews died 15 months later and the land was released to the Land Trust for preservation, education and continued farming.

The Land Trust works closely with Mr. Wes Stroud, a close friend and neighbor of Mr. Matthews, who has leased the Matthews land for cattle ranching since 1985. Mr. Stroud continues to lease the land from the Land Trust of North Alabama and provides insight into and assistance with the management of the Matthews Property so that it remains in keeping with Elliott Matthews' wishes.

"Mr. Matthews loved this land. The farm was his pride and joy," says Mr. Stroud. "The decision that [he] made was timeless and now the beauty of his land will be with us forever."

Preserving our farms is essential this day and age. The good news is that saving land through a Land Trust is easy, it benefits the farmer and the community and it preserves forever the land and all the legacies that accompany it.

For more information visit <http://landtrustnal.org>, 256-534-LAND (5263), or email [questions@landtrustnal.org](mailto:questions@landtrustnal.org).

## SOCIETY OF ST. ANDREW- GLEANING ALABAMA'S FIELDS, FEEDING ALABAMA'S HUNGRY

By Mary Lynn Botts, Society of St. Andrew

Society of St. Andrew (SoSA) is a national non-profit that works with farmers to recover food that would otherwise go to waste, and distribute that food in order to feed those in need in Alabama. The recovered food is edible but no longer sellable, whether because it is the wrong size, overripe, not pretty enough to be sold, or simply an overabundance.

Farmers: when you find yourself thinking, "I hate for this to go to waste," call us. We can come to the farm or to a farmers market to pick up produce. SoSA also "gleans," a Biblical term for harvesting leftover crops. We bring volunteers along with a field supervisor to a field and harvest crops that might go to waste. Our volunteers all sign a waiver of liability to protect the farmer and we train field supervisors to accompany them.

A quarter of our fellow Alabamians are food insecure, not knowing where their next meal is coming from. Thanks to many participating Alabama farmers, SoSA recovered close to 1 million pounds of food in 2013 that would have gone to waste.

Farmers, put my phone number in your contacts as "waste" and call me; Mary Lynn Botts, Alabama Program Director, [205-245-](tel:205-245-3214)



SoSA volunteers glean a field of strawberries in Cullman. Photo courtesy Society of St. Andrew / Mary Lynn Botts

[3214](tel:205-245-3214), or [alglean@endhunger.org](mailto:alglean@endhunger.org)

Not a farmer? Volunteers are needed in all areas of the state. If you enjoy the outdoors, the joy of harvesting, the sense of satisfaction that you are doing something for others then consider joining our "Gleaning Team." We are also in need of volunteers to glean farmers markets. Search YouTube for "gleaning SoSA Alabama" for a tutorial on gleaning farmers markets.

We are especially in need of volunteers in Auburn, Huntsville, and Birmingham. To volunteer contact Mary Lynn Botts at [205-245-3214](tel:205-245-3214) or email me at [alglean@endhunger.org](mailto:alglean@endhunger.org).

## DRUID CITY GARDEN PROJECT EXPANDS THIS FALL

Druid City Garden Project, based in Tuscaloosa, uses school gardens, farm stands, and educational programs to help diverse communities of Alabama create vibrant food systems. In the fall of 2013, they expanded into three schools and the Juvenile Detention Center. Recently, they announced that, this fall, they would be expanding into two more schools – Oakdale Elementary and the Tuscaloosa Magnet School-Elementary -- as part of their "Gardens 2 Schools" program.

DCGP will work with these schools for 2 years, providing weekly hands-on garden education lessons, using their uniquely created curriculum that meets AL Course of Study



guidelines, and that incorporates Alabama growing conditions. They will also bring their Budding Entrepreneurs program to the new schools, where students learn basic business practices while selling produce to their families. They will train educators on the curriculum, on how to operate gardens, and how to run the program. They expect to grow an average of 300lbs of produce in each school garden, each year.

Learn more about DCGP at [www.druidcitygardenproject.org](http://www.druidcitygardenproject.org). DCGP's annual fall fundraiser, the Garden Party, will be in Tuscaloosa on September 14 – save the date!

## WATER IS LIFE (CONT'D)

(Continued from page 1)

The Alabama Rivers Alliance developed the Alabama Water Agenda publication (first published in 2007 then revised in 2011) to guide river advocacy efforts.

The Agenda focuses on four key policy solutions – Water Policy, Enforcement, Funding, and Agency Coordination - for protecting Alabama's water resources and serves as the centerpiece of the Alabama Rivers Alliance strategic plan. The first and key priority under the Agenda is achieving comprehensive water management policy for Alabama.

Alabama ranks sixth in the nation for the most continually flowing streams.

Engraved on the Alabama state seal, our rivers are essential to our economy, our ecology, and our society. Major components of our natural and cultural heritage, Alabama's rivers also supply us with drinking water and play a critical role in transportation, agriculture, and industry. They generate power, serve as a habitat for our wildlife, and provide us with recreation opportunities, such as fishing, swimming, and paddling.

In order to support the many uses of our state's waterways for now and for future generations, Alabama needs comprehensive water management. This goes beyond simply addressing water quality, as required by the Clean Water Act and the Alabama Water Pollution Control Act. Water quantity must also be addressed, examining such issues as water

withdrawals, water conservation, protecting natural flow regimes, transferring water from one river basin to another, future water supplies, and the relationship between surface water and groundwater.



*The Duck River, a tributary to the Mulberry Fork of the Black Warrior River, in Cullman County. Photo credit Nelson Brooke, courtesy of the Alabama Rivers Alliance Facebook page*

We have fallen behind our neighbors in managing our water. Alabama has been mired in litigation with Georgia and Florida over interstate waterways, and both of those states are far ahead of Alabama in terms of accounting for and managing their rivers. As Alabama seeks to protect our water interest from other states, it is essential that we have an understanding of what water resources we have, what we need, and how we are going to manage water in the future.

The Alabama Rivers Alliance recommends the following components as essential for a sustainable water management plan:

- **Monitoring and Management of Water Withdrawals** – Enhance the current certificate program to ensure more accurate monitoring and management of water withdrawals on a statewide basis.
- **Protection of Stream Flows** – Put in place procedures for science to determine the amount of flows needed in our river systems and groundwater resources in order to sustain all of the demands for water withdraw-

als, while ensuring the natural system remains healthy and sustainable.

- **Management of Interbasin Transfers** – Manage the exchange of water from one basin to another to maintain and protect the health and flows of each natural system involved in the transfer.
- **Conservation and Efficiency Programs** – Implement statewide programs incentivizing and requiring money-saving and water-saving conservation and efficiency programs.
- **Regional Decision-Making Structure** – Make decisions about the implementation of a comprehensive water plan at the watershed level in order to achieve the greatest benefit and avoid long-term problems statewide.

Fortunately, the Governor and the Legislature in Alabama recognize the importance of this issue and are taking steps to develop a water management plan. As citizens who care about and rely on Alabama rivers, we must be engaged in this process and ensure that our voice as well as the voice of the rivers is a key part in developing a balanced plan for Alabama.

On April 17<sup>th</sup>, 2014, Governor Bentley released the Alabama Water Agencies Working Group report outlining recommendations for a comprehensive water policy. This report can be found on the Alabama Rivers Alliance website at [www.alabamarivers.org](http://www.alabamarivers.org).

The report lays out a good explanation of the issues involving water in our state and lists possible policy recommendations for each issue. It provides some general guidance in how we move forward, such as setting up issue focused stakeholder groups to further develop the details of complex issues, such as instream flows, conservation and reuse, and water permitting.

We have a lot of work ahead of us to keep this process moving forward and ensure stakeholders are driving the process. Please sign up for our mailing list at to learn more about this process how you can be involved. You may join or sign up for our mailing list at [www.alabamarivers.org](http://www.alabamarivers.org).



*Staff of Alabama Rivers Alliance. Photo courtesy Cindy Lowry*



## POTENTIAL TAR SANDS OPERATION POSES THREAT TO NORTHWEST ALABAMA SOIL AND WATER

By Cindy Lowry, Alabama Rivers Alliance

The Alabama Rivers Alliance is very concerned about the emerging threat of tar sands oil extraction in the northwestern part of Alabama (Black Warrior and Tennessee Watersheds).

In his 2014 State of the State Address, Governor Bentley announced that the Geologic Survey of Alabama will be testing and exploring the possibilities for tar sands oil extraction in Hartselle Sandstone, which runs under much of northwestern Alabama and down into central Alabama. Tar sands extraction can be done in various methods depending on the

depth of the substance, but it is likely to be open pit or surface mining in the Shoals area. The Oil and Gas Board of Alabama has been charged with creating the regulations for this practice, since it is currently not a federally regulated process.

The Alabama Rivers Alliance has been working with citizens and local groups like the Tennessee Riverkeeper and Shoals Environmental Alliance to organize the community, find information, talk with the oil and gas board about developing regulations, and engage local governments. To date, two local governments have jumped on board with reso-

lutions calling for comprehensive environmental studies to be done before any mining is allowed.

Concerned citizens can learn more and get involved by liking the group Stop Alabama Tar Sands Mining on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/AlabamaOilSands>.



An open-pit tar sands mining operation in Alberta, Canada.  
Photo courtesy: 911metallurgist.com

*Do unto those downstream as you  
would have those upstream do  
unto you.*

~Wendell Berry

### Like ASAN on Facebook!

Get more up-to-the-minute news, event announcements, and more!



## CALLING ALL COMPUTER GEEKS AND ARTSY TYPES!

Are you a techie, a computer geek, or simply a diehard social-mediaholic? ASAN could use your help!

We are forming a committee of folks to help inform decisions and strategy around the management and design of our website, social media presence, behind-the-scenes organizational software, and more.


If you have a background in any of these things and are interested in helping out, please get in touch with Alice at [alice@asanonline.org](mailto:alice@asanonline.org) or Gene at [gene@asanonline.org](mailto:gene@asanonline.org).

Similarly, we're calling all old-school and digital artists and casual doodlers to help us out with some of our design and communications needs!

Are you a printmaker willing to design flyers and promo posters every once in a while? Want to be the name behind the design for ASAN's next bumper sticker, t-shirt, and other swag?


Give us a shout — we could really use your skills! Contact Alice at [alice@asanonline.org](mailto:alice@asanonline.org) or 256-743-0742.

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## ASAN HOSTS COMMUNITY POTLUCKS AROUND THE STATE

Thanks to everyone who attended the six ASAN Community Potlucks we held in April, and who helped make them the great success that they were! More than 120 people attended, including many who are new to ASAN!

Extra special thanks go to those who helped to organize the potlucks, securing space and helping to publicize them to your local networks. This is precisely where our network's strength comes from!

There will be more of these in the future, so please get in touch if you'd like to organize one in your community. See below for two that are coming up soon!



### UPCOMING POTLUCKS:

Wednesday, June 18  
6:30-8:30pm  
Madison, AL (North AL)  
Asbury United Methodist Church

Thursday, June 19  
6:30-8:30pm  
Birmingham, AL  
Hopewell Missionary Baptist Church  
Optional farm tour at 5:45pm



Is there a group in your community devoted to local foods and/or sustainable ag that holds regular potlucks or other open, *inclusive* gatherings? Please let us know!

We don't intend for ASAN potlucks to compete with any of these local efforts, but rather want to lend our weight to amplify them!

We are compiling a list to post as a resource on the ASAN website. We'll post information about when, where, and how often the group gathers, and who to contact, for folks who may be interested in joining.

Please send information to Alice at [alice@asanonline.org](mailto:alice@asanonline.org) or 256-743-0742.

## WHAT'S IN STORE (CONTD)

(Continued from page 1)

cate in underserved communities. Doing so not only impacts health outcomes in the long-term by providing healthy food options to children and families, but also bolsters local economies in the short-term through job creation and an increase in the number of venues for local farmers to sell their products.

VOICES for Alabama's Children is excited to launch a campaign to bring a statewide healthy food financing initiative to

Alabama, in partnership with our national partners, the American Heart Association and Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, and local partners like the Alabama Sustainable Agriculture Network and the Alabama Food Policy Council.

Our organizations will be working with state leaders to reduce the economic barriers for healthy food retailers to provide healthy options in underserved communities and most importantly, educating local consumers about the benefits of healthy eating.

VOICES for Alabama's Children is a statewide non-profit that works to ensure the well-being of Alabama's children through research, public awareness, and advocacy. For more information, visit VOICES for Alabama's Children's website at [www.alavoices.org](http://www.alavoices.org).

Learn more by joining VOICES for Alabama's Children's online advocacy network at [www.alavoices.org](http://www.alavoices.org) to fight for child nutrition! Also, be sure to "Like" us on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/AlaVoices/>!



## UPDATES FROM REGIONAL FOOD POLICY COUNCILS

### North Alabama Food Policy Council:

Save the date for the North Alabama Food Policy Council's open planning session on Saturday, July 19th, 9 am-12pm in Ridley Hall, Church of the Nativity, downtown Huntsville! It is a great opportunity to network, learn about new local food initiatives, and help decide what actions the Food Policy Council can take to amplify these efforts! The open forum will build upon the four Local Food Dialogues the Food Policy Council hosted last year in Huntsville, Rainsville, Cullman and Muscle Shoals. Check for updates on Facebook ("Food Policy Council North Alabama") or

[www.nafoodpolycouncil.org](http://www.nafoodpolycouncil.org). To join the Council or receive email updates contact [adaniel@fbofna.org](mailto:adaniel@fbofna.org) for more information.

### River Region Food Policy Council:

The River Region Food Policy Council has finished up research on their school garden inventory. They are planning to release the results at an end-of-summer school garden event, which will also serve to connect teachers and administrators to information on how to start their own school gardens. Keep an eye on [www.riverregionfood.org](http://www.riverregionfood.org) for more information.

the

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for action alerts, news,  
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## FOOD POLICY BRIEFING: NEW COTTAGE FOOD LAW GOES INTO EFFECT JUNE 1

By Kristin Woods, ACES

Locally grown and produced food is becoming more and more popular across Alabama. Farmers markets have provided small food producers and home processors greater economic opportunity. Because of the costs of meeting food regulations, in many cases the markets have provided the only venue available to a small producer. They provide an outlet for products and assistance with infrastructure and advertising.

In the last 10 years, the number of farmers markets nationwide has more than doubled. The demand has led many processors to wish to expand operations by starting a business out of their home, a cottage food business. According to a recent survey conducted by ATKearney, 30% of shoppers will switch stores to find more local food products. In an attempt to capture some of the locavore market, even the mega retailer, Wal-Mart, has plans to increase local produce offerings to 9% by the year 2015.

While some may be disappointed that the new Alabama law does not allow for the sale of more items, or more sales venues, setting standards that preserve public health while allowing for economic prosperity is a difficult task for our legislators and public health officials. Alabama's Cottage Food Law (SB 159) opens the door for small food business expansion without compromising public health.



Before the passage of the SB 159, non-hazardous foods could only be sold at state sanctioned farmers markets, as well as, special events such as charitable, religious, civic, or a not-for-profit organization's food sale. SB 159 goes into effect June 1 and allows for the sale of non-hazardous foods from a person's home. Some of the items that may be sold include:

- Baked goods, such as cakes and pies that do not need refrigeration. This includes wedding cakes and character cakes for birthdays and holidays.
- Canned jam and jelly. With fancy packaging, these make fabulous gifts.
- Dried herb mixes. This is a great thing to also have for sale at a farmers market that sells meat.
- Candy. Easy to make, store, and great for holidays.

The law stipulates that only non-hazardous foods may be sold out of the home, so no meat, fish, low acid, or acidified foods. The law also does not allow internet sales. A small business owner wishing to operate under this new rule must take a food safety course, such as ServSafe, and register with the county Department of Public Health. There is no fee for registration.

For more information about operating under the new law, contact Regional Extension Agent, Kristin Woods, at (251) 753-1164 or [WOODSKL@aces.edu](mailto:WOODSKL@aces.edu) or your county Extension office.

If you would like to read the bill for yourself, the specifics can be found at <http://alisondb.legislature.state.al.us/acas/searchableinstruments/2014rs/bills/sb159.htm>.

## NEWS FROM YOUR NEIGHBORS

Congratulations to **Andy Grace**, who won a James Beard Award for his 2012 film *Eating Alabama!* The film won in the Broadcast and New Media category for best special/documentary. Andy is the Board President and a founder of the Druid City Garden Project in Tuscaloosa, and a professor at UA. He is an ASAN member and former ASAN board member.

**Lee and Shannon McBride** are relocating from Huntsville to north Cullman County, where they plan to start Hickory Hill Homestead and Farmacy. Their homestead plans include native medicinal plants, an orchard specializing in Asian persimmons, and small ruminants. Lee will continue serving as the Local Food Coordinator for the Farm Food Collaborative. They are excited about this transition, and especially excited to be much closer to so many farmers and wholesale markets.

**Edwin Marty** left in April to take a position in Austin, TX, as the Environmental Policy Program Manager in their Office of Sustainability. Edwin had been the Executive Director of EAT South in Montgomery for the past 4 years. He also served as ASAN's Board President for 2 years, stepping down in January of this year. Prior to his tenure at EAT South, he founded and ran Jones Valley Urban Farm in Birmingham. Edwin's absence will be (and already is!) strongly felt in Alabama. We wish him and his family all the very best in the Lone Star State, and know Austin is lucky to have him.

**Skye Borden** has stepped down as the Coordinator of the River

These two 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](mailto:alice@asanonline.org) or (256) 743-0742.

Region Food Policy Council. She and her husband **James Walter** are expecting their first baby, a little boy, in early June. Congratulations to them both!

Deep Roots of Alabama will be welcoming a new director this June. In late June **Wendy Payne**, the current director, will be relocating with her husband and children to Germany, where her husband has taken a new job. Wendy has been a wonderful influence on this area and will be greatly missed in the community. Deep Roots is excited to welcome **Ashley Chapman**, creator of [urbangardenal.com](http://urbangardenal.com) and urban agriculturalist, to guide Deep Roots forward as a gardening health initiative & seed to plate program. Contact Ashley at [ashley.chapman@deeprootsofalachabama.org](mailto:ashley.chapman@deeprootsofalachabama.org).

**April Hobbs** will be stepping down as manager of the Tune Farm Incubator, to work for a community garden and kitchen project in Capetown, South Africa, starting in August. **Liz Nutt**, who has been at the Incubator since February 2014 working for Heron Hollow Farm, will take over for April as the new Farm Manager.

## CLASSIFIEDS & RESOURCES

The Farmer Veteran Coalition is heading up a national expansion of the Homegrown By Heroes product label, spearheaded by the Kentucky Department of Agriculture. To qualify for the Homegrown By Heroes label, one must have served honorably or still be serving in any branch of the U.S. Armed Forces, and be at least 50 percent owner and/or operator of the farm business. Veterans of all eras are encouraged to apply. FVC staff assists applicants in developing food safety plans and, if needed, business plans.

FVC is now accepting and processing Homegrown By Heroes applications, which can be completed at <http://www.hgbh.org>.

## UPCOMING EVENTS

MORE DETAILS ON ALL OF THESE EVENTS (AND MORE!) AT [WWW.ASANONLINE.ORG/EVENTS](http://WWW.ASANONLINE.ORG/EVENTS).

Jun 5 — **CSAs Straight from Alabama Farms to Your Table**, Mobile. Hosted by Mobile County Master Gardeners. 9:30-11am.

Jun 5 — **Kids Gardening Workshop**, Spanish Fort. Hosted by Seasons in the Sun Farm.

Jun 5 — **Citizens Rally to Stop Alabama Tar Sands Mining**, Florence.

Jun 7 — **American Chestnut Foundation Orchard Tour and Crop Mob**, Muscle Shoals. Learn about TACF's efforts to restore the American Chestnut, and tour the orchard. Starts at 9am.

Jun 10 — **Alabama Organic Consumers' Education Workshop Series**, Phenix City. Organic refreshments at 5pm, presentations 6-8pm.

Jun 12 — **Alabama Organic Consumers' Education Workshop Series**, Auburn. See above.

Jun 20 — **Hoochee Poosa Locavores potluck meeting**, Roanoke. Regular meeting of area Slow Foods chapter.



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## UPCOMING EVENTS (CONT'D)

(Continued from page 14)

Jun 20 — **JPick Farms Field Day**, Killen. Focus on all-natural pest control for vegetables, and on-farm cold storage.

Jun 21 — **3rd Annual Community Garden Open House Tour**, Huntsville. Hosted by the Tennessee Valley Community Garden Association.

Jun 21 — **Summer Forages and Pasture Walk**, Muscle Shoals. Guided walk-through and presentation at JC Holt Farm.

Jun 21 — **Peer to Peer High Tunnel Workshop Series**, Eufaula. Series of hands-on workshops lasting through August, all free of charge.

Jun 24 — **Lamb by the River**, Florence. Featuring locally raised lamb, prepared by a local chef, music, and a presentation on the importance of local food.

Jun 25 — **Spring/Summer Gardening Tips Workshop**, Dothan. Hosted by Aunt Katie's Community Garden.

Jun 25-29 — **Freedom Summer**

**50th**, Jackson, MS. Conference and 50th anniversary commemoration of 1964's landmark "Freedom Summer."

Jun 27 — **Construction of Hydroponics Demonstration**, Dothan. Hosted by Aunt Katie's Community Garden.

Jun 28 — **Cost of Poverty Experience (COPE) Workshop**, Phenix City. Poverty simulation hosted by BeYond Expectations. More info on page 5.

Jul 8 — **Beginning Farmer Seminar Series**, Pike Road. Topic: land management and resources.

Jul 8 — **Tennessee Valley Community Garden Association Monthly Potluck**, Huntsville. Open to all, 6:30pm.

Jul 10 — **Beekeeping 101**, Dothan. Hosted by Aunt Katie's Community Garden.

Jul 17 — **Beekeeping 201**, Dothan. Hosted by Aunt Katie's Community Garden.

Jul 19 — **North Alabama Food Policy Council Open Planning Session**,

Huntsville. Gathering to brainstorm and strategize the Council's future work and priority areas, 9am-12pm.

Jul 31 — **Beekeeping 301**, Dothan. Hosted by Aunt Katie's Community Garden.

Aug 7 — **Beekeeping 401**, Dothan. Hosted by Aunt Katie's Community Garden.

Aug 12 — **Beginning Farmer Seminar Series**, Pike Road. Topic: computer software and technology for agribusiness.

Aug 12 — **Tennessee Valley Community Garden Association Monthly Potluck**, Huntsville.

Aug 14-16 — **Federation of Southern Cooperatives' 47th Annual Meeting and Awards Dinner**, Birmingham/Epes. Aug 14th awards dinner in Birmingham followed by annual meeting in Epes Aug 15-16th.

Aug 16 — **Hopewell Women in Agriculture Conference**, Birmingham.

(Continued on page 16)

## ASAN

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### — UPCOMING EVENTS (CONT'D) —

*(Continued from page 15)*

Aug 20-22 — **Agricultural Risk Management and Business Development Training Workshop**, Mobile. *Hosted by AAMU's Small Farms Research Center.*

Aug 30 — **Fall Gardening Tips Workshop**, Dothan. *Hosted by Aunt Katie's Community Garden.*

Sept 6 — **MSAN Farm Tours**, Northeast Mississippi. *Three farm tours, free and open to all.*

Sept 6 — **Beginning Farmer Seminar Series**, Pike Road. *Topic: expert roundtable Q&A.*

Sept 9 — **Tennessee Valley Community Garden**

**Association Monthly Potluck**, Huntsville.

Sept 14 — **The Garden Party**, Tuscaloosa. *Annual fall fundraiser for the Druid City Garden Project, pairing local chefs with local farmers.*

Oct 3-5 — **CoopEcon**, Epes. *Regional/national conference to train and educate about cooperatives and new economies.*

Nov 7-8 — **Mississippi Food Summit**, Jackson, MS.

Nov 10-12 — **Slow Money National Gathering**, Louisville, KY.

Nov 13-15 — **Facing Race: A National Conference**, Dallas, TX.

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