



THE ALABAMA  
SUSTAINABLE  
AGRICULTURE  
NETWORK

# ASAN UPDATE

Summer 2015

Published Quarterly

## ADVENTURES IN FERMENTATION

By Pete Halupka and  
Lindsay Whiteaker

Fermented foods are quickly gaining popularity and have made things like kombucha and kefir almost household words. But fermentation, far from being the latest new health craze, has actually been a critical part of traditional diets for centuries.

"Celebrity fermenter" Sandor Katz writes in *The Art of Fermentation*, "The word ferment, along with the words fervor and fervent, comes from the Latin verb *fervere*, or to boil. Fermentation is the transformation of food by various bacteria, fungi, and the enzymes they produce. Fermentation is a strategy used to guide transformation that create delicacies rather than decomposition."

Essentially, fermentation is intentional rot. It's this



Completely fermented meal of congee (rice porridge) topped with natto (soybeans) and pickled eggplant during Sandor Katz residency. Photo credit HRF

amazing platform for which human culture, microbial communities, climate, flora and fauna are able to interact and create fermented foods. Commonly fermented foods include salami, cheese, yogurt, beer and some types of coffee and tea. Many other common foods like sauerkraut, ketchup, mustard, and soy sauce were traditionally fermented, before industrial

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## EMERGING OPPORTUNITIES IN ALABAMA AGRICULTURE: BLACKBERRIES

By Michael LaBelle

This is Pt. 4 of a series on niche market opportunities for Alabama growers. More on the series on page 5.

This issue's opportunity in Alabama agriculture is the cultivation of blackberries. Wait – I know, blackberries are not in any way new to Alabama. I have fond memories of scratched legs running to deliver a two pound coffee can of wild blackberries to my grandmother, from which she'd make me a southern delicacy known as "blackberry cobbler," swimming in delectably sweet juice. But times have changed and urban markets have developed a hunger for big, fat modern, improved varieties of blackberries.

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Organic Kiowa blackberries. Credit: MightyGrow Organics

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## RESISTING MONOCULTURE TO EMBRACE "MANY WORLDS WITHIN ONE WORLD"

By Robyn Hyden

On April 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup>, ASAN hosted storyteller Molly Shea for a presentation entitled "Dismantling Monoculture," first at the Adelante Alabama Worker Center in Birmingham on April 15, and then at Lowe Mill in Huntsville on April 16. Shea is one of many volunteer "bees"

from the Beehive Design Collective who travel the globe using elaborate murals as popular education tools in order to talk about globalization, environmental degradation and oppressive economic policies.

The "Dismantling Monoculture" presentation focuses on the Beehive's recently completed

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## LETTER FROM THE ASAN BOARD PRESIDENT



I've been greatly encouraged over the past few years by the steadily growing number of restaurants sourcing locally. When we moved to South Alabama five years ago, local food in a restaurant was novel and hard-to-find. (To be fair, this only accounts for local sourcing that was being marketed and publicized as such, and misses those who probably always have been quietly sourcing from neighbors and truck-stands and their own gardens/farms.)

The landscape sure looks different today! Chefs from Mobile to Huntsville are seeking out local farmers to provide them with the freshest, best tasting food possible, largely in response to consumer demand. This is what happens when we vote with our wallets! Even national chains are seeking sustainably grown food and sourcing locally when possible.

Chipotle, a major trend-setter with regards to local sourcing, made national news recently by announcing they have removed GMO foods from their menu as much as possible. To the best of my knowledge, Chipotle was the first national chain to make a point of

sourcing sustainably grown and local meat and produce. Luckily for us, others are following suit. I am very hopeful that "standard fare" in restaurants will commonly be *local* fare.

I recently attended a farm-to-table cook-off hosted by Seasons in the Sun in Spanish Fort, Alabama. Afterward, I had a chance to chat with Chef Will Hughes of Daphne about his experience sourcing local menu items. After working as a chef in Rhode Island and New Orleans, Will came home to Daphne four years ago and set about trying to find farmers to buy from directly. He was surprised by how difficult that turned out to be. "I found this big gap between farmers and chefs." He was simply ahead of the curve. He found a couple of farmers willing to work with him as the trend gained momentum and today most of his menu is locally grown.

We might often feel as if we're fighting an uphill battle, but take heart, compatriots; we are gaining ground! Consumer demand is impacting our food system, from school lunch rooms

to five-star restaurants. Some of our greatest allies can be our local chefs, so let's do our best to enlist them in the cause.

When you go out to eat, ask if any menu items are sourced locally and try to choose those items. If possible, speak to the chef or general manager. Let these folks know that you appreciate their efforts to support local food systems, and if they haven't caught on yet, encourage them to do so. Chef Will has a word of advice for farmers: go to the chefs; don't wait for them to come to you. Be proactive, and remember that one of our most powerful weapons is our dollar, so vote daily!

Sincerely,

Anne LaBelle  
ASAN Board President

For more tips for farmers, chefs, and buyers, check out our farm-to-restaurant article from the Summer 2013 newsletter, available at:  
[http://asanonline.org/docs/2013\\_summer\\_web.pdf](http://asanonline.org/docs/2013_summer_web.pdf).

### CONTRIBUTORS: SUMMER 2015

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

**Lindsay Whiteaker** and **Pete Halupka** co-own Harvest Roots Farm & Ferment, currently based in Hartselle. Lindsay is a farmer, fermenter, and doula. Pete is a forager, fruit explorer, and Southern heirloom apple preserver.

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## WHAT'S UP WITH EDWIN?

By Anne LaBelle

Last April, we sadly said goodbye to our dynamic former ASAN President, Edwin Marty, as he headed west to become Austin's first Sustainability Food Policy Manager. Edwin is a founding member of ASAN, co-founder of Jones Valley Urban Farm and former Executive Director at EAT South. I caught up with him on a recent trip to Texas and got the scoop on his fab new job. The city of Austin, Texas, hired Edwin to develop a comprehensive sustainability plan to improve the local food system. Although he's on a five year plan to develop the full program, initial small projects are already getting underway. I asked him about the pros and cons of his new job. Pros: he's learning a lot of new things, he has a steady supply of great interns providing help, he has NO pressure to raise \$\$\$, and he's working with a supportive organization in a community that really "gets it." Cons are few, but the commute is not fun (Austin has some serious traffic issues), and he confided that he *really* misses Alabama. Well, Edwin, the feeling is mutual! We miss you, too!



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## BLACKBERRIES (CONT'D)

(Continued from page 1)

### The opportunity

Just like elderberries, the U.S. is a net importer of blackberries. And the trend is increasing with consumption growing steadily, up 40% between 2009-2011. U.S. production was \$30.8M in 2009, increasing to \$43.2M in 2011. Domestic production is dwarfed by imports. In 2010, we imported more than 116 million pounds of conventionally grown blackberries at a wholesale price of \$147M.

The situation with organic berries is even more interesting. In 2008 (the last year with available data) there were 348 certified organic farms growing blackberries on 492 acres, mostly in the northwest.

Since organic blackberries sell for 2-3 times that of conventional, there are good reasons to increase organic blackberry production in Alabama. In Washington State, where most of U.S. organic blackberries are grown, the difference in per acre yield was 7200# conventional, and 6000# organic in 2008. However, organic blackberry yield per acre *had more than doubled from 2003 to 2008*, indicating that organic production has the potential to reach parity with conventionally grown berries. Considering the price premium and market scarcity, this is a tasty opportunity for Alabama's organic growers.

### What can go wrong?

Alabama has had some rather variable weather over the past couple of years. Obviously, a late freeze can wipe out or severely reduce a crop,

### 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 aims to highlight new opportunities that Alabama farmers can pursue with a minimum of investment in land, equipment and capital.

Recap of the series so far: part 1 (Fall 2014) focused on elderberries, part 2 (Winter) shiitake mushrooms, and part 3 (Spring) bananas.

as can hail, insects and disease. (Or, in my case, 95HP John Deere bush hog, with which one of my employees recently mowed down my beautiful, six-foot-tall, black-green blackberry bushes, covered in blossoms with the promise of a bumper crop. As I write this, I am in mourning, but in the final stage of grief.) That being said, there is a new alternative to growing blackberries out in the field.

### A great high tunnel opportunity!



High tunnel blackberry production. Photo credit: papillondream.shutterstock.com

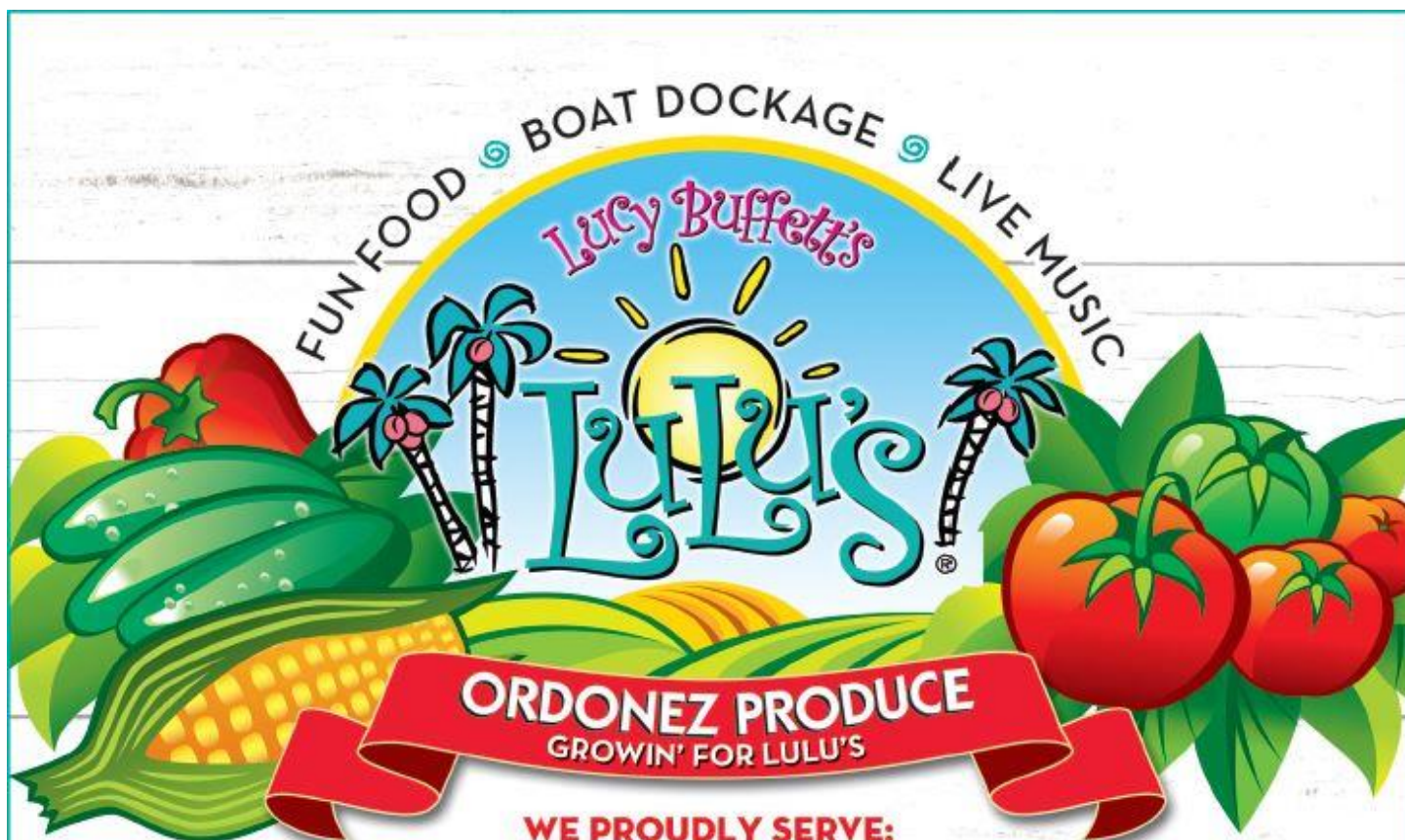
On a recent visit to the Chilton Research and Extension Center in Clanton, Alabama, I learned that blackberries grown in high tunnels have an increased yield of 250% over field-

grown berries! That's exciting! In the event of an unexpected late freeze or torrential rainfall, the plants are protected. Also, you can get a second fruiting in the fall. You can find more information in this ACES publication: <http://tinyurl.com/namlc7f>.

So, how do you grow blackberries? This article is merely intended to pique your interest, but Auburn Extension has a very comprehensive booklet on some of the most

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Under the Bridge in Gulf Shores





## BLACKBERRIES (CONTINUED)

(Continued from page 3)  
current research  
(contact ACES for a  
copy), and I will post a  
few helpful links at the  
end of this article.  
Now, let's look at the  
basics.



Nine berries per foot. Credit: MightyGrow Organics

### Basic Planting Recommendations

Blackberries are very tolerant of almost any soil, but they like well-drained soil and full sun. Drip irrigation is best. Most varieties, even those that are supposed to be self-supporting, benefit from a simple trellis system consisting of end posts with two wires to attach the canes to for training. Since labor is one of the largest expenses, mulch is your friend. I recommend either wheat straw applied VERY thick (4"-6") or whole, green, ground tree mulch applied 4" thick. I'm not a big fan of plastic mulch for the same reason I didn't recommend it for elderberries. Your blackberries are going to send up new shoots as the old plants fruit and die. If you have plastic around your plants, the shoots will tend to pop out of the ground BETWEEN your rows of plants, right where you do NOT want them. Plus, organic mulch

will feed earth worms and allow for easier fertilization.

When the new plants or rooted cuttings are planted, a small handful of bone meal can be deposited under the plants. This will supply phosphorus while the new plant is establishing its root system. After planting, but before mulching, apply a modest amount of good quality organic fertilizer. You can apply the fertilizer all at one time or in a split application. You can also apply fertilizer through the drip irrigation system (fertigation). Any soluble organic fertilizer will work, such as liquid fish, humates or kelp. Just be certain that whatever you use doesn't clog up your drip tape.

Since blackberries are a primacane bramble, they will use the first year to get a root system established and begin growing their first canes or stalks. Your first marketable fruit will grow on second year cane, but the yield will increase to full production in year three.

If you plan to pick and market the berries yourself (instead of "pick your own"), you need to be prepared to cool the fruit once it is picked. The greatest enemy to fresh produce, but especially berries, is field heat. Berries should be cooled to 35 degrees as soon as possible. To see how to build your own portable forced-air cooling unit, look here: <http://tinyurl.com/pwupkfr>.

### Marketing

Aside from the "usual suspects" of farmers markets, CSAs, and pick-your-own operations, other marketing options include:

- Local grocery or health food store (may not require organic certification)
- Wholesale produce dealer
- Build your own brand
- Value-added products like jellies, jams and wines

If you're looking for a seasonal crop, blackberries could be right for you. Like most farming endeavors, there are periods of frantic activity followed by down time. With the field laid out correctly, plants mulched

and trellised and with irrigation in place, your main labor is in pruning the canes and picking the berries. There will be some normal upkeep such as minor weeding and mowing, but mostly, for about five weeks in June, you will be BUSY. With an average production of 6000# per acre at some-

where around \$3.00/lb....well, you can do the math.

If you're already growing blueberries, which ripen earlier, you can keep people coming to you for fresh, organic fruit for another month. A fall crop is even possible in a high tunnel. Blackberries are native to Alabama and have been part of our culture ever since there have been people in the area. With the new varieties that produce large fruit (some are even thornless), the convenience of modern irrigation techniques, and steadily increasing demand for locally grown, organic blackberries, this might be the right time for you to add a blackberry patch to your farm.

### Interested? Dig a little deeper:

- "Growing Blackberries for Fun and Profit" <http://tinyurl.com/lg7ldfh> (LSU AgCenter)
- Trends in the blackberry industry <http://tinyurl.com/jvqk2sg>
- Small Fruits Bramble Training <http://tinyurl.com/maelg5m>



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## MONOCULTURE (CONTINUED)

(Continued from page 1)

mural series about globalization, which includes images entitled Free Trade of the Americas, Plan Colombia and Mesoamérica Resiste.

The murals, which were created by a team of artists over the course of years, weave together a complex narrative about trade policies in which corporations and military regimes dismantle workers' rights and environmental protections in the pursuit of profit.

The Beehive distills complex, oppressive situations into metaphors illustrated with animals and insects, including both the large-scale systems and ground-level individuals to tell the story. A trade agreement might be represented as a large, complex web or an invasive species; those who resist and fight back through community-based agriculture, labor organizing and institution building are shown as ants, wasps or bees: weak individually, but powerful when united.

Shea shared the Beehive's careful process of gathering stories from the grassroots by traveling in impacted communities in Central and South America. Because of trade deals like NAFTA and CAFTA and development policies like Plan Puebla Panama and Plan Merida, many formerly independent subsistence farmers or communal landholders have suffered displacement, violence, impover-



Molly Shea of the Beehive Design Collective speaks to a crowd of about 30 at the Adelante Alabama Worker Center in Hoover. Photo credit: Rachael Roberts

ishment, illness, hunger and death. The collective is committed to doing justice to the stories that are shared with them by telling their stories far and wide and bringing the images back to the communities to use for their own organizing. All of the artwork is offered free of charge and without copyright.

The Beehive's agricultural metaphors will appeal to farmers, who might note the striking animal and plant diversity. Beehive Collective painstakingly researches indigenous plants and animals to tell their stories of resisting monoculture. One of the slogans Shea repeated in the presentation, "Many worlds within one world," summarizes their philosophy of resisting monoculture - not only seeking diversity in agricultural life, but also in human existence.

At the Birmingham event we discussed the true cost of "free trade" and shared stories of individual resistance and organizing to resist monoculture within our own society. We ended the night learning about the proposed Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), the most far-reaching and potentially devastating free trade agreement yet. Huntsville's audience was interested in discussing the military-industrial complex's role in this system and how they saw it manifested each day in their local communities.

At Stillman College on May 17th, Shea presented a different mural, The True Cost of Coal, to Stillman's Young, Black and Green student environmental organization. This graphic is based on stories gathered from Appalachia from communities impacted by mountaintop removal coal min-

ing. Students learned about the devastating impact of extractive industries and the history of resistance within Appalachia. Many of the histories embedded in the mural are forgotten or often untold stories of resilience, rebellion and community building, despite extreme oppression. Many of the same themes from Central and South America repeat in North America's struggles against labor abuses, environmental degradation and displacement.

In Tuscaloosa Shea also conducted a "Train the Trainers" class using The True Cost of Coal graphic. Eight attendees learned how to use storytelling with this image as an organizing tool. The graphic can be read in multiple ways, moving through time and space and focusing on different stories of individuals, communities and systems that impact us all. We were encouraged to connect our own community's stories with those in the graphic. Because all of the people in the mural are represented as different animals, we found that it was easier to view the stories as universal and relatable to diverse groups of people.

Thanks to all those who came and participated in what was truly a cross-pollinating series! Special thanks to our partners Adelante Alabama Worker Center, Alabama Coalition for Immigrant Justice, Alabama's Young, Black & Green, Cahaba Group of the Sierra Club, Canterbury Chapel in Tuscaloosa, Fig Leaf Costumes, Huntsville Socialist Library, Lowe Mill Arts & Entertainment, Magic City Agriculture Project, Rosita's, Stillman College, and Unitarian Universalist Church of Huntsville for making these presentations possible!!

To view, copy or order any of the Beehive's murals, visit <http://beehivecollective.org>.



Detail of the Beehive's epic "Mesoamérica Resiste" mural. Photo credit: Rachael Roberts





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## FERMENTATION (CONTINUED)

(Continued from page 1)

production methods forced manufacturers to devise more consistent, mass-producible means of preservation (generally salt and/or vinegar).

### The science behind fermentation

In a fantastic book we reference often called “Fermented Fruits and Vegetables: A Global Perspective”, the authors outline some fundamentals of fermentation: “Microorganisms are never found in isolation; they reside in communities. Mixed, diverse cultures are the rule in nature. The practice of fermentation largely consists of manipulating environmental conditions to encourage certain organisms and discourage others. The presence or absence of oxygen plays a major role in the outcome of fermentation. Key words that are important: Anaerobic fermentation (without oxygen) and Aerobic fermentation (with oxygen).”

The most common groups of microorganisms involved in food fermentations are bacteria, yeasts, and molds.

**Bacteria** — Because the majority of bacterial families present in foods are related to food spoilage, the important role of bacteria in the fermentation of foods is often overlooked. The most important bacteria in desirable food fermentations are *lactobacillaceae*, which have the ability to produce lactic acid from carbohydrates. *Acetobacter* produce acetic acid and are important especially in the fermentation of fruits and vegetables.

**Yeasts** — Yeasts are organisms that ferment sugars into alcohol and carbon dioxide. The English word *yeast* drives from the Greek word *zestos* meaning “boiling hot,” since in fermentation they



Top: Racking (siphoning to separate liquid from sediment) mead with Sandor Katz at his homestead during fermentation residency. Bottom: HRF Spring Tonic Vinegar in the making. Credits: HRF

produce bubbles, like boiling. Yeasts and yeast-like fungi are widely distributed in nature. They are present in orchards and vineyards, in the air, the soil and in the intestinal tracts of animals. Like bacteria and molds, yeasts can have beneficial and non-beneficial effects in foods. Yeasts play an important role in the leavening of bread and the production of alcohol by converting sugar.

**Molds** — Certain molds (like *Aspergillus*) produce undesirable toxins and contribute to the spoilage of foods. However, others impart characteristic flavors to foods and others produce enzymes, such as amylase for bread making. Molds from the genus *Penicillium* are associated with the ripening and flavor

of cheeses. Molds are aerobic and therefore require oxygen for growth. They also have the greatest array of enzymes, and can colonize and grow on most types of food.

### Wild Fermentation vs. Cultured Yeasts

Wild fermentation is initiated by organisms spontaneously present on the food or in the environment. Culturing most likely originally began with some form of wild fermentation, but has since been “domesticated,” with cultures being saved and used to inoculate future ferments.

Somewhere in the ballpark of northeast China and eastern Russia, a culture developed on the top of black tea, making it tangy. This culture was symbiotic community of bacteria and yeast, or a SCOBY. Someone saved this wild culture, adding it to more tea to reproduce the tangy beverage that the wild culture made. It was successful, and thus kombucha was born.

This process of transferring a small amount of an active or mature ferment into a fresh batch of its appropriate food, be it flour, tea or milk is referred to as a type of backslapping. This is how yogurt, sourdough, kombucha, kefir and salami are produced, among other products. (Think of it as

seed saving in your microbial garden). We much prefer wild yeasts at Harvest Roots.

### Cleanliness and Sterilization

Katz, a must-have author for fermenters, says in *The Art of Fermentation* that “diverse microbes in a fermentation process are much like a small army. They respond to potential pathogens with such vigor that they out-compete a pathogen’s place in the ferment. While it is important to be clean during wild fermentation, sterilization (or the use of heat, alcohol or pressure cooking) is not necessary. When working with a less diverse form of fermentation such as beer making sterilization is necessary.”

### Why Fermentation is Great!

#### Low-energy method of food preservation

— Fermentation has been used as a strategy for saving fuel, since fermentation digests certain nutrients that otherwise would require long cooking, and enables foods to remain stable at ambient temperatures. Canning requires high temperatures at sustained lengths to ensure food safety. Sure, canned foods will provide sustenance in times of emergency, but how do we produce more canned items if fuel in the form of fossil fuels or wood are scarce?

#### Increased health benefits

— Recently fermentation has gained attention for its nutritional and health benefits. Bacteria play crucial roles in many aspects of our digestive and immune health, and fermented foods can support, replenish and diversify our internal microbial ecology. Fermentation provides health benefits in that it pre-digests foods, making nutrients more available to our bodies. Fermented foods also increase lactic acid, which supports digestive health, immune function and general well-being.

**Flavor** — On top of these benefits, fermentation simply produces more interesting and compelling flavors!

### Our Evolution at Harvest Roots Farm & Ferment

We, like many other young people,

(Continued on page 9)



## FERMENTATION (CONT'D)

(Continued from page 8)

began farming because of a romantic notion regarding the land, the pleasures of self-sustenance and early mornings of meaningful work. Like many, we entered organic farming with a business model anchored by annual crops, because it's not as capital intensive upfront and you can enter the marketplace almost immediately. At the time of our first market and CSA, all the knowledge we had was theoretical, not practical. We floated from farm to farm through various types of land leases (how to do this without experiencing great turmoil is a whole article on its own). Along the way, fermentation was always a side item on our table because of Lindsay's knowledge and love for the practice; it was simply a value-added product, no different than jams or jellies.

We also realized that profitability was something we needed to seek as soon as possible as young agriculturalists, and at least for us personally, we weren't going to find it growing lettuce. For us, our family history, and our long term ecological visions, a farm producing exclusively annual vegetables and culinary herbs wasn't going to cut it.

We had a great crop of Pak Choy one spring but after goats ate half of it and pests another quarter, we were left with crops barely usable for CSA shares. In that low moment, we realized that we could turn a crop of Pak Choy into kimchi for a remarkable turnaround of both profitability but also flavor, storage capability for us and the customer, and increased nutrient density and health benefits.

Now, coming up on our first full year

of solely producing and selling fermented products, we are focused on continuing to create an increasingly profitable, diversified, and ecologically sustainable foundation for our business. We have our fermentation business but are also slowly building a medicinal herb operation and actively expanding our 425-tree nursery focused on resilient, Old Southern Heirloom apples and other fruits.

### HRF&F Northeast Fermentation

**Tour** Our funds were low going into this past winter, but moving into our second year of this fermentation business, we saw it of utmost importance to see other established operations and how they function in places more familiar with traditions of fermented foods. We were able to purchase a truck in great condition... except the suspension. We drove halfway across the country and back in a squeaky truck that shook so badly it made us numb. And loved it.

We began our trip by driving north through Roanoke, VA, and on to Washington D.C. for a quick visit to Pete's brother, a bourbon aficionado, and then about two hours due west to an operation called Copper Fox. Copper Fox's brewing operation is tucked in an apple orchard valley next to an old apple packing house. Copper Fox is the only distillery in the United States that malts their own barley in house. This entails soaking the barley, spreading it evenly across floor at a certain temperature, allowing it to sprout ever so slightly, and then smoking it over apple or cherry wood to draw out particular flavors. Though we aren't in the distilling business, when we say Fermentation Tour, we mean it. Anything fermented goes!

We breezed through New York City, dabbling in David Chang's kimchi (he adds Sprite to it!),

Momofuku's Pork Buns, and an overpriced but beyond-good-for-you bone broth at Brodo, located in the East Village. Then on to Wurtsboro, NY, to meet with our favorite cider maker, Andy Brennan of Aaron Burr Cidery. All of Andy's work is done without pitching yeast — it is all wild yeast from the air or on his apples. He also has small batches of cider made exclusively from wild, foraged apples or abandoned homestead apples. Andy is very focused on craft, and his business is on the scale of nature, dictated by the wild, available yeasts and the apples — scaling up would sacrifice that. He works out of a farm cidery the size of a two-car garage in 250-gallon food grade barrels, and he has mastered it. There is something to be said about the consistency and contentment when you reach a plateau in your business where you can take a breath and say, "This is it. This is where I want to be." That's where it feels like Andy is. Andy was warm and welcoming, and sent us on our way to Ithaca with a bottle of two to pop for Pete's upcoming birthday.

Ithaca is a truly amazing place for food, landscape, and agriculture. Our first business tour was with Crooked Carrot, who have a diverse range of fermented vegetables from pickles to beets to Red Cabbage Sauerkraut. All of them are quality, organic, locally sourced and truly resolved in their flavor profiles. There was one ferment we especially loved: Escabeche, a spicy, red-brined, radish and turnip mix of spices.

The Crooked Carrot facility is a small, but incredibly functional space adjoined to an organic farm that, unbeknownst to us, was co-founded in 1990s by Karen Wynne of Rosita's Farm in Hartselle, without whom the Fermentation Tour would not have been possible — small world! Karen helped sponsor our trip through the Farm Incubator Program she's worked hard to develop in north central Alabama for the past few years, and we are greatly indebted to her.

Crooked Carrot's symbiotic relationship with the farm was an amazing sight to see. While we were there, the



Top: Tour of Aaron Burr Cidery in Wurtsboro, NY. Bottom: Pete and Lindsay (right) with the owners of Farm and Fermentation in Cortland, NY. Credits: HRF

(Continued on page 11)





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## HIGH TUNNEL PEST EXCLUSION SYSTEM—A MUCH-NEEDED INNOVATION

By Ayanava Majumdar

Mechanical barrier for insect control is not a new concept, but the Alabama Extension Vegetable IPM Team along with a group of producers has re-imagined and advanced the application of a physical exclusion system for high tunnel producers who are in great need of pest prevention that is easy and cost effective.

In south Alabama, Will Mas-tin of Local Appetite Growers has fitted 50% shade cloth on nearly five high tunnels to reduce pest pressures and improve crop quality. Similarly, Steve Carpenter of Jack-O-Lantern Farms in north Alabama used a 30% shade cloth keep out large moths from the tunnel crops. Another on-farm demonstration site with 40% shade cloth is under development. Along with these cooperating producers, we have conducted laboratory studies using high tunnel models fitted with various grades of woven shade cloth and gained very useful insight about the effectiveness of physical exclusion that closely match field observations.

This High Tunnel Pest Exclusion (or HTPE) system is a seriously cool technology to keep bugs off your crops. Using 30 to 40% shade cloth, it is very cost-effective with numerous benefits and basically entails installation of fabric on the side-walls and end



A high tunnel equipped with the HTPE. Photo credit: Ayanava Majumdar

-walls of your high tunnel. Having a tight-sealing structure is critical to the success of HTPE system. The overall idea is to block large insect pests from coming in when the side-walls of a high tunnel are rolled up for temperature regulation. So far we have had great success with 40% woven shade cloth to stop armyworms, stink bugs, and leaf-footed bugs without completely excluding beneficial insects (lady beetles).

The HTPE system is a “work-in-progress” and we will continue to develop it with additional research. We are also evaluating a variety of other woven materials and fabric for their pest control potential inside high tunnel or open field crop.

You can familiarize yourself with the basics of physical exclusion and insect netting by visiting <http://www.aces.edu/anr/ipm/Vegetable/pestexclusion.php>.

A new SARE manuscript called “High Tunnel Pest Exclusion System: A novel strategy for organic crop production in the south” is available at <http://www.southernshare.org/Educational-Resources/Bulletins/Southern-SARE-Bulletins/High-Tunnel-Pest-Exclusion-System-A-novel-strategy-for-organic-crop-production-in-the-South>.

Alabama IPM Communicator newsletter is a great way to stay in touch about integrated pest management tactics and training events near you. To subscribe to the newsletter, visit [www.aces.edu/ipmcommunicator](http://www.aces.edu/ipmcommunicator).

## FERMENTATION (CONT'D)

(Continued from page 9)

farmer walked into the kitchen to ask the fermenters if they needed kohlrabi because they “had a pile of it going to compost”. Seeing a setup perfectly equipped to manage this issue of excess, we reflected on how it is unheard of for organic farmers in Alabama to pass off large volumes of traditionally fermented vegetables like cabbage, carrots, beets. We don’t have anything close to what Ithaca has in organic vegetables, which may relate back to the small consumer base for organic produce in Alabama. We’d like to see that grow.

We talked with Silas and Anna of Crooked Carrot about the idea of a *local food processor*: a business that makes their living by processing, you got it, local food. This role of local food processor is one we’ve been aspiring towards – absorbing

excesses of local food and being creative in its repurposing. This idea was ultimately the most helpful to discuss with the kind folks at Crooked Carrot and we’ve brought it home. What we’ve realized is that fermentation has to reflect the state of our bio-region and the crops that do well here. There may never be excess crops of cabbage in Alabama for us to “upcycle” into sauerkraut. But there’s no place like Alabama for growing tomatoes, okra and eggplant - which we’ve become creative with fermenting into products now popular with our customers, especially the Curry Eggplant or the Oak Fire Roasted Okra.

We visited many more places than we could talk about here - two more cideries, a



Fermented products made by Food and Ferment in Cortland, NY. Photo credit: HRF

home-scale pickling and fermenting venture in Ithaca... we were slated to visit Millstone Cidery and Hex Ferments in Baltimore but our trip was cut short by a snow storm. But we came home with a sense of pride about our climate, bioregion and diversity. We want to reflect what makes our biology, climate, and community here so special. In the end, we see

our most important task in the community as processing local, clean foods while increasing their shelf life and health benefits, with low-energy means of production that reflect our biome and local culture.

Find out more about Harvest Roots Farm & Ferment on Facebook and Instagram @harvestrootsfarm. Please feel free to shoot them an email at [harvestrootsfarm@gmail.com](mailto:harvestrootsfarm@gmail.com)

# Save the Date

FOR ALABAMA SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE NETWORK'S

## 2015 REGIONAL FOOD & FARM FORUMS

JEMISON  
DEC 2

MENTONE  
OCT 13

AFRICA-  
TOWN  
Nov 17

SLOCOMB  
OCT 29

MORE INFORMATION AT  
[HTTP://ASANONLINE.ORG/RFFF2015](http://asanonline.org/rfff2015)



## THE LOCAL FOOD SYSTEM: GETTING TO KNOW YOUR NEIGHBOR

By Natilee McGruder

Addressing our relationship to food is no easy feat. This relationship is complex—it involves culture, levels of comfort, parenting styles, education and practical experience with cooking. We can see the gaps in skill level and knowledge when it comes to regularly preparing nutritious and local food for your family.

We know that some children do not get enough food in our communities while others suffer from dietary related diseases and some only

have access to “food-like” products that are devoid of nutri-

tion. Taking the time to get to know your neighbor is the best way to know what your neighbor needs. While we consider our relationship with food we also find connected issues such as transportation, wages,

environmental justice and conservation, water quality and more. So where do we start?

The River Region Food Policy Council (RRFPC) is searching for that answer while filling a vital role in the community — providing data and facilitating communication and connections between the various actors in our local food system. We consider our

local food system to include the growing, processing, distributing, consuming and wasting of food in Montgomery, Macon, Lowndes, Elmore and Autauga counties. The RRFPC supports common-sense policies to ensure that our region’s food sources are SHARED: sustainable, healthy, affordable, responsibly grown and equitably available.

Together with ASAN, the RRFPC is partnering with the Montgomery Area Wellness Coalition and the Central Alabama Regional Planning Department in the REACH for Wellness program. This program is made possible by the REACH (Racial and Ethnic Approaches to Community Health) grant from the Centers for Disease Control.


In this partnership, the RRFPC is laying the groundwork to complete a Community Food Assessment (CFA) for Macon, Lowndes, and Montgomery counties. We are currently in the planning year for a CFA that will help increase local food literacy by educating the public on the existing food system. The RRFPC will also make relevant data presentations related to food issues and collaborate with REACH grant partners to help frame the work of healthy food access. This undertaking requires strong leadership, support and community networking.

There are currently two county-level food security assessments in Alabama: the Lee County Assessment (Meissner, 2012)

(Continued on page 14)




*Clockwise from top left: RRFPC survey winner at Maxwell Air Force Base's Wingman Day. Blessing the TULIP community garden in Tuskegee. RRFPC Director Natilee McGruder tabling at an event. Mothers' Day survey contest winners from West Montgomery. Credits: RRFPC.*



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*Much of our food system depends on our not knowing much about it, beyond the price disclosed by the checkout scanner; cheapness and ignorance are mutually reinforcing. [...] The more knowledge people have about the way their food is produced, the more likely it is that their values—and not just “value”—will inform their purchasing decisions.*

*Michael Pollan, The Omnivore's Dilemma*

## NEWS FROM YOUR NEIGHBORS

This month, **Josalyn Randall** left her work family at **Druid City Garden Project** (DCGP) in Tuscaloosa to move to the mountains of east Tennessee with her fiancée, Heath. Josalyn was instrumental to the early success and survival of DCGP, working as a volunteer before coming on board as staff. Since those early days in

2010, Josalyn has grown into a talented and dedicated farmer, paying close attention to the plants under her watch and always ensuring quality, beautiful produce left DCGP's gardens. Josalyn

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.

is beloved by students and customers alike, is passionate about her work and her community, and will be sorely missed. All of us at DCGP wish her the very best in her exciting next steps!

Congratulations to **Matthew and Jesie Lawrence** of **Marble Creek Farmstead** in Sylacauga, who welcomed their first child, Luke Anson Lawrence on March 10!

Congratulations to **Will and Liz Doonan** and 4-year-old daughter **Ava**, of

**Heron Hollow Farm** in Falkville!

They are celebrating baby #2 Claire Lucille Doonan, who arrived in style on March 24.

## CLASSIFIEDS & RESOURCES

The **Alabama IPM Communicator** is a weekly e-newsletter on Integrated Pest Management published by ACES. It provides updates about pest identification, seasonal fluctuations, and management recommendations. To subscribe, email [bugdoctor@auburn.edu](mailto:bugdoctor@auburn.edu). Past issues are archived at <https://store.aces.edu/ListItems.aspx?CategoryID=180>. Also look for Alabama Vegetable IPM on Facebook.

**Spencer Farm** in Marion Junction is hiring a Vegetable Operations Manager to manage the production, harvest, and distribution six acres of field vegetables and microgreens. This person will work as part of a team with the Farm Owner and his family, seasonal interns, and various farm volunteers and visitors to continue providing food for the larger community. Farm management practices draw on organic and permaculture philosophies. Farm produces vegetables, micro greens, eggs, honey and various meats, for a local farmers market, restaurant, and new CSA in Selma. Housing provided. Potential exists for longer-term stays. Interested parties contact Chip Spencer at 334-850-9041 or [201spencer@gmail.com](mailto:201spencer@gmail.com).

## LOCAL FOOD SYSTEM (CONTINUED)

(Continued from page 13)

and the soon-to-be released Macon County Food Assessment, which adds significantly to the ability to understand and assess food security in rural and poor areas of the South.

This planning and research year (FY2015) for the tri-county CFA is essential to the successful completion of the project. There is a wealth of knowledge and infrastructure that is already in place in our food system and our goal is to tap into that base in order to strengthen and improve the food system for our neighbors in Macon, Montgomery and Lowndes counties. With the successful completion of the assessment planned by 2017, we would like to conduct a similar assessment in Elmore and Autauga.

The RRFPC is looking for potential partners who fund or provide

technical assistance to organizations conducting Community Food Assessments or to organizations that work around food literacy, policy and security. We plan to explore partnering with AmeriCorps to hire a VISTA during our CFA process as well as technical assistance to establish an internship program with local grad students in public health, environmental science, public health and nutrition and law. We hope to engage all sectors of the community because we all have a stake in this food system. We do this work because we know that as a community, if you are not at the table you may be on it.

Find out more about the River Region Food Policy Council and its work at [www.riverregionfood.org](http://www.riverregionfood.org) or on Facebook!





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

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

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

## UPCOMING EVENTS

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

*June 4 — Livingston*

### Alabama Cottage Food Law Food Safety Training

Free, hosted by ACES.

*June 5—Mobile*

### Coastal Seafood Craze

Fundraiser for the Alabama Coastal Foundation.

*June 7 — Huntsville*

### 1st Annual Downtown Huntsville Cheese Festival

Featuring five Alabama dairy farms and other artisans.

*June 14—Mt. Laurel*

### Sustainable Farmer Social

Hosted by Mt Laurel Farm

*June 19 — Goodman, MS*

### Alliance Field Day

Once-monthly field days hosted by the Alliance for Sustainable Agriculture Production

*June 20 — Eufaula*

### Peer-to-Peer High Tunnel Training

Free workshop on variety on topics relating to high-tunnel production.

*June 20 — Clanton*

### Beginning Farmer/Rancher Workshop: Livestock, Forages, and Farm Planning

Hosted by Cawaco RC&D Council

*June 20-21*

### Cob-a-thon

Learn to build using cob. Hosted by Daniel Smith of Hoochee Poosa Locavores

*June 26-28 — Jackson, MS*

### Climate Justice Alliance and US Social Forum Assembly

Hosted by Cooperation Jackson, to focus on democratic, cooperative approach to climate justice.

*June 26-27 — Piedmont*

### South Poll Grass Cattle Association Field Day

Annual event whose location rotates around the Southeast. Registration before June 18 is \$50.

*July 11 — Huntsville*

### Alabama Medicinal Plant Growers Association Conference

Featuring workshops, speakers, and tours

*July 17 — Goodman, MS*

### Alliance Field Day

See June 19

*July 18 — Eufaula*

### Peer-to-Peer High Tunnel Training

See June 20

*July 18 — Jasper*

### Beginning Farmer/Rancher Workshop: Soil Health

Free, hosted by Cawaco RC&D Council

*July 19 — Nauvoo*

### Sustainable Farmer Social

Hosted by the McDowell Farm School

*August 7 — Pinson*

### Beginning Farmer/Rancher Work-

(Continued on page 16)

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### UPCOMING EVENTS (CONTINUED)

*(Continued from page 15)*

**shop: Managing Invasive Species**  
Hosted by Cawaco RC&D Council

*August 8 — Clanton*  
**Beginning Farmer/Rancher  
Workshop: Fruit and Vegetable  
Production and Marketing**  
Hosted by Cawaco RC&D Council

*August 21 — Goodman, MS*  
**Alliance Field Day**  
See June 19

*August 23 — Sylacauga*  
**Sustainable Farmer Social**  
Hosted by Marble Creek Farm

*Fall — locations statewide*  
**ASAN Regional Food &  
Farm Forums**

See the full-size version of  
graphic at right on page 12!

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