



THE ALABAMA
SUSTAINABLE
AGRICULTURE
NETWORK

ASAN UPDATE

Winter 2016-2017

Published Quarterly



Sacred Stone camp, photo by Tony Webster

WATER STEWARDS FOR LIFE

By Skye Borden

Water is life. Without it no creature on earth could exist. As an essential element for survival, it is one of the most precious, if not the most rare, materials on earth.

It should come as no surprise then that people feel threatened when their water resources are at stake. In just

the past fifty years, an estimated 1,800 disputes over water resources have erupted around the world. Some of recent history's bloodiest conflicts, including the Rwandan genocide and the war in Darfur, have been tied to water scarcity.

In the U.S., water conflicts have been far too common-

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POLICY CORNER: FOOD SAFETY REGULATIONS

By Karen Wynne

Great news about the Food Safety Modernization Act's Produce Safety Rule! No, seriously. Right now with exemptions, many of the farmers reading this will be glad to know that they are too small or too local for the new FDA food safety regulations.

Does FSMA even apply to you?

Do you sell less than \$25,000 in produce in a year*? You're not required to comply.

Growing produce for personal use? You're okay. Veggies are going to a processor?

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BALANCING INCREASED IRRIGATION, ERRATIC WATER FLOWS, AND INADEQUATE WATER POLICY

By Mary Ignatiadis

As rainfall has decreased and become more inconsistent here in Alabama, the number of farms relying on irrigation has increased. Irrigating crops can improve yields by ~50%, but our state doesn't have a comprehensive water management plan to make sure that there's enough water to go around. A group of scientists at the University of Alabama in Huntsville is hoping that their new method of mapping irrigation patterns

(Continued on page 6)

REGIONAL FORUMS RUNDOWN

With the fourth Regional Food & Farm Forum on Thursday, December 1, ASAN will have concluded another fantastic series of its signature down-to-earth, practical training and networking events.

Poarch

This year's series kicked off with a burst of energy as a crowd of around 60 farmers, gardeners, ag resource providers, and community advocates gathered at the luxurious Wind Creek Hotel and Casino in Poarch (Escambia County). This Forum was hosted and organized in collaboration with the Poarch Band of Creek Indians, where tribal members and tribal administration are eager to cultivate sustainable, land-centered jobs and businesses, and to promote good health both for individuals and for the environment.

Tribal Historic Preservation Officer Robert Thrower narrated a past-and-present bus tour of the reservation and surrounding communities, which, along with an opening group exercise, helped

(Continued on page 2)

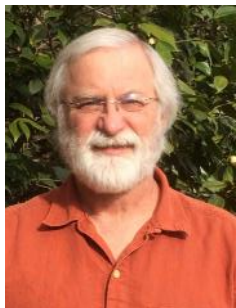


Clock-wise from top left: Margaret Baggett demonstrating basket-weaving; coded seed packets from the Sand Mountain Seed Bank; Cooking 101 roundtable discussion. Photos by Alice Evans.

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LETTER FROM THE ASAN BOARD PRESIDENT



We're moving into the time of year for winter meetings, where we have a chance to reflect on the past year, plan for the coming year, reconnect with friends, exchange ideas, and learn good stuff. I've had a chance

to participate in some meetings recently that remind me of the good things that people are doing and give me hope for the future.

The ASAN Regional Forums have been great this year (see cover and opposite page). There've been lots of participants, dynamic discussion groups, and a chance for people in each region to meet each other and make connections. As I write this we've completed three of them and have one more, on 12/1 at the University of West Alabama in Livingston.

Recently in Orange Beach, the Alabama Association of Conservation Districts had their annual meeting. Members from all over the state were there along with folks from Alabama Cooperative Extension, USDA-NRCS, and many interested groups. Soil and water conservation was a dominant theme, as were food systems and access to food. Sessions I attended included folks from the Druid City Garden Project, Heirloom Harvest, Florida Dept. of Agriculture, and the Alabama Farmers Market Authority. The Alabama Soil and Water Conservation Committee is applying for a conservation partnership grant to help Alabama farmers implement practices to improve soil health. If successful, ASAN will be a partner in this project.

I was also at the Alabama Fruit and Vegetable Growers Assn. annual meeting in Clanton. This is a great meeting every year and it has been a pleasure to see it grow over the years. They had over 300 folks there, mostly small farmers, with interesting presentations and discussions about food production, marketing, and food safety.

There are lots more opportunities coming up this winter to meet with good folks, learn good stuff, and make good connections. The biggie, and one of my favorites, will be the Southern SAWG Conference in Lexington, KY this January. Go to this if you can (see p11)!

Other highlights include the Georgia Organics conference in Atlanta (celebrating 20 years as an organization), and the 125th Annual Tuskegee Farmers Conference, both in February.

Finally, we are always trying to improve ASAN and make it as relevant to you as we can. We will be undertaking some major strategic planning and organizational development, this coming year, and will be asking our members, supporters, and partners for your contributions, feedback, and suggestions.

Please think of how ASAN is important to you and how we can make it better. And please remember that your membership and financial support are critical in enabling us to fulfill our programs and our mission. Please join, renew, give a gift membership, and/or make an end-of-year donation today, and help ASAN – and in turn, this work and this movement – continue to grow!

Sincerely,

Kirk Iversen
ASAN board president

REGIONAL FORUMS (CONTINUED)

(Continued from page 1)

to ground Forum participants in a contextual understanding of the history of the host site and host community. As one participant put it, this focus on history and context helped to “connect all of our immediate communities in time and space”.

The afternoon was packed with roundtable discussions on everything from small-scale poultry to compost to medicinal herbs, and in between sessions participants got to converse with a wide array of exhibitors. One especially powerful element was the convergence of a number of different experts in seed saving, ethnobotany, and native and heirloom plant varieties; the Sand Mountain Seed Bank and the Mvskoke Food Sovereignty Initiative (out of Oklahoma) shared an exhibit table and gave away free seeds, newly organized and coded thanks to SaveTheSeed.net. The day concluded with the awarding of over a dozen door prizes, collected by donation through the hard work of Angela McMorris.

Thank you to the planning committee: Carolyn White, Angela McMorris, Robert Thrower, Arelene Mack, Wynnell Bell, Darrell Hollinger, Lori Sawyer, Martha Daughdrill, Frewin Osteen, Judy

(Continued on page 3)

CONTRIBUTORS: WINTER 2016-2017

Skye Borden is a lawyer, writer, and environmental advocate from the Deep South. Her book *Thirsty City*, a 2016 Reed Environmental Writing Award finalist, explores the history of Atlanta's decades-long water war. www.skyeborden.com

Karen Wynne is an organic consultant, soil scientist, and owner of Rosita's Farm in Hartselle, AL.

Mary Ignatiadis is a Huntsville native, recent graduate of Williams College, and past ASAN intern.

Natilee McGruder is the Director of the River Region Food Policy Council in Montgomery.

Lindsey Lunsford is a graduate of Tuskegee University and the coordinator of the TULIP Community Garden. She is working on a Masters degree in Environmental Management.

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

Alice Evans is the Executive Director of ASAN. She is a native of Huntsville, and now 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>.

REGIONAL FORUMS (CONTINUED)

(Continued from page 2)

Johnson, Darlene Baker, Elder Mosley, Gabriel Denton, and Jonathan Munday!



Childersburg — roundtable discussions along Talladega Creek, below the covered bridge; tour outside the Grist Mill. Photos by Alice Evans.



Poarch — clockwise from bottom left: bus tour led by Tribal Historic Preservation Officer Robert Thrower; roundtable discussion sessions. Photos by Jonathan Munday.



Nauvoo — Farm tour, roundtable discussions, and group gathering in the main barn. Photos by Whitney Moore.



al Forum.

About 15-20 of those attending the ASAN Forum stuck around to participate in the Sierra Club's state chapter retreat, which began when the Forum ended and ran through the weekend.

This collaboration with the Sierra Club gave both groups a wonderful opportunity to further build relationships and "cross-pollinate," especially since there were a number of food-themed sessions on the Sierra Club agenda.

Special thanks to every last member of the crew at the Farm School / Camp McDowell, and to Jan Hoadley, Elyse Peters, Lindsey Mullen, and Terri Tingle / Café 13.

Livingston: The final Forum will take place after this newsletter has gone to press, on Thursday, December 1, at the University of West Alabama in Livingston (Sumter County). Thanks to the help of UWA's Division of Economic Development and Outreach, along with a strong local planning committee including Pam Madzima, Andrew Williams, Wade Williams, Eddie Parham, Mustafa Morsy, and Yawah Awolowo, there is a fantastic array of roundtable discussions lined up for the event. We expect a crowd of 50-60, who will be treated to a tour of various agricultural, environmental, and economic projects on campus, a delicious lunch, and plenty of good company (smart, too!).

See more photos from each event on our Facebook page (@ASANonline) and at <http://asanonline.org/RFFF16>.

Childersburg: The second Forum took place just ten days later, on Monday, October 10, at the Kymulga Grist Mill in Childersburg (Talladega Co.), and was attended by around 40 people, predominantly young beginning farmers. In the morning, caretaker Ben Austin led a fascinating tour of the gristmill, the covered bridge, and the grounds, which straddle Talladega Creek, a tributary of the Coosa River. The gristmill and the covered bridge were built in 1860; the gristmill was fully operational until 2012, when heavy flooding damaged the mill's foundation. Repairs have been made since then, but the mill now operates for demonstration purposes only.

A fantastic lunch was provided by the Alpine Café, located just down the road from the park. The weather was perfect for an afternoon of roundtable discussions in the pavilion and at picnic tables along the creek, in the shade of the trees and the covered bridge.

Thanks to the Childersburg planning committee! Charles Walters, Sandra Simone, Matthew Lawrence, Charlie Griffin, and Emma Turner.

Nauvoo: A crowd of around 80 gathered for the third Forum, which

was held on Friday, October 28, at the McDowell Farm School at Camp McDowell, located in Nauvoo (Winston County). The Farm School, which was built in the last three years or so, is a relatively new development at Camp McDowell, which has existed since 1948 and is owned by the Episcopal Diocese of Alabama. The Farm School hosts school groups (mostly 3-5th graders) for three-day, two-night educational field trips, on which they get to participate in the farming process from planting seeds to harvesting to preparing a meal. The Farm School has crop fields, a teaching kitchen, livestock, a greenhouse, fruit trees, solar panels, and more — so while the space contributed tremendously, the people themselves were what enabled this especially dynamic and engaging Region-

Many thanks to our 2016 sponsors:

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Sierra Club—Alabama Chapter
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Poarch Band of Creek Indians, Feeding the Gulf Coast, McDowell Farm School, Southern SARE, University of West Alabama, and lots of exhibitors!

GRAZING IN THE CITY: 2ND ANNUAL FARM-TO-FORK PICNIC SHOWCASES FRIENDS OLD AND NEW

ASAN's 2nd annual Graze: Birmingham farm-to-fork fundraiser picnic was held on Sunday, September 11, this year, again at Avondale Brewery in Birmingham.

None of it could have been possible without the talent and generosity of our participating farms and chefs (* marks first-time participant):

- Golden Temple Café // Belle Meadow Farms*
- Real & Rosemary* // Pleasant Ridge Farms*
- Shindigs Catering* // Marble Creek Farmstead
- Magic City Sweet Ice* // Petals from the Past*
- Thyme Randle // Southern Foothills Farm*
- el barrio restaurant // Snow's Bend Farm
- Sprout & Pour // Yellowhammer CSA*
- Silvertron Café* // AA Farm Creamery*
- Mimi's Sodas* // Chilton Research and Extension Center* + Reeves Peach Farm*
- Pollo Lucas* // Mt Laurel Farm*
- OvenBird* // Heron Hollow Farm
- Relish Café* // Grandview Farms
- West End Community Café // West End Community Gardens
- Pelham Culinary Academy* // Deep South Food Alliance
- Jones Valley Teaching Farm
- Harvest Roots Ferments

Please support these folks who support ASAN!

Thanks also to an AMAZING crew of volunteers, who make everything happen behind the scenes, before, during, and after the big day.

We look forward to Grazing with y'all again in 2017!



Thanks to our sponsors!



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WATER STEWARDS (CONTINUED)

(Continued from page 1)

place. As I write, protesters are sleeping in freezing tents and teepees at the Sacred Stone camp in Standing Rock, North Dakota. These men, women, and children are standing up against the Dakota Access pipeline, a project that they fear will pollute their drinking water. They feel they have no choice but to fight: the water is their life.

In California, environmentalists and agribusiness have been engaged in fierce standoff of a different kind. There, a federally listed endangered species – the tiny delta smelt minnow – has spawned a massive legal battle over the region's scarce water supplies. The conflict has pitted urban water users against farmers, and neighbors against one another. It has also left an uncertain future for the struggling smelt: without water, the fish will not survive.

In Flint, Michigan, enormous



Flint Michigan water pickup site, photo by USDA

pallets of bottled water are stacked high at pickup locations across town. There, residents learned that the tap water in their homes was contaminated with lead. Families in Flint had unknowingly been poisoning themselves for years, one glass at a time. Now, those same folks stand in line by the pallets, waiting to pick up a week's worth of bottled water supplies. They have no choice but to wait: without the bottled water, they cannot live.

Here in Alabama, volunteers in Uniontown scour the local creek beds for signs of pollution. They test their water supplies regularly, fearful of another accidental sewage overflow, of the strange-smelling discharges from the local processing plant, and of the hidden contaminants seeping underground beneath the community's massive coal fly ash dump. They organize and they march. They show up to county commission meetings. They have no choice but to speak up: they need clean water to live.

As sustainable farmers, as environmental stewards, and as keepers of the earth, we have an obligation to use our resources responsibly. It is commonplace for farming communities to talk about being good "land stewards," but we must come to think of ourselves as good water stewards as well.

There is so much that we can do. We can plant stream buffers and cover crops to prevent erosion. We can range animals and plant crops away from creek beds to curb the flow of excess nutrients. We can use planting techniques and irrigation schedules to limit water consumption. We can take small steps together, in the hope that it will make a big impact. In words and deeds, we can stand with vulnerable communities in their fight for water rights. We can be the kind of neighbors that we would hope to have. We have to try: life depends on it.

IRRIGATION (CONTINUED)

(Continued from page 1)

can help state leaders to plan and prepare for more intensive water use in agriculture.

Cameron Handyside is one of those scientists at the National Space Science and Technology Center (NSSTC) at UAHuntsville. Handyside wants to promote sustainability through the equitable distribution of water among farmers and communities. Though water is generally abundant here, farms clustered in the same watershed can cause local water scarcity when they all irrigate. To avoid water conflicts between farms, urban areas, and wildlife as irrigation practices grow in Alabama, we need to be able to predict how irrigation will change water availability. Take this summer's drought as an example: the Paint Rock River at little more than a trickle, despite the fact that not many farmers irrigate in the River's watershed. The low water levels threatened dozens of aquatic species found nowhere else in the world, and prevented farmers downstream from irrigating. However, streams in heavily irrigated watersheds experienced water levels only slightly lower than normal. Planning for water availability in the Southeast is difficult because it is highly variable.

Detecting and measuring new irrigation systems

Understanding irrigation trends is the first step in planning for future water use. In Alabama, the state agencies in charge of managing water use have limited resources for measuring water availability and charting new withdrawals from irrigation. Handyside and his fellow researchers at NSSTC can fill in this knowledge gap by combining existing crop and water system models, USDA crop data, and satellite imagery. They're calling their new tool the Watershed Hydrologic Stress Tool (WHyST).

WHyST combines existing models for crop yields and water systems with USDA data. Farmers may already be familiar with the Decision Support System for Agrotechnology Transfer (DSSAT) crop yield model. DSSAT is widely used to simulate regional crop yields because it takes many variables into account. The NSSTC team uses a more precise version of DSSAT to predict how weather changes will affect the need for irrigation. In order to determine how much water is available for irrigation under different weather conditions, the team looks to a water systems model developed by the USDA. The team then plugs in USDA data for the crop acreage of each watershed to their model, and finds how much water would be needed to irrigate Alabama's crops. The satellite imagery allows them to spot fields that are already being irrigated. WHyST might be crucial in helping state decision-makers for measuring and planning for increases in irrigation.

Getting the most out of irrigation

As farmers already know, the ability of irrigation to increase crop yields is dependent on time of day, date, weather, existing soil conditions. DSSAT is traditionally used by USDA to help to

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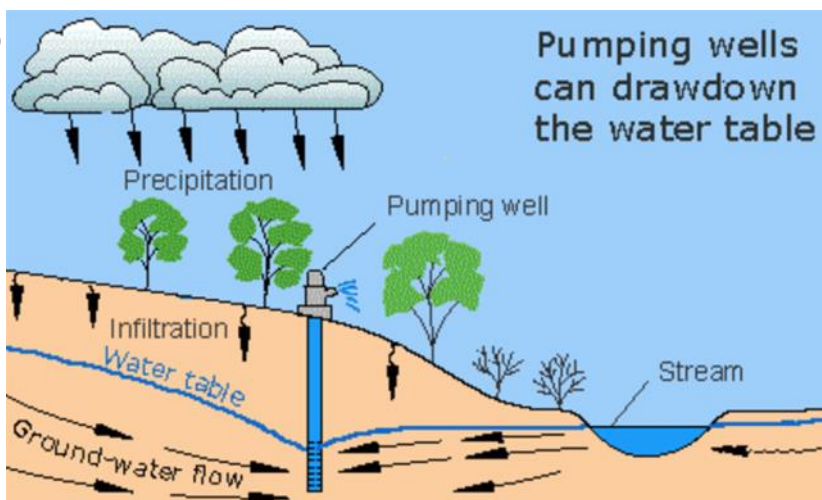
IRRIGATION (CONT'D)

(Continued from page 6)

predict the impact of irrigation on farm income. The costs associated with irrigation can be high, depending on whether “we’re drilling a well 200 feet deep or putting a pump on a water source on someone’s property,” explains Chuck Boggs of Ace, LLC, a company just over the border in Tennessee that specializes in solar-powered irrigation systems. “We work to satisfy the needs of each individual customer.” (They do free site surveys for potential customers).

Since 2012, farmers can take advantage of the Alabama Irrigation Tax Credit to offset some of the cost of installing an irrigation system. However, electricity for pumping, whether from the ground or from streams, can still be expensive for heavily-used irrigation systems. Furthermore, the well might not provide water at a high enough pressure to irrigate effectively.

As an alternative to drilling a well, some farmers with no water on their property have informal agreements with their neighbors that allow them to pump from bodies of water on their neighbor’s property. This practice is currently illegal in Alabama, though that might soon change. The outdated law comes from a time when we did not understand that groundwater and surface water flows are connected; drawing water from a well several hundred meters from the stream can have the same impact on water levels as pumping from the stream itself (see picture).



This diagram by the USGS illustrates how irrigating from a well can impact the streams, farms, and urban areas around you. (<http://water.usgs.gov/edu/earthgwquifer.html>)

The future of water use in Alabama

With the introduction of the Tax Credit in 2012, Alabama began officially trying to increase our acres of irrigated cropland. Incentivizing irrigation is supposed to help our farmers to stay competitive with farmers in neighboring states like Georgia, where the majority of cropland is irrigated. Only 4% of Alabama cropland was irrigated in 2012 (USDA Economic Research Service). However, competing with farmers in Georgia and Tennessee is not the goal of many ASAN member farms. Small-scale farmers who are focused on profiting through direct, local sales and good land management will have to find ways to make irrigation initiatives work for them.

ASAN member farms already lead the way in sustainable practices in our state. We must actively promote responsible irrigation practices in our farming communities as irrigation becomes more wide-

spread. In addition to creating water use conflicts, a recent study by Auburn University found that irrigation has increased run-off and agricultural pollution in the southwestern corner of the state.

Handyside sees the turn to irrigation as an effort not just to improve, but ex-

pand Alabama agriculture. He is among many farmers and scientists who predict that the water-intensive crops drying out the West will need to be grown in the Southeast in the near future. The problems associated with irrigation, and the gaps in current policy related to regulating water use and access must be addressed. They will impact us whether we address them or not, but dealing with them sooner allows us to make decisions that are more thoughtful and strategic, rather than laying haphazard plans in the midst of an already unfolding crisis.

To learn more about efforts for proactive, comprehensive water policy, check out the work of the Alabama Rivers Alliance.

Thanks to Cameron Handyside and Chuck Boggs for providing information for this article.



Laying drip irrigation, photo credit Julie Hunter





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FOOD SAFETY (CONTINUED)

(Continued from page 1)

If the process is killing potential pathogens, you are exempt. Growing things that are generally not eaten raw, like winter squash or sweet potatoes? Those aren't included in the rule (right now).

Are your farm's total food sales less than \$500,000, and are half of your sales direct to an end-user like an eater, restaurant, grocery store or other food preparer that's located within the state or Indian reservation or a 275-mile radius? Then you may qualify for an exemption from the Produce Safety Rule. Food sales include all sales of food and animal feed, though – not just produce sales. If you qualify for an exemption, you still need to post a sign at your farm stand or label your product with your farm name and address to meet the regs. And honestly, if your total food sales from your business are over \$500,000 and you sell a lot less than \$250,000 in veggies, you might want to think about restructuring your business.

(*All sales numbers are calculated by the average sales over the three previous years. The numbers should be adjusted for inflation.)

Timeline for implementation

Even if you are growing fresh vegetables for a distant wholesale market, the regulations are slowly being implemented, starting with the biggest farms first. If you are selling between \$25,000 and \$250,000 in produce (and don't meet the local food criteria above), you'll need to start complying in January 2020. If you are selling more than \$250,000 in produce you'll need to comply by January 2019, and if you sell over \$500,000 in produce you'll need to meet the requirements by January 2018. If you fit in the last two categories, I sure would like to meet you. 256-520-2400.



Left: water quality and water monitoring mini-workshop led by Jayme Oates, at the 2015 ASAN Regional Food & Farm Forum at the Farm at Windy Hill in Mentone. Photo credit Alice Evans. Right: Marguerite McClintock and Dylan Taylor at a recent water testing training led by Alabama Water Watch, photo courtesy Karen Wynne.



Even if you do have to comply in 2020, the paperwork is not as painful as I expected, plus you have a few years for everyone else to figure it out.

Also, if you are doing a lot of wholesaling, your buyer probably requires you to obtain GAP (Good Agricultural Practices) certification. GAP food safety standards are not the same as the FSMA rules and cover more than just pathogens. Hopefully the two standards will become better correlated in the next few years.

The bad news

Of course there is some bad news (assuming that the above looks like good news)...

Water testing: Some farmers that have to comply will need to test their water sources for generic E. coli, especially if they are applying overhead irrigation from a pond or other surface water. Right now we don't have a lab in Alabama that tests water using the standard that the FDA is requiring, so there are some logistics to sort through. You may want to look at Alabama Water Watch's water testing program. They have an inexpensive on-farm monitoring system that can help you get a better idea whether your water sources could pose a problem.

Training: A person on staff will be required to have participated in a full-day in-person food

safety training. Those trainings should start to be offered very soon and we'll keep you posted. Lots of Power Point slides - bring something caffeinated!

Gray areas: And the law is still a moving target. Many parts, like inspections and inspectors and the like, haven't been clearly defined, and other parts like manure use will be vague until there is more research to support a set of rules. And the exemptions aren't set in stone; there is always the possibility that the rules could get strict-

er in the future.

So what should you do for now?

1. Start keeping sales records, if you haven't already. You'll need to demonstrate your farm sales history to show whether and how you'll need to comply in the future.
2. Learn about food safety as it applies to your farm. Even if you're not required to meet these standards, we are all responsible for keeping our produce safe for our customers. Hopefully there will be more opportunities in the next few years to learn practical ways to keep pathogens off of our foods.
3. Learn more about when, if and how you'll need to comply with the new produce safety rule. This is a very simplified explanation of a complex law. And, once again, stay tuned for the details ...



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START WITH THE VISCERAL: AFRO-VEGAN CHEF BRYANT TERRY IN MONTGOMERY

By Natilee McGruder

Many of us who work with food justice often wonder, how do you fix a broken food system? This September 30th, Montgomery had the opportunity to collaborate on some actionable solutions with James Beard

Leadership Award-winning chef, author and activist Bryant Terry.

The River Region Food Policy Council (RRFPC) celebrated the end of the second year of our Center for Disease Control (CDC)-funded community food assessment project, through skills and wisdom sharing, community organizing, and student engagement around fresh and local food. The goal of the RRFPC's community food assessment, called the Food Turn Up, is to provide useful information to local communities as a way to "equip each one with knowledge



Bryant Terry, photo credit Caleb Aycock.

of their food system, to empower each one to act, and to inform the future grants and policy choices in Alabama, the Black Belt and across the U.S."

The Food Turn Up is funded by the

CDC's Racial and Ethnic Approaches to Community Health (REACH) partnership, so we are able to serve the African-American populations of Lowndes, Macon, and Montgomery Counties who suffer from high rates of dietary related diseases.

Originally from Memphis, Chef Bryant Terry seeks "to empower youth to be more active in fighting for a more sustainable food system." He debuted this path when he founded an initiative for high-risk young people of color in New York City, called b-healthy, while studying history as a graduate student at NYU. Chef Terry's particular

path from community organizer to celebrated chef-tivist, author, and thought leader in the food justice movement, made this collaboration with the Food Turn Up even more meaningful.

Our first event September 30th, was a lunchtime lecture at the Fairview Farmers market, which brought together a diverse group of over 80 people including a panel that offered wisdom on our food system and our agricultural history from black elders in the Macon, Montgomery and Lowndes Counties. One elder, longtime farmer and war veteran, Mr. George Paris of Tuskegee brought a gift for the audience of beautiful sweet potatoes from his Macon County farm. This prompted Chef Terry to affectionately recall an uncle who was known to always keep a baked sweet potato in his pocket as a snack, something he suggested folks today could do in place of a processed and nutritionally devoid snack.

Ms. Flora Brown, who manages the host-

(Continued on page 11)

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BRYANT TERRY (CONT'D)

(Continued from page 10)

site Fairview Farmers Market and is one of the few black female market managers in Alabama, expressed her wish that the Montgomery community would embrace her market. Though her market has been operating for over a decade on the predominantly black west side of Montgomery, the overwhelming majority of participants at the lunchtime lecture were at the market for the very first time.

Complementing our local knowledge, Chef Terry gave an actionable example of how the consumer could solve a food system challenge: he suggested that those in attendance could organize a small weekly meet up of people committed to fresh and local food who felt they did not have the time to prepare weekly meals from scratch. Terry suggested that this group could meet at their local farmers market (supporting local production, distribution and consumption), host a group cooking session at the kitchen of a local church (skill sharing and using underutilized community resources), and then divide up the food so that every household takes home delicious high quality and quick meals for the week (cooperative economics). This technique is reminiscent of “soup swap” parties, where with a few committed households who

make enough food to divide amongst the group, all families can leave the party stocking their freezer with home cooked food.

The RRFPC welcomed a group of black homeschool families at the lunchtime lecture and lowered the average age of our audience dramatically, at the afternoon event at the EAT South Downtown Farm. Chef Terry shared his journey to a plant-based lifestyle using hip hop lyrics and storytelling with just under thirty middle school students from Common Grounds (Montgomery) and from the Tuskegee Youth Safe Haven after-school programs. We also welcomed members of the TULIP community garden (Tuskegee) and students from the Auburn University Montgomery Honors Program who enjoyed a panel featuring former Ms. Georgette Norman, Director of the Rosa Parks Museum, and Ms. Sharon Bell, a farmer in Mosses (Lowndes County).

At both events participants were treated to citrus collards with raisins and sweet potatoes blended with coconut milk and maple syrup, two amazing recipes created by Chef Terry and lovingly prepared by Ms. Geri Moss of and her new vegetarian/vegan friendly restaurant Montgomery restaurant, A Touch of Soul Café. The majority of the produce consumed was purchased from the Fairview Farmers Market and the EAT South Farm.

Everyone has a place at our table. From parents to policymakers, the RRFPC brings together people of all ages, races, genders, and belief systems, to improve the food system. Everyone has a stake in our region's food system and we can all be strong advocates for change. A good food policy council will link diverse partners like farmers, eaters, investors and chefs together and provide a space for their collaboration within the food system. Our process follows Chef Terry's personal philosophy: “start with the visceral, to ignite the cerebral and end at the political.”

Follow us @riverregionfood on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram or contact us at riverregionfood.org.



Top: Fairview Farmers Market manager Ms Flora Brown, Bryant Terry, and the author; photo credit Caleb Aycock. Bottom: Bryant Terry engaging young folks at EAT South Downtown Farm, photo credit Lindsey Lunsford.

DON'T MISS THE 2017 SSAWG CONFERENCE!



SOUTHERN SSAWG CONFERENCE

**Practical Tools & Solutions
for Sustaining Family Farms**

Jan. 25–28, 2017 • Lexington, Ky

Many in ASAN's network have had the privilege of attending the annual conference hosted by the Southern Sustainable Agriculture Working Group (or SSAWG) — some may have gotten the opportunity when the conference was in Mobile, AL, in January 2014 and 2015. It has moved on to Lexington, KY, where it celebrated its 25th anniversary last year, and this January will hold its 26th annual conference.

As most anyone who's been to the SSAWG Conference will tell you, this regional conference for sustainable farmers and sustainable food system advocates is a fantastic place to learn from and connect with the region's best and brightest. Andrew Williams of the Deep South Food Alliance says it's “like the super bowl in terms of information and practices that fit small farmers.”

The conference is for serious organic and sustainable producers, farm to school participants, urban farmers, and those interested in creating more vibrant community food systems in the South. The event offers informative pre-conference courses and field trips, practical conference sessions, networking, trade show, and Taste of Kentucky feast on Saturday night. Each year, participants go home with information to use immediately to improve their operations.

Karen Wynne of Rosita's Farm in Hartselle, AL, says “I tell anyone that's farming or interested in farming that if they only attend one conference a year, it should be the SSAWG conference. There is nothing more inspiring than being surrounded by over a thousand energetic, creative, curious, and smart farmers and supporters.”

The full conference schedule is available at: <http://www.ssaWG.org/january-2017-conference/>. Early-bird registration ends December 21, so register now!

We have created a [Facebook event](#) for Alabamians attending the conference to use to coordinate ride-sharing and room-sharing and other plans. You can access it via our main Facebook page @ASANonline. See you in Lexington!



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AS THE MATERIALS FLOW: WHAT IS YOUR COMMUNITY MADE OF?

By Lindsey Lunsford

What makes a community? The integral parts, moving layers, seams and stitches: just what is a community made of? What does it take to make a community function? These are a few of the questions myself and five others set out to understand when we ventured to Barcelona, Spain, this October. My team and I were sent from Western State Colorado University's Masters in Environmental Management Program, where for our Infrastructure and Development Course we were to help the Spanish municipality of Barberá de Valles understand their material flows.

The term "material flows" relates to the overall assessment of the movement of objects throughout a system during a particular period of time. In this case it refers to the items and resources coming into and out of the community.

Barberá De Vallés is a "peri-urban" community which means it is in between rural and urban in its location and population. Barberá De Vallés seeks to do simple things; feed its children, employ their parents, provide clean water, and provide for future generations. Barberá De Valles, like countless communities across the globe, wishes to be self-sufficient so that it can take care of its citizens without dependence on outside municipalities or investments. In order to accomplish this goal, they must understand their current assets and challenges. That is where we came in.

Now imagine your community: on any given day what is coming into and out of it? How many people are commuting, how many trucks are dropping off supplies to stores, how many are taking shipments away? What about the water in the pipes (and the pipes themselves!) – where is it going? How is electricity being supplied to the power grid, and how is it being used? How much food is being shipped in? What about the food growing from the ground? You soon realize that beyond the often fixed,



Clockwise from bottom left: Meat, vegetables, and seafood for sale in the fresh market side of the market in Barberá De Vallés. Author Lindsey Lunsford outside La Sagrada De Familia in Barcelona, Spain. All photos courtesy Lindsey Lunsford.

static notion of "community", lies a very transitory, dynamic symphony of life and its moving wonders. Although communities tend to stay in the same physical place, they are on the move in the sense that new things are being added and subtracted from them constantly.

Some may ask if there is such thing as a truly self-sufficient community. All material flows are, in the end, global and interconnected – the world can't ever truly be divided cleanly into separate, independent "communities." But that said, most communities have *far* fewer "closed loops" than they could have. There is a 100-home neighborhood 20 minutes from Amsterdam that is working to grow its own food, generate its own power, and manage its own waste, seeking to become a model self-sufficient community in the face of the growing concerns over climate change and population growth.

But this isn't a new phenomenon. Right here in Alabama, I've heard tales from the glory days when my alma mater Tuskegee University, then Tuskegee Institute, once grew its own food, made the very bricks it's built from, generated its own power, and controlled its own waste.

So what would self-sufficiency look like for Barberá De Vallés? We broke into four working groups: food, water, energy, and waste, to tackle that question.

We started at the central market. Where

better to try and understand the essence of a community than at its marketplaces?

For here food, water, energy, waste, and people all collide. Each product arrives at the stands carrying its own story of its own material flows – seed, fertilizer, water, soil, land, human labor, transportation...

The central market of Barberá de Valles was truly a beauty. Enclosed in a large building, the market was split down the middle with a national grocery store chain on one side, and on the other, a fresh market with a host of different vendors selling produce and meats. Having both the fresh market and the

grocery store housed in one facility, it seemed ideal, as community members could easily access "the best of both worlds". But I was saddened to learn that very little of the produce sold in the fresh market was grown locally.

Our team found a great deal of energy, waste, and water data, but quickly realized that this community, like many across the world, lacked significant data on its local food production potential. Being a community gardener and food justice advocate, this was especially disheartening – as I think the most tangible measuring stick for a community's self-sufficiency, no matter where you are in the world, lies with its ability to feed itself.

Overall this experience has opened my eyes to a world of connections between all of the vital resources in a community. For example, if we are to recommend to Barberá De Vallés that they increase their local agriculture production, we must factor in whether there is enough available fresh water to support that increase. Food and waste are intertwined, in that we can divert food waste from the overall waste stream and harvest it for compost. If we all can better understand the materials flowing through our communities, I believe it will fuel better planning and infrastructure for our communities' futures.

JOIN, RENEW, DONATE, OR GIVE A GIFT FOR ASAN THIS DECEMBER!

As our Board President Kirk mentions in his letter (see p2), ASAN will be doing some major organizational development and strategic planning work in the coming year. This type of work is ongoing, but it's important to periodically take a step back from the daily grind to take stock of the big picture — to examine who we are, where we've come from, where we want to go, and what it will take to get there.

In the 15 years since ASAN was founded, the world of local, sustainable food has changed tremendously. We're excited for the opportunity to tackle these questions and to chart a path forward for the coming years.

And, as a *network*, we clearly can't do that without y'all! We plan to come to you — our members, partners, and other constituents — at every step of the process for your perspectives, your ideas, your needs, resources, and feedback. You are what makes ASAN, ASAN.

If you haven't renewed your paid membership in a while (check the address label to see), or if you get the newsletter but have never taken the step to become a member... please take the time to do it now! You can also give the gift of a local, sustainable food system for a friend or family member! (asanonline.org/join-asan)

We will not be sending out an end-of-year fundraising mailer this year, but please don't let that keep you from contributing! You can donate online (asanonline.org/donate) or by mail (address on back).

Here's to a fruitful 2017!



NEWS FROM YOUR NEIGHBORS

Congratulations and a fond farewell to **Betsy Irwin**, who retired from her position at the **Moundville Archaeological Park** this fall and plans to move to Colorado to start a café/art gallery with her sister and soak up the dry mountain air.

Congratulations also to **Norbert Wilson**, who is leaving the Auburn University Ag Econ and Rural Sociology Department at the end of this semester to move to Boston, where he will take on a new role as professor at Tufts University's Friedman School of Nutrition Science and Policy. Best of luck Norbert!

Finally, congratulations to **Charlie Meek**, who retired this fall from his role as Executive Director of the **Northwest Alabama RC&D Council**. Charlie helped bring national recognition to the Council — Charlie, we hope you enjoy some well-deserved R&R. And a very warm welcome to **Lauranne James**, the Council's new director who began in October!

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.

CLASSIFIEDS & RESOURCES

Pecan Point Farm and Creamery in Hurtsboro is looking for a fall/winter intern or employee. Duties related to cow dairy and creamery, grassfed beef, layer hens and ducks, pecans, beehives, commercial kitchen, and more. Housing and food from the farm provided. Small stipend may be paid depending on skills or as skills grow. For more information contact George Rogers (706-835-5985) or Becky Ward-Rogers (334-667 6902), or email pecanpointfarm@bellsouth.net. Farm website is pecanpointfarm.com.

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

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Donations and annual dues are tax-deductible.

☐ Individual Supporter: \$25

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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

December 2 – online
Webinar: All Bugs Good and Bad

December 2-4 – Nashville
Tennessee Local Food Conference

December 4-6 – Tuskegee
74th Annual Professional Agricultural Workers Conference (PAWC)

December 9 – Winona, MS
Alliance Field Day

December 13 – Fairhope
Mobile Bay Green Drinks – Fairhope

December 13 – Montgomery
Veg Out Potluck

January 25-28 – Lexington, KY
Southern SAWG “Practical Tools & Solutions for Sustaining Family Farms” Conference

February 15-17 – Tuskegee
125th Annual Farmers Conference

February 17-19 – Tuskegee
National Goat Conference

February 17-18 – Atlanta
Georgia Organics Conference

Submit your event to our events calendar!

Email alice@asanonline.org, and be sure to include:

- Name of event
- Host group and contact information
- Location (including full address)
- Date/time
- Price
- Link to event website, Facebook event page, and/or flyer, if there is one.
- Short (3-4 sentences) description of the event written in "third person" (ie "XYZ Club invites you to join them for their annual meeting" vs "join us for our annual meeting")
- Please send information in the body of the email, not simply a flyer or attachment. We can link to something already online but can't upload a PDF flyer.

ASAN

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