



THE ALABAMA
SUSTAINABLE
AGRICULTURE
NETWORK

ASAN UPDATE

Summer 2016

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A BUYER'S GUIDE TO NAVIGATING FARMERS MARKETS

By Katie Willis

Farmers' market season is upon us; soon our shoulders will bear the weight of canvas bags filled with heirloom tomatoes, Chilton County peaches, and ears Silver Queen sweet corn. Whether they are a Saturday morning ritual with the whole family or a quick Tuesday evening stop on your way home from work, farmers markets allow you to connect with and consume the changing seasons.

Finding the right market and learning all of its specificities can



Photos courtesy Tuscaloosa River Market (L) and Mobile's Market on the Square (R)

seem daunting in the beginning. What should be a relaxed and fulfilling outing can quickly become overwhelming, especially for folks trying out the market for the first

time. Farmers' markets are different from the grocery store, and different from one another, and often operate on a set of unspoken rules that no one tells you in advance.

We're here with a crash course in farmers markets, so you don't feel left to wander up and down the rows and rows of white tents doing all the wrong things -- and hopefully so that more first-time customers might feel comfortable trying out a farmers market near them this season!

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COMING SOON TO ALABAMA: INDUSTRIAL HEMP

NEW LAW LEGALIZES INDUSTRIAL HEMP FARMING IN ALABAMA, FOR RESEARCH PURPOSES ONLY

By McMillan Arrington

In February of 2014, the President signed the 2014 Farm Bill, which legalized industrial hemp production for research purposes in the US. To qualify under Section 7606 of the Farm Bill, the industrial hemp must be grown pursuant to an authorized research or pilot program. On May 10, 2016, Alabama became the 29th state to pass legislation pursuant to the 2014 Farm Bill when Governor Robert Bentley signed Act 2016-293, The Alabama Industrial Hemp Research Program Act, into law.

My interest in industrial hemp began in 2012 as an entrepreneur but accelerated in 2014 when I co-founded BastCore LLC, a company that processes hemp. Hemp is what many investors refer to as a triple-bottom line investment due to its potential to have positive economic,



Hemp stalk, seed, and flower, photo courtesy Joe Schroeder and @bigswitchfarm

A BRIEF HISTORY OF INDUSTRIAL HEMP IN THE U.S.

By Michael LaBelle

Farmers were once REQUIRED BY LAW to grow industrial hemp. How did a common industrial plant (compare cotton, soy or pine trees) with an estimated 25,000 uses become illegal to cultivate, evolving into a pariah of federal government? And why is the legal reestablishment of hemp cultivation a big deal for Alabama farmers and citizens?

With the founding of the colonies, England gained an important source for hemp. The Crown even allowed taxes to be paid in hemp, and colonists were required by law to grow it. Demand at the time was far beyond supply. The USS Constitution, "Old Ironsides," required almost 60 tons of hemp for sails, cordage, caulking and other construction materials. Multiply that by every large capital ship England had in operation and you get some idea as to how much hemp was grown during the Revolutionary War era.

Up to 90% of all paper was made using

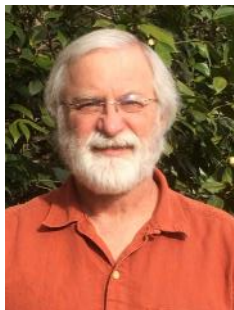
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LETTER FROM THE ASAN BOARD PRESIDENT



Are you an ASANista? ASAN is a member-based group dedicated to the promotion of sustainable farming systems in Alabama. That *member-based* thing is the most important part

of it. We rely on our members for guidance, participation, and help in what we do. *We are* our members, and our member *are* ASAN.

We are a *network* of folks and organizations. Our work is largely connecting with one another, so the more of us there are and the more opportunities we have to connect, the better and stronger and more robust our network becomes. Every one of us has some knowledge, background, interests, connections, and points of view that we can contribute to make the network more abundant and fulfilling.

If you've been a part of ASAN for a while, think about what you've gained. Have you made any important connections at the Food and Farm Forums? Did you find out about a great workshop or event? Read any interesting articles lately (in the newsletter, perhaps)? Have you nodded your

head when you heard of something ASAN is doing and thought, "This is a good thing, I'm glad ASAN is involved in this."?

And, as a part of ASAN, how have you helped make the network stronger? What have you brought to our shared table? Have you answered someone's question about starting a farm, or finding sources for good food? Joined or even led a discussion group at a Forum? Have you showed up at events, or even helped host or plan one? Forwarded ASAN communications, publications, or other resources to others in your personal network?

It should come as no surprise to you — there is much work to be done. We've got a lot of ideas for things to do, maybe sometimes too many. We welcome your feedback or suggestions as to what we should be concentrating on. Even better, we welcome your skills and knowledge and connections and sweat equity, to help us bring some of these ideas to life.

Finally, as a member-based group, we need members. Paid members. Membership is not expensive, but it gives us a base to build on and is really important. If you've not joined, please do so. And if you

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have, please get others to join. Tell someone about ASAN — a friend, family member, a farmers market customer or vendor...

Please go to <https://asanonline.org/join-asan/> to join. You can also fill out the form on page 15 and mail it to us with a check, if you prefer.

Be an ASANista!

Kirk Iversen
ASAN Board President

CONTRIBUTORS: SUMMER 2016

McMillan Arrington is a co-founder of BastCore LLC (a company that processes hemp), investor, entrepreneur, lobbyist, and tireless hemp advocate. He lives in Pike Road with his wife and two young daughters.

Michael LaBelle co-owns MightyGrow Organics, based in Fruitdale.

Carol Gundlach lives in Montgomery and is a policy analyst at Arise Citizens' Policy Project (arisecitizens.org).

Lindsay Turner is the Executive Director of the Druid City Garden Project in Tuscaloosa (druidcitygardenproject.org), and serves on the board of ASAN.

Kirk Iversen is ASAN's Board President and a traveling soil-scientist with the NRCS. He lives in Auburn with his wife and turtles.

Katie Willis is a native of the Birmingham area and a farmer, baker, activist, and ASAN intern.

Alice Evans is the Executive Director of ASAN. She is a native of Huntsville and currently lives in Birmingham.

ABOUT ASAN:

The mission of the Alabama Sustainable Agriculture Network is to support conservation practices, families who grow and consume natural food and fiber, and the communities where they live. ASAN provides peer-to-peer education, training, and networking opportunities to our broad network of farmers, gardeners, food-based businesses, agricultural resource organizations, and community leaders. We are a membership-based organization that seeks to improve the lives of small farmers and rural and urban communities and make a positive impact on the state's environment and health.

We define sustainable agriculture as farming that supports families and communities while conserving natural resources. We embrace the breadth of overlapping ways — ecological, economic, social, historical, etc. — that together, we can build a more sustainable food system. Find out more at <http://asanonline.org>.

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FARMERS MARKETS (CONTINUED)

(Continued from page 1)

How to choose a market

Just like the farmers and their products, farmers' markets have unique personalities, characteristics, and offerings. They are all different, and you may find some more suited to your needs and preferences than others.

Ask yourself: What do I want to buy - fruits and veggies; meats and eggs; value-added items like breads, cheeses, dips, and soaps; prepared foods like sandwiches; and/or arts and crafts? Do I want a market with a vibe like a county fair or festival, or something a little more strictly-business?

What days and times am I available to go to the market? How do I plan to pay? What markets are accessible and conveniently located?

Why are farmers' markets important to me? What do I hope to get out of my market: more sustainably raised food, a face-to-face connection with local farmers, a replacement for the grocery store, a community experience?

If you don't know the answers to all these questions, don't worry -- try testing out a few markets and see how they feel.

Finding a market:

Check out www.fma.alabama.gov/fmcounty.aspx for a statewide list of farmers markets by county, and www.localharvest.org/ for a map of farmers markets (and farms, CSAs, u-pick farms, and more). ASAN has several archived Local Food & Farm Guides on our website which may also prove useful for those in certain areas. (We are hoping to update and upgrade these resources in the not-too-distant future!)

A word of caution: farmers markets are constantly popping up, changing locations/open days, and sometimes shutting down, so be sure to contact the markets listed, to confirm any information you find.

Producer-Only Markets

Many markets have policies regulating



Photos courtesy Coastal Alabama Farmers' and Fishermen's Market in Foley (top L), East Lake Market in Birmingham (top R), and Pepper Place Market in Birmingham (above)

what kinds of products their vendors can sell. Some markets are "producer-only" markets, which means that the person selling the products is the person who grew, raised, and/or made them. The "producer-only" designation is intended to make sure that consumers who think they're buying from local farmers, actually are. As such it prohibits the practice of reselling (in which a vendor sells products bought wholesale, often from producers outside the area). Drilling down, however, the designation is applied slightly differently, market to market, and so gets a little trickier for vendors selling breads, teas, candies, and other value-added products -- if you mixed or steeped the tea, or baked the bread, but other people grew the ingredients, who "produced" it? It's not always obvious, so feel free to ask a farmer or vendor about the origins of their products.

Payment Options

Not all farmers' markets and/or vendors are able to accept credit cards, food stamps, or farmers' market coupons. At some markets, individual vendors may opt to accept those forms of payment. Know that doing so often incurs additional cost to them (compared with cash), so they may not let you (or be happy about letting you) swipe your card just for a one or two dollar bunch of radishes. If you aren't sure, ask the vendor before you load your bag with produce, wrap yourself a bouquet, or bite into a cream cheese danish.

That said, many farmers' markets make accepting all forms of currency a

breeze. Look for an information booth to ask about tokens for electronic payment. In this system, the market runs your credit or EBT card for the amount you desire, and gives you tokens with which to pay for your purchases.

If your method of payment is not accepted at your favorite farmers' market, contact the market manager to find out if there are public board meetings you can attend to make a suggestion.

Accessibility

When heading out the door to the market, give some thought to your physical (and emotional) needs. Markets vary in size and scope. At some markets, convenient parking is often impossible to find. If walking long distances is difficult for you, consider a more accessible market: one with handicap parking, fewer vendors, and/or wide rows and a smooth terrain.

Then there's the question of determining the importance of actual market accessibility, consider how you plan to protecting your emotional health. How do you feel about shopping in the rain? Or sweating through your clothes before 9 o'clock? Or big dogs who don't pick up on social cues? Keep in mind that at some markets, at the height of the season, crowds swell and dogs and strollers make maneuvering difficult, which can cause anxiety and stress. Make sure you come prepared for large crowds. Bring a cellphone. Keep your children close. And plan out an emergency meeting place. Even the smallest amount of self-care can aid in your market success.

DOs and DON'Ts of Farmers Markets

Though the list below is by no means complete and universal, it may help you have a more successful *and* enjoyable trek through the markets this summer.

1. DO check first to see if a particular market allows pets. If so, pay attention to where your pets wander and DO keep them leashed, close, and under constant surveillance. DO remember to watch where they poop and always clean up after them. Always be sensitive to those market customers who may fear or not like dogs of any size.
2. DON'T squeeze produce! Fruits like

(Continued on page 5)

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FARMERS MARKETS (CONTINUED)

(Continued from page 3)

tomatoes and peaches bruise easily and when customers innocently “test their ripeness,” they cause damage to the products. Remember, you are one of *many* to come by the booth on market day.



Photos courtesy Morgan County/Decatur Farmers Market (L) and Greensboro Farmers Market (R)

3. DO ask questions! Obviously don't talk endlessly and clog up the line of paying customers, but get to know your farmer and their farming and growing practices. Ask about what's going on at the farm, or their favorite way to prepare whatever you just bought. Most farmers love to cook and are excited to share their recipes with you.

4. DON'T let the good hype around local, sustainable food pull the (organic, pasture-raised, artisanal) wool over your eyes -- be discerning, ask questions, and pay attention to your gut. As one ASAN Facebook follower advised, “Look at what all the farms are growing. If only one guy has potatoes in August, there's a good chance he's not growing it himself.” Sadly, despite best efforts, this is often true even at producer-only markets.

5. DON'T question prices or try to haggle. Most vendors at the farmers' market are selling to make a living and support themselves and their families. Sometimes farmers' market prices can be hard to stomach, but remember, if you wouldn't do it at the grocery store, don't do it at the market.

6. DO, on the other hand, educate yourself on the *real* cost of food and take that into account when you shell out a few extra bucks for those organic eggs or those heirloom heads of garlic.

7. DON'T feel like you have to buy from every vendor, or that asking a question means you've committed to a purchase. Remember, farmers expect questions. They expect window-shopping. The entire future of their farm is not hinging on your guiltily buying that one basket of squash.

8. DO always thank your farmer. Appreciate them and they'll appreciate you.

9. DON'T assume the women behind the tent only grew the flowers. Women are farmers, too, and you might be surprised that they are making a big impact by entering the farming world at ever-increasing rates. (The same is true for minority farmers!)

10. DO bring your own bags, whenever you can, and a cooler if you're not planning to bring your purchases straight home. For many fruits and veggies, keeping them chilled is key to their longevity; produce that bakes in your hot car for several hours may not make it past the next morning.

11. DO make a loop (or two or three) around the farmers' market. There's no need to rush, unless the market's closing; take your time and be intentional about your purchases.

12. DO remember that arriving at the beginning of the market allows you first pick of the day's selections and that showing up 20 minutes before the market ends means there might be slim pickings on the tables.

13. DON'T arrive at the end of market and offer to pay farmers a measly sum for their remaining produce; it's not fair to the vendors or other customers who've paid full price all day. And DON'T arrive early and expect farmers to sell to you before the market opens. These are implicit norms but in many cases also explicitly stated in market rules.

14. DON'T expect your vegetables and meat to look and taste like food from the grocery store. Varieties

will differ -- which may mean better taste -- and therefore so will shapes, colors, and sizes! DO remain open to a little bug damage on your veggies, especially if they're sustainably/ organically grown, and know that this doesn't mean they are spoiled or low-quality. Animals' bodies develop differently when they are able to move around freely and consume a more natural and diverse diet, so meats will likely vary in taste and texture from grocery-store meat. DO ask the farmer for advice on how to tweak your cooking habits to account for the differences.

15. DO build a relationship with the vendors you like! Ask how much longer certain products will be available, or what new crops may be available in the coming weeks. Ask if they are at market every week, so you won't be surprised or confused when one week they're suddenly missing.

16. DO take it to the next level! Individual farmers and markets alike, often have email lists and social media pages where they make announcements about vendors/products for the coming market, weather closures, special events and offers, etc.

Farmers' markets provide a space for customers to build relationships with the people growing and producing their food, and in doing so, to learn more about the full life of their food and the lives it has touched *before* reaching the table. Customers come to understand the work required to cultivate their food, the importance of sustainable farming practices, and the differences in

industrially raised grocery-store products and ones that are fresh and locally, humanely, and lovingly produced.

Farmers' markets can be beautiful sites of social cohesion and community, as they bring people together to enjoy, celebrate, and appreciate food. One Tuscaloosa-area farmer explained, “markets are one of



Photos courtesy Madison City Farmers Market (top) and Athens Saturday Market (bottom)

(Continued on page 7)

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By Lindsay Turner

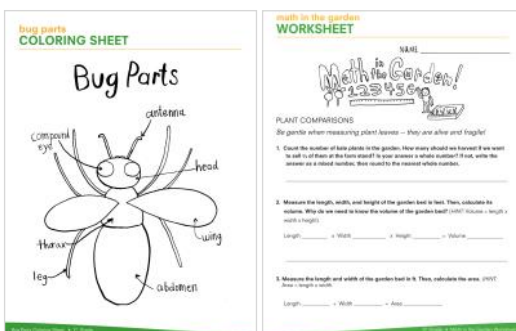
Let's face it; school gardens are trendy. But all too often, these gardens are underutilized.

That is why, with the generosity of the State Department of Agriculture and Industries and Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Alabama, we at Druid City Garden Project are publishing our standards-based K-5 curriculum on our website on June 1, 2016.

Our school gardens and curriculum have been shown to increase children's test scores, their desire to try and eat a range of healthy foods, and their excitement about school in real, measurable ways. (See www.druidcitygardenproject.org/numbers for evaluation methods and measurable programmatic results.)

But, despite this, we have also found that there are huge barriers to incorporating garden-based education.

With this curriculum, we hope to bring the most important lessons that we have



Sample pages of DCGP's new school garden curriculum

learned over the years to educators across Alabama.

If you're a teacher or Principal in a public or private K-5 school in Alabama, or if you have a farm, garden center, or alternative teaching space, this curriculum is designed for you.

Our lessons connect classroom activities to the real world. Students measure, graph, hypothesize, read, write, create haikus, and more. Built in taste tests and cooking lessons let students eat the food they have grown.

Every lesson plan is linked to Alabama Course of Study standards and comes with all associated content; you will not have to spend your time and money devising your own worksheets. It is all included.

Additionally, a detailed Garden Toolkit helps you grow, using organic methods. This toolkit contains a template for the "Standard DCGP School Garden Design," step-by-step "how-to" manuals to help you build key structural elements, and guides to topics such as outdoor classroom management techniques.

We believe that our students learn best when they put their knowledge into practice. We believe that children can be just as excited over vegetables as they are over candy. We believe that school gardens can change eating habits, improve academic success, and make learning fun.

And we want you to believe it, too.

For more information, visit

www.druidcitygardenproject.org/curriculum and see ad on opposite page!

NEW MEAT PROCESSING FACILITY FOR SUSTAINABLE FARMERS NEEDS YOUR SUPPORT

ASAN members and owners of Marble Creek Farmstead in Sylacauga, Jessie and Matthew Lawrence this spring purchased a majority share in a USDA Inspected meat processing facility in Pell City. The facility is currently open and processing swine, beef, goat, chicken, rabbits, and lamb, under both USDA inspection custom exemption.



Storefront of the new facility, photo courtesy Pell City Processing.

than the custom exemption allows, or want to be able to cross state lines to sell their product.

The processing facility is an exciting and important development, as adequate and high-quality processing has long been a major barrier for direct-market sustainable livestock producers throughout

the state. Too many producers eat into slim profit margins as they have to drive livestock long distances in order to have it slaughtered, or forgo larger profit margins because the processing facilities lack the ability to process the meat in certain ways that would make the end prod-

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FARMERS MARKETS (CONT'D)

(Continued from page 5)

my favorite days because your work finds a home in the mouths of many people. People are at a farmers market for the experience they share with the person growing their food and it's really gratifying to know I'm a part in that symbiotic relationship. It's really hard to underestimate the joy one can receive from feeling a connection, no matter how superficial, that is both continuous and enduring." Though you won't find every farmer at the market ready to wax poetic about the joys of selling their produce, many enjoy the weekly respite from laboring in the field and the chance to demonstrate the importance of their work.

All the ways that farmers' markets differ from more commercialized, industrialized, anonymous means of buying food (think grocery stores, but also online shopping services, etc) are opportunities to invest in and grow a better, more locally rooted, more inclusive food system and food culture. They are also opportunities for first-time market-goers to feel intimidated and out of place.

Hopefully this article can begin to build a bridge to make "crossover" a bit smoother and easier. But if you are an experienced market-goer, market vendor, or market manager/volunteer, keep an eye out for opportunities to make your market more approachable and navigable to newbies. The future of our markets depends on it.

MEAT PROCESSING (CONTINUED)

(Continued from page 7)

uct more appealing to higher-dollar buyers.

That's why Matthew and Jesie, along with previous owner Bruce Ervin, who will stay on as the plant manager and part owner, plan to make the facility a "producers' processor." As producers themselves, they understand the needs of the farmers raising these animals, and will cater to those needs with their new facility. The facility's focus is on producers who raise animals for direct retail or wholesale sale, and while all producers are welcome, they will focus on serving the sustainable farmer market.

Matthew notes that, "this operation needs support right away from the farmer community if it is to remain a financially viable option." He says, "There is a need for this type of processing but we can only sup-

Capabilities of interest to sustainable farmers:

- *Currently:* Producers have access to the plant whenever they have animals on the premises, and are encouraged to observe and be present during the process.
- *Soon:* The plant is working to be able to include the name and logo of the farmer, as well as producer-specific pricing on the label.
- *Currently:* can do nitrate-free bacon and hams. *Soon:* sugar-free option on sausages.
- *Planned:* stunning plus scald and scrape options, for true nose-to-tail processing.
- *Future:* They are investigating becoming the first in the state to offer Certified Organic processing, for those needing this service as well.

Call or email Matthew Lawrence at 205-936-6120 or pellcityprocessing@gmail.com for more details or to schedule your processing!

port it for so long if the business isn't there. If you have animals to be processed and want to see these type of services available, please give it all the support you can, as soon as you can."

ASAN is asking for the support of not only farmers but also consumers and advocates for local, sustainable food. Says ASAN director Alice Evans, "This is one of those moments where we need to show up for the things we say we support. If you want more local, sustainably raised food, want local farmers to thrive, want to be able to feed your families food that was raised ethically and environmentally right here in Alabama – this is one of those times we need to show up, and to put our money where our mouths are. We need the village to make this thing fly."

Matthew and Jesie are working with a team of volunteer supporters, with the support of ASAN, to create a crowdfunding campaign that will launch in mid-June. Funds raised will help "bridge the gap" to keep the operation going until producers can adjust (and the facility can support itself on processing alone). Keep an eye on social media and on the ASAN website for more information, and when the time comes, please give if you can, and help spread the word!

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HEMP LAW (CONT'D)

(Continued from page 1)

social and environmental impacts. I saw bringing hemp to Alabama as an opportunity to positively impact my state and local community, while also providing my business and others with a source of locally-grown hemp.

The opportunity for “pilot programs” under the Farm Bill is what motivated me to reach out to John McMillan, Commissioner of the Department of Agriculture & Industries. With Commissioner McMillan’s guidance, I commissioned a white paper from Auburn University which addressed the potential impact of hemp in Alabama. The results of that white paper suggest that hemp is well-suited for growth in Alabama.

With Commissioner McMillan’s unbri-dled support and a corroborating white paper from Auburn University, I had what I needed to approach the Alabama Legislature



Left: Kentucky farmer Joe Schroeder in a field of fiber hemp. Top: harvested hemp stalks awaiting “breaking”, a process by which a machine separates the inner core of the stalk (or hurd) from the fiber. Photos courtesy Joe Schroeder and @bigswitchfarm

to find a sponsor for a bill in Alabama. Senator Paul Bussman and Representative Ken Johnson fearlessly led the charge at the statehouse in support of creating a research program in Alabama. The Alabama Industrial Hemp Research Program Act authorizes the Department of Agriculture to administer an industrial hemp research program and to license growers, who may be persons, businesses or coop-

eratives, to grow industrial hemp. The bill also authorizes institutions of higher education to conduct industrial hemp research.

Now that Governor Bentley has signed the bill, the next step in the process will be for the Department of Agriculture to promulgate rules and regulations necessary to administer the program. It is my hope and reasonable belief that the

Department of Agriculture will structure its program to have as wide of a reach as the interest level supports. For this reason, I encourage all farmers, entrepreneurs and other interested persons to contact the Alabama Department of Agriculture to express your interest in this amazing new opportunity in Alabama.



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Food from down the road.

HEMP HISTORY (CONT'D)

(Continued from page 1)

hemp fiber. George Washington farmed hemp, and Thomas Jefferson developed improved strains. The first drafts of the Declaration of Independence were on hemp paper. Hemp was grown throughout the new United States, with Kentucky becoming the largest producer up until WWI. The Gutenberg and King James Bibles, and the works of Thomas Paine, Lewis Carroll, and Mark Twain were printed on hemp paper. Then something changed. In the mid-1800's, paper from wood became available, and hemp soon fell victim to politics.

During Herbert Hoover's presidency (1929-33), hemp was made illegal after being a traditional industrial crop for over 160 years. Turns out, hemp was too good for its own good. Hemp could be used to make clothes, cars, plastics, building materials, rope, paper, linens, food, medicine, fuel and more. Such versatility impacted profits of many major companies. With the Marijuana Tax Act of 1937, robber barons used their wealth and power to curtail hemp production. While the Act did not outlaw hemp, it foreshadowed changes to come.

Misinformation and Ulterior Motives

Industrial hemp (*Cannabis sativa*) and medicinal/recreational marijuana share the genus *Cannabis*. Detractors seized upon this affiliation. The plant that became known as "marijuana" was a scapegoat of anti-drug legislation. In order to rally public opinion against the "new" drug that was supposedly causing disruption within proper society, the US government launched a propaganda campaign that confused the public by using these terms interchangeably: marijuana = cannabis = hemp. Farmers protested the movement, but were ignored by Congress.

At the time, *Cannabis sativa* was the basis for many commonly prescribed medicines. When doctors heard that "marijuana" was to be made illegal, they thought nothing of it—their medicines did not contain "marijuana." It was too late before they realized that one of their best and most harmless remedies had been taken away by the likes of one William Randolph Hurst, who subsequently made millions off the burgeoning timber paper industry.

Under the leadership of Henry Anslinger, the first head of the US Department of Narcotics, the government launched what would become known as the "war on drugs." Anslinger married the niece of Andrew Mellon, the US Secretary of the Treasury. Mellon was a banker heavily invested in the timber industry, as were many of his clients and friends. For 32 years, Anslinger shaped drug policy and was instrumental in determining society's attitude toward marijuana, taking advantage of the prevailing distrust between the races to further demonize and propagandize the plant.

A Renaissance for Industrial Hemp

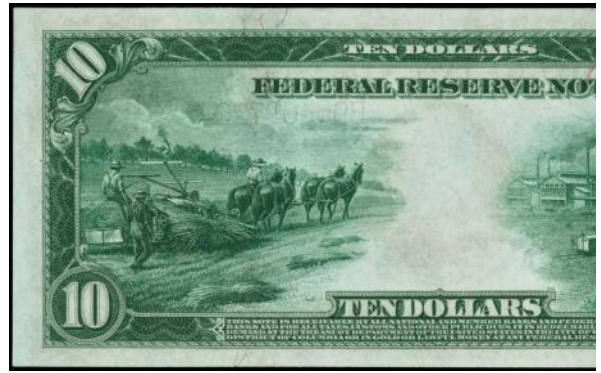
That was then, this is now, and "the times, they are a changing!" Societal attitudes are opening towards the benefits of *Cannabis sativa*, and industrial hemp is enjoying a long over-due change in status. The 2014 Farm Bill authorized the states to begin growing hemp for research purposes. Kentucky has once again become the leader, with more than eight tons of hemp seed planted in 2015.

On May 10, 2016, Governor Bentley signed legislation that will allow Alabama to begin the limited cultivation of hemp for study as a possible cash crop for Alabama farmers. [See article on page 1 and 10.]

Who knows what future products will be made from hemp? We already know that hemp seeds are incredibly nutrient-dense. Hemp oil can be made into thousands of products, from milk to paint. Hemp fiber can be used to make high quality paper, cloth, cordage and a host of other products. Even the "waste" material around the fiber can be used as a biofuel and in construction. Hempcrete is a building material made from hemp hurd (soft inner core of the stalk), lime and water, and it is appealing because it is fire resistant, durable and highly insulating.

Potential for Farmers

How can hemp impact a farmer's bottom line? A farmer growing hemp at



Top: 1914 \$10 Federal Reserve note, printed on hemp paper, features farmers harvesting hemp. Left: Kentucky hemp farmers Mike Lewis (left) and Joe Schroeder (right) present an American flag made from organic, family-farmed hemp to Farm Aid co-founder and Board President Willie Nelson (center), photo courtesy Joe Schroeder.

3.9 tons/acre will earn \$480/acre after all expenses, AND it can be followed by a different crop. [Note: these figures were based on a 2015 Wisconsin report assuming farmers supplied all the fiber that a particular paper mill would need for one year. The total came to 533,000 acres.]

Thousands of acres in Alabama are tied up for twenty years or more with each crop of pine trees. What if that land were converted to annual crop production? Hemp can be followed with winter wheat, then soy beans, with the next summer's crop again being hemp. Hemp serves as both a cash AND a cover crop, building soil organic matter and nitrogen. This is important, since most cover crops have no cash value.

Finally, as a transition crop, hemp is ideal! Hemp requires no pesticides or herbicides and can easily be grown with natural fertilizers, using natural farming methods. Farmers can generate income during the three-year certified organic land transition, making hemp a profitable gateway to increased organic acreage.

I encourage Alabama's farmers to stay informed as this situation develops. The potential benefit to small farmers is greater than anything I can remember in my lifetime. Let your voice be heard in Montgomery and Washington. The long night of hemp prohibition is drawing to a close with the dawning possibility that this amazing crop will once more be grown throughout our state and country.



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POLICY ROUNDUP: HUNGER PREVENTION AND THE ALABAMA LEGISLATURE

By Carol Gundlach

The Alabama Legislature has now adjourned its 2016 regular session, and it was a busy year on the anti-hunger front. On the positive side, a new law allowing former drug felons to receive SNAP food assistance was implemented. And all children in some high-poverty schools are now eligible for free school meals.

Other new developments have not been so positive. In 2016, most states, including Alabama, reinstituted an old SNAP rule that places draconian time limits on food assistance for able-bodied adults who can't find work and don't live in households with children. And legislation was introduced that would have made it harder for people to qualify for food, welfare and health care assistance.

End of SNAP drug felon ban

In a quiet win, Alabama joined the majority of states by allowing otherwise eligible people with a past felony drug conviction to receive food assistance under the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and cash assistance under the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program. The change was part of the 2015 prison reform law.

People who previously were denied SNAP or TANF benefits because of a felony drug conviction can now apply at their local Department of Human Resources (DHR) office. Households that already receive SNAP or TANF but have a household member who is not included in the "assistance unit" because of a drug conviction can report the newly eligible person to their caseworker for inclusion in the unit. The increase in the number of people in the unit could increase benefits, though any income from the newly eligible person also would be counted.

Community eligibility for school meals

Children who eat school meals tend to perform better in the classroom than those who do not. On the health front, school meals contribute to lower childhood obesity rates and to diets richer in a variety of foods, including fruits, vegetables and milk.

Under new federal regulations, more than 800 high-poverty Alabama schools can now use "community eligibility" to provide free school meals to all of their students.

Community eligibility reduces school paperwork, allows for more flexibility in how and where meals are served, and has been shown to increase the number of children who eat healthy meals at school. The program also boosts the number of children eating breakfast, an underutilized service that many schools are seeking to expand. In total, 347 Alabama schools adopted community eligibility for the 2015 school year, and 45 additional schools adopted it for the 2016 year. Nearly 450 Alabama schools, including nearly 100 high-poverty schools, remain eligible but have not yet adopted community eligibility.

Return of strict time limits for SNAP

Many unemployed Alabama adults once again face strict time limits for assistance under SNAP, commonly known as food stamps. These "able-bodied adults without dependents" (ABAWDs) – folks who do not live in a SNAP household with children – will be allowed to receive SNAP benefits for only three months during a three-year period unless they either meet complex work requirements or are found to be exempt. Because of the Great Recession, this federal rule has not been in effect for nearly a decade. Now that the economy has improved, reinstatement of this rule has denied food assistance to as many as 35,000 low-income Alabamians.

Exemptions to the ABAWD rule are complicated. They include people who can't work because of disability or pregnancy, people who are in an approved job training program, people living in 13 high-unemployment (mostly Black Belt) counties, people who are homeless, people under 18 or over 49, and people who provide at least 80 hours a month of volunteer



A community assembly as depicted by the Beehive Design Collective in their "Mesoamérica Resiste" mural.

service.

On April 1, the first round of ABAWDs were cut off Alabama's SNAP program. Anti-hunger advocates believe many of the people who were terminated are actually exempt, usually because of a disability. If people have received a SNAP termination letter from

DHR, they should contact Legal Services (866-456-4995) to see if they qualify for help getting benefits restored.

Legislation introduced to restrict access to public assistance

The Alabama Legislature considered at least three different bills that would have made it more difficult for needy people to receive food, cash and health care assistance. All three bills were based on "model" legislation developed by out-of-state groups and contained many of the same provisions. All the bills would all have prohibited Alabama from renewing federal waivers from the ABAWD time limits, no matter how high unemployment might be in the future.

The most draconian of these bills also would have ended Alabama's use of federally permitted options in the SNAP and TANF programs that expanded eligibility and would have imposed a three-year lifetime limit on TANF benefits. The result would have been to force many low-income seniors, working people, and people with disabilities to liquidate many of their very limited resources to continue to receive food assistance. The bill also would have imposed complicated red-tape requirements on both recipients and already underfunded state agencies.

Anti-poverty advocates were able to successfully stop these punitive bills during the 2016 legislative session but expect to see them reintroduced in 2017.

For more information on these and many more policy developments, and to get involved in advocacy across a wide array of issues, go to <http://arisecitizens.org>. ASAN is an organizational member of Alabama Arise.

Coming soon...

Graze: Birmingham Sunday, Sept. 11

Our 2nd annual farm-to-fork picnic fundraiser, again at Avondale Brewing!

Needed: farmers, chefs, volunteers, sponsors, and throngs of happy attendees!

Membership Drive June 16-30

Help us grow the ASAN family!

Needed: tabling volunteers (farmers and non-farmers) at markets around the state!

Regional Food & Farm Forums Late Sept.-early Dec.

Our anchor series of training and networking events—four day-long events will be held at sites around the state. Keep your eyes peeled for a save-the-date — you won't want to miss them!

Needed: local planning help and sponsors/exhibitors!

NEWS FROM YOUR NEIGHBORS

Congratulations to both **Camp Powers** and **Mike Pigg** of **First South Farm Credit**! Camp has retired from his role as President of the South Alabama Division, where he served for the past 28 years. Following his retirement, the North and South Alabama Divisions of First South combined to become the Alabama Division, and Mike Pigg was named to lead it. Mike had served as President of the North Alabama Division for the past five years, and is now responsible for all of First South's 16 branches and operations in Alabama. Mike has worked with First South for over 36 years and recently re-located to the Division office in Montgomery to handle his new state-wide duties.

Very fond farewell to longtime **EAT South** farm managers **Jetson Brown** and **Catherine Doe**, who leave Montgomery for South Florida in early July, and to **Liz Laroche**, who has served as EAT South's Executive Director for the past year. Warm welcome to **Sara Byard**, formerly of the Wellness Coalition in Montgomery, who came on board in May as the new Executive Director. And warm future-welcome to **Caylor Roling**, who along with her family will be moving back to her native Alabama from Oregon, to

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? Send it to alice@asanonline.org or (256) 743-0742.

start as Farm Manager in July.

Congratulations to the **Northwest Alabama RC&D Council** and its chairman **Roger Hayes**!! The National Association of RC&D Councils named the NW AL RC&D Council the **2015 RC&D Council of the Year**, and named Roger the **2015 Council Member of the Year**! Both will be honored in Reno, NV, this July at the Association's national meeting. Learn more about the Northwest Alabama RC&D Council on Facebook (@NorthwestAlabamaRcdCouncil). Learn more about RC&D throughout the state at <http://alabamarcd.org> and at www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detail/al/home/ (search RC&D).

Congratulations to **Josalyn Randall** (former Program Director for **Druid City Garden Project**) and her husband **Heath**

Bailey on the April 12th birth of their first child, a baby girl named **Garnet Scott Bailey**. Josalyn, Heath, and baby Garnet now live in Sevier County, TN.

Steph Munkachy, longtime and beloved fixture at Jones Valley Teaching Farm in Birmingham, will be departing soon for a Teach for America position in Cleveland, OH.

UPCOMING EVENTS

DETAILS FOR THESE EVENTS
AND MORE, AT
WWW.ASANONLINE.ORG/EVENTS

June 2-3 — Huntsville
Meat Goat Workshop

June 4 — Jemison
Blueberry and Blackberry Walking Tour

June 4 — West Blocton
Cahaba River Ramble

June 7 - online
Weed Management in Organic Cropping Systems (webinar)

June 7 - Spanish Fort
Mobile Bay Sierra Club Meeting

(Continued on page 15)

Help us build a better Alabama.

Join ASAN or renew your membership today!

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☐ quarterly print newsletter

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

MEMBERSHIP LEVEL

Donations and annual dues are tax-deductible.

☐ Individual Supporter: \$25

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☐ Business or Organization: \$200

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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 (CONT'D)

(Continued from page 14)

June 8-10 - Auburn

Annual Meeting - Soil & Water Conservation Society

June 9 - Birmingham

Cahaba Group of the Sierra Club Meeting

June 9 - Gadsden

Coosa Valley Sierra Club Meeting
 Featuring ASAN director Alice Evans!

June 14 - Fairhope

Mobile Bay Green Drinks - Fairhope

June 14 - Montgomery

Veg Out Potluck

June 15 - Mobile

Mobile Bay Green Drinks - Mobile

June 16-30 - throughout Alabama

ASAN Membership Drive!

Join online today or mail us the form above!

June 17 - Greenwood, MS

Alliance Field Day

June 25 - Auburn

Alabama Water Watch Annual Meeting

June 25 - Eufaula

Peer-to-Peer Training Workshops

July 5 - Spanish Fort

Mobile Bay Sierra Club Meeting

July 12 - Fairhope

Mobile Bay Green Drinks - Fairhope

July 12 - Montgomery

Veg Out Potluck

July 14 - Birmingham

Cahaba Group of the Sierra Club Meeting

July 14 - Gadsden

Coosa Valley Sierra Club Meeting

July 15 - Batesville, MS

Alliance Field Day

July 16 - Auburn

Alabama Medicinal Plant Growers Association Conference

July 20 - Mobile

Mobile Bay Green Drinks - Mobile

July 20-24 - Olympia, WA

Rooted in Community Youth Leadership Summit

August 1-3 - Tuskegee

Master Goat Producers Certification Training

August 1 - Spanish Fort

Mobile Bay Sierra Club Meeting

August 2 - online

Residue and Tillage Management in Organic Farming: Eastern States (webinar)

August 9 - Fairhope

Mobile Bay Green Drinks - Fairhope

August 9 - Montgomery

Veg Out Potluck

August 11 - Birmingham

Cahaba Group of the Sierra Club Meeting

(Continued on page 16)

ASAN

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for future features!

*healthy farms,
healthy foods,
healthy communities.*

UPCOMING EVENTS (CONT'D)

(Continued from page 15)

August 11 – Gadsden

**Coosa Valley Sierra Club
Meeting**

August 15 – Mobile

**Lunch and Learn: Every Kid
Should Eat a Pound of Dirt**

August 17 – Mobile

**Mobile Bay Green Drinks –
Mobile**

August 17-19 – Mobile

**Risk Management and Busi-
ness Development Work-
shop**

August 18-20 – Birmingham/Epes
**Federation of Southern Co-
operatives/Land Assistance
Fund Awards Dinner and
Annual Meeting**

August 19 – Cedar Bluff, MS
Alliance Field Day

August 20 – Cullman
**Farm Y'all Farm-to-Fork
Dinner**

August 27 – Cullman
Farm Y'all Festival

September 6 – Spanish Fort
**Mobile Bay Sierra Club
Meeting**

September 8 – Birmingham
**Cahaba Group of the Sierra
Club Meeting**

September 8 – Gadsden
**Coosa Valley Sierra Club
Meeting**

September 10 – Montgomery
Arise Annual Meeting

September 11 – Birmingham
Graze: Birmingham

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

September 13 – Montgomery
Veg Out Potluck

September 16 – Mount Olive, MS
Alliance Field Day

September 24 – Selma
Fall Farm to Feast

November 17-18 – Clanton
**Alabama Fruit and Vegeta-
ble Growers Association
Conference and Tradeshow**

November 17-19 – Jackson, MS
**Mississippi Food Summit
and Agricultural Revival**