



*Sustainable
Local Food
Policy
Council
Report:*

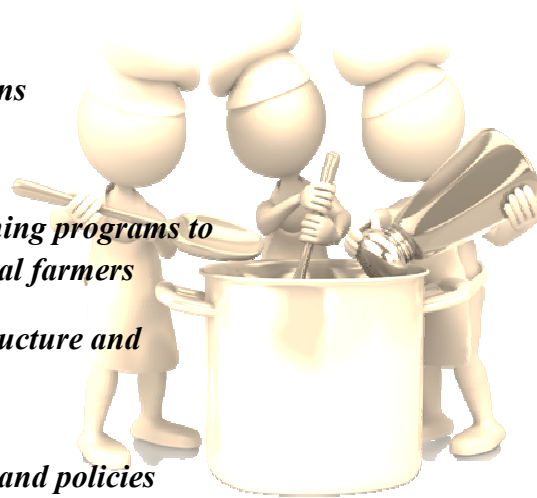
*Recommendations for
a Sustainable Local
Food Economy*

*Presented to the Louisiana
Legislature*

January 12, 2012

ACT 388 Policy Council	
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Pursuant to House Act 388 of the 2010 Regular Session of the Louisiana Legislature, the Louisiana Sustainable Local Food Policy Council (the council) prepared a report to sustain the local food economy in Louisiana and make recommendations to further enhance the agriculture economy. The council consists of a diverse group of local food interests and agricultural stakeholders throughout the state. It is a collaborative effort with the goal of identifying opportunities that will build a sustainable local food economy, and, in turn, will help stimulate job creation and economic development while preserving farmland and increasing consumer access to fresh, locally grown food.

Louisiana's local agricultural economy is very important to the state and contributes over \$9 billion to Louisiana. The ultimate goal is to forge partnerships throughout the entire Louisiana food system and open doors for all facets of agriculture. Many of the recent economic development projects that have located in the state are agriculturally based.

In identifying sustainable local food policies for Louisiana, the council discussed the following policy issues:

- Increase the amount of sustainable local food in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and School Breakfast program in Louisiana public schools, and increase the availability of sustainable local food under public assistance programs, including the SNAP/Food Stamp Program at local farmers markets.
- Promoting urban and backyard gardens for the purposes of improving the health of citizens lowering food costs for Louisianans.
- Potential impacts that the production of sustainable local food would have on economic development, both the direct impacts for the producers of sustainable local food and the actual and potential indirect impacts.
- Identification of local and regional efforts that could provide information and training programs to assist entrepreneurs and local farmers pursuing opportunities related to a sustainable local food economy.
- Issues regarding strengthening local infrastructure and entrepreneurial efforts related to a sustainable local food economy.

In Louisiana and across the United States, fresh local food has received much well-warranted attention. When businesses, institutions, and consumers purchase locally grown produce, the money is put back into the local economy and directly into the hands of producers.

A local sustainable food economy in Louisiana would aid in building our rural communities through the development of local and regional food systems and value-added agriculture, and provide direct-marketing opportunities for producers and producer groups. Louisiana has a cornucopia of diverse agriculture; the Sustainable Local Food Policy Council identified issues and recommendations that will help develop policies that will protect our bounty for future generations.

The Louisiana Sustainable Local Food Policy Council legislation was sponsored by Representative Scott M. Simon during the 2010 legislative session and is housed within the Louisiana Department of Agriculture and Forestry (LDAF). It was created for the purpose of building a local food economy, [therefore] benefitting Louisiana by creating jobs, stimulating statewide economic development, preservation of farmlands and water resources, increasing consumer access to fresh and nutritious foods, and providing greater food security.

The policy council met in September 2010, November 2010, February 2011, May 2011, September 2011, and January 2012. Summaries of these meetings are contained in the next section of this report. Meeting minutes, presentation materials, and background materials that comprise the basis for this report are available by contacting the Louisiana Legislature.



The first meeting of the Louisiana Sustainable Local Food Policy Council convened on Wednesday September 8, 2010 at the State Capitol in Baton Rouge. An overview of the bill, Act 388, was presented and members of the council were introduced. Representative Scott Simon appointed Dr. Carrie Castille as Co-Chair of the council, and Robert's Rules of Order were adopted. The members of the council shared their expectations and roles. Kathleen Allen from the Louisiana Board of Ethics gave a brief presentation explaining financial disclosure and circumstances that require disclosure.

Following the councils' administrative actions, highlights of local food systems in the state were discussed. Tables 1-5 outline guest speakers from this and all subsequent meetings as well as the issues that were deliberated.

Louisiana Sustainable Local Food Policy Council Wednesday, September 8, 2010, 10:00am State Capitol, House Committee Room 4 900 North Third Street Baton Rouge, LA 70802	
Guest Speaker	Topic
Dr. Brad Leger, Director, LaYapp Louisiana State University Agricultural Center	Louisiana Young Ag Producers Program (LaYAPP)
Dr. John Westra Louisiana State University, Agricultural Center	Louisiana Market Maker
Dickie Brennan Palace Café & Dickie Brennan's Steakhouse	Integration of Local Foods in Louisiana Restaurants
Stephen Santillo Blue Dog Café and Jole's LA Bistro	Obstacles Locating Fresh Foods in Restaurants
Guy Gremillion Capitol City Produce	Voluntary Certification Program that Certifies Individuals, Famers, etc. Are Selling Safe, Sanitary Products
Vince Ferachi Capitol City Produce	Issues Regarding the Promotion of Local Food, Including Tracing the Food Path From the Rural Grower, to Shipper, to the End User With the Goal being to Have Local Schools, Nursing Homes, and State Hospitals Procure Local Food Instead of the Cheapest Available

Table 1. Policy Council Meeting Outline September 8, 2010

Louisiana Sustainable Local Food Policy Council Tuesday, November 16, 2010 10:00 am- 12:00 pm Louisiana 4-H Museum 8592 Highway 1, Suite 2 Mansura, LA 71350	
Guest Speaker	Topic
Alice Dubois Future Farmers of America (FFA) Ponchatoula, LA	Student Development Activities, Chicago Urban Agriculture, Strawberry Farm Business, Special Needs students' Involvement with Projects, Trials with Hydroponic Gardening Project, Community Garden at Headstart
Marguerite Constantine WesMar Farms	Non-Traditional Farms, Farm Stays (Agrotourism), Education Programs, Procuring Goat Milk on WIC
Trent Bonnette Brown Bag Gourmet	Difficulties Getting Fresh Local Food for his restaurant including the logistics of obtaining certain items, Implementing Local Food Distribution Systems, Tax incentives for Louisiana Restaurants that purchase local food

Table 2. Policy Council Meeting Outline November 16, 2010

Louisiana Sustainable Local Food Policy Council Wednesday, February 2, 2011 10:00 am-12:00 Tulane Tidewater Building 1440 Canal Street New Orleans, LA 70112	
Guest Speaker	Topic
Natalie Jayroe and Ashley Graham*	Overview of the New Orleans Food Policy Advisory Committee
John Dupre, Judy Stracener, Sylvia H. Dunn, Clair Angelle Blanchard, Cecelia E. Enault, LDN, RD, Jo Lynne Corroero, Renee Lanie Sherville, MS, LDN, RD Louisiana Department of Education	Panel Discussion, Regarding Louisiana School Lunch and Nutrition Programs
Bill Ludwig, Regional Administrator, Food and Nutrition Service's (FNS) Southwest Region, USDA	Ending hunger in the region by 2015, Supporting Breakfast in the Classroom Program and Summer Programs
Natalie Jayroe and David Coffman*	Overview of Food Banks and Food System Assessment and Hunger-Free Louisiana.
Kathryn "Kiki" Fontenot* Louisiana State University Agricultural Center	Overview of Louisiana School Gardens

Table 3. Policy Council Meeting Outline, February 2, 2011

*Presentation Available Online: www.repscottsimon.com/food_policy_council

Louisiana Sustainable Local Food Policy Council Friday, May 13, 2011 9:00 am-11:30 Covey Rise Lodge 24009 Singing Waterfall Road Husser, LA 70442	
Guest Speaker	Topic
Jim Jenkins Louisiana Department of Agriculture and Forestry	Overview of Louisiana Meat Processing Industry and Meat Inspection Program
Dr. Gary Hay	Overview of Louisiana Livestock Industry
Dr. Karl Harborth Louisiana State University Agricultural Center	Discussion of Current Trends in the Livestock Industry: Grass-Fed Beef
Dr. Theresia Lavergne Louisiana State University Agricultural Center	Discussion of Current Trends in the Livestock Industry: Free Range Poultry
Gary Cazaubon Louisiana Department of Health and Hospitals	Discussion of Current Trends in the Livestock Industry: Artisan Cheese

Table 4. Policy Council Meeting Outline, May 13, 2011

Louisiana Sustainable Local Food Policy Council Tuesday, September 27, 2011 9:00AM-12:00 Bayou Terrebonne Waterlife Museum 7910 Park Avenue Houma, LA 70364	
Guest Speaker	Topic
Jack Isaac	Overview of the Louisiana Fisheries Industry
Robert Romaine	Overview of the Louisiana Aquaculture
Kim Chauvin Mariah Jade Shrimp	Traceability and Certification in the Louisiana Shrimping Industry
Thomas Hymel Louisiana State University Agricultural Center	Delcambre Direct/Louisiana Direct
Gary Bauer	Marine Stewardship Council Certification
Mike Voisin	Overview of the Louisiana Oyster Industry
Dr. John Bell HAACP	HAACP, Food Safety, etc.

Table 5. Policy Council Meeting Outline, September 27, 2011

*Presentation Available Online: www.repscottsimon.com/food_policy_council

One of the goals of the council is to increase the amount of sustainable local food in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and School Breakfast Program in Louisiana's public schools. In order to help identify issues affecting school nutrition programs, a subcommittee was created at the February 2011 meeting. The subcommittee was led by Dr. Judy Stracener of the Louisiana Department of Education.

According to a February 1, 2011, memo from the USDA, Louisiana law cannot mandate that schools with a federal breakfast or lunch program purchase local food for these programs.⁴ However, according to the 2008 Farm Bill regulations, schools are allowed to use local or geographic preference in the bid language. Specifically, "The Secretary shall allow schools to use a geographic preference for the procurement of unprocessed agricultural products, both locally grown and locally raised." The 2008 Farm Bill also requires the Secretary to encourage schools to purchase unprocessed agricultural products "to the maximum extent practicable and appropriate."

The Farm to School Initiative is an effort to connect schools with regional or local farms in order to serve healthy meals using locally procured foods. Farm to School activities may vary from community to community depending on demographics; however, the basic goals remain the same:

- To meet the diverse needs of school nutrition programs in an efficient manner;
- To support regional and local farmers and thereby strengthen local food systems; and
- To provide support for health and nutrition education (FNS, 2011)

Issues to consider in the creation of a Louisiana Farm to School program:

- Food safety should be considered the program's number one priority; therefore it's crucial to include language in the legislation about soil testing, the regulation of chemical pesticides and herbicides, and mandating that all eligible farms be inspected to ensure they employ 'Good Agricultural Practices.'
- Provide educational programs and resources on 'Good Agricultural Practices' to local farms in preparation for the program's inspection.²
- School districts generally require food providers to carry up to \$1 million in liability insurance. This stipulation could be cost prohibitive for small, local

¹The February 1, 2011 USDA memo regarding local procurement can be found at the following link: http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/governance/Policy-Memos/2011/SP18-2011_os.pdf

²A manual on 'Good Agricultural Practices' produced by the Joint Institute for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition can be found at the following link: http://jifsan.umd.edu/training/gaps_manual.php

farms that are otherwise eligible to participate in the Farm to School program. Further study is required to determine if this \$1 million coverage in liability insurance is actually necessary.

- If it is found to be necessary, include language in the legislation to create a liability cap for agricultural products of farmers that bring in less than \$1 million in sales.
- Additionally, language should be included in the legislation to protect participating schools. Schools that procure their food from local sources should be deemed not liable in the case of a lawsuit brought against the school as a result of serving local food to students.
- A multi-level educational program should be coordinated and administered to teach students, instructors, kitchen staff, food service providers, retailers, and farmers about growing, production, and handling of local foods. This program would be geared not only to educate, but build a demand for local, seasonal products, and increase the capacity of local farmers. Targeted curriculum currently exists for students called “Nutrition Across the Curriculum.”
- The Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program (FFVP) provides all children in participating schools with a variety of free fresh fruits and vegetables throughout the school day. It is an effective and creative way of introducing fresh fruits and vegetables as healthy snack options. The FFVP also encourages schools to develop partnerships at the state and local level for support in implementing and operating the program (FNS, 2011)

In the past, the Louisiana State University AgCenter has partnered with nearby schools to provide land for gardens. A recommendation was made to expand the model turn over state-owned property to municipalities to start community gardens.³

Issues to consider when turning over state property to municipalities for the use of community gardens:

- Create an inventory of state property and determine which sites would be best-suited to allow municipalities and residents to cultivate community gardens.
- Expanding current legislation that limits the liability of property owners who create written agreements with other parties to share their facilities for recreational purposes. R.S. 9.2800.22 currently covers schools that enter into a joint-use agreement with a second party for the purpose of conducting or engaging in recreational activity on school grounds afterhours. The Louisiana legislature should expand R.S. 9.2800.22 to include any state or private property that will be used to cultivate a community garden by another entity.
- Including stipulations in written agreements to mandate soil testing, regulate the use of pesticide and herbicide, and ensure the allowance of onsite produce sales.

³Toolkits for community garden agreements can be found at the following link:
(<http://www.nplanonline.org/nplan/products/CommunityGardenToolkit>)

In order to increase the availability of local sustainable food throughout the state, Louisiana should expand the use of EBT card readers at farmers' markets to encompass all Louisiana farmers' markets, thus ensuring that state residents have access to local produce.

Issues to consider in the expansion of the EBT card reader access:

- The state of Iowa was able to expand the use of EBT card readers at farmers' markets by partnering with commodity organizations and the USDA to finance transaction fees for credit, debit, and EBT purchases. Other model programs exist in New York and Texas.
- Louisiana is currently working with USDA and other organizations to identify funding sources to provide EBT card readers at Louisiana farmers markets.

Additionally, it was recommended that the state identify sources of funds to develop innovative social marketing efforts to forge long-term relationships between vulnerable citizens and farmers markets.

Examples in increasing activity with the Farmers' Market Nutrition Program (FMNP):

- Offering seniors additional market vouchers for Louisiana milk or seafood would simultaneously provide markets and support Louisiana agriculture. Furthermore, Louisiana should provide matching funds to increase the yearly FMNP voucher from about \$20 to \$60.
- This should also include the Department of Health and Hospitals agreeing to accept Cash Value Vouchers (CVV) for the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women Infants and Children (WIC) at Farmers Markets and other retail produce outlets that are certified to accept FMNP vouchers.

Economic Impact and Training programs to assist entrepreneurs and local farmers

Previous research proves that a sustainable local food economy has the potential to have both direct and indirect positive impact on producers, consumers, and the overall economic development of regions and communities.

Sustainable farms support local economies by providing jobs for members of the community and purchasing supplies from local businesses. A University of Minnesota study showed that small farms with gross incomes of \$100,000 or less made almost 95 percent of farm-related expenditures within their local communities (Levins & Richard, 2009).

Studies have shown that small, locally owned farms have a multiplier effect: for every dollar the farm spends, a percentage remains in the local economy, contributing to the economic health of the community (Swenson, 2009).

Many programs exist that offer training and support to budding entrepreneurs. Renewed efforts should be made to target farmers and producers specifically. This is especially true regarding our future generation of farmers. Training should include: business training courses at local universities and colleges as well expanding the amount of technical assistance offered by agriculture extension agents to ensure crop expertise on commodities with high potential for local farming.

The average age of the Louisiana farmer is 57; because of this, it is paramount that the barriers to entry in this vital market are not so great that our young people are discouraged from choosing to become agricultural producers. The Louisiana State University AgCenter offers a one-year intensive classroom and hands-on, mentor-based experience that makes high school juniors and seniors aware of the options available in food and fiber production, and encourages them to consider a career in agriculture through the Louisiana Young Ag Producers Program (LSU Ag, 2011). Further recommendations include:

- Several states have implemented policies that encourage and support “Direct Farm Marketing” by providing training, technical assistance, and support programs that offer grants and loans to new farmers and those with limited resources.
- The California legislature has included specific sections related to Direct Farm Marketing in the California Food and Agricultural Code.⁴
- Technical assistance should also support grocers and other retailers to help source locally grown produce.
- Public safety and health are of utmost importance, as well as training farmers in good agricultural practices is key to developing local markets for farmers and producers to sell products.

⁴ See Drake Agricultural Law Journal: <http://www.statefoodpolicy.org/docs/aglawjrn.pdf> pp. 428-43

Louisiana currently has excellent tools to help strengthen our local infrastructure that reward entrepreneurial efforts:

Delcambre Direct Seafood – The Twin Parish Port Commission, along with the LSU Ag Center and Sea Grant, have created a marketplace where consumers are able to contact seafood producers (fisherman) directly to purchase fresh shrimp and other seafood when they arrive at the dock (DD, 2011).

Louisiana MarketMaker is an online marketing resource that was originally developed to give Illinois farmers greater access to regional markets; it is now available in Louisiana.

- MarketMaker is a FREE internet marketing tool that farmers' markets and other direct food sellers can use to find local producers, identify potential markets, and promote their market place. MarketMaker also helps consumers find food markets that offer fresh and locally grown foods. MarketMaker allows consumers, farmers, ranchers, fisherman and other food-related entrepreneurs throughout the state to connect with each other directly.
- MarketMaker provides internet marketing exposure, which is usually costly, to any size farming operation. The producers sell more of their product directly to the consumer allowing them to keep 100% of the food dollar (MM, 2011).

Agriculture Farmland Preservation

The council also deems it important to urge and request that the Legislature allow state, parish and local governments to purchase conservation easements from owners of quality farmland.

- An agricultural and forestry conservation easement is an interest in land which represents the right to prevent development or improvement of a parcel for any purpose other than agricultural and forestry production;
- This program is to preserve the State's agricultural and forestry land base by helping to ensure the continued viability of Louisiana's agricultural and forestry industry
- These preserved farms contribute not only to a secure land base for agricultural and forestry operations, but also to a host of other quality of life benefits that accrue at both the local, parish and state level
- The agricultural and forestry conservation easement may be granted by a farmland owner to a state, parish or local government agricultural and forestry land preservation program
- The preservation of farmland makes good economic sense on many levels
- It helps preserve the State's agricultural and forestry industry; contributes to the local tax roll, and generates tax revenue
- Because Louisiana continues to experience a strong market, there exists an ever-increasing pressure to convert farmland to development throughout the State
- This is causing the rapid escalation of easement values throughout Louisiana
- The rapid escalation in easement values means that fewer farmland acres can be preserved with the same amount of program funding

Louisiana Buy Local Purchase Incentive Program

In 2011, Senator Fred Mills created the Louisiana Buy Local Purchase Incentive Program through Act 330, to promote the consumption of Louisiana agricultural products by granting incentive payments to certain restaurant establishments for purchases of Louisiana agricultural products. The act was signed by Governor in June 2011.

Other Strategies, Initiatives and Policies to Consider

Restaurants that use Louisiana seafood, beef, rice, yams, corn or other state-grown or harvested products could get a 4 percent rebate for buying and serving those items to patrons. For example, every dollar of (the 4 percent) incentive means a restaurant has to buy \$25 of local product. The program promotes the idea of the sustainability of a food supply and buying local products and the funds would come from fees assessed by the various industries themselves. If one segment of the farming or fishing industry doesn't want to participate but another segment does, the restaurants that use the products of the participating industry will be eligible for the 4 percent rebate. The maximum the fund can have is \$7 million in each fiscal year. The Louisiana Department of Agriculture and Forestry will administer the initiative. The initiative is a three-year pilot program that ends in 2014, but can be extended by lawmakers.

Additionally, the “Dine Fresh Louisiana” program will be created to recognize the Louisiana restaurants and chefs that are purchasing Louisiana seafood as well as fresh, local and seasonal agricultural products on their menus. The program is designed to encourage farmers and fishers to continue producing and supplying restaurants with homegrown products, and creates an incentive for restaurants to “buy local.”

Louisiana chefs recognize the value in supporting local for not only their bottom lines, but also for the difference Louisiana local products and produce make; after all, **Louisiana fresh, Louisiana first.** Louisiana restaurants participating in the program will feature the “Dine Fresh Louisiana” brand on their menus and the restaurants will be marketed throughout Louisiana and the nation. Therefore, it is recommended that the Louisiana Buy Local Purchase Incentive Program is fully funded and implemented.

Healthy Food Retail Financing Program

The council recommends the funding of Act 252, a statewide financing program that provides grants and loans to healthy food retail ventures that improve access to fresh fruits and vegetables and other affordable healthy food in underserved communities, especially in low-income and rural areas. This program should be structured and capitalized as a public-private partnership that creates financial capital specifically for healthy food retail development.

The state of Louisiana should allocate or identify resources to secure \$5 million to capitalize this Healthy Food Retail Financing Program. State resources should be used to leverage additional financial capital from sources including private sector financial institutions, operator equity, foundation and federal grants, and New Markets Tax Credits — and to capitalize a revolving loan fund.

Other Strategies, Initiatives and Policies to Consider

The Program should advance health and economic opportunity, in particular these goals:

Providing competitive financing for healthy food retail ventures in underserved communities; increasing access to affordable healthy food to improve diets and health; promote the sale and consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables, particularly Louisiana grown; and supporting expanded economic opportunities in low-income and rural areas.

The Program should be established as a public-private partnership managed by the Louisiana Department of Agriculture and Forestry and implemented in cooperation with a community development lender and a nonprofit organization with expertise in food access and health.

The successful Pennsylvania Fresh Food Financing Initiative provides a strong model. Program partners should also coordinate with nutrition assistance and education programs, so that Louisiana citizens are both able and encouraged to make healthy food choices.

Diverse healthy food retail projects that should be eligible for Program financing, include:

New supermarkets and grocery stores; store expansion and infrastructure upgrades; farmers' markets; food cooperatives; and mobile markets and delivery projects. The program must be comprehensive and sufficiently flexible to meet the needs of diverse underserved communities and projects.

Similarly, the lending partner should work to meet the needs of the project and community when determining suitable financial products.

The Program should make one-time awards of grants and loans through a rolling, competitive selection process.

It should utilize a two-stage applicant review process that is both transparent and straightforward. *Eligibility* for financing should require all projects to: benefit an underserved community; demonstrate a meaningful commitment to sell fresh fruits and vegetables; accept SNAP/Food Stamp Program and WIC; and be sustainable. *Financial awards* to eligible applicants should reflect the: viability of the project and operator; ability to repay debt; project and community need; promotion of fresh produce, particularly Louisiana grown; and expansion of economic opportunity.

Strong program oversight and project monitoring mechanisms should ensure that State resources help finance quality, healthy food retail ventures that positively impact the health and economic well-being of underserved communities statewide.

Creation of Regional Food Policy Task Forces

Many local food economy issues are local or regional in scope. For example, a farmer who was a guest speaker at one of the council meetings was forced to cease his roadside produce operation due to a city ordinance. This is an individual who employs about 15-20 people in his local community. One of the reasons stated for his being made to close his business was that he was unable to compete with grocery stores.

Another example cited at a meeting was the lack of a packing plant that has curtailed hog and cattle production in north Louisiana and the inability to hire local labor, even though able bodied, employable folks live in their area. For this reason, a recommendation has been made to continue the goals of the council through local or regional food policy task forces to address issues at the local level. The council is scheduled to terminate in June of 2012 and it is recommended that the council be replaced by these local/regional food policy task forces.

Expansion of USDA Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program

The Council recommends expanding the USDA's Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program in Louisiana beyond the current 14 school districts in order to provide free fruit and vegetable snacks to all Louisiana students who qualify. Notwithstanding the fact that the Department of Education (DOE) has exhausted the federally allotted program resources on 14 of the Louisiana school districts, the council urges the DOE to apply for additional funding to extend this program to all qualifying Louisiana schools. ***No Fiscal Note Required***

Creation of Louisiana Farm to School Program

The Council also urges the state to create a Farm to School program to provide Louisiana schools with local procurement options. The Farm to School program could be a collaborative effort between the Louisiana Department of Agriculture and Forestry and the Louisiana Department of Education. Model legislation from North Carolina and Texas Farm to School programs is referenced.⁵

⁵ Model legislation can be found at the following links: North Carolina Farm to School (<http://www.ncga.state.nc.us/Sessions/2009/Bills/House/PDF/H1832v1.pdf>), Kentucky (<http://www.lrc.ky.gov/Statrev/ACTS2006/0244.pdf>), Review of all state legislation (http://www.farmentoschool.org/files/publications_177.pdf)

Conduct the “Louisiana Food Access Summit”

Many states have developed and enacted legislation to support or end hunger in their states by 2015. With nearly one in eight Louisiana households facing food insecurity, the Louisiana Legislature must take action to support these families and communities. A “Louisiana Food Access Summit” will be convened in the fall of 2012 to bring together state departments, non-profits, businesses and others involved in the local food economy to identify strategies and goals. The three priority areas for this summit include:

- A plan to end hunger in Louisiana including widespread use of EBT at Farmers’ Markets
- An exploration of a farm to school initiative in Louisiana
- An evaluation on the progress of establishing local and regional food policy taskforces throughout Louisiana

Continue to Fund the Louisiana Nutrition Assistance Program

In the past four years, Louisiana has provided funding for the Louisiana Nutrition Assistance Program. In the first two years of this program \$10 million was used to purchase more than 18 million pounds of food that was distributed throughout food banks in the state. This funding was used exclusively to purchase Louisiana- grown, produced, caught, and processed food items directly from Louisiana owned businesses.

This program supports economic development in the agriculture sector and provides much needed food resources to families that are at risk of hunger. This program should be incorporated into the annual budget with a dedicated line item and set amount of funding.

Fund the Healthy Food Retail Financing Program

The state of Louisiana should fund the Healthy Food Retail Financing Program, created under Act 252 during the 2009 regular session, and develop a statewide financing program that provides grants and loans to healthy food retail ventures that improve access to fresh fruits and vegetables and other affordable healthy food in underserved communities, especially in low-income and rural areas. This program should be structured and capitalized as a public-private partnership that creates financial capital specifically for healthy food retail development. State resources could be used to leverage additional financial capital from sources including private sector financial institutions, operator equity, foundation and federal grants, and New Markets Tax Credits — and to capitalize a revolving loan fund.

Fund the Louisiana Buy Local Purchase Incentive Program

Further, the Council urges the state to identify funds to support Act 330. The bill creates the “Louisiana Buy Local Purchase Incentive Program” to promote the consumption of Louisiana agricultural products by granting incentive payments to certain restaurant establishments for purchases of Louisiana agricultural products.

Create the Agriculture and Forestry Lands Conservation Easement Fund

The establishment of the Agriculture and Forestry Land Conservation Easement Fund seeks to preserve as much land as possible, quickly, to maximize the preservation of land into the future. We hereby urge and request the Legislature to allow state, parish and local governments to develop a program that would allow the purchase of conservation easements from owners of quality farmland in Louisiana.

In accordance with Act 388 of the 2010 Regular Session of the Louisiana Legislature, The Sustainable Local Food Policy Council has prepared a report that addresses the need for a Sustainable Local Food economy in the state of Louisiana.

This report highlights specific criteria for establishing a sustainable local food economy. Primarily, the council assessed the issue of what type of foods are being served to public school students under the National School Lunch Program and the School Breakfast Program and the possibility of increasing the amount of sustainable local food used in these programs.

The council further analyzed the possibility of making sustainable local food available through public assistance programs, including the possibility of SNAP/Food Stamp Program use at local farmers markets. Also considered was the possibility of potentially promoting urban and backyard gardens for the purpose of improving the health of citizens, and making use of idle urban property in an effort to lower food costs for Louisianans.

An evaluation of the potential impacts that the production of sustainable local food would have on economic development, both the direct impacts for the producers of sustainable local food and the actual and potential indirect impacts was also assessed.

Further, the Council identified a myriad of local regional efforts that could provide information and training programs to assist entrepreneurs and local farmers pursuing opportunities related to a sustainable local food economy. Over the course of the study issues regarding strengthening local infrastructure and entrepreneurial efforts related to a sustainable local food economy were identified, as were programs that are already in place.

Through the recommendations made by the Council and with a consolidated effort on behalf of public and private citizens, a sustainable local food economy can be achieved in the state of Louisiana.

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