



Mississippi Farm to School Interagency Council

**PROGRESS REPORT TO THE MISSISSIPPI LEGISLATURE
ON FARM TO SCHOOL IN MISSISSIPPI**

December 2014

Table of Contents

Executive Summary	2
Council Authority: House Bill No. 718	4
Interagency Farm to School Council Members	7
Acknowledgements	7
Interagency Farm to School Accomplishments.....	8
Farm to School	11
Challenges Related to Farm to School in Mississippi.....	11
Key Findings of the Council.....	16
Overview of the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and School Breakfast Program (SBP) in Mississippi.....	16
Expenditures for Meals Served in Mississippi Public Schools.....	17
The Impact of the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act on School Meal Expenditures	18
Purchasing of Food for Mississippi Schools.....	19
Farm to School Purchases in Mississippi	19
Farm to School Programs and Activities in Mississippi.....	22
Findings from Survey of Child Nutrition Directors.....	24
Findings from Survey of Farmers	25
Findings from Public Comments and Stakeholders Meeting	25
Current Programs Available to Assist and Promote Farm to School Efforts	26
Findings from Research into Surrounding States’ Farm to School Programs	32
Recommendations.....	33
Appendix.....	37
Appendix I. Income from USDA to Schools.....	37
Appendix II. Vicksburg Warren School District Farm to School Case Study.....	38

Executive Summary

Farm to school is any commercial relationship where a school purchases locally grown or locally raised agricultural products to serve in school meals. In addition, farm to school can include educational programs for students on local agriculture and nutrition. Farm to school programs are becoming more prevalent across the nation. At the national level, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the Department of Defense (DoD) provide assistance for the effort to get more locally grown produce in school lunches.

The State of Mississippi has been actively engaged in purchasing Mississippi grown produce for school lunch programs since 2002 through the Mississippi DoD Farm to School Program, a partnership of the Mississippi Department of Education (MDE), and the Mississippi Department of Agriculture and Commerce (MDAC), and the USDA/DoD Fresh Program. The Mississippi DoD Farm to School Program has experienced growth in terms of volume and variety of local produce purchased by schools. For school year 2014-2015, schools ordered 32,927 cases of nineteen different Mississippi products totaling \$1,034,869.77, an increase of 334 percent from the previous school year when orders totaled \$238,626.

Additional farm to school purchases are made by local school districts that may choose to purchase local foods directly from farmers. The Mississippi State University Extension Service (MSU-ES) and Alcorn State University Extension Program (ASUEP) have also been actively involved in encouraging the purchasing of local crops for schools. Other farm to school activities such as educational efforts for school personnel, farmers, and students as well as school gardens are being implemented by state agencies, local school districts, and various non-governmental entities.

The Interagency Farm to School Council, formed by the Legislature in 2013, has spent the last 18 months researching the current farm to school efforts in Mississippi and state and federal regulations and procedures involved, identifying the concerns of farmers and school nutrition directors, and providing needed education for both groups. Purchasing local food is a widely shared goal but involves a complex web of federal, state, and local governmental entities interacting with a developing marketplace to provide safe products for vulnerable consumers, school children.

While the interest in farm to school and purchasing locally is growing, some existing challenges to expanding this marketplace further include:

- The limited availability and seasonality of crops in Mississippi. Most Mississippi crops are grown when students are not in school.
- The competition for locally grown food by farmers markets and restaurants can result in a limited supply.
- Limited funds for purchase of local products. Schools in the state receive USDA reimbursement funds for school lunches. Out of those funds, the average amount spent

per meal by schools for the purchase of both fruits and vegetables is 19 cents for the 101,773,496 student meal equivalencies served.

- A lack of knowledge by school food service directors and farmers about the requirements to sell to schools.

The Council recommends the following actions to be taken to promote and expand farm to school in Mississippi:

- Encourage continued cooperation between state and federal agencies, universities, and non-governmental organizations to promote farm to school efforts.
- Continue educational efforts by the MDE and the MDAC through the development and distribution of educational materials and training provided through workshops and seminars for child nutrition directors and farmers.
- Expand MDAC's farmtoschoolweek.org website to include additional educational materials and resources to educate schools and farmers on farm to school.
- Continue cost-share programs that provide financial assistance to farmers receiving approved food safety certifications such as USDA's Good Agriculture Practices/Good Handling Practices (GAP/GHP).
- Develop a safe food handling and growing training/certification made available by the Mississippi State University Extension Service and/or the Alcorn State University Extension Program that would be made available to farmers interested in selling to schools.
- Continue efforts by MSU and ASU to encourage food hubs and the use of existing and new vegetable processing facilities.
- Encourage state agencies, school districts, universities, and non-governmental organizations to apply for funding opportunities made available through federal and state agencies and private foundations to promote farm to school.
- Continue efforts that create opportunities and avenues for farmers and schools to connect with one another and have a dialogue regarding farm to school.

Council Authority: House Bill No. 718

House Bill 718

(As Sent to Governor)

AN ACT TO CREATE AN INTERAGENCY FARM TO SCHOOL COUNCIL TO FACILITATE THE PROCUREMENT AND USE OF LOCALLY GROWN AND LOCALLY RAISED AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTS IN SCHOOL MEALS IN ORDER TO IMPROVE THE QUALITY OF FOOD SERVED IN SCHOOLS AND TO SUPPORT THE STATE ECONOMY BY GENERATING NEW INCOME FOR MISSISSIPPI FARMERS; TO DESCRIBE THE MEMBERSHIP OF THE COUNCIL; TO SET FORTH THE DUTIES AND PURPOSES OF THE COUNCIL; AND FOR RELATED PURPOSES.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF MISSISSIPPI:

SECTION 1. (1) There is created an Interagency Farm to School Council, to identify models and methods of promoting farm to school programs in the state in order to improve the availability of healthy, fresh foods in schools and to promote the economic development of Mississippi farmers and food producers.

- (2) The council shall be composed of the following members:
 - (a) One (1) person who represents the State Department of Education, appointed by the State Superintendent of Public Education;
 - (b) One (1) person who represents the Mississippi Department of Agriculture and Commerce, appointed by the Commissioner of Agriculture and Commerce;
 - (c) One (1) person who represents the State Department of Health, appointed by the State Health Officer;
 - (d) One (1) person who represents the Mississippi State University Extension Program;
 - (e) One (1) person who represents the Alcorn State University Extension Program;
 - (f) One (1) person who represents food service directors in Mississippi public schools, appointed by the State Superintendent of Public Education;
 - (g) One (1) person who represents a nonprofit organization in Mississippi working to promote farm to school programs, appointed by the Commissioner of Agriculture and Commerce;
 - (h) One (1) person who represents poultry producers in Mississippi, appointed by the President of the Mississippi Poultry Association;
 - (i) One (1) person who represents the Mississippi Farm Bureau Federation.
- (3) In appointing members of the council, the appointing authority shall ensure that the members reflect the diversity of this state, with members representing rural areas, urban areas and different geographical regions of the state.
- (4) The council is charged with facilitating the creation and growth of farm to school programs in communities throughout the State of Mississippi through studying, recommending and administering best practices for creating farm to school programs. This can be accomplished with actions including, but not limited to:

- (a) Creating and administering an assessment or survey designed to evaluate what specific programs or efforts would be the most effective in increasing the number of farm to school programs in the State of Mississippi;
 - (b) Helping to develop and expand local pilot farm to school programs in Mississippi;
 - (c) Notifying and assisting interested schools, farms, and community organizations in applying for funding sources and grants related to supporting and decreasing the cost of purchasing locally grown and locally raised agricultural products to serve in school meals;
 - (d) Assisting Mississippi farmers in marketing and building commercial relationships with food service directors in schools;
 - (e) Developing or administering training programs for Mississippi farmers related to marketing crops, food safety, processing crops, business management, liability and risk management, and any other topics deemed appropriate by the council;
 - (f) Working with the Mississippi Department of Education Office of Child Nutrition to assist school food service directors in creating and amending school procedures, procurement forms, proper handling, preparing and storing procedures in order to facilitate the purchase of locally grown and locally raised agricultural products to be served in school meals;
 - (g) Developing or assisting an organization in developing a website that lists schools and farmers interested in participating in farm to school programs, promotes farm to school events and programs throughout the state and promotes communication and sales between Mississippi farmers and schools; and
 - (h) Encouraging schools, community organizations, restaurants, grocery retail stores and other local organizations and businesses to purchase more locally grown and locally raised agricultural products to serve or sell through their businesses in order to support and increase local farmers' capacity to grow and produce food for commercial purposes.
- (5) The council should hold its first meeting no later than August 1, 2013, with the date, time and location of this first meeting to be determined jointly by the members serving on the council. At the first meeting, the council shall elect a chairman, vice chairman, and any other officers deemed necessary, from its members. The council shall meet periodically but no less than four (4) times per year.
- (6) Members of the council shall serve without compensation or reimbursement for their expenses related to participating in the council, and the council shall function without appropriations or state funds. However, the council can accept funds that may be offered as financial grants from public or private sources. The Mississippi State Legislature and any department, division, board, bureau, commission or agency of the state, or of any political subdivision thereof, may provide, at the request of the chair of the council, such facilities, assistance and data as will enable the council to carry out its duties.
- (7) The council shall report its progress and findings to the Education Committees of the House of Representatives and the Senate, the Agriculture Committees of the House of Representatives and the Senate, the Public Health and Human Services Committee of the House of Representatives, the Public Health and Welfare Committee of the Senate, or

any successor committees, on or before January 1, 2015, and once annually in each following year in which the council is convened.

(8) The provisions of this section shall stand repealed from and after July 1, 2015.

SECTION 2. For purposes of this act, the following terms shall have the meanings herein ascribed unless the context clearly indicates otherwise:

- (a) "Council" means the Interagency Farm to School Council created in Section 1 of this act.
- (b) "Farm to school program" means any commercial relationship where a school purchases locally grown or locally raised agricultural products to serve in school meals and can include educational programs for students on local agriculture and nutrition;
- (c) "Locally grown or locally raised agricultural products" means any food products grown on Mississippi farms or gardens, and includes, but is not limited to, fruits, vegetables, and nuts grown in Mississippi, meat, poultry, eggs, dairy, fish, seafood and other aquatic products produced in Mississippi, and products processed into value-added products that are grown or produced in Mississippi;
- (d) "School" means any K-12 accredited public or private institution for learning and also includes public and private preschools.

SECTION 3. This act shall take effect and be in force from and after its passage.

Interagency Farm to School Council Members

The Interagency Farm to School Council was created by the Mississippi Legislature in 2013 through the passage of H.B. 718 to identify models and methods of promoting farm to school programs in the schools in order to improve the availability of healthy, fresh foods in schools and to promote the economic development of Mississippi farmers and food producers.

The Council is comprised of the following members:

Paige Manning; Chairman	Mississippi Department of Agriculture & Commerce
Dr. Gregory Reed; Vice-Chairman	Alcorn State University Extension Program
Gail Kavanaugh; Secretary	Vicksburg Warren School District
Priscilla Ammerman	Mississippi Department of Education
Gerri Ellis	Mississippi Fruit & Vegetable Growers Association
Dr. Brent Fountain	Mississippi State University Extension Service
Mark Leggett	Mississippi Poultry Association
Samantha C. Newman	Mississippi Farm Bureau Federation
Dr. Evelyn Walker and Brenda Clark	Mississippi State Department of Health

Acknowledgements

The Interagency Farm to School Council would like to thank the following organizations for their assistance during this process and for participation in the stakeholders meeting.

Alcorn State University Extension Program	Mississippi Farm to School Network
Alliance for Sustainable Agriculture	Mississippi Food Corp
Center for Health Law and Policy	Mississippi Food Policy Council
Innovation, Food Law and Policy Clinic	Mississippi Health Advocacy Program
at Harvard	Mississippi State University Extension
Churchill Produce	Service
Coomes Produce	Mississippi Sustainable Agriculture
Delta Fresh Foods	Network
DeSoto County School District	My Brother's Keeper, Inc.
EduFood Consulting	National Center for Appropriate Technology
Footprint Farms	National Federation of Independent
Gulf Coast Produce	Businesses
Holmes County Food Hub	North Bolivar School District Consolidated
Itawamba County Schools	Partnership for a Healthy Mississippi
Kuji Farms	Pascagoula Schools
Merchants Foodservice	Rankin County School District
Mississippi Association of Cooperatives	St. Bethany's Fresh
Mississippians Engaged in Greener	University of Mississippi
Agriculture	Yazoo City Schools

Interagency Farm to School Council Accomplishments

The Interagency Farm to School Council is charged with facilitating the creation and growth of farm to school programs in communities throughout the State of Mississippi through studying, recommending, and administering best practices for creating farm to school programs. The Council convened its first meeting in July 2013. During the course of 18 months, the Council met ten times. One of the goals of the Council was to gain a better understanding of farm to school in Mississippi including the types of farm to school activities that are currently taking place in the state and an explanation of why farmers and schools are or are not participating in farm to school activities.

During the course of time the Council met, the Council heard from various organizations including the Mississippi Food Policy Council, the Partnership for a Healthy Mississippi and the Farm to School Program Coordinator for Oxford School District to gain insight on the types of farm to school activities are taking place in Mississippi.

The Interagency Council visited the Holmes County Food Hub near Durant to gain a better understanding of how farm to school works on the farmers' side. During the visit, Council members saw crops that were planted for schools, talked to a local farmer about his experiences with farm to school, and visited a processing facility where turnip and collard greens are chopped and bagged for delivery to schools.

The Interagency Council developed the following objectives in 2013 to determine actions and recommendations:

- (1) To cultivate and locate farmers to sell Mississippi products within the DoD Farm to School Program.
- (2) To cultivate and locate farmers to sell to individual school systems outside of the DoD Program.
- (3) To cultivate food nutrition directors to purchase Mississippi products from Mississippi farmers and create a connection between farmers and schools.
- (4) To cultivate a state cooperation at the legislature.

Table 1 is a summary of the accomplishments of the Interagency Council and its members in regards to the action suggested in H.B. 718. The findings and results of these tasks are explained further in the report.

Table 1. Summary of Council Accomplishments

Actions Outlined in H.B. 718	Summary of Council Accomplishments
<p>Creating and administering an assessment or survey designed to evaluate what specific programs or efforts would be the most effective in increasing the number of farm to school programs in the State of Mississippi</p>	<p>In order to evaluate farm to school programs and efforts, the Council conducted two surveys, one for child nutrition directors and one for farmers. The questions were designed to gain information such as whether they participate in farm to school, why they do or do not participate in farm to school, and the perceived challenges of participating from the perspective of both the school and farmer.</p> <p>The Mississippi Farm to School Interagency Council sought public comments on proposed objectives of the Council and the promotion of farm to school programs in Mississippi in order to evaluate efforts that would be the most effective in increasing the number of farm to school programs in the state. Public comments were accepted via the web, email, mail, or hand delivery.</p> <p>The Council hosted a Stakeholders meeting on July 16, 2014, to evaluate efforts that would be the most effective in increasing the number of farm to school programs in the state. The purpose of the meeting was to gain input and recommendations from various stakeholders on promoting farm to school in Mississippi. The Council invited 32 stakeholders to participate including farmers, school officials, governmental agencies, and non-governmental organizations that work with farm to school programs. Participating stakeholders discussed the objectives of the Interagency Farm to School Council and recommendations for promoting farm to school.</p>
<p>Helping to develop and expand local pilot farm to school programs in Mississippi</p>	<p>The Council researched and identified farm to school programs and efforts currently taking place in Mississippi. Farm to school programing in surrounding states was also assessed.</p>
<p>Notifying and assisting interested schools, farms, and community organizations in applying for funding sources and grants related to supporting and decreasing the cost of purchasing locally grown and locally raised agricultural products to serve in school meals</p>	<p>MDAC sends notices to a database of farmers and agricultural organizations to create awareness of various grant opportunities available through state, federal, and non-profit agencies and organizations. The Department also sends notices of workshops, seminars, and other training opportunities to farmers.</p>
<p>Assisting Mississippi farmers in marketing and building commercial relationships with food service directors in schools</p>	<p>The MSU-ES, MDE, and MDAC developed a training program to assist Mississippi farmers in marketing and building commercial relationships with food service directors in schools. Four training sessions were held in various locations around the state including Jackson, Cleveland, Verona, and Hattiesburg. The training session brought together farmers and school child nutrition directors and allowed them to network while learning about how to participate in farm to school, DoD Farm to School, procurement, how to find farmers and schools that are interested in participating in DoD. Participating in the workshops were 92 farmers and 52 school staff.</p>

	An additional training session was held for farmers in conjunction with the ASUEP annual Small Farmer Conference with 75 farmers participating.
Developing or administering training programs for Mississippi farmers related to marketing crops, food safety, processing crops, business management, liability and risk management, and any other topics deemed appropriate by the council	Training programs for farmers are being implemented by various organizations across that state such as the ASUEP, MSU-ES, and the Mississippi Fruit and Vegetable Growers Association (MFVGA), which are all represented on the Council. In addition, training is also being provided by the Mississippi Food Policy Council, North Mississippi Fruit and Vegetable Growers Association, Mississippi Sustainable Agriculture Network, Mississippi Association of Cooperative, as well as other organizations.
Working with the Mississippi Department of Education Office of Child Nutrition to assist school food service directors in creating and amending school procedures, procurement forms, proper handling, preparing and storing procedures in order to facilitate the purchase of locally grown and locally raised agricultural products to be served in school meals	A procurement template was created by MDE Office of Child Nutrition to address concerns of child nutrition directors in regards to purchasing local foods. It was utilized during the regional Market Ready procurement trainings and at a summer conference for school food service directors. The MDE Office of Child Nutrition presented procurement training at “New Administrator” orientation for all new child nutrition directors.
Developing or assisting an organization in developing a website that lists schools and farmers interested in participating in farm to school programs, promotes farm to school events and programs throughout the state and promotes communication and sales between Mississippi farmers and schools	<p>The Mississippi State University Extension Service added a featured option to the buyers list so schools can register for through the MarketMaker¹ program to enable farmers to find schools that are interested in purchasing from them.</p> <p>MDAC also created and maintains the website farmtoschoolweek.org which includes information about farm to school and resources for schools to use to promote Farm to School Week.</p>
Encouraging schools, community organizations, restaurants, grocery retail stores and other local organizations and businesses to purchase more locally grown and locally raised agricultural products to serve or sell through their businesses in order to support and increase local farmers' capacity to grow and produce food for commercial purposes	<p>MDAC developed resources to promote farm to school to farmers and schools such as brochures, 17 different posters featuring farmers that grow produce for Mississippi schools, cling-ons for school cafeteria lines, bookmarks, and coloring books.</p> <p>MDE and MDAC joined together to celebrate Mississippi Farm to School Week on October 8, 2013, at Sherman Avenue Elementary in Vicksburg and on October 9, 2014, at StoneBridge Elementary School in Brandon. At these events, farmers that provide products for the DoD Farm to School Program spoke to students about agriculture. The students dined with the Representatives from the MDE and Commissioner of Agriculture and Commerce Cindy Hyde-Smith as well as State Senators and Representatives and the farmers.</p> <p>The Mississippi Farm Bureau Federation implements its Ag in the Classroom Program to assist K-12 students in acquiring a broader knowledge about agriculture.</p>

¹ MarketMaker is a marketing tool that connects farmers and fishermen with food retailers, grocery stores, processors, caterers, chefs, and consumers. It also serves as a research tool and interactive mapping resource for identifying target markets, developing customized census profiles, and mapping food related businesses over demographic maps.

Farm to School

Farm to school is defined as any commercial relationship where a school purchases locally grown or locally raised agricultural products to serve in school meals. In addition, farm to school can include educational programs for students on local agriculture and nutrition. "Locally grown or locally raised agricultural products" are any food products grown on Mississippi farms or gardens, and includes, but is not limited to, fruits, vegetables, and nuts grown in Mississippi, meat, poultry, eggs, dairy, fish, seafood and other aquatic products produced in Mississippi, and products processed into value-added products that are grown or produced in Mississippi.

There are many benefits to having farm to school programs. Farm to school creates additional marketing opportunities for farmers to sell their products locally. When selling to schools, farmers have an assured market for their products and decreased labor costs related to sales. Farmers participating in the Mississippi DoD Farm to School Program with the MDE and MDAC are given orders in advance of planting so they know exactly how much to plant to supply the needed orders. Farmers participating in the program can also take advantage of MDAC's Revolving Fund Program to get paid within five days of making deliveries. With regards to schools, farm to school programs increase access to fresh fruits and vegetables to students, while introducing fresh produce to future consumers.

Farm to school is currently taking place in Mississippi in terms of both schools purchasing local products and educational programs such as school gardens. While there is interest in farm to school and purchasing locally, there are some existing challenges facing the expanding marketplace that have been identified by the Council.

Challenges Related to Farm to School in Mississippi

1) The seasonality of fruits and vegetables produced in Mississippi make it difficult for schools to purchase fresh, locally grown produce.

The seasonality of most fruits and vegetables produced in Mississippi poses a large challenge for schools when purchasing Mississippi-grown produce. Schools are in session in the State of Mississippi from mid-August until mid-May which limits the amount of fresh produce that can be grown locally and served in the school systems. Most fresh fruits and vegetables are abundant during the summer months when schools are not in session which makes it increasingly difficult for schools to purchase the volume and variety of products from local farmers. While farmers in Mississippi do produce fall and winter crops, crop availability decreases during the fall and winter months and begins to increase in the spring season. Chart 1 depicts an availability calendar for Mississippi fresh produce. The months that students are typically out of school are highlighted in yellow.

Chart 1. Mississippi Fresh Produce Availability Calendar²



² The dates on this calendar were sourced from the Mississippi State University Extension Service.

2) Schools often compete with other marketplaces for local produce.

Agriculture, the state's largest industry, is a \$7.4 billion industry in Mississippi.³ While the produce industry is growing across the state, it represents a small portion of Mississippi's total agriculture production. MSU-ES estimates that specialty crops,⁴ excluding sweet potatoes, represent about two percent of the state's overall production in agriculture bringing in around \$118 million to farmers. Sweet potatoes account for an additional \$69 million. Other than wholesale and retail outlets, competing markets for locally-grown produce are farmers markets, restaurants, CSAs (community supported agriculture), and on-farm sales through farm stands and u-picks.

Farmers Markets

Consumer demand for locally grown produce has led many small farmers to sell their produce through one or more of the 85 farmers markets located throughout the state. The number of farmers markets has grown from 23 in 2006 to 85 in 2014.⁵ This increase has led to demand for fresh produce at farmers markets. An advantage of selling at a farmers market is that farmers often receive a premium price for their products as consumers are willing to pay more for fresh, local produce. Disadvantages include not having guaranteed sales, having to market their farm and produce, and costs associated with transportation, storing, and staffing of vendor booths.

Farmers markets in Mississippi are spread across the state. Map 1 depicts the locations of the markets. Those shown in green are markets that participate in the Farmers Market Certification Program⁶ administered by the Mississippi Department of Agriculture and Commerce. Those depicted in gold are non-certified markets, or markets that do not participate in the program.

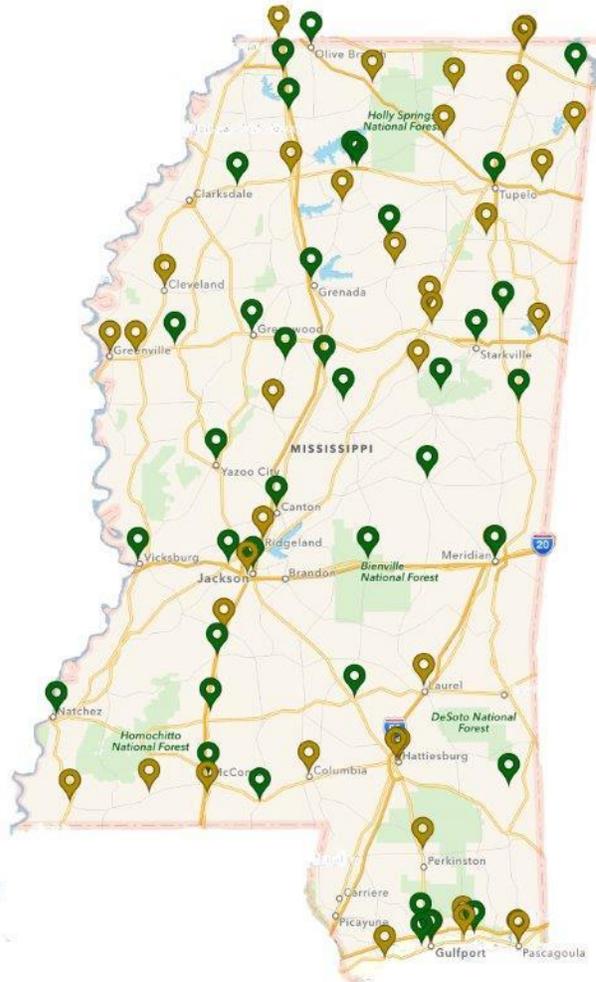
³ Data provided by Mississippi State University for the Mississippi value of production estimates for 2013.

⁴ Specialty crops are defined as fruits and vegetables, horticulture crops, and tree nuts.

⁵ Data was provided by the Mississippi Department of Agriculture and Commerce. This includes farmers markets with multiple farmers selling produce, not roadside stands or farm stands.

⁶ The Mississippi Certified Farmers Market program is a voluntary branding program, created and administered by the Mississippi Department of Agriculture and Commerce to promote and identify a market place for Mississippi grown fruits, vegetables, plant materials, and other products made and/or processed in the state.

Map 1. Locations of the 85 farmers markets located in Mississippi.



Restaurants

A growing trend in the restaurant industry is serving locally grown and locally produced foods, which is another competing market for Mississippi's produce. As the trend for eating local has grown, chefs are fulfilling this consumer demand by purchasing from local farmers. Many chefs promote their local cuisine and that they buy from local farmers by highlighting it on their menus

and menu boards. According to the National Restaurant Association, the Top 5 Trends for 2014 are 1) Locally source meats and seafood; 2) Locally grown produce; 3) Environmentally sustainable; 4) Healthful kids’ meals; and 5) Gluten-free cuisine. An advantage for farmers selling to restaurants is that they often receive a premium price for their products.

CSA’s and On-Farm Sales

Another growing trend in Mississippi as a way to purchase local fresh fruits and vegetables is through Community Supported Agriculture (CSA’s). Community Supported Agriculture consists of individuals, or members, who pledge support to a farm operation by purchasing shares up front at the beginning of the season. In return, the customer receives a variety of produce and other farm goods that are available on a timely basis such a weekly. On-farm sales of produce, oftentimes through u-pick operations or on farm market stands, also compete with farm to school.

3) Schools have limited funds to purchase fruits and vegetables, and fresh, locally grown produce often cost more than non-local products.

Mississippi schools have limited budgets in which to prepare and serve meals to students. On average, schools spend approximately \$2.84 to prepare each meal, of which only \$1.09, or 38 percent, is spent on the food portion of the meal. Of this, approximately \$0.19 is spent on the fruit and vegetable portion of the meal on average. With limited funds, it can be challenging for schools to purchase locally grown foods as they often have to opt for non-local in order to stay within their budget and still meet dietary requirements.

Local produce often carries a premium price due to freshness, quality, other characteristics demanded by consumers, as well as economies of scale. Farmers selling produce direct to consumers through venues such as local farmers markets generally receive this premium price. Table 2 demonstrates the price difference in local versus non-local produce. As seen in the chart, the prices typically paid by the Vicksburg Warren School District (VWSD) are lower than the typical price that a farmer receives for local in-season produce at the Mississippi Farmers Market.

Table 2. Comparison of prices currently paid by schools for produce items versus prices paid by consumers for local produce at a farmers market.

Product	Pack Size	Unit of Measure	Current Price Paid by VWSD	Prices Paid at MS Farmers Market
Cantaloupe	Case	Each	\$2.13	\$2.50
Cucumbers	Pound	Pound	\$0.67	\$0.67-\$1.00
Blueberries	Pound	Pound	\$1.84	\$2.00-\$3.00
Sweet Potato	Pound	Pound	\$0.31	\$0.37
Watermelon, Seedless	Case	Each	\$3.84	\$3.50-\$8.00
Tomatoes, Grape	Flat	12/1 pt	\$18.84	\$19.00-\$36.00

4) A lack of knowledge exists among both school child nutrition directors and farmers about the requirements to sell to schools.

While both schools and farmers are interested in participating in farm to school, a lack of knowledge about how to go about doing so exists for both entities. A survey of child nutrition directors conducted by the MDE reveals that 58 percent of survey participants would purchase more locally grown products if they felt more comfortable with the procedure. Oftentimes, farmers and child nutrition directors are unaware of how to connect with one another. There is often a lack of understanding of the procurement procedures by nutrition directors and options to purchase from a farmer. Farmers, on the other hand, are not always aware of the types of products that schools would like to have and how produce needs to be packaged when delivered. Efforts are currently being made by various state agencies, universities, and non-governmental organizations to address this issue.

Key Findings of the Council

Overview of the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and School Breakfast Program (SBP) in Mississippi

The NSLP and the SBP operate in all public school districts as well as some private, parochial schools and other entities in Mississippi. Meals are provided in the form of school breakfast, school lunch, and after-school snacks. **Schools in Mississippi provided 101,773,496 student meals equivalencies during school year 2012-13.** (A meal equivalency indicates a meal served; however, only lunch is considered a full equivalent. The meal equivalent ratio is: school lunch equals one full meal, school breakfast equals .60, and after-school snack equals .33.)

This program operates on a reimbursement basis.⁷ Schools do not have an operating budget unlike other portions of the school district. They file monthly claims for the number of meal equivalents served each month based on the number of students that eat each day in the cafeteria in all three meal programs. The MDE Office of Child Nutrition distributes funds back to the schools based on those claims using USDA Food and Nutrition Services funds.

Schools are reimbursed from federal funds based on their number of free and reduced students in the district as well as a small reimbursement for paid students. Students that were classified in the fully paid or reduced-meal price category paid a per meal fee that is set by the individual school district.

The average reimbursement (income) per meal equivalent for Mississippi public schools for school year 2012-2013 was \$2.859. This figure includes federal funds, state matching funds, and all charges to students and adults in the cafeteria. An additional source of income for schools is USDA Donated Foods. These funds are provided to schools in the form of entitlement dollars

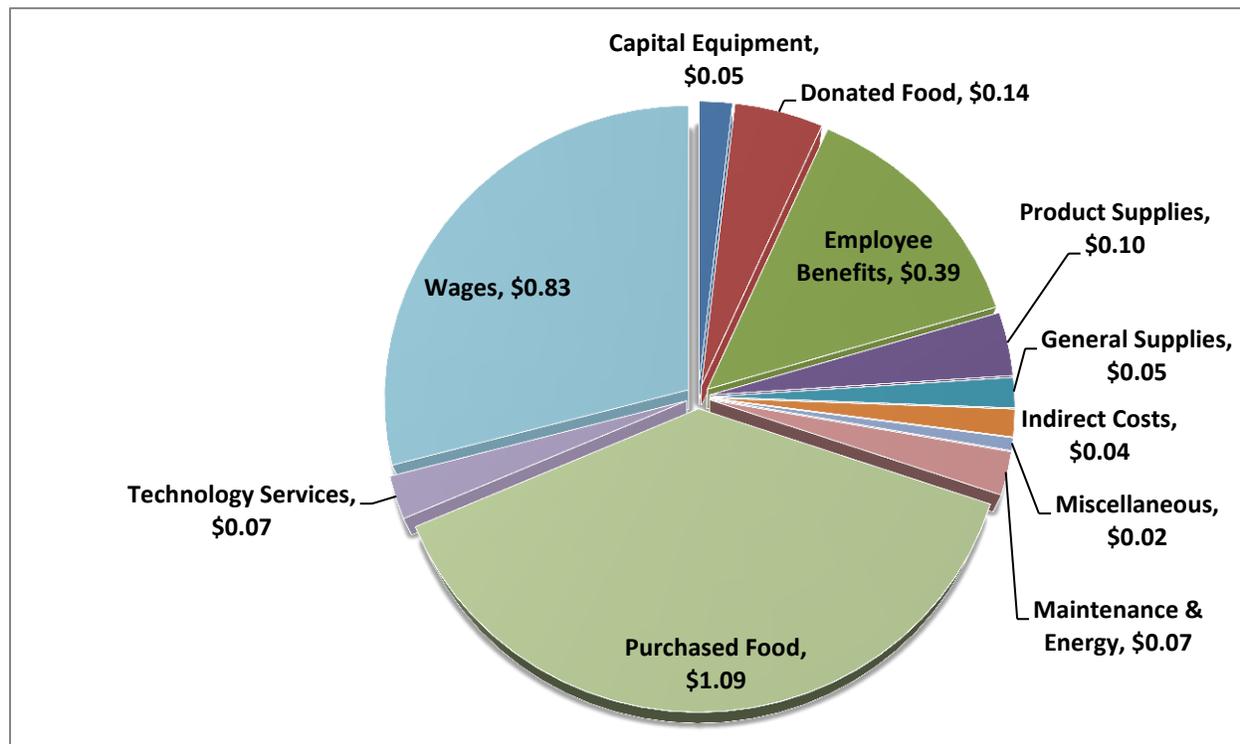
⁷ Reference Appendix I on page 37 for detailed information on reimbursement rates.

which may be used to purchase items provided by the USDA Food Distribution Division in the form of donated canned fruits and vegetables, bulk meats, cheeses, flour, pasta, and other items. A portion can be diverted to the DoD Fresh Program for the purchase of fresh fruits and vegetables. In school year 2012-2013, the entitlement rate for schools was provided by USDA at a rate of .2275 cents per lunch (only) equivalency served the school previous year.

Expenditures for Meals Served in Mississippi Public Schools

The average per meal expenditure for Mississippi public schools for the school year 2012-2013 was \$2.845. The three major expenditure categories are purchased food (\$1.09), wages, (\$.83), and employee benefits (\$0.39). The breakout for expenditures by category is included in Chart 3.

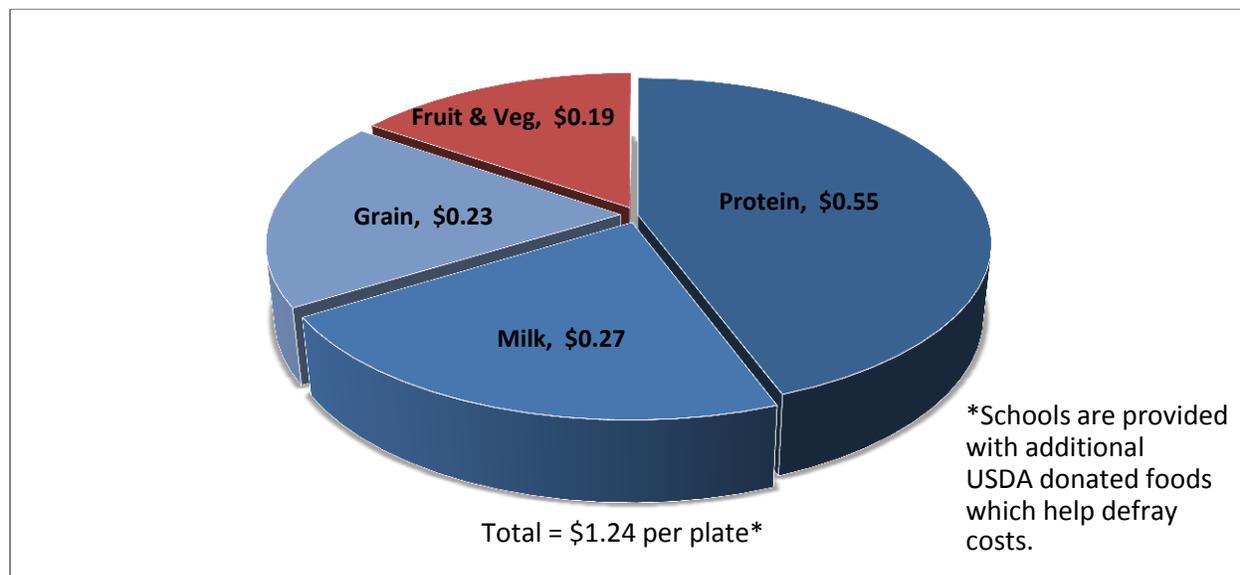
Chart 3. Total Average Expenditures per Meal



The state average for food expenditure per meal for school year 2012-2013 was \$1.09. Chart 4 depicts average food costs per food category, in which schools are required to serve in order to meet the reimbursable meal regulations from USDA.⁸ The prices are shown by serving and represent the average per serving cost of each type of food in the statewide purchasing program’s on-line ordering system. (Schools receive \$.2275 per meal in the form of USDA donated foods which they utilize in order to bring the total per plate costs down to the state average shown.)

⁸ Price information obtained from Statewide Purchasing Order Guide.

Chart 4. Average Food Cost per Plate Served



The Impact of the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act on School Meal Expenditures

In 2010, the US Congress passed the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act (HHFKA) which was signed into law by President Obama. Among other changes to the NSLP and NSBP was a complete overhaul of the nutrition standards for both programs. These nutrition standards are commonly referred to as the meal pattern. The meal pattern established the serving sizes, required food items, calorie ranges (minimum and maximum), and limits on some nutrients such as saturated fat, trans fat, and sodium for all reimbursable meals.

Other changes included larger serving sizes for fruits and vegetables, requirements that all grain/bread items must be at least 50% whole grain by the fall of 2014, and lower fat levels in all milk served to students. In addition to the increased serving sizes for fruits and vegetables, it was mandated that all students must pick up a fruit or vegetable with each breakfast and lunch. The strict nutrient standards coupled with the requirement that all grain servings must be 50% whole grain required the food industry to produce new products for the school market. Because many items that meet the USDA standards tend not to be acceptable for retail or restaurants sales, industry had to develop and produce food items specifically for school food service. As a result the schools have seen steady increases in their food costs since the implementation of the HHFKA meal pattern, while witnesses a decrease in product availability.

The requirement that students pick up a fruit or vegetable (particularly at breakfast) has increased the amount of fruits and vegetables purchased by school child nutrition programs. Further, many children who are required to pick up a fruit or vegetable do not want to eat them and throw them

in the trash. This has made many school cafeterias serve less expensive canned and frozen products and/or juices so that they are not using scarce child nutrition funds to purchase more expensive fresh products that may not be eaten. The HHFKA allows for fruits and vegetables in all forms in the NSLP and SBP.

Purchasing of Food for Mississippi Schools

The Mississippi Department of Education operates the largest school purchasing cooperative in the nation. It is one of only two statewide cooperatives in the nation. Schools were authorized by the Mississippi legislature in 1992 to participate in a group purchasing program under the administration of the Mississippi Department of Education. The first purchases under new statewide contracts were made in January 1993.

This cooperative is now made up of 185 organizations including Head Start Centers, private schools, residential care centers and all but two public school districts (Jackson Public and Biloxi School District). Utilizing full-line distribution and direct-to-manufacturer bids, the statewide cooperative provides schools with lower cost food and supplies, utilizing the economies of scale inherent with large volume procurement. The cooperative additionally allows schools the option to participate in contracts for produce, milk, and ice cream purchases. **Food deliveries through this program, including the value of USDA donated foods which are distributed to school districts, totaled in excess of \$120 million dollars for school year 2013-2014.**

Farm to School Purchases in Mississippi

Schools have two options available in which to procure locally grown products: 1) Schools may use their reimbursement funds to procure locally grown products and 2) Schools may purchase locally grown products through the Mississippi DoD Farm to School Program. Schools can utilize both options.

Schools may use their reimbursement funds to procure locally grown products. Under USDA regulations they may offer a geographic preference for “minimally processed” locally grown or locally raised agricultural products. Under USDA rules, geographic preference allows schools to define a geographic area (within the state, within 100 miles of the school, etc.) and offer vendors of locally grown products with in that area a competitive advantage in bids or price quotes.

A second source of locally grown agricultural products is available to the schools through the Mississippi DoD Farm to School Program. Beginning in 2002 through a partnership with MDE, MDAC, and the USDA/ DoD Fresh program, schools in Mississippi have been able to spend entitlement dollars to purchase available Mississippi-grown fruits and vegetables.

Since the 1990s, the USDA has partnered with DoD to procure American-grown fruits and vegetables. The USDA Food Distribution Division allows state agencies to divert a portion of the entitlement dollars provided for donated foods toward the purchase of fresh fruits and vegetables. They partner with the DoD in order to utilize the expertise DoD has available

through departments that procure fruits and vegetables for base dining facilities and commissaries throughout the world. The DoD procures and administers regional “prime vendor” contracts for purchase and delivery of fruits and vegetables to schools. Mississippi’s prime vendor is Gulf Coast Produce located in Biloxi. Mississippi is allowed to further divert a portion of the total DoD Fresh entitlement dollars toward the purchase of locally grown products. The MDE surveys school districts throughout the entire state in early spring for orders of cases of locally grown products to be delivered the following school year. Chart 5 shows the flow of entitlement dollars to Mississippi schools and how they can be diverted for the purchase of fruits and vegetables for school lunches.

Chart 5. Flow of Entitlement Dollars from USDA to Mississippi Schools

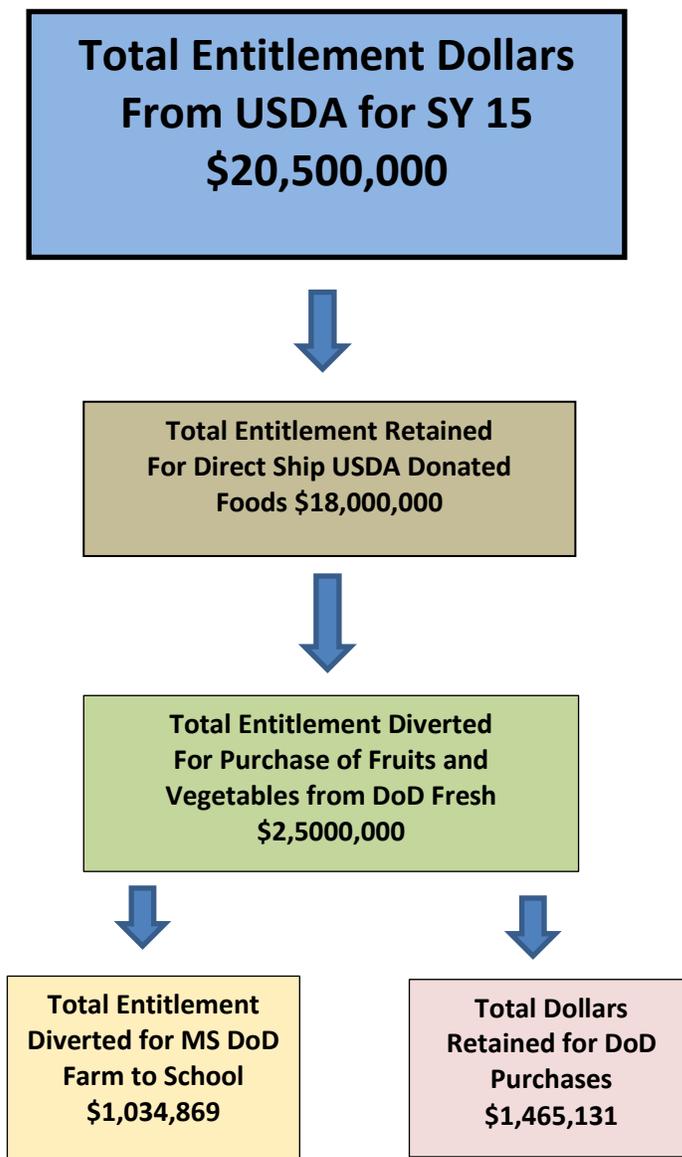


Table 3. Comparison of the Two Options for Farm to School Purchases

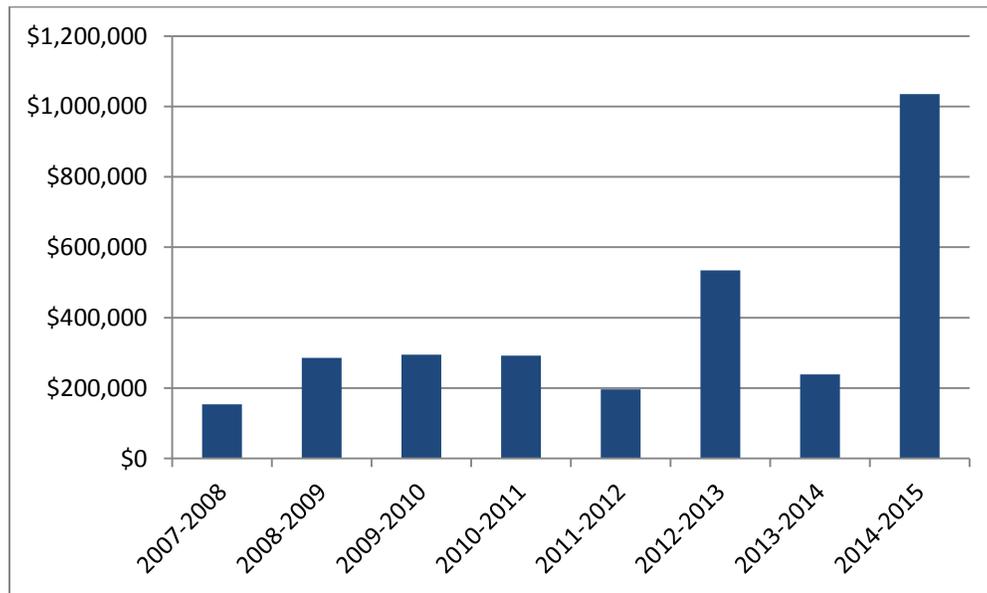
	Schools purchase from local farmers using reimbursement funds	Schools purchase local product through the Mississippi DoD Farm to School Program
Program Structure	Schools purchase from local farmers using reimbursement funds. Produce is supplied to individual schools or school districts.	Bulk purchasing program with produce being supplied to multiple schools and school districts across the state.
Delivery of Product	Product is delivered by the farmer to individual schools or school district as agreed upon by the school and farmer.	Product is delivered by the farmer to at least one of three distributors in the state. The distributors are responsible for delivering product to the schools.
Food Safety Certification Requirements of Farmers	Food safety certification requirements of farmers are left to the discretion of the school districts.	Farmers are required to have Good Agriculture Practices/Good Handling Practices (GAP/GHP) certification or an equivalent, such as Primus, to participate in this program.
Order Details	Farmers work directly with the child nutrition director to determine the pricing, delivery, and volume of orders.	Farmers work directly with MDAC to determine pricing, delivery, and volume of orders. Farmers receive the orders prior to planting so they know how much to plant.
Characteristics of Farmers Best Suited for Program	Small farmers that can supply only a few schools are a good fit for this farm to school option.	With produce being distributed to schools statewide, the case quantity needed to fill the orders can be rather large making this a good option for farmers with more production volume. However, MDAC and MDE do work with multiple small farmers to purchase the quantity needed to fill the orders.
Payment for Product	Farmers receive payment from school/school district.	Farmers receive payment from DoD's prime vendor, or farmers can get paid within five days of delivery through MDAC's Revolving Fund Program.

Farm to School Programs and Activities in Mississippi

All schools districts across the state participate in the Mississippi DoD Farm to School Program. The Mississippi Farm to School Program has experienced significant growth in terms of volume of Mississippi produce purchased by schools and the variety of the locally grown available for schools to purchase as reflected in Chart 6. **For school year 2014-2015, schools ordered 32,927 cases of Mississippi product totaling \$1,034,869.77 compared to 7,711 cases in 2013-2014 totaling \$238,626.** Nineteen products were offered to schools including sweet potatoes, blueberries, peas, butterbeans, collard greens, cucumbers, eggplant, bell peppers, grape tomatoes, strawberries, satsumas, seedless watermelons, sweet corn, cantaloupe, squash, zucchini, hydroponic cucumbers, green beans, and turnip greens.

Much of this growth is attributed to the educational efforts of the Mississippi State University Extension Service, Mississippi Department of Education, and Mississippi Department of Agriculture and Commerce through four regional Market Ready Trainings and training in conjunction with the Alcorn State University Extension Program Annual Grower Conference.

Chart 6. Orders of Mississippi Produce Placed by Schools



In addition to participating in the Mississippi DoD Farm to School Program, some school districts are purchasing additional produce from local farmers and/or participating in farm to school activities such as school gardens. While not a comprehensive list of all schools purchasing produce from Mississippi farmers, some of the school districts that have purchased local products directly from farmers using reimbursement funds include the Vicksburg Warren

School District⁹, Oxford School District through its Good Food for Oxford Schools Program, North Bolivar School District, Hattiesburg School District, Holmes County School District, and Stone County School District.

Many schools across the state have implemented school gardens to teach students about healthy eating and where their food comes from. MDAC recently awarded 27 schools with grants to purchase supplies needed to plant a school garden through its Growing Lunch Program.

Many governmental and non-governmental organizations are implementing a variety of farm to school activities. A sampling of some of the work being done includes:

- As part of the National Farm to School Network, the Mississippi Farm to School Network was developed to connect farmers to schools in Mississippi. The Mississippi Farm to School Network plans to serve as a hub for resources, information and assistance within the state for farm to school programs. The Network's strategies include engagement, communication, networking, and technical assistance. The Network will promote farm to school across the state while collecting and dispersing crucial information to and from a wide audience. The Network hosted a Farm to School Roundtable at the 2014 Mississippi Food Summit put on by the Mississippi Sustainable Agriculture Network.
- My Brother's Keeper in conjunction with the Mississippi Food Policy Council and the Delta Fresh Foods Initiative received a 2015 USDA Farm to School Grant to host the third annual Mississippi Farm to Cafeteria Conference. This statewide event provides up to date information on farm to cafeteria programming, educates participants on other institutional markets for farm produce, and it provides a forum for schools, farmers, and other key stakeholders to connect and network.
- The Partnership for a Healthy Mississippi received a 2014 USDA Farm to School Grant to address challenges of farm to school in Mississippi by providing training and technical and financial assistance to key stakeholders. As part of the grant, the Partnership offers financial assistance to farmers to help cover the cost of receiving GAP/GHP certification.
- The Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians has implemented a Fresh Produce Initiative which consists of constructing multiple high tunnels used for growing fresh produce for schools.
- The Mississippi Food Policy Council has played a leading role in hosting the annual Farm to Cafeteria Conference to educate both farmers and school nutrition directors on farm to school and to create networking opportunities so key stakeholders can connect.
- Food Corps is playing a role in farm to school by educating students about food and nutrition and building and tending to school gardens.
- The Delta Fresh Foods Initiative is a diverse coalition of community stakeholders committed to establishing sustainable, equitable community food systems in the Mississippi Delta. Through their efforts, schools in the Mississippi Delta are participating in farm to school by purchasing from local farmers.

⁹ A case study depicting the methods that the Vicksburg Warren School District used to purchase local produce from Mississippi farmers is included in Appendix II on page 38.

- The Mississippi Farm Bureau Federation implements its Ag in the Classroom Program to assist K-12 students in acquiring a broader knowledge about agriculture. Through the program, educators are encouraged to teach more about the food and fiber system and the critical role of agriculture in the economy.
- The MSU-ES, MDE, and MDAC developed a training program to assist Mississippi farmers in marketing and building commercial relationships with food service directors in schools. Training sessions brought together farmers and school child nutrition directors and allowed them to network while learning about how to participate in farm to school, DoD Farm to School, procurement, how to find farmers and schools that are interested in participating in DoD. An additional training session was held for farmers in conjunction with the ASUEP annual Small Farmer Conference.

Findings from Survey of Child Nutrition Directors

In August of 2013, MDE solicited survey responses from school districts across the state regarding concerns and problems they had with using locally grown products in their schools. A summary of responses is included below. Ninety-one school administrators responded to the survey of the approximately 150 school districts in the state.

When asked to check all locally grown produce procurement activities they had participated in:

- 75.8% said they receive Miss. DoD products,
- 4.4% said they procured locally grown products from local farmers
- 6.59% said they had procured locally grown products through their contracted produce distributors
- 13.19% said they had done none of those activities.

When asked to list any items that they had purchased from local farmers in the previous year, the following items were listed: collard greens, butternut squash, sweet potatoes, turnip greens, and watermelon.

When asked to choose statements that accurately described their interest in purchasing locally grown products:

- 27.16% said they were very interested in buying locally grown products
- 58.02% said they would buy more locally grown products if they felt more comfortable with the procedure
- 22.22% said they were not really interested in purchasing locally grown products.

When asked to rank their concerns and challenges with procuring and using locally grown products in their schools from 1 (greatest challenge) to 5 (no real challenge), the schools responded as listed below. The percentages of responses rated as 1 (greatest challenge) are ranked below with percentile in parenthesis.

- 1) Food Safety Concern (32%)
- 2) Knowledge of correct procurement procedures (29%)

- 3) Availability of suitable products in their area of the state (13%)
- 4) Not enough time to devote to procuring and purchasing local produce (12%)
- 5) Cost of local products (11%)

Findings from Survey of Farmers

MDAC distributed a survey to farmers reflective of the survey for child nutrition directors created by the MDE. The purpose of the survey was to obtain information from farmers about their ability and willingness to participate in farm to school as well to determine the challenges that farmers perceive regarding farm to school. An attempt was made to reach as many farmers as possible to complete the survey. Survey information was made available during regional Market Ready Trainings and notices were put in the *Mississippi Market Bulletin* and sent to MDAC's farmer database. The survey was completed by 46 farmers. The key findings from the survey include:

- While food safety is top concern for child nutrition directors, 59% of the farmers did not have any type of food safety certifications
- 49% were "very interested" in selling to schools
- 34% would attempt to sell to schools if they felt more comfortable with how to do so
- 17% are not really interested in selling to schools

When asked why they are interested in selling to schools, the top five responses were:

- 1) To increase access to healthy, locally grown foods
- 2) To educate children on where their food comes from
- 3) To build relationships within communities
- 4) To help diversify their markets
- 5) New revenue source for my family

When asked the degree of challenging (extremely challenging, very challenging, and challenging somewhat challenging, not challenging), the top challenges expressed by farmers regarding selling to schools were:

- 1) Prices are willing and able to pay for local products (78%)
- 2) Seasonality of available products doesn't fit school schedule (72%)
- 3) Unaware of procurement procedures of schools (70%)
- 4) Food safety certification requirements (64%)
- 5) Willingness to participate by food nutrition directors (61%).

The percentage of farmers answering extremely challenging, very challenging, or challenging is represented in the parentheses.

Findings from the Public Comments and Stakeholders Meeting

The Council hosted a Stakeholders meeting on July 16, 2014, to evaluate efforts that would be the most effective in increasing the number of farm to school programs in the state. The purpose

of the meeting was to gain input and recommendations from various stakeholders on promoting farm to school in Mississippi. The Council invited 32 stakeholders including farmers, school officials, governmental agencies, and non-governmental organizations that work with farm to school programs. Participating stakeholders discussed the objectives of the Interagency Farm to School Council and recommendations for promoting farm to school. Some of the comments that the Council received are below.

- Expand the farm to school website to include a more interactive forum for farmers and food service directors.
- Address concerns like this one: My first concern is how we go about obtaining the required price quotes to buy locally?
 - What if there is only 1 farmer growing something locally? How do we know that the price we are receiving is fair?
 - Are the farmers going to be able to make the deliveries to all of the district schools? We now have 22.
 - Are we going to have farmers knocking on our door every 5 minutes trying to obtain our business? I am all about buying locally, but would rather do it through DoD.
 - Auditors can be painful, if you have out of the ordinary things.
- More educational efforts geared toward making child nutrition directors and farmers more aware of the regulations involved in starting or running a farm to school or farm at school program.
- A database that includes farmer contacts that possess the type of distribution capacity to sell and deliver to schools either in person, or through bided distributors.
- Farm to School programs need be easy and manageable.
- Ag in the Classroom, Farm Bureau Women are already doing the things that your committee are researching and I know we all would share what is working well for us.
- Continue with Market Ready Trainings, they are a good way for schools and farms to learn more about Farm to School.
- Ask the Legislature to endow a mini-grant program, which would fund local farm to school programs and help schools purchase more locally grown foods. Mini-grant programs can help to offset costs of farm to school efforts and thus encourage local communities to develop farm to school programs.
- Compiling a “most wanted” list of fruits and vegetables that Mississippi schools are interested in purchasing.
- Dedicated Farm to School Coordinator in the Department of Agriculture and Commerce.

Current Programs Available to Assist and Promote Farm to School Efforts

Currently there are a variety of programs available to assist schools, farmers, state agencies, non-governmental organizations, and other entities with farm to schools efforts. Programs are available at the local and state level as well as the federal level.

Chart 7 shows a diagram of programs that are available at the local and state level for various stakeholders. A description of these programs follows in Table 4 color coded by program.

Chart 7. Mississippi Programs Available to Assist with Farm to School Efforts

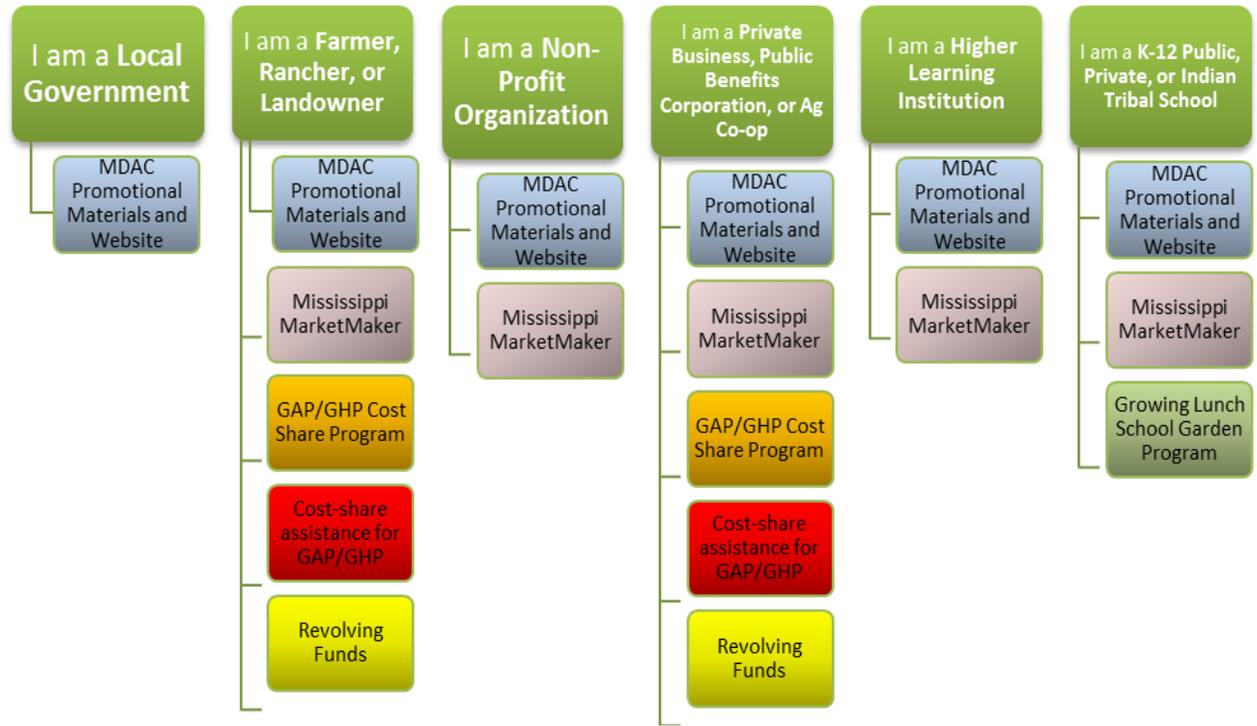


Table 4. Description of Local and State Programs to Assist with Farm to School Efforts

Program	Administrator	Description
MS MarketMaker	MSU Extension Service	The MarketMaker research tool is an interactive mapping resource for identifying target markets, developing customized census profiles and mapping food related businesses over demographic maps. This resource is designed to help researchers, policy makers, marketing instructors, as well as lenders and ag entrepreneurs develop business plans.
MDAC Promotional Materials and Website www.farmtoschoolweek.org	MDAC	This website was initially developed by MDAC to promote Mississippi Farm to School Week and to provide resources and information about farm to school to farmers and schools. The website includes downloadable resources such as posters featuring Mississippi farmers, menus, and educational materials.
GAP/GHP Cost Share Program	MDAC	This program will reimburse farmers that have successfully passed a Good Agricultural Practices (GAP)/ Good Handling Practices (GHP) certification for 75% of the cost up to a maximum of \$500 per year. Funds for this program are provided through the USDA Specialty Crop Block Grant Program.
Cost-share assistance for GAP/GHP	Partnership for a Healthy Mississippi	For farmers participating in the MDAC GAP/GHP cost-share program, The Partnership for a Healthy Mississippi will reimburse farmers the remaining portion of their certification costs not covered by MDAC.
Revolving Funds	MDAC	The Revolving Funds Program allows MDAC to pay farmers within five days of their school deliveries for any DoD Fresh Mississippi purchased produce. This allows DoD Fresh farmers to seasonally reinvest in their respective farms.
Growing Lunch School Garden Program	Apply through MDAC, USDA funded	Eligible schools can receive a grant up to \$500 to purchase supplies needed to plant a school garden. Growing Lunch seeks to enhance the Farm to School program across the state. This program will act as an educational tool to enhance the knowledge of school-aged children on agriculture, healthy eating, and how food arrives on their plate.

USDA also offers a variety of loan and grant programs available to various stakeholders to assist with farm to school efforts. Chart 8 shows programs available applicable to the various stakeholders. The programs are color coded according to funding agency with in USDA. Table 5 explains each of the programs.

Chart 8. Chart Outlining USDA Programs¹⁰



¹⁰ Source: USDA Grants and Loans that Support Farm to School Activities, <http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/f2s/usda-grants-supporting-farm-to-school.pdf>.

Table 5. Description of USDA Programs Available to Assist with Farm to School Efforts

Program	Administrator	Description
Agriculture, Food and Research Initiative Grants	USDA, National Institute of Food and Agriculture	A host of grants that support research in the areas of plant production and health, food safety, nutrition, natural resources, renewable energy, agricultural economics, rural communities, and agricultural technology.
Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Grants	USDA, National Institute of Food and Agriculture	These grants are for organizations that train, educate, and provide outreach and technical assistance to new and beginning farmers on production, marketing, business management, legal strategies and other topics critical to running a successful operation.
Business and Industry Guaranteed Loans	USDA, Rural Development	This program helps new and existing businesses based in rural areas gain access to affordable capital by guaranteeing loans made by private lenders. The 2008 Farm Bill placed a special emphasis on supporting businesses that establish and facilitate the processing, distribution, aggregation, storing and marketing of locally or regionally produced food products.
Community Facilities Grants and Loans	USDA, Rural Development	These grants and loans Community Programs provide assist in the development of essential community facilities in rural areas and towns of up to 20,000 in population. Projects that support local and regional food systems that may qualify for CF funding include, but are not limited to, the following: farmers markets (i.e. structures); school and community kitchens, food banks, including refrigerators; community gardens (i.e., purchase land; water source access) and noncommercial greenhouses; and refrigerated trucks.
Community Food Project Grants	USDA, National Institute of Food and Agriculture	These grants are intended to increase food security in communities by bringing the whole food system together to assess strengths, establish linkages, and create systems that improve the self-reliance of community members over their food needs.
Farm Loans, Microloans	USDA, Farm Service Agency	USDA provides loans to farmers and ranchers through local Farm Service Agency county offices, and also works with local banks to provide a government guarantee for farm loans made by those financial institutions to farmers and ranchers. The Agency targets a portion of its loan funds to minorities and women farmers and ranchers. Farmers and ranchers can explore FSA's Microloan Program for streamlined loans of up to \$35,000.
Farm Storage Facility Loans	USDA, Farm Service Agency	Farm Storage Facility Loans finance the purchase, construction, or refurbishment of farm storage facilities. This program finances new cold storage buildings, which can be particularly important to those growing fruits and vegetables for the fresh market.
Farm to School Grant	USDA, Food and Nutrition Service	These grants help schools and their partners source more foods locally and provide complementary educational activities to students that emphasize food, farming, and nutrition. Currently, eligible schools can apply for Planning and Implementation funds, and a range of other eligible entities can apply for Support Service or Conference and Event funds.
Farmers Market and Local Foods Promotion Grants	USDA, Agricultural Marketing Service	These grants are intended to support the development and expansion of local and regional food business enterprises to increase consumption of, and access to, locally and regionally produced agricultural products, and to develop new market opportunities for farm and ranch operations serving local markets.
Federal-State Marketing	Apply through MDAC/USDA,	These grants are made for a variety of projects that explore barriers, challenges, and opportunities in marketing, transporting, and

Improvement Program	Agricultural Marketing Service	distributing food and forest products.
Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program Grants	USDA, Food and Nutrition Service	These grants are passed through state agencies to districts to serve elementary school students additional fresh fruits and vegetables during the school day outside of the normal time frames for the National School Lunch and School Breakfast Program. Schools must also integrate the FFVP with other efforts to promote sound health and nutrition.
Rural Business Enterprise and Opportunity Grants	USDA, Rural Development	These grants support sustainable economic development in rural communities with exceptional needs and facilitate the development of small and emerging rural businesses and programs supporting training and technical assistance for business development.
Rural Cooperative Development Grants	USDA, Rural Development	These grants support rural economic development through the creation or improvement of cooperative development centers. Cooperative development centers in turn provide assistance for starting up, improving, or expanding rural businesses, especially cooperatives.
Specialty Crop Block Grant Program	Apply through MDAC, USDA, Agricultural Market Service funded	These funds are intended to solely enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops, defined as “fruits, vegetables, tree nuts, dried fruits, horticulture, and nursery crops (including floriculture). Grants are awarded to the State agencies responsible for agriculture, who are encouraged to partner with outside entities to address issues related to specialty crops. The grants have been used to support school and community gardens, farm to school programs, and access to specialty crops in underserved communities.
Sustainable Ag Research and Education Grants	USDA, National Institute of Food and Agriculture	These grants are made to advance sustainable innovations in American agriculture. Three funding tracks are available: Research and Education, Professional Development and Producers.
Team Nutrition Training Grants	USDA, Food and Nutrition Service	These grants allow State agencies to establish or enhance sustainable infrastructures for implementing Team Nutrition's goal of improving children's lifelong eating and physical activity habits. State agencies may re-grant funds to districts and in the past, several farm to school related projects have been supported.
Value Added Producer Grant	USDA, Rural Development	Value-added processing and marketing helps farmers and ranchers receive a higher portion of the retail dollar. Value-Added Producer Grants support planning activities, such as developing a business plan, as well as working capital. Specific funds are available for projects that focus on local and regional supply networks or support beginning farmers and ranchers, socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers, and small or medium-sized farms or ranches. Grants may fund projects that: create a business plan to market value-added products; evaluate the feasibility of direct marketing freshly bottled milk; evaluate the financial benefits of processing and marketing meat versus selling live animals; expand marketing capacity for locally- and regionally-grown products; and expand processing capacity.

Findings from Research into Surrounding States' Farm to School Programs

The Council assessed farm to school efforts taking place in surrounding states. Table 6 shows a brief synopsis of farm to school and local purchasing efforts taking place.

Table 6. Synopsis of Farm to School Efforts in Surrounding States

State	K-12 Population (% eligible to receive free and reduced)	Statewide Purchasing (\$ Amount)	Local Purchasing	Other Programs
Alabama ¹¹	735,000 (58.7%)	DoD Fresh (\$1.6M)	Regional purchasing programs are beginning.	There are many public, private, and non-profit school garden projects around the state.
Arkansas ¹²	476,000 (61.8%)	None	About 20 schools reported small scale purchasing.	The Arkansas Grow Health Study provides many recommendations including health guidelines, F2S purchasing, and school gardens. Implement the findings of the Arkansas Grow Health Study.
Louisiana ¹³	703,000 (67.0%)	None	Local purchasing estimates are difficult to quantify due to high number of private and parochial schools.	LSU has provided funding for 17 school garden projects. LSU will hold Louisiana's first farm to school statewide meeting in 2015
Tennessee ¹⁴	972,000 (44.2%)	DoD Fresh (\$7.1M)	The Local Food for Local Schools Initiative complements DoD Fresh in large school districts like Memphis and Jackson.	The Local Food for Local Schools Initiative has helped build large school garden and school greenhouse operations capable of providing for school meals. The University of the South is building a food hub to further promote FTS activities and alleviate local food insecurity.

¹¹ Information sourced from Hassey Brooks, Program Director/Federal Liaison, Alabama Department of Agriculture and Industry.

¹² Information sourced from Arkansas Grow Healthy Study, University of Arkansas Research and Extension <http://www.archildren.org/Press-Center/Current-News/2014/Arkansas-Farm-to-School-Month-Competition-celebr.aspx>

¹³ Information sourced from, Katie Mularz, State Lead, National Farm to School Network, <http://eddataexpress.ed.gov/state-report.cfm?state=LA>, and <http://www.coweninstitute.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/03/SPELA-2012-web-final-3-6-12.pdf>

¹⁴ Information sourced from Kids Count Data Center, Anne E. Casey Foundation http://www.tn.gov/agriculture/marketing/Produce_pdfs/Resourceguide.pdf
DoD Fresh: the Basics. Webinar presented by USDA Food and Nutrition Service

Recommendations

Through studying farm to school efforts in Mississippi and input gathered from various stakeholders two of the most common themes identified by the Farm to School Interagency Council were 1) Encouraging purchases of safe, locally grown products is good for farmers, schools, children, and the economy and 2) More education and coordination of all groups involved – farmers and schools, parents and students, state agencies and private sector organizations- is the most pressing need.

The elements are in place in the public and private sector and with closer coordination, farm to school in Mississippi can grow. The Council recommends the following actions to be taken to promote and expand farm to school in Mississippi.

- 1) Encourage continued cooperation between state and federal agencies, universities, and non-governmental organizations to promote farm to school efforts.
 - The Farm to School Interagency Council does not recommend any new state programs to increase farm to school programs at the local level. Instead, the Council recommends the continued cooperation between state agencies and with non-governmental and private sector groups to promote farm to school activities in Mississippi.
 - The Mississippi Department of Agriculture and Commerce and the Mississippi Department of Education, as detailed in this report, have a long history of working together to bring schools and farmers together. The two agencies promote farm to school by purchasing local produce from farmers through the Mississippi DoD Farm to School Program, providing educational activities, and hosting activities during Farm to School Week.
 - The Farm to School Interagency Council has in the last 18 months worked to identify activities of various agencies, universities, and organizations and improve these lines of communication between the groups. The much-needed training and education programs taking place should continue.

- 2) Continue educational efforts by the Mississippi Department of Education and the Mississippi Department of Agriculture and Commerce through the development and distribution of educational materials and training provided through workshops and seminars for child nutrition directors and farmers.
 - The Mississippi State University Extension Service, Mississippi Department of Education, and the Mississippi Department of Agriculture and Commerce developed the Farm to School Market Ready Training to assist Mississippi farmers in marketing and building commercial relationships with food service directors in schools. These training sessions that brought together farmers and school child nutrition directors and allowed them to network while learning about

how to participate in farm to school, Mississippi DoD Farm to School, procurement, and how to find farmers and schools that are interested in participating in DoD, should be continued on regular basis.

- As a result of the regional Market Ready Trainings and the Mississippi DoD Farm to School Program has grown significantly. For school year 2014-2015, schools ordered 32,927 cases of Mississippi product totaling \$1,034,869.77 compared to 7,711 cases in during the 2013-2014 school year totaling \$238,626.
- To keep farmers informed and to create awareness, MDAC sends notices to farmers and agricultural organizations of various grant opportunities of available through state, federal, non-profit agencies, and organizations as well as notices of workshops, seminars, and other training opportunities to farmers. The information disseminated by MDAC is important in increasing awareness of opportunities among farmers.

3) Expand MDAC's farmtoschoolweek.org website to include additional educational materials and resources to educate schools and farmers on farm to school.

- The greatest need the Council identified was the need for a single place to answer the questions of school personnel and farmers about rules and requirements to buy and sell. The lack of knowledge is a major hindrance to getting more farmers and schools connected. This website, which has been used mainly to promote and provide resources for Mississippi Farm to School Week, could serve as that resource.
- The website should link to Mississippi MarketMaker (ms.foodmarketmaker.com), an online directory where schools can search for and contact farmers/ranchers in Mississippi by commodity, in order to increase awareness of the tool among farmers and schools. Farmers need to sign up to be found through the directory. The Mississippi State University Extension Service added a featured option to the buyers list so schools can register for through the MarketMaker¹⁵ program to enable farmers to find schools that are interested in purchasing from them.

4) Continue cost-share programs that provide financial assistance to farmers receiving approved food safety certifications such as USDA's Good Agriculture Practices/Good Handling Practices (GAP/GHP).

- USDA's GAP/GHP certification is a third party food safety audit that focuses on the best agricultural practices to verify that fruits and vegetables are produced, packed, handled, and stored in the safest manner possible to minimize risks of

¹⁵ MarketMaker is a marketing tool that connects farmers and fishermen with food retailers, grocery stores, processors, caterers, chefs, and consumers. It also serves as a research tool and interactive mapping resource for identifying target markets, developing customized census profiles, and mapping food related businesses over demographic maps.

microbial food safety hazards. Farmers are required to have this certification to sell to schools through the Mississippi DoD Farm to School Program.

- Although viewed as costly by some, this certification opens the doors to many marketing opportunities. Currently there are 29 GAP/GHP certified farmers in Mississippi, with a majority being sweet potato and blueberry growers. Cost-share programs increase the number of certified farms in state, thus increasing the number of eligible farmers to sell to schools through the Mississippi DoD Farm to School Program.
 - MDAC has awarded cost-share funds to 33 farmers through its cost-share program which reimburses farmers 75 percent of their incurred costs to become certified up to \$500. The Partnership for a Healthy Mississippi offers a cost-share program to reimburse farmers for the remaining 25 percent. ASUEP has a cost-share program as well for farmers.
- 5) Develop a safe food handling training/certification made available by the Mississippi State University Extension Service and/or the Alcorn State University Extension Program that would be made available to farmers interested in selling to schools.
- While MDE requires that farmers selling through the Mississippi DoD Farm to School Program obtain GAP/GHP certification, schools that purchase produce directly from farmers using their reimbursement funds have the ability to use their discretion as to whether to make this certification a requirement.
 - With food safety being a top concern of child nutrition directors, the option of a safe food handling training/certification will give schools an assurance that the farmers that they are purchasing from have been trained and know how to properly handle food safely and properly.
 - The Council recommends that the training be made available by MSU-ES and/or ASUEP as both universities currently provide food safety training for farmers.
- 6) Continue efforts by MSU and ASU to encourage food hubs and the use of existing and new vegetable processing facilities.
- Food hubs offer a combination of production, aggregation, distribution, and marketing services making it possible for small and medium size farmers to get into certain markets that they may not otherwise be able to get into when marketing individual. Food hubs can play an important role in the growth of farm to school as these hubs allow farmers to aggregately fill orders that they can not fill alone.

- 7) Encourage state agencies, school districts, universities, and non-governmental organizations to apply for funding opportunities made available through federal and state agencies and private foundations to promote farm to school.
- There are numerous federal programs as well as state programs available for small farmers and schools to encourage more participation in farm to school as outlined in this report on pages 27-31.
 - A number of organizations are utilizing the available grant funds to promote farm to school activities. My Brother's Keeper in conjunction with the Mississippi Food Policy Council and the Delta Fresh Foods Initiative received a 2015 USDA Farm to School Grant to host the third annual Mississippi Farm to Cafeteria Conference. The Partnership for a Healthy Mississippi received a 2014 USDA Farm to School Grant to address challenges of farm to school in Mississippi by providing training and technical and financial assistance to key stakeholders. As part of the grant, the Partnership offers financial assistance to farmers to help cover the cost of receiving GAP/GHP certification. The Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians has implemented a Fresh Produce Initiative which consists of constructing multiple high tunnels used for growing fresh produce for schools through funding from the 2014 Farm to School Grant.
 - MDAC has utilized federal grants to fund a GAP/GHP cost-share program and to develop promotional and educational materials for farm to school.
- 8) Continue efforts that create opportunities and avenues for farmers and schools to connect with one another and have a dialogue regarding farm to school.
- A key to expanding farm to school in the state is bringing farmers and schools together so they both have a clear understanding of each other's role in farm to school as well as the regulations that each must adhere to. This effort has already begun through the leadership of various organizations
 - Events such as the Food Policy Council's annual Farm to Cafeteria Conference as well as the Market Ready Training programs put on by the MSU-ES, MDE, and MDAC have brought both farmers and school together to learn more about farm to school and provided a networking opportunity for the two stakeholders.
 - In addition, training programs for farmers are being implemented by various organizations across that state such as the ASUEP, MSU-ES, and the Mississippi Fruit and Vegetable Growers Association, North Mississippi Fruit and Vegetable Growers Association, Mississippi Sustainable Agriculture Network, Mississippi Association of Cooperatives, as well as other organizations.
 - Some of the initial strategies of the newly formed Mississippi Farm to School Network are to build a statewide membership network, serve as hub for farm to school resources, and hold farm to school events across the state to foster connection and educate stakeholders.

Appendix

APPENDIX I.

Income from USDA to Schools

The National School Lunch and Breakfast Programs operate on a reimbursement basis. Meals are served at the sites, and the claims for those meals are processed through the Office of Child Nutrition. The reimbursement rate for school year 2012-2013 for the lunch, breakfast, and after-school programs is delineated in the tables below. This is considered income from USDA to the schools. The data are taken from the United States Department of Agriculture Food and Nutrition Services' website.

National School Lunch Program (NSLP)

Payment Type	Less than 60% *	Less than 60% + 6 cents**	60% or more	60% or more + 6 cents
• Paid***	.27	.33	.29	.35
• Reduced	2.46	2.48	2.48	2.54
• Free	2.86	2.98	2.88	2.94

*Refers to districts that served less than 60 free and reduced lunches in the previous school year

**6 cents refers to the additional funds provided per meal at lunch for districts meeting the nutritional standards as required by the Healthy, Hunger-Frees Lunch Act of 2010.

***Paid is the amount reimbursed to school in addition to the money received at the time of purchase from the paying child.

School Breakfast Program (SBP)

Payment Type	Non-Severe Need*	Severe Need
• Paid	.27	.27
• Reduced	1.25	1.55
• Free	1.77	1.85

*Refers to districts that served at least 40% free and reduced school lunches the previous year.

After-School Snack Program*

Payment Type	Payment Amount
• Paid	.07
• Reduced	.39
• Free	.78

*Schools that offer scheduled, after-school educational or enrichment activities in a supervised environment are eligible for this program.

APPENDIX II.

Vicksburg Warren School District

Farm to School Case Study

The Farm to School initiative is not new to schools. USDA and the Mississippi Department of Education Office of Child Nutrition have encouraged schools to implement a farm to school program for many years. The Vicksburg Warren School District has worked to develop a procurement model for locally grown produce. There were some hurdles along the way, but the availability of fresh locally grown produce provides optimum nutrition for our students. By creating a purchasing model for locally grown produce, we have also enhanced hands-on learning activities such as school gardening, farm visits, and culinary classes.

The Vicksburg Warren Child Nutrition Department participates in the USDA/DoD Fresh Program which allows the program to spend some of their entitlement dollars on Mississippi grown fruits and vegetables. This has been a very successful way to introduce many Mississippi fruits and vegetables to our students. The introduction to Mississippi fresh products opened our minds to the possibility of securing additional locally grown produce.

In 2012, the district was approached by a Mississippi cooperative association to purchase locally grown produce from their farmers. The initial meeting exposed some general misconceptions from both the farmers and the school nutrition staff. The staff had concerns over delivery, safety, cost, quantities, and procurement. The farmers had concerns over packaging, delivery cost, production quantities, and a general apprehension for conducting business in an unknown environment. The issues were discussed and the farmers provided adequate assurances to convince the staff of their ability to provide safe produce with required certification. The cooperative and school district developed an initial trial delivery to all twelve school sites. Menus were developed to incorporate the locally fresh grown produce and deliveries were coordinated around production needs. The product was delivered to each site and met all required standards. The cooperative and the school district continued this delivery agreement for one month as a trial.

The next step was to develop a seamless approach of incorporating locally grown products into our menus. The school district already was using a local produce distributor. A meeting between the local produce distributor, school district, and the farmer's cooperative was organized. This meeting outlined needs and requirements of all parties. The produce distributor along with the school district required GAP/GHP certification from growers. The cooperative of growers were able to provide the certification and satisfied the district and the distributor's requirements. The next step was to look at menus and determine products and quantities needed by the school district. The produce distributor and the cooperative developed a schedule to

receive fresh produce products at the distributor's warehouse. The school district then ordered the needed produce on their regular produce order. A hands-on approach was used in coordinating demand and supply. If the locally grown crops were not ready for harvest, the distributor could choose a different supplier. The cooperative communicated harvest information with the school district and menu adjustments were made to accommodate freshly harvested product.

The method used was very effective for all parties and was extended through the 2013-2014 school year. The cooperative essentially became a vendor to the produce company. As the school district received inquiries from other Mississippi growers, they were included in the pool of vendors for our produce distributor. The developed procedures resulted in the local growers having an established buyer, the school district. This method also made locally grown produce available to other markets in the Vicksburg area.

The school district developed a revised bid document for the 2014 -2015 school year. It included a produce product list identifying Mississippi grown products. The bid document also included a geographic preference provision for Mississippi grown produce within a 100 mile radius of the Vicksburg Warren School District. Produce distributors met with the school district in a pre-bid conference to explain the geographic preference and the product preference list. Bidders were also instructed to secure the best pricing and act as the buyer for the school district. This sometimes results in not selecting the Mississippi product because of cost. Vicksburg Warren School District has a new produce distributor for the 2014 – 2015 school year and uses the same procedures for locally grown products. The developed process is one that can be implemented by other school districts and produce distributors.

As mentioned previously, the Mississippi or locally grown product must be price competitive. Many times a school district may want to choose locally grown products but are limited by the difference in cost. A sample of cost comparisons is attached to demonstrate differences in locally grown product pricing and market pricing. Other factors that can influence school districts to limit locally grown products are staffing, time, knowledge of procurement procedures, availability of product and delivery. Each school district is unique and must determine if buying locally is the right choice for their program.