



THE ALABAMA  
SUSTAINABLE  
AGRICULTURE  
NETWORK

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# ASAN UPDATE

Fall 2015

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## EMERGING OPPORTUNITIES IN ALABAMA AGRICULTURE: GARLIC

By Michael LaBelle

Garlic is an often overlooked crop in the south, but is one of the easiest crops to grow, and there is a large, increasing demand. After its introduction into the New World by early European settlers, garlic became part of our southern heritage. We now use it liberally in almost everything we cook — a good thing, because for thousands of years, garlic has been recognized as a powerful medicine to treat a variety of health conditions. Ancient Egyptian records indicate its use dates back as far as the construction of the Giza Pyramids. Later, Hippocrates, the father of Western medicine, also advocated liberal use of garlic in treating a variety of health conditions.

My accidental interest in garlic started about five years ago. My mother has had an ornamental plant growing in her back yard for the past forty years. She has long thought the plant is a leek, a relative to garlic but with different properties. I planted some of her “leeks,” but after the first harvest they just didn’t look right. After much research I determined that what we have is actually elephant garlic. The bulbs are HUGE. I harvested one bulb this spring that alone weighed over a POUND! Compare that to the “normal” garlic bulbs you buy in the store, which weigh an ounce or less.

I grow for fun, but Martha Daughdrill of ViperVille Vegetable Farm near Atmore, AL has been growing what appears to be the same variety for the past 15 years. She also came upon it accidentally, and named her unidentified garlic “Creole Garlic,” since it came from

*This is Pt. 5 of a series on niche market opportunities for Alabama growers. More on the series on pg. 5.*



*The author with elephant garlic, photo courtesy Michael LaBelle*

*(Continued on page 5)*



## YOU DON'T WANT TO MISS GRAZE: BIRMINGHAM

On Sunday, September 13, ASAN will host Graze: Birmingham, a farm-to-fork fundraiser picnic in which farmer-chef pairs will serve dinner tapas-style in the shady backyard of Birmingham’s Avondale Brewery. It’s the perfect way to spend a Sunday afternoon in early fall, plus, it goes to support and grow ASAN!

Graze is about celebrating all the talent and richness that Birmingham and Central Alabama have to offer, from the pastures to the plate. Grazers get the satisfaction of a mouth-watering meal, local craft brews, and foot-stomping tunes from the Red Mountain White Trash (another type of chef pairing, as they are joined by Carole Griffin of Continental Bakery and Chez Lulu on vocals!). But since Graze is a fundraiser for ASAN, Grazers also get the satisfaction of contributing to the critical purpose that

*(Continued on page 3)*

## ‘TIS THE SEASON FOR ASAN REGIONAL FOOD & FARM FORUMS!

October 13 marks the first of 2015’s Regional Food & Farm Forums, to be held in Mentone, Slocumb (Oct 29), Africatown (Nov 17), and Jemison (Dec 2). See the handy — and beautiful! — save the date graphic on the back page for a map, to see which one is closest to you!

These popular events are coming up fast, and as we will not publish another print

*(Continued on page 3)*



## LETTER FROM THE ASAN BOARD PRESIDENT



Here's your chance to get involved!

Five years ago, my husband Michael and I explored south central Mississippi and Alabama in search of an ideal property to get our new business going. When we settled in Fruitdale, AL, just north of Mobile, I searched online for a local organization where we could meet like-minded people and was so happy to find ASAN!

We joined immediately and made plans to attend the upcoming Food & Farm Forum in Selma. What a treat that was! We met some wonderful people who walk the walk and talk the talk. At the forum, we met folks like Karen Wynne, Edwin Marty, Jim Ewing, Lee McBride, Kirk Iversen and Jan Garrett for the first time.

Today, many of those same folks (and many new ones who've found ASAN since!) remain committed, volunteering countless hours supporting our farmers,

promoting the local food movement, and ensuring access to good, healthy food for everyone in their communities.

Speaking of volunteers, we could use your help this fall! Our hard-working Executive Director, Alice Evans, has done a fine job furthering the growth of ASAN, and our Regional Forums have been instrumental to that growth. This year's Regional Forums are just around the corner, and will be happening in Mentone, Slocumb, Africatown, and Jemison. There's more information on the opposite page. These events rely heavily on volunteers, in planning and execution. If you live near one of the forum locations, or have connections nearby, please email Alice at [alice@asanonline.org](mailto:alice@asanonline.org) and offer help.

The typical Forum format is roundtable discussions with experts on a wide variety of topics, a tour or hands-on component, wrapped up with a locally grown and prepared meal. If you or someone you know would like to host a roundtable, let us know! If you'd like for us to offer a certain topic, we'll round up an expert! Sponsors help fund these events

and we're always seeking exhibitors, so this could be a great opportunity for your company to get involved. If you know a local farmer or chef, let's highlight their local goodness at the Forum!

If you just can't wait until the Forums for a delicious, locally grown meal, plan to attend ASAN's first farm-to-table picnic, *Graze: Birmingham*, at Avondale Brewery in Birmingham on Sunday, September 13<sup>th</sup>. Look for details on the opposite page. It's going to be awesome and is expected to sell out fast, so get your tickets now!

If you aren't already a member, please consider joining ASAN and also making a tax deductible donation. You can help support local sustainable food systems as we help small farmers, ranchers, fishermen AND consumers of Alabama grown food!

Sincerely,

Anne LaBelle  
ASAN Board President

### CONTRIBUTORS: FALL 2015

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

- Michael LaBelle** co-owns MightyGrow Organics, based in Fruitdale.
- Gabe Denton** homesteads with his parents and siblings at Jubilee Promise, and is the assistant secretary for the Deer Park, AL Community Center.
- Stephen Tsikalas** is an Assistant Professor of Geography at Jacksonville State University and a volunteer water quality monitor for Alabama Water Watch.
- Nelson Brooke** is a Birmingham native and has served as the Black Warrior Riverkeeper's staff Riverkeeper since January of 2004.
- Susan Diane Mitchell**, a resident of Birmingham since 1991, is Priestess at Udja Temple and a Board member of the Magic City Agriculture Project (MCAP).
- Anne Randle** is an Extension Specialist for Home & Community Gardens at Tuskegee Univ. Cooperative Extension. She lives and farms in Auburn.
- Carol Gundlach** is a policy analyst at Arise Citizens' Policy Project—learn more at [arisecitizens.org](http://arisecitizens.org). She lives in Montgomery.
- Anne LaBelle** is ASAN's Board President and the co-owner of MightyGrow Organics in Fruitdale.
- Alice Evans** is the Executive Director of ASAN.

### ASAN BOARD OF DIRECTORS

- Lucy Buffett**, Lulu's (Gulf Shores)
- Laurie Gay**, End of the Road Farm (Summerdale)
- Randall Hastings**, Hastings Farm (Bay Minette)
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- Anne LaBelle**, MightyGrow Organics (Fruitdale) — Board President
- Ayanava Majumdar**, ACES (Auburn)
- Jessica Norwood**, Emerging Changemakers Network (Mobile)
- Jodie Powell**, Sweet Home Organics (Leroy)
- Deborah Thomas**, Southern Rural Black Women's Initiative, and the Federation of Child Care Centers of Alabama (Montgomery)
- Lindsay Turner**, Druid City Garden Project (Tuscaloosa) — Board Secretary
- Charles Walters**, River Oaks Farm (Millbrook)
- Andrew Williams**, The United Christian Community Association, and the Deep South Food Alliance (Safford)
- Myles Wright** (Montgomery) — Board Treasurer

## GRAZE: BIRMINGHAM (CONTINUED)

(Continued from page 1)

ASAN pursues every day – to build a food system where more Alabamians enjoy food that is raised responsibly by a growing pool of well-supported, diverse, homegrown Alabama farmers.

### Starring...

Some of the many contributing time, talent, and products include: Deep South Food Alliance, Dixon Family Farms, Fiddlehead Farms, Grandview Farm, Harvest Roots Farm & Ferment, Hepzibah Farms, Heron Hollow Farm, Marble Creek Farmstead, Snow's Bend Farm, To Your Health Sprouted Flour, West End Community Garden, American Culinary Federation (including culinary instructors from Culinary and Jeff State Community College), Chez Lulu, Downstairs Diner at East Lake UMC, Golden Temple, Kowaliga Restaurant (on Lake Martin), Little Savannah, Montgomery Super Suppers, Thyme Randall, and West End Café.

Vegetarians, fear not -- Graze will feature plenty of delicious vegetarian (and vegan!) dishes, so don't let that be

the reason you miss out on this awesome event!

There will be a raffle table as well, including items such as a free home energy evaluation and consultation by Eco Three; a signed copy of New York Times bestseller *Just Mercy*, by Bryan Stevenson of the Equal Justice Initiative; and gift baskets and gift certificates from supporters like Organic Harvest Market and Café (Hoover) and Deep Roots Apotheke.

### Tickets

In order to make Graze accessible to as wide an audience as possible, tickets are offered with sliding scale pricing – this means that Grazers name their own ticket price, between \$25-60, according to how much they can afford, how much they think the food/drink/entertainment is worth, and how much they want to give to support ASAN. (See inset for more info.) There are some incentives to encourage folks to give as generously as possible – those who pay at least \$40 for their ticket will get six tickets to "spend" at the raffle table, and those who pay \$60+ get one year's free individual membership to ASAN!

To buy tickets go to <http://grazebham.brownpapertickets.com>. See you September 13!

### MORE ABOUT SLIDING SCALE PRICING

You may be asking, why go to all the trouble? Why not just set a single price for everybody and call it a day? Simply put, to make the event accessible to folks for whom that single set price (say, \$50) would have been out of reach.

Sliding scale pricing is not a new concept – there are lots of great models out there for pay-what-you-can restaurants, theaters, medical practitioners, and music (you may have heard of Radiohead's "In Rainbows"?). But at least in Alabama, it hasn't been used much for fundraisers or nonprofit events like this one.

So we're going out on a bit of a limb, but we felt it was an important expression of ASAN's values to make our events – even (or perhaps especially) those whose primary purpose is fundraising – accessible to as wide a population as possible. It's all too easy to equate a contributor's monetary support with their level of support for the work in general, which all too often then informs the perceived "worth" with which that person is considered and treated. But \$50 has different weight in different people's hands – for instance, it may be what one person earns in 20 minutes' worth of work, and what another earns in an entire day. A sliding scale price structure uses one to counterbalance the other, in order to open the door a little wider to both.

**If this is something you support and want to see more of, please let us know! Reach out and tell us what you think!**



Have you joined  
ASAN yet?

Is it time to renew  
your membership?

Check the back page above your address, and then go to [www.asanonline.org/join-asan](http://www.asanonline.org/join-asan) to donate online!

## FORUMS (CONT'D)

(Continued from page 1)

newsletter before they arrive, please keep an eye on <http://asanonline.org/rfff2015> for all the latest updates, agendas, registration information, and more!

For those who may be unfamiliar, the Forums are one-day gatherings that convene farmers, gardeners, community leaders, and good food advocates to "cross-pollinate" and learn from one another while building community.

Each event consists of: a wide variety of expert-facilitated roundtable discussions; experiential learning opportunities like farm tours and mini-workshops; exhibits and resource tables; and of course, a delicious, locally sourced meal. Topics covered range from those specific to on-farm production and marketing, to general interest topics like fermenting and pollinator protection, to intersecting issues such as environmental justice, community economic wellbeing, and more.

The Regional Food & Farm Forums are open and accessible to those with all levels of experience, and each is planned in response to the

particular needs and interests of its host community. The overarching

goal of the Forums is to sow the seeds for collaborative partnerships that will continue to grow after the event has passed.

If your organization or company is interested in sponsoring or exhibiting at one or all of the Forums, please contact Alice at [alice@asanonline.org](mailto:alice@asanonline.org)!







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## GARLIC (CONT'D)

(Continued from page 1)

a yard in Louisiana and has a spicier flavor than the regular elephant variety. Income from her garlic sales at farmers markets and restaurants in Mobile and Baldwin County have allowed her to retire from her teaching job into full-time farming this year. Last year, she grew about 20 bushels.

Garlic likes well-drained soils, so heavy clay soils can be an issue. As always, I recommend a soil test. If you have heavy soils, amend with LOTS of compost. Since my raised beds have high organic matter, this isn't an issue for me. After balancing out the minerals and correcting pH with high calcium lime as needed (6.4 is considered ideal), I applied some poultry litter fertilizer and loosened the soil a little. This allowed me to easily plant by hand, using only a small hand trowel. I planted the bulbs 2" deep and about 6" apart. Conventional garlic is planted in rows 6" apart with the bulbs 4" apart, but for my monster 5" elephant bulbs, I need a little more room. After planting, I mulched with 6" of wheat straw, watered and waited till late spring.

I have found that garlic is significantly less difficult to grow than onions. Insect problems are rare; Martha and I concur that nematodes are the only real threat in the Deep South.

Now for some "insider" tips on growing garlic in the South. First, use a good layer of mulch. While this will suppress any late season weeds, the main reason for mulch is to keep the soil cooler in the spring. Warm soil causes the garlic plant to begin forming a bulb, which you want to delay as long as possible. The more and

### About This Series

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 highlights new opportunities that Alabama farmers can pursue with a minimum of investment in land, equipment and capital.

Recap of the series so far: elderberries (Fall 2014), shiitake mushrooms (Winter), bananas (Spring), and blackberries (Summer).



Top, photo courtesy Martha Daughdrill.  
Bottom, rosemary garlic, photo courtesy Michael LaBelle.

larger the leaves on the plant, the larger the bulb will be, so you want to keep the soil cool and moist as long as possible.

The other secret that Southern garlic growers

have learned to employ is *vernalization*. This is a fancy word that means keeping your garlic cloves in cold storage for as long as possible before planting, 6 weeks at the least. Simply place the cloves in an open plastic bag (NOT sealed), inside a paper bag, in the warmer part of your refrigerator. You do NOT want your cloves to freeze. Proper vernalization will all but guarantee a crop of nice, large sized bulbs.

So what is the market like for garlic in the U.S.? In the most recent year with data available (2011), we consumed more than 340 million tons of garlic, of which

only 195,000 tons were produced in the U.S. That is two pounds for every person in the country! The U.S. is the largest consumer of garlic in the world, but is only eighth in production. China is the largest supplier of garlic, producing more than 22,000,000 tons per year.

Wholesale conventional garlic sells for around \$0.60 per pound with an average production of 16,500 pounds per acre, or gross income of \$9,900 per acre. Not bad money when compared to corn! But for small producers, without access to commercial harvesting equipment, the farmer is looking at LOTS of hand labor. Even so, he or she is probably not going to be selling the crop at wholesale. Fresh California garlic is currently

selling for \$7.00 per pound (plus \$5.00 shipping), about the same price a grower can expect at a farmers market. Try revisiting your production and income calculations using those numbers!

As you can see, you don't have to grow a lot of garlic to be able to significantly increase your on farm income. Other than farmers markets, growers can also supply garlic to area CSAs as well as health food stores or even commercial produce buyers. Most garlic is grown in significant amounts is grown on contract.

Most garlic grown in the U.S. comes from California. Why even consider growing it in Alabama? First of all, we can grow just about ANYTHING here, from potatoes in the coastal counties to corn in the Black Belt. We have the climate, land, and water that many states, California included, would love to have. Second, there is a growing demand for ANY produce grown and sold locally. Finally, it really is an easy crop to grow... IF you follow just a few simple steps to virtually ensure success.

I say "virtually ensure success" because every farmer reading this article knows there are no guarantees. A wetter and colder winter can always hinder the growth of your garlic crop. A hotter spring can cause your plants to "break bulb" too soon, before the foliage is fully developed. This will result in smaller bulbs.

Garlic can be stored after harvest for replanting in the fall, or you can create value-added items by preserving it in vinegar or oil.

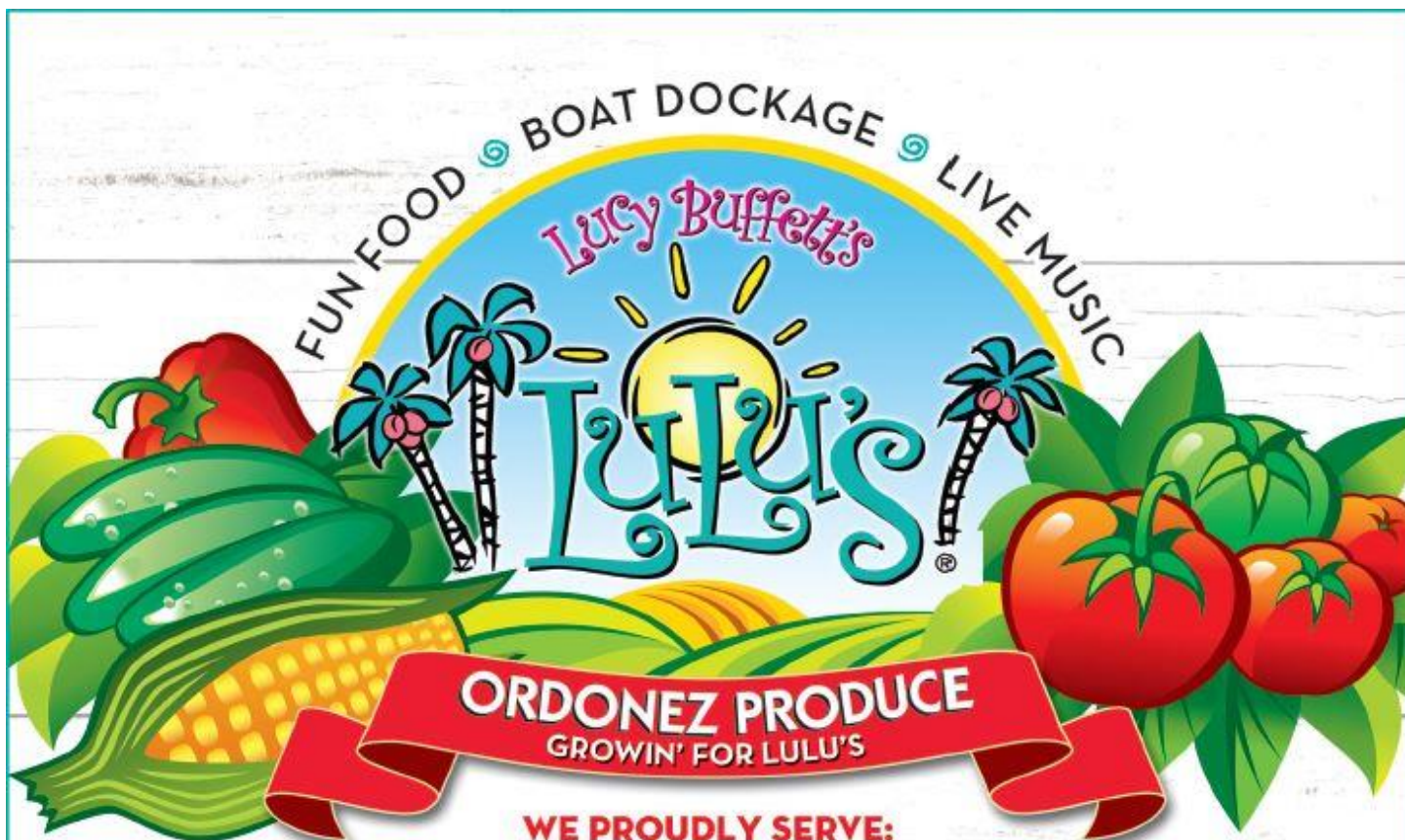
If you decide to add garlic to your fall planting schedule, now is the time to get started. You need time to cold treat your bulbs and get your planting beds in shape. But since it is so hot outside, let's just start with the bulbs. That way you can tell all of your friends you are "working" on your fall garlic crop, without breaking a sweat over it. And once you have a good supply of your own, locally acclimated bulbs, you won't have to buy any again, and THAT is what we call sustainable.

More market information:

[http://www.agmrc.org/commodities\\_products/vegetables/garlic-profile/](http://www.agmrc.org/commodities_products/vegetables/garlic-profile/)

More on growing organic garlic in the Deep South, seeds and lots of helpful tips: [http://greyduckgarlic.com/Southern\\_Garlic\\_Grower\\_Guide.html](http://greyduckgarlic.com/Southern_Garlic_Grower_Guide.html)





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Under the Bridge in Gulf Shores





## "NOTHING TO LOSE BUT OUR CHAINS" — ENVISIONING JUST TRANSITIONS

By Gabe Denton

It is inspiring and empowering to witness a community working towards economic, social, and environmental equity. That is exactly what Cooperation Jackson did when 300 gathered at the Lumumba Center in Jackson, MS for their Southern People's Movement Assembly (PMA) on Just Transition, June 26-28.

The U.S. Social Forum developed PMAs as gatherings to identify root causes of systemic problems, to envision the world that we want, and to create solidarity and collective action for conscious systemic change.

Jackson is one of the Our Power pilot sites of the Climate Justice Alliance (CJA). These communities have been adversely impacted by systemic injustices and structural challenges that lead to climate change, and are supported by CJA to build local green economies and empower people.

The gathering in Jackson drew folks from across race, gender and cultural lines, folks representing many different communities and organizations, including the other Our Power Communities. The goal of the PMA was to create collective consciousness, solidarity, and strategy for system change, all within the sustainable, restorative and new economic framework of "just transition" in the Deep South and ultimately the world. A just transition is a framework for a fair and sustainable shift to a low-carbon economy.

The PMA's host, Cooperation Jackson, has been in the process of starting three interconnected cooperatives, all of which are worker owned and democratically run. They are the farm co-op, the composting/recycling co-op, and the catering co-op, which provided amazing meals for the PMA. Co-ops like these allow for system change because they are built on the principles of self-determination and solidarity economy



Photo © Cooperation Jackson

that empower and sustain poor communities. The gathering began Friday with supper followed by the preliminary panel of community folk who defined the purpose and expectations of the PMA. Saturday folks

worked with their chosen track (Gender, Youth, Labor/Worker, Economic Democracy, and Energy Democracy) to unpack and strategize on system change. We had time to share stories, listen, and connect at personal and community levels.

I was in the youth track, where we openly shared our experiences with the education system: an expectation to fail, over testing, skewed history facts, and inadequate preparation for meaningful careers. We identified the prevalence of wasted resources, poisonous food, hazardous energy production, inefficient public transportation, and state violence as critical areas of social change. We all agreed that these issues have been severely affecting poor people, particularly black, native and some immigrant communities.

A youth facilitator asked, "What is your creative outlet, and how is it a resource for just transition?" Answers included: cooking to build community, line dancing to start a revolution, music to let off steam, expressive poetry, listening, and storytelling.

The youth track had radical vision and offered much hope. We wanted access to safe places where being a rebel was cool. Guerrilla gardening and hip-hop-based storytelling were identified as some of the tools to work towards system change. We decided that there is a great need to create apprenticeships and alternative ways of teaching including art, dancing, and storytelling that could potentially create media ownership.

One Native American youth reminded us that we are adequate and valuable experts on our own land and in our communities. We realized that we had the power in small things like growing gardens, visiting neighbors, and creating honest and safe spaces for dialogue

and action. We concluded that a beloved community is necessary to bring about system change through education, sustainable actions, laughter, and love.

We also toured New West Jackson and saw the community rebuilding itself through resident leadership and neighborhood labor. Abandoned houses are being transformed into usable spaces like an office space, a bed and breakfast, and a youth hangout. Also, an artistic urban farm is being created using the principles of permaculture.

On Sunday, we synthesized all of the discussions and future plans. We talked about events that mapped our actions towards Katrina's 10-year commemoration (August 29, 2015) and the Road to Paris to hold governments accountable with a local to global vision for climate change. We planned to protest the deceptive "greenwashing" that is likely to happen in Paris at the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change in November-December 2015. This convention has repeatedly made decisions that look environmentally friendly but actually benefit extractive corporations and governments.

The PMA opened many eyes and hearts to the systemic and structural injustices suffered by black and native people and all poor people. At the assembly, we honestly shared our stories of privilege, oppression etc and discussed solutions. We affirmed our paths forward with Assata Shakur's chant, "It is our duty to fight for our freedom. It is our duty to win. We must love each other and support each other. We have nothing to lose but our chains."



Article author Gabe Denton. Photo © Cooperation Jackson

## THE HOW'S AND WHY'S OF MONITORING WATER QUALITY

By Steve Tsikalas

Alabama Water Watch (AWW) was established in 1992 as a citizen volunteer water quality monitoring program. This program has established a network of volunteers across the state of Alabama with the aim of improving Alabama's water quality and water policy. Success of this program has been aided by three interrelated components: (1) citizen monitoring groups, (2) a university-based program (based at Auburn University in Auburn, AL), and (3) a non-profit association.

AWW incorporates a data-to-action focus. Free training is provided to citizens who become certified to collect, analyze, and understand data, which is then sent to AWW to publish and share on their website. Methods of water monitoring are backed by Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) approved monitoring plans. Specifically, AWW trains monitors in water chemistry (pH, turbidity, alkalinity, hardness, dissolved oxygen), bacteriology [fecal matter and *Escherichia coli* (*E. coli*)], and stream biomonitoring (macroinvertebrates as water pollution indicators).

### Water Monitoring and Its Importance in Agriculture

In agriculture it is necessary to add fertility to your soil in order to replenish nutrients and have healthy crop yield. However, there are better and worse ways to go about this. A vast amount of fertilizers (especially synthetic fertilizers) often make their way into local streams causing spikes in various elements, especially nitrogen and oxygen. This leads to excessive growth in algae, which in turn depletes the water of oxygen and causes hypoxia or "dead zones".



*Clockwise from top: water chemistry monitoring in Jacksonville, AL on a chilly winter day, (L to R) LaVern Barrs, Payten Samuels, and Jade Patolo. Whitney Henson (L) and Barbara Edwards (R) in the JSU Water Quality Lab prepping bacteriological samples for incubation. Tripp Lott conducting water chemistry monitoring. Photo credits: Steve Tsikalas*

A dead zone is an area of a stream (or lake or ocean) where the aquatic life is killed off due to limited oxygen in the water. Many studies trace these dead zones to human factors, specifically excess nutrients in runoff and piped wastewater into streams. Conducting routine water chemistry monitoring tells farmers what chemical variables are in their streams. They can then compare these levels with what are considered to be normal levels, information that is provided in free manuals distributed by AWW.

Bacteriological monitoring can also be extremely helpful to farmers. When livestock are allowed to roam freely and enter into streams, inevitably, high levels of fecal matter enter the stream system. High counts of fecal matter lead to growth of the often harmful and sometimes deadly bacteria, *E. coli*.

AWW bacteriological monitoring on a regular basis can reveal how much fecal matter is entering into the streams and whether or not unhealthy counts of various bacteria are found there. This is important to investigate not only for your own health and safety, but also for all of those

downstream. As they say, "Love thy downstream neighbor!"

### AWW in Action

As one of the founding members of the Jacksonville River Monitors organization, I can personally attest to both the community rewards and intrinsic rewards of participating as a water monitoring volunteer for AWW. The geographers at Jacksonville State University (JSU) have been conducting monthly monitoring of local streams since January 2014. This has been an eye-opening experience. We sample three stream segments, two of which are often frequented by community members for swimming in the summer months. Our monitoring of bacteria has shown that, especially during the warm summer months, these streams have had unsafe levels of *E. coli*. We are also charting fluctuations in various chemistry variables to determine if there are spikes in the data that may be resulting from fertilizer use.

Being an active monitor gives one a sense of environmental responsibility and stewardship that can be very rewarding. It has been pleasing to see our organization growing in number and the passion our students have for our freshwater health.

### Get Involved!

AWW is a tremendous program that benefits everyone involved. The networking and friendships I have made in the program over the past two years has been priceless. I plan to continue my participation in the program and encourage others to join too. The first step to getting involved is to become a certified water monitor—contact AWW (info below) to find out more! Let's all work together to keep our streams healthy!

Learn more about Alabama Water Watch, including about upcoming water monitoring trainings!

- Visit their office on the campus of Auburn University
- Visit their website at [www.alabamawaterwatch.org/](http://www.alabamawaterwatch.org/)
- Call or email them at 888-844-4785 or [info@alabamawaterwatch.org](mailto:info@alabamawaterwatch.org)



## SHEPHERD BEND MINE PROPOSAL DEFEATED AT LAST

By Nelson Brooke

It all started in 2007 when the University of Alabama Board of Trustees issued a request for proposals to coal mining companies interested in strip mining for coal on UA property within Shepherd Bend, a large bend along the Mulberry Fork of the Black Warrior River in Walker County.

Local citizens took notice and informed Black Warrior Riverkeeper, whose mission is to protect and restore the Black Warrior River and its tributaries. Not long after, students within the University of Alabama System began to organize along with local citizens to stand up against the proposed 1773-acre Shepherd Bend Mine.

The Shepherd Bend portion of the river happens to be home to many people, people who love the river and their peaceful way of life along it. This Mulberry Fork also is a major municipal drinking water source for the greater Birmingham area. The Birmingham Water Works Board's Mulberry Intake provides daily drinking water to 200,000 people.

In 2008, despite widespread public opposition, a subsidiary of Drummond Company received a permit from the Alabama Department of Environmental Management (ADEM) to discharge the coal mine's polluted water out of 29 points into the Mulberry Fork and its tributaries. Ten of these points were upstream of the Mulberry Intake, which is situated just across the river from Shepherd Bend.



Left: Students from universities across Alabama protesting in solidarity against Shepherd Bend Mine at the University of Alabama, photo © Nelson Brooke, Black Warrior Riverkeeper. Below: this image highlights the proximity of Shepherd Bend to the Birmingham Water Works Board's Mulberry Intake, just across the river. Image © Lewis Communications

Black Warrior Riverkeeper, represented by the Southern Environmental Law Center, appealed ADEM's Clean Water Act permit, but unfortunately the courts allowed it to stand.

Despite rising public pressure to derail this ill-conceived coal mine proposal, in 2010 the Alabama Surface Mining Commission (ASMC) issued a strip mining permit to Shepherd Bend, LLC. The Birmingham Water Works Board appealed the ASMC permit, knowing it would be an uphill battle.

Having the 2 necessary permits in hand to begin strip mining, there was only one linchpin in place that prevented Drummond from mining coal: the University of Alabama is the majority surface and mineral rights owner at Shepherd Bend, and the insti-

tution had yet to make a move toward leasing rights over to Drummond.

Black Warrior Riverkeeper's campaign - along with tireless efforts by local citizens, students, drinking water consumers, partner organizations, businesses, and municipal leaders - to stop Shepherd Bend Mine persisted with consistent public education and media coverage for over 8 years. That continuous pressure on the University of Alabama System Trustees kept them from ever taking a stance on Shepherd Bend Mine.

And it kept Shepherd Bend Mine from ever becoming a reality, because on June 19, 2015, Drummond Company issued a press release announcing they would no longer pursue mining coal at Shepherd Bend.

This hard-fought battle, and a big win amidst much doubt that such a proposal could ever be stopped in Alabama, gives credence to the importance of citizen advocacy. This story is an example of how, if we come together as strangers, neighbors, community - in solidarity - we can stand up for what is right with confidence. Standing up for our water, air, and land is patriotic, and it is our right. It is our duty to protect Alabama's natural heritage, and leave this magnificent state in better condition for future generations to enjoy and prosper.



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## BUILDING #SOUTHERNPEOPLESPOWER IN UNIONTOWN AND BEYOND

By Susan Diane Mitchell

On July 2, my partner Majadi Baruti and I travelled from Birmingham to Uniontown, a small town in Perry County, for the Southern People's Power Organizing Intensive, organized by the Southern Movement Assembly (SMA) and Project South.

Majadi and I were attending as representatives of the Magic City Agriculture Project (MCAP). We traveled to Uniontown with Adam Johnston of the Alabama Rivers Alliance, a long-time advocate for water protection and environmental justice in Uniontown. Adam explained that while the Black Belt is so named for its rich dark soil, in many cases that soil has been depleted by decades of extractive agriculture and overuse. Furthermore, the chalky layer beneath the Black Belt is very difficult for water to penetrate and drain through—this would prove key to understanding the many environmental issues plaguing Uniontown.

The stench throughout Uniontown is beyond nauseating—a result of a coal ash dump, a cheese factory that dumps waste in a stagnant manmade lagoon, and a broken sewage system that spews untreated human waste into the air through giant sprinklers. The community of Uniontown was once a relatively thriving small rural community of black farmers, but today has a little over 2500 residents. Many citizens of Uniontown have left, or passed away as the population has aged out. Those who remain deal with the daily misery of swarms of flies, heavy malodorous air, and polluted water. Many suffer from neuropathy, headaches, rashes and other health ailments that they attribute to living daily in such a polluted environment. Still, many have grown alarmingly complacent and

fearful of challenging the status quo.

The continued onslaught of environmental degradation to the Uniontown's land and water is what led Adam to commit his time, energy and heart to Uniontown, starting a few years ago. He grew close with Uniontown residents Jeannette and Bill Williams, and Esther Calhoun. Jeannette Williams began the Black Belt Citizens Fighting for Health and Justice Coalition a several few years ago, and has since passed the torch to Esther's leadership. It is the work of BBCFHJ that caught the attention of the SMA, and brought the organizing intensive to Uniontown to begin with.

The host site for the training was Quinn Chapel AME Church, a historic church built in 1902 by its own members. It is pastored by Rev. Yvonne Howze, who along with her husband and Mrs. Annette Williams, were warm and gracious hosts throughout the gathering. In light of the eight black churches across the South that were burned in the weeks following the June massacre of the Charleston Nine, Quinn Chapel's willingness to host this event was a courageous and bold act. Even more so, in the context of the level of corporate control over the community, environmental racism, bad governance and neglect on the part of public servants, and police violence in Uniontown. It is clear that Rev. Yvonne is fired up, fearless, and committed to taking a stand as a spiritual leader against the injustices taking place in her community.

### Standing in Solidarity

On June 3, 2015, Amanda Bracknell reported in *The Marion Times-Standard* that the BBCFHJ is fighting to raise awareness and sounding a call for continued action against the City of Uniontown, Sentell Engineering, the Alabama De-



Top L: Esther Calhoun (L), president of Black Belt Citizens Fighting for Health and Justice, and Ash-Lee Woodard-Henderson, organizer for Project South. Top R: the author (far R) and other participants in the organizing intensive. Bottom: leading rally chants at Quinn Chapel AME Church, at the end of the march through Uniontown.

partment of Environmental Management (ADEM), and the USDA for continuing to sign off on the gross mismanagement of nearly \$5 million dollars in grant monies that were supposed to fix the miserably broken wastewater treatment system in Uniontown.

While the BBCFHJ and the people of Uniontown have been fighting these problems for decades, their fight is part of the larger fight for justice that the Southern People's Movement is coordinating and leading throughout the region.

Our gathering in Uniontown drew in dozens of activists, organizers and community leaders from across the South, including representatives from North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Arkansas, Kentucky, Georgia, Mississippi, and Louisiana, and others who had travelled from as far away as Boston and California. Additionally, several attendees are originally from other countries, including Nigeria and Liberia. Among the many people we met, Ash-Lee Woodard Henderson and Steph Guilloud of Project South and Ruben



Preparing to march through Uniontown

(Continued on page 12)





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## FORMATION OF STATEWIDE COMMUNITY GARDEN NETWORK UNDERWAY

By Anne Randle

A group of community garden leaders from across Alabama are working to form a statewide network of community gardens. Similar groups exist regionally throughout Alabama, but this will be the first attempt to create a statewide network, bringing gardens together from Huntsville to Mobile, Livingston to Auburn, and everywhere in between. The primary purpose of this network will be to make Alabama's community gardens more sustainable by connecting participants to gardens and gardens to each other.

Many gardens struggle to find participants even though there are often people nearby interested in community gardening. This information gap has been a struggle for Extension staff and community leaders as well, who need to connect people to projects but often don't have a complete list of gardens to reference. Making it easier to find community gardens will increase participa-



L: Grow Selma garden planting (photo courtesy Grow Selma). R: photo courtesy Anne Randle

tion and keep garden leaders from burning out.

Community gardeners will also benefit from building relationships with each other. New gardeners will learn from insight shared by established gardeners. Resources like tools or seeds may also be shared between gardens. These relationships will contribute to the sustainability of community gardens. Other goals, like finding funding or resources for gardens or hosting regional or statewide meetings, may be accomplished as this network grows.

Alabama's statewide network is drawing inspiration from similar networks in Vermont and North Carolina, which now both serve more than 300 gardens in their respective states. Pulling from universities, Cooperative Extension, grassroots organizations, and enthusiastic gardeners, they have found great success promoting, growing, and sustaining gardens in their respective states. Leaders from the North Carolina Community Garden Partnership have

even reached out to provide guidance as Alabama leaders undertake this project.

Planning is just beginning for the network, but if you are active in or work with a community garden and would like more information, please contact Anne Randle at [arandle@mytu.tuskegee.edu](mailto:arandle@mytu.tuskegee.edu).

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## UNIONTOWN (CONT'D)

(Continued from page 10)

Solis Garcia of Universidad Sin Fronteras stood out as leaders and facilitators, as well as Glory A. Kilanko of Women Watch Afrika, and Suzanne Pharr, veteran activist and co-founder of Southerners on New Ground (SONG).

### Taking Action

With all this people power united in one place, we had to put it to use! Our gathering was not just a workshop, but a hands-on training. We created and implemented a protest, assigned roles, conducted a march through the center of town, and articulated a set of demands in front of City Hall. And while BBCFHJ was the frontline group advancing these demands, they had the

entire SMA backing them. (As we marched through town, much of the community seemed surprised, amazed, even confused, and most kept their distance. But one or two community members saw what we were doing, saw the value in it, and joined in!)

I found this active, hands-on organizing training personally invaluable as I move into a new phase of my life of activism and organizing, in Birmingham and beyond. In one of the last activities, we group according to region, and it was here that I began to get to know Alice Evans, Lisa Moyer, and Alexis Murphy of SONG, Kelly Burns of the Coalition of Alabama Students for the Environment (CASE), and others who had traveled from around Alabama. We had a great, hard-

working time, and were all motivated not just to take the information, connections and organizing strategies we'd gained back to our respective community work, but also to continue to build alliance among ourselves and our respective groups.



## A BIG WIN FOR SECOND CHANCES: ALABAMA ENDS ITS LIFETIME SNAP BAN

By Carol Gundlach

The United States is the richest nation in the world. Yet nearly one in five Americans said they did not have enough money to feed their family at some point in the last year, a Gallup poll found. That's known as "food insecurity," and far too many American families struggle with it.

Here in Alabama, food insecurity is even worse. Nearly one in four Alabamians report food hardship, the fourth worst rate in the nation. In Alabama's 7th Congressional District, the food hardship rate was more than 27 percent. And in Alabama's largest city, Birmingham, the food hardship rate was 21 percent — 11th worst among metro areas.

Fortunately, the Alabama Legislature took a huge step this year to help fight the problem. As part of a new prison reform law, Alabama next year will end a policy barring people with a past felony drug conviction from ever receiving assistance under the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), formerly known as food stamps.

That's big news in the fight against hunger. SNAP participation reduces household food insecurity by more than 10 percent and children's food insecurity by nearly 9 percent, the USDA found. SNAP has been shown to improve participants' health, resulting in lower rates of obesity, diabetes and hypertension. SNAP also is associated with increased consumption of fruits and vegetables, less depression among participating seniors, and fewer nutritional deficiencies among preschool children.

Unfortunately, not every low-income person is eligible for SNAP benefits. The 1996 federal welfare reform law instituted a lifetime ban on receipt of SNAP benefits for anyone ever convicted of a felony drug offense. The ban applies only to people convicted of an offense involving drugs. Other offenses, including violent crimes and fraud, do not result in permanent denial of assistance.

Federal law allows states to waive this restriction and provide SNAP benefits to people with prior drug convictions. Alabama will do that beginning Jan. 30, 2016, for offenders who have completed their sentences or are successfully serving probation or parole.

The total number of Alabamians affected is difficult to determine with certainty. But in 2011, approximately 11,000 prisoners — about a third of the state's total prison population — were serving terms for drug convictions. In the same year, some 3,200 Alabama residents were convicted of drug offenses, and around 3,700 drug offenders were released from Alabama prisons.

Nationally, 70 percent of incarcerated women have minor children they must support after leaving prison. Often lacking job skills and education, these mothers also face a stigma associated with incarceration that can make it


difficult to find a job. For many, access to food assistance may be the only thing standing in the way of homelessness, foster care or a return to crime.

The SNAP ban was intended to discourage drug use and to prevent people from using public assistance to purchase illegal drugs. Since 1998, however, SNAP has used an electronic card system, making the sale of benefits more difficult. And many states that allow former felons to receive benefits impose conditions to address such concerns — for example, compliance with parole restrictions, payment of fines and penalties, waiting periods before benefits are granted, or completion of drug treatment.

Hunger is a challenge that won't disappear overnight in Alabama. But ending the lifetime SNAP ban is a good first step toward ensuring that no one in our state has to go to bed hungry.




Senator Linda Coleman (R), who sponsored the Legislation lifting the lifetime ban from SNAP benefits for drug felons, and Jacquelyn Hardy (L), who brought the issue to Alabama Arise. Photo courtesy Alabama Arise.



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## NEWS FROM YOUR NEIGHBORS

Congratulations to **Mary Lynn Botts**, who has entered a well-earned “retirement” from her role as Alabama’s Program Coordinator for the **Society of St. Andrew**. From SoSA: Mary Lynn “has been the driving force in Alabama for several years and is stepping down as program coordinator to travel with her husband **Mike** and his work.” And a warm wel-

come to **Josh Howard**, who has taken over the reins as the new Program Coordinator for the state!

**Collins and Liz Davis** of Bluewater Creek Farm are expecting their 2nd daughter at the end of October. Abby, baby #1, is super excited to be a big sister and they are all looking forward to meeting the newest member of the family.

Congratulations to **Amanda Storey** (of Jones Valley Teaching Farm) and **Mike Benson** on the birth of Mae Ella Benson on June 25<sup>th</sup>! Little sister to Martin Everitt, Mae Ella likes to party all night long.

**Jones Valley Teaching Farm** recently broke ground on the Woodlawn High School Urban Farm, taking another step in creating a comprehensive model for food education in a focused network of pre-K-12 schools in Birmingham. Woodlawn High School students will have design and manage agricultural production and operate a social business, as they develop entrepreneurial skills and engage in civically-minded work around food access and sustainable agriculture. More at [www.jvtf.org](http://www.jvtf.org)

Best wishes to Birmingham’s favorite forager and cheesemonger, **Chris Bennett**, who is moving this fall to Charleston, SC.

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

before him) was born on July 8<sup>th</sup>. He weighed 8 lbs.

Congratulations to **Charles and Gillian Walters** of River Oaks Farm in Millbrook, who gave birth to their first child, Hazel Ellis Walters, on Sunday, August 23.

Congratulations, best wishes, and much appreciation and respect to **Ms. Sophia Bracy-Harris**, as she concludes her stunning 43 years of leadership of the Federation of Child Care Centers of Alabama (FOCAL). Ms. Sophia says of those early years, “*The conviction that I brought to FOCAL was born out of the flames that consumed our family home when it was fire bombed. It also brought a determination to give back the kindness that had been given to my family and me following this evil act*”. *I cut my teeth on racial healing that has created a stronghold for empowerment*”.

## CLASSIFIEDS & RESOURCES

**North Mobile County Market + Food Park** is looking for farmers, artists, musicians, bakers, chefs, cooks and everyone in between. The market is the first and third Saturday of every month in downtown Prichard. Please

contact the market manager, Jonathan Adams, by email ([JonDAdams@gmail.com](mailto:JonDAdams@gmail.com)) or phone ([352.217.7870](tel:352.217.7870)) to reserve one of the remaining vendor slots.

**Seasons in the Sun Farm** in Spanish Fort is opening a market in Stapleton in October, and is hiring for full- and part-time positions to staff it. Pay starts at \$9/hr. For more information email D’Lee Reeves at [seasonsinthesunfarms@gmail.com](mailto:seasonsinthesunfarms@gmail.com).

## UPCOMING EVENTS

DETAILS FOR THESE EVENTS  
AND MORE, AT  
[WWW.ASANONLINE.ORG/EVENTS](http://WWW.ASANONLINE.ORG/EVENTS)

September 8 – Fairhope  
**Mobile Bay Green Drinks – Fairhope**

September 10 – Birmingham  
**2015 Southern Exposure Film Screenings**

September 12 – Birmingham  
**Introduction to Plant Taxonomy/ Classification**  
Hosted by the Birmingham Botanical Gardens

September 12 – Whitehall  
**Alabamians for Restoration Conference**  
Diverse coalition of partners working towards social and climate justice.

September 12 – Montgomery  
**Arise Citizens’ Policy Project 2015 Annual Meeting**  
Open only to current individual and group members of Alabama Arise.

September 12 - Birmingham  
**Fermentation 101**  
Hosted by Harvest Roots Farm & Ferment, cost \$20.  
September 13 – Birmingham  
**Graze: Birmingham**  
More info on page 3 of this newsletter!

(Continued on page 15)



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 PO Box 2127, Montgomery, AL 36102.

## UPCOMING EVENTS (CONT'D)

(Continued from page 14)

September 14-15 – Tuskegee  
**Veterans Agriculture Training Workshop**

September 16 – Mobile  
**Mobile Bay Green Drinks – Mobile**

September 18 – Goodman, MS  
**Alliance Field Day**

September 18 – Montgomery  
**MGM Burger Bash**  
 Benefit event for EAT South

September 21 – Montgomery  
**International Peace Day Conference**

September 23 – Mobile  
**2015 Southern Exposure Film Screenings**

September 24 – Fairhope  
**2015 Southern Exposure Film Screenings**

September 25 – Clanton  
**Alabama Beekeepers Association Annual Convention**

September 25 – Tuscaloosa  
**Cottage Foods Workshop**

September 26 – Mobile  
**Twenty-First Century Chickens – Managing a Small Backyard Flock**

October 2 – Red Boiling Springs, TN  
**2015 Biodynamic Celebration**

October 3-4 – Blount County  
**24<sup>th</sup> Annual National Solar Homes Tour**  
 ASAN will be exhibiting!

October 3 – Foley  
**Alabama Festival of Flavor**

October 6 – Birmingham  
**Eat Drink Read Write Festival – Human Library**  
 Human “books” (including ASAN’s Alice Evans) available for checkout by folks interested in food/culinary industries.

October 10 – Birmingham  
**Growing Native Trees from Seed, Pt. 1**

October 13 – Mentone  
**ASAN Regional Food & Farm Forum (1 of 4)**  
 More info on page 3 of this newsletter!

October 13 – Birmingham  
**Green Drinks – Birmingham**  
 Kickoff to a revived regular series of networking gatherings.

October 13 – Fairhope  
**Mobile Bay Green Drinks – Fairhope**

October 16 – Goodman, MS  
**Alliance Field Day**

October 17 – Marion Junction  
**A Seat at the Table: Farm to Feast**  
 ASAN will be leading a morning roundtable!

October 21 – Mobile  
**Mobile Bay Green Drinks – Mobile**

October 29 – Slocomb  
**ASAN Regional Food & Farm Forum (2 of 4)**  
 More info on page 3 of this newsletter!

(Continued on page 16)

## ASAN

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### UPCOMING EVENTS (CONTINUED)

(Continued from page 15)

November 17 – Mobile  
**ASAN Regional Food & Farm  
Forum (3 of 4)**

More info on page 3 of this newsletter!

November 19-20 – Clanton  
**Alabama Fruit and Vegetable  
Conference and Tradeshow**

November 20 – Goodman, MS  
**Alliance Field Day**

December 2 – Jemison  
**ASAN Regional Food & Farm  
Forum (4 of 4)**

More info on page 3 of this newsletter!

