

# **COMING TO THE TABLE: THE ALABAMA FOOD POLICY COUNCIL**

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Researchers at Auburn University conducted surveys at nine listening sessions around Alabama in collaboration with AARP and stakeholder groups. We found that more than 85% of respondents are concerned about where their food is produced. Participants suggested that there are tangible policy opportunities for a food policy council in Alabama, and that they would look favorably upon increasing cooperation with state and local governments to improve the food system, particularly on the issues of hunger reduction, zoning and infrastructure improvements, and local procurement of school food.

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In early 2012, a broad coalition of stakeholders, including AARP, created a Steering Committee to develop an Alabama Food Policy Council (AFPC). The group has since developed a survey and conducted nine listening sessions with 228 people from across the state to learn about Alabamians' understandings of, and opinions about, their local food and agriculture system; to identify the issues that residents believe are most pressing for a burgeoning AFPC; and to determine the capacity of various communities in helping to improve the local food and agriculture system.

Some major points include:

- A majority of survey respondents (53.1%) indicated that food insecurity and hunger was the most pressing issue the Alabama Food Policy Council should address. Respondents largely indicated that they want to see increased collaboration between government and non-profit entities to improve the food system and food policy.
- While 85.1% of respondents stated that they care where their food is produced, 29.5% of respondents do not know where their food is produced. Only 11.6% of respondents say that much of their food is produced in Alabama.
- Survey respondents look very favorably on messages about economic development and job creation; 67.1% strongly agree/agree that food production in Alabama increases economic development, and 62.7% of respondents strongly agree/agree that we need state policies to reduce food insecurity.
- Listening sessions were able to gather a sample that, while not necessarily reflective of the State of Alabama, was reflective a demographic that is interested in a statewide food policy council (largely white, very educated, high income). Approximately 63.2% of these people would be willing to pay dues to a food policy council, and the average willingness to volunteer was nearly 4 hours a month.
- Listening session participants largely touched on the themes of collaboration and incentives as important to keep in mind while moving forward.
- The Alabama Food Policy Council Steering Committee has decided to move forward into 2013 as a program of a nonprofit.

## BACKGROUND

Generally defined, a food policy council is a diverse group of citizens and organizations from across the food system that seeks to educate citizens about the food system, collaborate to identify and address issues in the food system, and advocate for policy changes that would improve the food system. Each food policy council has a different agenda different based upon the geographic scope of the council and the interest of its members and stakeholders.

According to the Community Food Security Coalition, in 2012 there are 180 food policy councils in the United States, representing an 80% increase over 2010. Of these food policy councils, 38% have a local focus, 13% have a regional focus, and 15% have a statewide focus.<sup>1</sup> Many of them have priorities such as policy development and advocacy, improving the local food economy, education and outreach, partnership building, public health improvement, and addressing food insecurity.

There are currently three food policy councils in Alabama—one with a local focus (the Greater Birmingham-Jefferson Food Policy Council), and two with a regional focus (the North Alabama Food Policy Council and the River Region Food Policy Council).

Currently, the Greater Birmingham-Jefferson Food Policy Council focuses on addressing the issue of food deserts, as well as other policies to improve business and food access. The North Alabama Food Policy Council primarily focuses on democratizing the local food system by improving communication and collaboration amongst stakeholders. The River Region Food Policy Council focuses on building Food Literacy in Central Alabama through a private-public partnership of various groups.

Overall, Alabama is a state that could benefit tremendously from a statewide food policy council. Alabama holds the dubious distinction of being both the fourth most food insecure (17.3% of households) and the third most obese (32.2% of the adult population) state in the nation. Some counties in its Black Belt have poverty rates of 40%, two of which have childhood poverty rates of over 50%.<sup>2</sup>

According to research from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, if Alabamians reduced their body mass index (BMI) by 5% by 2020, individuals in the state would save over \$3.381 billion dollars on healthcare costs for obesity-related illnesses such as Type 2 Diabetes, obesity-related cancers, heart disease, stroke, hypertension, and arthritis. By 2030, those savings could amount to approximately \$9.481 billion. Based on the current trajectory, Alabama's obesity rate will be 62.6% in 2030.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Sauer, Andrea. "FPC List Update Analysis." Paper prepared for the Community Food Security Coalition, May 2012.

<sup>2</sup> US Census Bureau. 2010 Census.

<sup>3</sup> "Bending the Obesity Cost Curve in Alabama." Issue brief prepared for the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, September 2012.

Food deserts span large swaths of the state, especially in the Black Belt and urban centers.<sup>4</sup> According to research in 2012 by the Centers for Disease Control, 87.1% of Alabamians indicated that they did not eat three or more servings of vegetables a day, and 77.5% did not eat two or more servings of fruit a day.<sup>5</sup>

Currently, the state's agrifood system is unable to feed Alabamians, as the top agricultural products are trees, poultry, and cotton, which cannot be eaten, or serve as raw inputs into the national agrifood system. Furthermore, acreage in vegetable production has decreased by more than 29% over the last 10 years. These issues, alone highlight the need for more citizen involvement in food policy.<sup>6</sup>

In early 2012, a broad coalition of stakeholders created a Steering Committee to develop the Alabama Food Policy Council (AFPC). This group is comprised of representatives from AARP, the Alabama Cooperative Extension System (ACES), the Alabama Sustainable Agriculture Network (ASAN), Auburn University, the Bay Area Food Bank, the Emerging Changemakers Network, the Food Bank of North Alabama, the Greater Birmingham-Jefferson Community Food Partners, the Hampstead Institute, Inc. (now known as EAT South), the River Region Food Policy Council, and the North Alabama Food Policy Council.

During Steering Committee meetings, researchers from Auburn University discussed the issues that statewide food policy councils across the country have addressed, and discussed the structures that various statewide food policy councils have adopted. While some food policy councils serve as an extension of and draw funding from the state's departments of agriculture, such as those in North Carolina and South Carolina, others focus on building partnerships specifically with schools and receive funding from private foundations, such as the Michigan Food Policy Council. Some are independent nonprofits that receive donations from membership dues and grants from private foundations, such as the Iowa food policy council, and other, such as the New Mexico Food Policy Council, are programs of an umbrella nonprofit that serves as a host and convener.

This coalition sought to assess Alabama residents' willingness to participate in a possible AFPC, what policies the AFPC should pursue, and what resources stakeholders and possible participants in a food policy council would be willing to contribute. These data would be subsequently used to make decisions about the structure and focus of the AFPC.

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<sup>4</sup> US Department of Agriculture Economic Research Service. Food Desert Finder.

<sup>5</sup> US Center for Disease Control "Alabama State Nutrition, Physical Activity, and Obesity Profile." September 2012.

<sup>6</sup> US Department of Agriculture. 2007 Census of Agriculture.

*Table 1: Statewide FPC Structures from Around the US*

	<b>Government/Nonprofit Partnership</b>	<b>Nonprofit/School Partnership</b>	<b>Independent Nonprofit</b>	<b>Program of a Nonprofit</b>
<b>Governance</b>	Comprised of government and nonprofit leaders named by Governor, with open meetings just as with any other State agency.	Run by volunteer board comprised of nonprofit leaders, school administrators, and citizens.	Run by volunteer board comprised of nonprofit leaders and citizens.	Comprised of agencies/ individuals that operates as program within a nonprofit.
<b>Focus</b>	Focused primarily on economic development through local food.	Focused primarily on improving school nutrition and education on local food.	Focused on alleviating hunger through local food system.	Focused on building capacity of existing groups.
<b>Funding</b>	Diverts existing state agency resources for FPC.	Funded primarily through grants from private foundations.	Funded through membership dues and grants.	Funded through host organization and stakeholders.
<b>Examples</b>	North Carolina, South Carolina	Michigan	Iowa	New Mexico

## METHODS

To gather data and build community capacity, nine listening sessions were held across the state in nine locations (Atmore, Auburn, Birmingham, Fairfield, Huntsville, Mobile, Montgomery, Rainsville, and Tuscaloosa). These sessions were held by the member organizations of the Steering Committee, as well as their respective community working partners, and took place between September and October of 2012.

Though each session was executed differently and included a different group of stakeholders, reflecting the regional diversity in interest and the ability of stakeholders to attend, each session was intended to both yield survey data that could be used to make decisions for the future of the AFPC and build community capacity and engage citizens. Listening sessions began with the administration of the survey, and then a moderated discussion using the discussion guide described below. These conversations varied in length based upon the parameters defined by community partners. Some involved panel discussions of local leaders, while others had moderated discussion of a broader group of stakeholders.

A survey and a listening session discussion guide developed by Auburn University were used to collect data. The remaining member of the Committee reviewed the instruments and provided guidance on modifications.

### *Survey Methods*

The survey included a series of 28 questions aimed at understanding the background, food preferences, attitudes, and policy preferences of respondents.

The first five questions sought to understand the overall policy preferences of respondents. In this series of questions, respondents were asked to rank individual policies or policy opinion statements based on their preferences in four different categories—school food, nutrition/food quality, food security, and local food production. These categories represent topics on which food policy councils around the country, both at the local and statewide level, have focused on both currently and in the past.

In each category, a set of four to five specific policies or policy opinion statements were made, and respondents were asked to rank them from most preferable to least preferable. One question, for example, was whether or not “State and local governments should work with food banks, food pantries, and other charitable organizations, including faith-based groups, to increase and improve programs that reduce food insecurity.” These policies and policy statements were developed so as to determine what a formalized food policy council might do, and what it might accomplish, particularly in its first few years of existence.

Next, respondents were asked to rank the overall categories in order of importance.

Additionally, respondents were asked if they would be willing to join a hypothetical food policy council by paying annual dues, and if so, how much they would be willing to pay (\$25, \$50, \$75, \$100, \$200, or more). Respondents were also asked how and how often they might be willing to volunteer using statements aimed at determining whether respondents were more comfortable in advocacy, education, or community organizing.

Questions were also asked in regard to what respondents defined as “local food”, where they believe much of their food is produced, their general attitudes on food insecurity and policy, and basic demographic information, including political leanings and religiosity.

While these surveys were meant to learn more about respondents’ attitudes and preferences, the surveys were also meant to determine precisely what kind of Alabamians demonstrated interest in food policy and the AFPC.

These surveys were reviewed and approved by Auburn University’s Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research (IRB). In addition to approving paper surveys for listening sessions, IRB approved the dissemination of this survey digitally. The digital survey is ongoing; however, its results are outside the scope of this document.

The full survey instrument can be found in Appendix B.

### *Discussion Guide Methods*

The discussion guide was developed in collaboration with the Steering Committee. Its purpose was to frame a conversation about the local food system and food policy at the community level, and to use the locally-based discussion to reflect upon what actions are needed at both local and state levels for a food policy council to be successful.

The guide, loosely based upon the Community F.E.A.S.T. model developed by the Oregon Food Bank (accessible at [www.oregonfoodbank.org/FEAST](http://www.oregonfoodbank.org/FEAST)), set the framework for a moderated discussion that explores what the food system is, assists participants in identifying the elements of the local food system, establishes the purposes of a food policy council, and engages participants in listing challenges, opportunities, and capacities for improvement in their local food system, and subsequently the local and state policies that may need to be addressed.

In communities where Steering Committee member organizations held more in-depth listening sessions (Huntsville, Mobile, Montgomery, and Rainsville), this guide was used to establish local priorities for action. The participants identified specific policy recommendations then “voted” on the recommendations or policy opinion statements by way of “sticky dots”, similar to the process used in the WorldCafe dialogue process. While these recommendations were for the use of the local food policy councils and community partners, we also integrate these results into our findings.

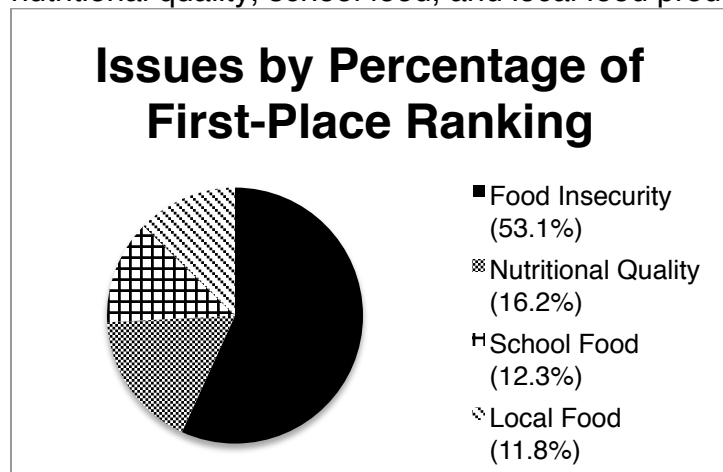


## FINDINGS

There were nine listening sessions and 228 individuals who filled out usable surveys.

### *Issue Ranking & Policy Preferences*

Overall, the most important issue to respondents was food insecurity (hunger), with 53.1% (121) of respondents indicating it was their top priority issue, followed by nutritional quality, school food, and local food production, respectively.



*Graph 1: Issues by Percentage of First Place Ranking  
(Percentages may not add up to 100% due to non-responses)*

In each issue category, respondents indicated their policy preferences by ranking specific policy and policy opinion statements.

*Table 2: Top-Ranked Policy Statements by Issue*

<b>Issue Category</b>	<b>Top-Ranked Policy Statement</b>	<b>First-Place Votes in Issue Category</b>
<b>Food Insecurity</b>	State and local governments should work with food banks, food pantries, and other charitable organizations, including faith-based groups, to increase and improve programs that reduce food insecurity.	43.4% (99)
<b>Nutritional Quality</b>	Communities should consider setting aside public property and creating zoning for community gardens and neighborhood farms in development plans.	31.1% (71)
<b>School Food</b>	Local, state, and federal governments should encourage school nutrition directors to buy from local farmers when possible.	39.0% (89)
<b>Local Food</b>	State and local policies should encourage local food production and processing as a means of job creation.	27.2% (62)

### *Dues and Volunteering*

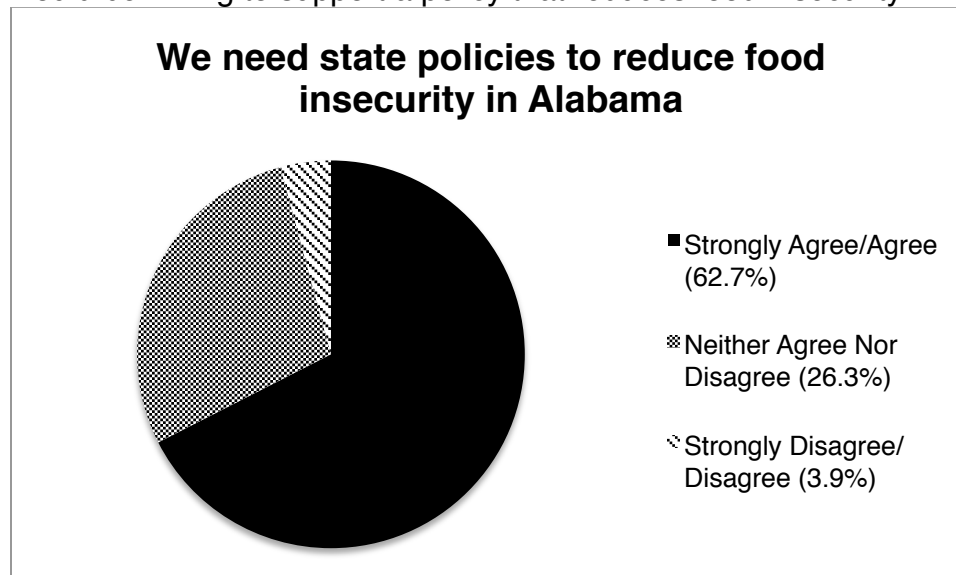
Of respondents, 63.2% (144 respondents) said they would be willing to pay annual dues to join the Alabama Food Policy Council. Average willingness/ability to pay is \$42.92.

The average respondent would be willing to volunteer 3.86 hours a month, depending on the activity. When asked what kind of volunteer activity with which they would be most comfortable, 37.7% are most comfortable attending monthly organizing meetings, 24.1% meeting with elected officials, and 19.7% hosting a meeting about food policy in their community.

### *Perceptions of the Food System*

Of respondents, 85.1% (200) say they care where their food is produced; however, 29% (66 respondents) indicate that they do not know where their food is produced. 11.4% (26 respondents) indicate that their food purchased was produced in Alabama, with 3.5% responding that it was produced within 50 miles of their residence, and 2.2% responding that it was produced within 25 miles of their residence.

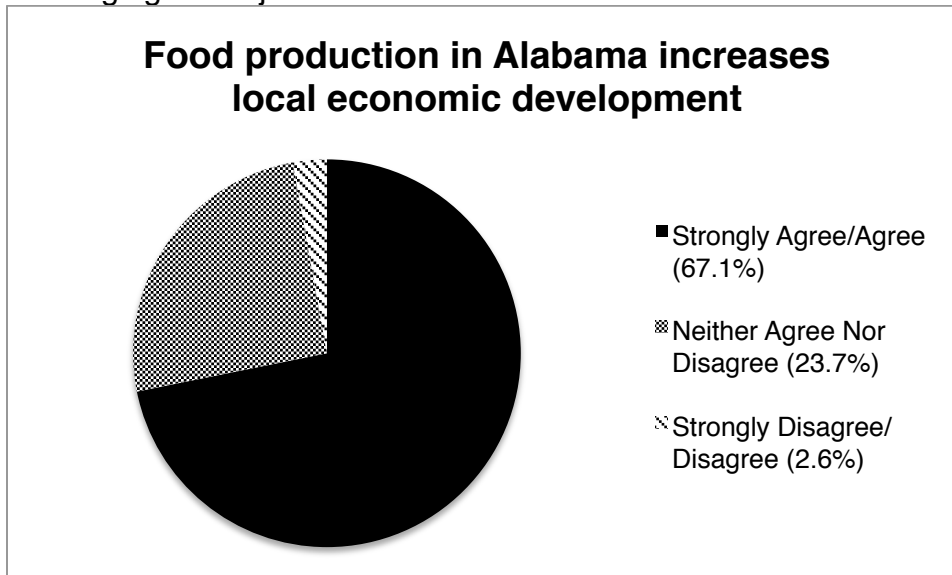
Of respondents, 69.3% strongly agree that there are people in Alabama who are food insecure, 44.7% indicate that they strongly agree that state policies are needed to reduce food insecurity in Alabama, and 46.5% of individuals strongly agree that they would be willing to support a policy that reduces food insecurity.



*Graph 2: Perceived Necessity of Policies to Reduce Food Insecurity (Percentages may not add up to 100% due to non-responses)*

These findings, reflective of the attitudes revealed in the policy preference questions (i.e. “Food insecurity is a problem in Alabama”), suggest that many of our respondents are highly aware of the issue of food insecurity and see it as very important.

Fifty-seven percent agree that food production is good for local economic development in Alabama, and 46.1% strongly agree that food production in Alabama increases local economic development. Of respondents, 49.1% strongly agree that they would be willing to support a program that increases local food production as a means of improving local economic development. This result may indicate that while economic development was not as important to individuals in the ranking exercise, respondents strongly agree that local food systems and food production could be a means by which to improve economic development and that respondents respond very well to messaging about job creation.



*Graph 3: Perceived Role of Food Production in Economic Development (Percentages may not add up to 100% due to non-responses)*

**Demographics**

Out of our respondents, 65.8% are female, 27.6% are male. The average age is 39.6 years old, the average household size is 2.4 persons, and 38.2% of respondents reported that they are married.

In terms of demographics, our survey respondents are broadly reflective of the those interested in a statewide food policy council in Alabama and not necessarily the population at large— predominantly white (76.1% of respondents are white), hold advanced degrees (30.7% had graduate and/or professional degrees), and are high-income earners (21.9% of households had incomes of \$100,000 or greater). This is discussed at greater length in the Demographic Limitations section on page 13.

Politically, however, respondents are split fairly evenly—25% of respondents indicated that they are “Conservative” or “Very Conservative”, 25% “Liberal” or “Very Liberal”, and 37.8% indicating they were moderate.

While the respondents may be reflective of a self-selected and homogenous group — meaning that it is primarily comprised of a specific subset of the population with an affinity to attend listening sessions in which food policy councils are discussed—much can be learned from the two areas in which respondents were less homogenous: political affiliation and religiosity.

One example is in the simple willingness to pay to join a food policy council. As in shown in Table 3, there is a noticeable difference in how people respond to the willingness to pay questions based on their political affiliation. Out of those that consider themselves to be Liberal or Very Liberal, 86% responded that they would be willing to pay to join a statewide food policy council, as opposed to 61.4% of those who consider themselves to be Moderates and 55.4% of those who consider themselves to be Conservative or Very Conservative.

*Table 3: Willingness to Pay by Political Affiliation*

	<b>Yes, I would pay dues</b>	<b>No, I would not pay dues</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Very Conservative or Conservative</b>	55.3% (31)	44.6% (25)	56
<b>Moderate</b>	61.4% (51)	38.6% (32)	83
<b>Very Liberal or Liberal</b>	86.0% (49)	14.0% (8)	57
<b>Total</b>	66.8% (131)	33.2% (65)	196

Political affiliation could also play a role in how change the way they respond to food policy statements based upon the language. In the local food section, explicitly political terms were used in the policy opinion statements in order to see how respondents reacted. In Table 4, we can see that out of the respondents that responded with a political affiliation, there are not major differences in the rate at which they are indicating that the issue of local food is most important in Alabama.

*Table 4: Local Food vs. Other Issues by Political Affiliation*

	<b>Local Food Top-Ranked</b>	<b>Other Issues Top-Ranked</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Very Conservative or Conservative</b>	15.4% (8)	84.6% (44)	52
<b>Moderate</b>	15.9% (14)	84.1% (74)	88
<b>Very Liberal or Liberal</b>	12.1% (7)	87.9% (51)	58
<b>Total</b>	14.8% (29)	86.2% (169)	196

However, in Table 5, a clear breakdown can be seen when respondents of different political affiliations are compared in responding to the policy statements *within* the local food category. We can see that Moderates tend to rank language that describes local food as a way to create jobs locally, higher than those who are Very Liberal or Liberal tend to rank language that describes sustainable agriculture as a way to improve the local food system higher, and that those who are Very Conservative or Conservative believe that grants and tax incentives for producers are the best way to improve the local food system. This shows that the language used will be important to the food policy council as it moves forward in trying to change public policy.

*Table 5: Local Food Idea Top Rankings by Political Affiliation*

Ranking	Policy Idea	Very Conservative or Conservative	Moderate	Very Liberal or Liberal	Sum
1	Job Creation	14	28	13	55
2	Sustainable Agriculture/ Agri-tourism	8	20	25	53
3	Reduce Regulations	13	22	7	42
4	Grants/Tax Incentives	15	13	11	39
	<b>Sum</b>	50	83	53	175

In terms of religiosity, our respondents indicated that they are religious, with 47.8% of respondents saying that religion is an important part of their daily life, and 50.4% indicating that their religious beliefs are “Very Important” to them.

Just as with political affiliation, religiosity changes how people respond to the willingness to pay question. While the majority of those in our survey that say that religion is important are willing to pay dues to a food policy council, those who say religion is not important are more likely to pay dues to such an organization, as can be seen in Table 6. This could be because those who are religious may already donate to a religious organization that they see as addressing issues in the food system.

*Table 6: Willingness to Pay by Religiosity*

	Yes, I would pay dues	No, I would not pay dues	Total
<b>Yes, religion is important</b>	63.8% (97)	36.2% (55)	152
<b>No, religion is not important</b>	78.4% (40)	21.6% (11)	51
<b>Total</b>	67.5% (137)	32.5% (66)	203

Religiosity could also play a role in how respondents ranked the larger issue categories. Those who say that religion is an important part of their daily life were more likely to indicate that food security was their top-ranked issue than those who indicated that

religion is not an important part of their daily life. This could be because many religious teachings emphasize the need to care for the poor or hungry, and thus this could influence respondents' perception of the food system as a whole. These figures can be seen in Table 7.

*Table 7: Food Insecurity vs. Other Issues by Religiosity*

	<b>Food Insecurity Top-Ranked</b>	<b>Other Issues Top-Ranked</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Yes, religion is important</b>	59.5% (88)	40.5% (60)	148
<b>No, religion is not important</b>	47.1% (24)	52.9% (27)	51
<b>Total</b>	56.2% (112)	43.7% (87)	199

#### *Demographic Limitations*

While we believe that the listening sessions were successful at engaging groups that are already concerned about issues of food policy in Alabama, there are concerns that the sample of respondents are not reflective of the state's population as a whole.

*Table 8: Comparing Survey Sample Demographics to American Community Survey\**

		<b>Survey Sample Demographics</b>	<b>ACS (2011)</b>	<b>Difference</b>
<b>Gender</b>	Female	68.8%	51.6%	+17.2%
	Male	28.8%	48.4%	-19.6%
<b>Age</b>	Median Age	28	38.1	-10.1
<b>Employment</b>	Unemployed, Seeking Employment	2.1%	6.8%	-4.7%
<b>Education</b>	Four-year Degree (Completed)	18.4%	13.9%	+4.5%
	Graduate/Professional Degree	29.9%	8.4%	+21.5%
<b>Income</b>	\$75,000 or Greater (Household)	30.8%	25.2%	+5.6%
<b>Race</b>	White	73.5%	70.2%	+3.3%
	African-American	14.5%	27.2%	-12.7%
	American Indian	1.3%	1.1%	+0.2%
	Asian	0.85%	1.4%	-0.55%
	Hispanic/Latino	3.8%	3.9%	-0.1%

*(Percentages may not add up to 100% due to non-responses)*

When comparing the demographics of our sample of survey respondents to those listed for Alabama by the 2011 American Community Survey, it is easy to conclude we have a

sample that is heavily biased towards females, younger individuals, employed individuals with relatively high household incomes, those who have higher levels of educational attainment than Alabama’s population as a whole. It is also worth noting that every racial demographic is under-sampled, with the exception of Whites and American Indians.

In terms of political affiliation, the survey is also heavily biased towards Moderates and Liberals. Table 9 compares our survey sample responses about political leanings to Gallup’s 2011 data on political affiliation in Alabama.

*Table 9. Comparing Survey Sample Political Leanings to Gallup\**

	<b>Conservative</b>	<b>Moderate</b>	<b>Liberal</b>
<b>Survey Sample</b>	24.3%	38%	24.7%
<b>Gallup (2011)</b>	49.8%	31.9%	13.1%
<b>Difference</b>	-25.5%	+6.1%	+11.6%

*(Percentages may not add up to 100% due to non-responses)*

In terms of religiosity, our survey sample is slightly less religious than the state of Alabama as a whole. While 50.4% of our respondents indicated that they were “Very Religious”, 74% of Alabamians responded in the same way according to a 2009 report by The Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life.

#### *Listening Session Responses*

Participants in the listening sessions highlighted two main themes—collaboration and incentives. Participants emphasized the need for the members of the AFPC Steering Committee to collaborate to improve food policy. Additionally, participants indicated that the AFPC would need to focus on collaborating with government agencies (such as the USDA) to provide resources to farmers and members. Participants also indicated that it would be vital to collaborate with state and local government officials to achieve policy goals.

In terms of incentives, participants indicated that incentives were needed to attract new and beginning farmers, for farmers to start and keep farms, for younger farmers, for schools to buy local, and for producers to produce for schools, and incentives to do things such as give away produce—such as through gleaning— or through tax incentives. Many participants indicated that they did not believe change in the food system could happen unless there were proper incentives.

Many participants discussed the need to improve food access, both with an approach that focused on geographic issues. While some participants, particularly in Birmingham, highlighted the need to address food deserts, others felt that approaches such as increasing SNAP participation and acceptance was important.

Participants indicated the need for education programs, both for policymakers and citizens, and indicated that when approaching policy-makers, specific recommendations needed to be made.

In terms of regulation, many participants in listening sessions indicated that food safety was important; however, participants understood that some regulations make it more difficult for smaller producers to compete in the market. Particularly at the Mobile listening session, participants discussed local regulations that prevented some restaurants, grocery stores, and farmers from donating to the local food bank. Some participants pointed out that restaurants were even forbidden from feeding employees after hours because of local health regulations.



## **POST-RESEARCH ACTIVITIES**

### *Alabama Sustainable Agriculture Network Food and Farm Forum*

At the Alabama Sustainable Agriculture Network (ASAN) Food and Farm Forum, held in Orange Beach, AL on October 26<sup>th</sup> -27<sup>th</sup> 2012, the AFPC Steering Committee reconvened to discuss the results of the surveys and listening sessions, as well as to discuss possible structure for the organization.

After reviewing information from the surveys, as well as insight from the experiences of other local and state food policy councils, the Steering Committee indicated that it would be best to move forward with a food policy council that, at least initially, served as a major program of a non-profit, with ASAN agreeing to house the AFPC.

Some members emphasized an opportunity to work with the Alabama Department of Agriculture and Industries. While this strategic opportunity was important, Steering Committee members were reluctant to adopt a structure similar to that of North and South Carolina because of potential problems with political and administrative instability.

Some of the Steering Committee members emphasized the need to continue listening sessions throughout the course of the food policy council's life so as to work towards democratizing Alabama's local food system. Many members were excited at the prospect of having more listening sessions in their respective areas and reaching out to individuals and groups with whom they are not currently working. These listening sessions could also serve as helpful when developing messaging and creating positive public opinion for possible policy changes.

Steering Committee members discussed the need to continue the conversation, particularly in regards to procuring funds for programs and staff, hiring criteria for staff, and keeping in mind the strategic partnerships that had to be formed in order to implement policy changes.

The Steering Committee agreed to reconvene in late 2012/early 2013 in order to plan for the future.

## CONCLUSIONS

Community partners were able to gather a diverse group of stakeholders to listening sessions. When asked to rank which issues regarding the food system were most pressing, 53.1% responded that food insecurity was most important. Respondents indicated that more policies were needed to reduce food insecurity (63.7% strongly agree/agree that “we need state policies that reduce food insecurity in Alabama”), and that local food production could benefit the state’s economic development (67.1% strongly agree/agree that “Food production in Alabama increases economic development”).

While 85.1% of respondents care where their food is produced, 29% do not know where their food is produced, and even fewer (11.4%) indicate that their food is produced in Alabama. This indicates that while the Alabamians surveyed are willing to pay attention to where their food is produced, there are limited opportunities and information within the current food system that incentivize acting on those values.

The survey response is heavily biased towards individuals who may be interested in a food policy council (predominantly white, well educated, high income earners, with moderate/liberal political affiliation) as opposed to representing the state of Alabama as a whole. This may emphasize a need to reach out to a stakeholder group that is more traditional in addition to those already involved.

There is also evidence that respondents respond very differently to language that may be seen as explicitly political. Moving forward, it will be necessary for the food policy council to attune their messaging very carefully to the current political environment in Alabama in order to achieve policy changes.

Respondents are largely very religious, with 50.4% of respondents indicating that their religious beliefs are very important to them. Given that religious individuals were more likely to indicate that food insecurity was their top-ranked issue, this may mean that a broader base of citizens in Alabama may respond favorably to policies that reduce food insecurity.

This survey indicates that participants would be willing to contribute both money and time to an organization that seeks to make policies that reduce food insecurity and improve the local food system as a whole.

The listening sessions indicate that individuals in Alabama are beginning important conversations about the local food system and there is much possibility for a more democratized, sustainable food system if these listening sessions and the work of the food policy council continue in a way that is both strategic and intentional.

**APPENDIX A: Full Survey Results**

## Coming to the Table: Alabama Food Policy Council Survey Results

234 Respondents total from 9 different listening sessions.

### **ISSUE RANKING & POLICY PREFERENCES:**

*Most important issue to respondents was food insecurity (hunger).*

#### ***Overall Policy Preferences***

<b>Rank</b>	<b>Policy</b>	<b>First Place Votes</b>	<b>Average Rank</b>	<b>Variance</b>
<b>1</b>	Food Insecurity	121 (53.1%)	1.88	1.18
<b>2</b>	Nutritional Quality	37 (16.2%)	2.51	1.01
<b>3</b>	School food issues	28 (12.3%)	2.77	1.02
<b>4</b>	Local food production	27 (11.8%)	2.87	1.14

#### ***Food Insecurity Policy Preferences***

<b>Rank</b>	<b>Policy</b>	<b>First Place Votes</b>	<b>Average Rank</b>	<b>Variance</b>
<b>1</b>	State and local governments should work with food banks, food pantries, and other charitable organizations, including faith-based groups, to increase and improve programs that reduce food insecurity	99 (43.4%)	2.15	1.83
<b>2</b>	State and local governments should help more retailers, including farmers' markets and roadside stands, accept food stamps (SNAP).	39 (17.1%)	3.15	2.24
<b>3</b>	State and local governments should offer incentives to <i>locally owned</i> companies that choose to open new grocery stores in areas that currently lack access to nutritious foods	29 (12.7%)	3.00	1.5
<b>4</b>	State and local governments should make public transportation available and efficient so people who are food insecure can better access nutritious foods	22 (9.6%)	3.19	1.77
<b>5</b>	State and local governments should offer incentives to any company that chooses to open new grocery stores in areas that currently lack access to nutritious foods	18 (7.9%)	3.51	1.68

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***Nutritional Quality Policy Preferences***

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<b>Rank</b>	<b>Policy</b>	<b>First Place Votes</b>	<b>Average Rank</b>	<b>Variance</b>
<b>1</b>	Communities should consider setting aside public property and creating zoning for community gardens and neighborhood farms in development plans.	71 (31.1%)	2.22	1.18
<b>2</b>	Convenience stores, gas stations, grocery stores, and farmers' markets should carry locally produced foods.	60 (26.3%)	2.52	1.48
<b>3</b>	Foods grown and processed in Alabama should be purchased and prepared in public institutions such as hospitals, prisons and senior centers.	58 (25.4%)	2.40	1.26
<b>4</b>	Government and civic groups should work with seniors to ensure they can access Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program benefits online.	20 (8.8%)	2.87	0.88

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***School Food Policy Preferences***

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<b>Rank</b>	<b>Policy</b>	<b>First Place Votes</b>	<b>Average Rank</b>	<b>Variance</b>
<b>1</b>	Local, state, and federal governments should encourage school nutrition directors to buy from local farmers when possible.	89 (39.0%)	1.85	0.79
<b>2</b>	Schools should have proper equipment so that foods are cooked on campus and not just warmed up.	61 (26.8%)	2.29	1.06
<b>3</b>	School garden programs should be developed to provide fresh fruits and vegetables to school lunchrooms.	41 (18.0 %)	2.49	0.99
<b>4</b>	Vending machines should either not be permitted on school campuses or those schools that choose to have vending machines should establish strict health standards for items offered.	18 (7.9%)	3.33	0.94

### ***Local Food Production Policy Preferences***

<b>Rank</b>	<b>Policy</b>	<b>First Place Votes</b>	<b>Average Rank</b>	<b>Variance</b>
<b>1</b>	State and local policies should encourage local food production and processing as a means of job creation.	62 (27.2%)	2.30	1.20
<b>2</b>	State and local governments should enhance the profitability of small- and medium-sized farms in Alabama by supporting direct farm marketing, sustainable agriculture, and agri-tourism efforts.	55 (24.1%)	2.38	1.16
<b>3</b>	State and local governments should reduce regulations that make local food production and processing difficult.	52 (22.8 %)	2.63	1.37
<b>4</b>	Grants and tax incentives should be offered to farmers and processors who produce high quality foods that meet community needs.	41 (18.0%)	2.68	1.19

### **DUES & VOLUNTEERING:**

62% of respondents (145) said they would be willing to pay annual dues to join the Alabama Food Policy Council. Average Willingness to Pay is \$42.92.

The average respondent would be willing to volunteer 3.86 hours a month, depending on the activity. 89 (38%) are most comfortable attending monthly organizing meetings, 56 (23.9%) are most comfortable meeting with elected officials, and 47 (20%) are most comfortable hosting a meeting about food policy in their community.

### **Willingness to Contribute**

<b>Measure</b>	<b>Average</b>	<b>Max</b>	<b>Min</b>	<b>Variance</b>	<b>Standard Deviation</b>
Willingness to Pay Dues	\$42.92 /year	\$500	\$0	2693.78	51.90
Willingness to Volunteer	3.86 hours/month	15	0	8.09	2.84

**PERCEPTIONS OF THE FOOD SYSTEM & FOOD HABITS:**

<b>Percentage of Food Shopping Done for Household</b>	<b>Percentage (Number) of Respondents</b>
0-25%	21.4% (50)
26-50%	11.5% (27)
51-75%	11.1% (26)
76-100%	51.7% (121)

85.1% (194) of respondents say they care where their food is produced.

*Shopping Habits*

	<b>Very Rarely</b> (0-5 times a year)	<b>Rarely</b> (6-11 times a year)	<b>Monthly</b> (12 times a year)	<b>Regularly</b> (2-3 times a month)	<b>Very Regularly</b> (4+ times a month)
At a Supercenter such as Wal-Mart or Target	<b>29.9%</b> <b>(70)</b>	12.4% (29)	11.5% (27)	21.4% (50)	<b>17.1%</b> <b>(40)</b>
At wholesale stores (Sam's Club or Costco)	<b>55.6%</b> <b>(130)</b>	15.4% (36)	9.8% (23)	6.0% (14)	<b>4.3%</b> <b>(10)</b>
At a typical grocery store (Kroger or Winn-Dixie)	<b>9.8%</b> <b>(23)</b>	8.5% (20)	13.7% (32)	32.5% (76)	<b>27.8%</b> <b>(65)</b>
At convenience stores (Kangaroo or Circle K)	<b>64.1%</b> <b>(150)</b>	15.4% (36)	4.3% (10)	5.1% (12)	<b>0.9%</b> <b>(2)</b>
At a large specialty grocer such as Whole Foods or Earth Fare	<b>39.7%</b> <b>(93)</b>	22.2% (52)	12.0% (28)	8.5% (20)	<b>9.0%</b> <b>(21)</b>
At a small health/natural foods store or a farm co-op	<b>50.9%</b> <b>(119)</b>	21.4% (50)	9.4% (22)	4.3% (10)	<b>3.8%</b> <b>(9)</b>
At a Farmers' Market	<b>30.3%</b> <b>(71)</b>	26.1% (61)	14.1% (33)	10.3% (24)	<b>11.1%</b> <b>(26)</b>
Directly from a producer's farm	<b>61.5%</b> <b>(144)</b>	17.1% (40)	5.1% (12)	2.1% (5)	<b>4.3%</b> <b>(10)</b>

*Perceptions on where food purchased is produced*

<b>Location</b>	<b>Percentage (Number) of Respondents</b>
Outside the U.S	4.3% (10)
The U.S.	43.2% (101)
The Southeastern U.S.	7.3% (17)
Alabama	5.6% (13)
Alabama <u>and</u> within 50 miles from where I live	3.4% (8)
Alabama <u>and</u> within 25 miles from where I live	2.6% (6)
I do not know	29.5% (69)



*Views on Food Security, Food Production, and Policy*

	<b>Strongly Agree</b>				<b>Strongly Disagree</b>		
<b>There are people in AL who are food insecure.</b>	69.3% (158)	11.0% (25)	5.3% (12)	5.7% (13)	0.9% (3)	0.4% (2)	1.8% (4)
<b>State policies help to eliminate food insecurity.</b>	11.4% (26)	10.5% (24)	18.0% (41)	25.0% (57)	13.2% (30)	7.5% (17)	7.5% (17)
<b>Food production in AL increases local economic development.</b>	46.1% (105)	21.1% (48)	12.7% (29)	6.1% (14)	4.8% (11)	1.8% (4)	0.9% (2)
<b>State policies promote local food production for local economic development in AL</b>	10.5% (25)	8.8% (20)	17.5% (40)	27.6% (63)	12.7% (29)	8.3% (19)	4.8% (11)
<b>Food insecurity is a problem in AL.</b>	51.8% (118)	19.7% (45)	11.4% (26)	6.1% (14)	1.3% (3)	1.3% (3)	0.4% (1)
<b>We need state policies to reduce food insecurity in AL</b>	44.7% (102)	18.0% (41)	15.4% (35)	6.6% (15)	4.4% (10)	3.1% (7)	0.9% (2)
<b>My family is not concerned about food insecurity in AL.</b>	7.5% (17)	7.0% (16)	11.4% (26)	12.7% (29)	13.2% (30)	16.2% (37)	25.0% (57)
<b>My family would support a policy that reduces food insecurity.</b>	41.7% (95)	20.2% (46)	13.6% (31)	7.0% (16)	5.3% (12)	2.6% (6)	2.6% (6)
<b>I do what my family thinks I should do.</b>	11.0% (25)	14.0% (32)	12.7% (29)	25.9% (59)	9.2% (21)	8.8% (20)	7.6% (18)
<b>Food production is good for local economic development in Alabama.</b>	57.0% (130)	20.2% (46)	8.3% (19)	4.4% (10)	1.8% (4)	0.4% (1)	1.3% (3)
<b>Most Americans are concerned about food insecurity in their state.</b>	5.7% (13)	5.7% (13)	11.8% (27)	26.8% (61)	19.3% (44)	18.4% (42)	5.3% (12)
<b>My family is concerned about increasing local food production to improve economic development.</b>	28.5% (65)	18.0% (42)	16.7% (38)	16.7% (38)	8.8% (2)	3.5% (8)	0.9% (2)
<b>Most Americans would support a state or local policy to reduce food insecurity.</b>	12.3% (28)	17.5% (40)	23.7% (54)	24.1% (55)	11.4% (26)	0.9% (2)	2.6% (6)
<b>If I supported a policy to reduce food insecurity I would tell my family.</b>	53.1% (121)	24.6% (56)	5.7% (13)	3.5% (8)	3.1% (7)	1.3% (3)	1.3% (3)
<b>We need state policies to increase local food production for local economic growth</b>	41.7% (95)	22.4% (51)	16.2% (37)	5.3% (12)	4.4% (10)	1.3% (3)	0.9% (2)
<b>Most people who are important to me think I should support a state policy that would reduce food insecurity.</b>	24.6% (56)	12.3% (28)	14.9% (34)	26.3% (60)	7.0% (16)	3.1% (7)	2.6% (6)

<b>My family would support programs that increased local food production in Alabama to improve local economic development.</b>	38.2% (87)	21.1% (48)	15.4% (35)	11.4% (26)	3.9% (9)	0.4% (1)	1.8% (4)
<b>Most Americans are concerned about using local food production as a way to improve local economic development.</b>	11.4% (26)	6.1% (14)	19.3% (44)	25.9% (59)	15.4% (35)	11.0% (25)	2.6% (6)
<b>Most Americans would support a state or local policy that increased local food production to improve local economic development.</b>	14.5% (33)	13.6% (31)	22.8% (52)	21.9% (50)	14.0% (32)	2.6% (6)	2.5% (5)
<b>If I supported a program that increased local food production to improve local economic development I would tell my family.</b>	53.9% (123)	16.2% (37)	10.1% (23)	5.3% (12)	3.1% (7)	1.8% (4)	1.3% (3)
<b>Most people who are important to me think I should support a program that would increase local food production to improve local economic development.</b>	24.6% (56)	15.8% (36)	19.3% (44)	20.6% (47)	4.4% (10)	3.5% (8)	2.6% (6)
<b>I would be willing to support a program that increases local food production as a means of improving local economic development.</b>	49.1% (112)	21.1% (48)	13.6% (31)	4.4% (10)	0.9% (2)	0.4% (1)	1.3% (3)
<b>I would be willing to support a policy that reduces food insecurity.</b>	46.5% (106)	24.6% (56)	11.8% (27)	4.4% (10)	2.2% (5)	0.9% (2)	1.3% (3)
<b>I intend to support programs designed to increase food production as a means of improving local economic development.</b>	43.4% (99)	25.0% (57)	12.7% (29)	6.6% (15)	1.3% (3)	0.9% (2)	1.3% (3)
<b>I intend to support programs that provide food to people who are food insecure.</b>	47.8% (109)	21.1% (48)	11.0% (25)	7.5% (17)	1.8% (4)	0.9% (2)	1.8% (4)

**DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION:**

*Gender:* Female: 68.8% (153 respondents); Male: 28.8% (64 respondents)

*Age:* Average: 39.6 years old; Maximum: 86, Minimum: 18, Median: 28

*Average Household Size:* 2.4 persons

*39.2% (87) of respondents report that they are married.*

*Race*

<b>Race</b>	<b>Percent (Number) of Respondents</b>
African-American	14.5% (34)
Asian	0.85% (2)
American Indian	1.3% (3)
Hispanic or Latino	3.8% (9)
White	73.5% (172)
Other	1.3% (3)

*Employment Status*

<b>Employment Status</b>	<b>Percent (Number) of Respondents</b>
Employed full-time	30.3% (71)
Employed part-time	15% (35)
Employed part-time, but seeking full-time employment	0.43% (1)
Unemployed	2.6% (6)
Unemployed, but seeking full-time employment	2.1% (5)
Retired	12.4% (29)
Student	27.4% (64)

*Education Level*

<b>Highest Level of Education</b>	<b>Percent (Number) of Respondents</b>
Less than 12 <sup>th</sup> grade	1.7% (4)
High School or GED	6.4% (15)
Some college, no degree	29.9% (70)
2-year college degree (Associate, Technical, etc.)	5.1% (12)
4-year college degree (Bachelor's)	18.4% (43)
Graduate/Professional Degree (Master's, PhD, MBA, etc.)	29.9% (70)

*Income*

<b>Income Level</b>	<b>Percent (Number) of Respondents</b>
Less than \$9,999	6% (14)
\$10,000 to \$24,999	6.8% (16)
\$25,000 to \$50,000	11.1% (26)
\$50,000 to \$74,999	8.5% (20)
\$75,000 to \$99,999	9.4% (22)
\$100,000 or more	21.4% (50)

*Political Leanings*

<b>Political Leaning</b>	<b>Percent (Number) of Respondents</b>
Very Conservative	11.5% (27)
Conservative	12.8% (30)
Moderate, Lean Conservative	11.5% (27)
Moderate	18.4% (43)
Moderate, Lean Liberal	8.1% (19)
Liberal	11.5% (27)
Very Liberal	13.2% (31)

*Congressional District Residence:*

<b>Congressional District</b>	<b>Percent (Number) of Respondents</b>
AL-01 Rep. Jo Bonner (R)	6.8% (15)
AL-02 Rep. Martha Roby (R)	4.5% (10)
AL-03 Rep. Michael Rogers (R)	12.6% (28)
AL-04 Rep. Robert Aderholt (R)	1.8% (4)
AL-05 Rep. Mo Brooks (R)	10.4% (23)
AL-06 Rep. Spencer Bachus (R)	2.3% (5)
AL-07 Rep. Terri Sewell (D)	8.6% (7)

*Religious Beliefs*

49.1% (109) say that religion is an important part of their daily life.

50.4% (118) say that their personal religious beliefs are “Very Important”

**APPENDIX B: Survey Instrument**

## Coming to the Table



The purpose of this survey is to understand stakeholders' perceptions of food in Alabama.

**We greatly appreciate your participation.**

AARP Alabama  
201 Monroe Street, RSA Tower 1880  
Montgomery, AL 36104

Auburn University  
Department of Agricultural Economics and Rural Sociology  
Auburn, AL 36849

## Coming to the Table

1. When discussing the food in your community, *school food* may be a consideration. Please rank the following proposed policy recommendations meant to improve school food. That is, put a “1” next to the most preferred recommendation, a “2” next to the second most preferred, and so on down to “4”. Please no ties.

\_\_\_ Local, state, and federal governments should encourage school nutrition directors to buy from local farmers when possible.

\_\_\_ Schools should have proper equipment so that foods are cooked on campus and not just warmed up.

\_\_\_ Vending machines should either not be permitted on school campuses or those schools that choose to have vending machines should establish strict health standards for items offered.

\_\_\_ School garden programs should be developed to provide fresh fruits and vegetables to school lunchrooms.

If other school food issues are important to you please list them below:

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2. When discussing the food in your community, the nutritional quality of the food available may be a consideration. Please rank the following policy recommendations that are meant to *improve food quality* in your community. That is, put a “1” next to the most preferred recommendation, a “2” next to the second most preferred, and so on down to “4”. Please no ties.

\_\_\_ Convenience stores, gas stations, grocery stores, and farmers’ markets should carry locally produced foods.

\_\_\_ Communities should consider setting aside public property and creating zoning for community gardens and neighborhood farms in development plans.

\_\_\_ Government and civic groups should work with seniors to ensure they can access Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program benefits online.

\_\_\_ Foods grown and processed in Alabama should be purchased and prepared in public institutions such as hospitals, prisons and senior centers.

If other food quality issues are important to you please list them below:

---



3. When discussing the food in your community, hunger (food insecurity) may be a consideration. Please rank the following four policy recommendations proposed to reduce hunger in your community. That is, put a “1” next to the most preferred recommendation, a “2” next to the second most preferred, and so on down to “5”. Please no ties.

*People who are food insecure lack access to both an adequate quantity of food and food that is wholesome and nutritious.*

\_\_\_ State and local governments should work with food banks, food pantries, and other charitable organizations, including faith-based groups, to increase and improve programs that reduce food insecurity.

\_\_\_ State and local governments should make public transportation available and efficient so people who are food insecure can better access nutritious foods.

\_\_\_ State and local governments should offer incentives to *locally owned* companies that choose to open new grocery stores in areas that currently lack access to nutritious foods.

\_\_\_ State and local governments should offer incentives to any company that chooses to open new grocery stores in areas that currently lack access to nutritious foods.

\_\_\_ State and local governments should help more retailers, including farmers’ markets and roadside stands, accept food stamps (SNAP).

If other hunger issues are important to you please list them below:

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4. When discussing the food in your community, local food production may be a consideration. Please rank the following four policy recommendations proposed to increase local food production in your community. That is, put a “1” next to the most preferred recommendation, a “2” next to the second most preferred, and so on down to “4”. Please no ties.

\_\_\_ Grants and tax incentives should be offered to farmers and processors who produce high quality foods that meet community needs.

\_\_\_ State and local governments should reduce regulations that make local food production and processing difficult.

\_\_\_ State and local policies should encourage local food production and processing as a means of job creation.

\_\_\_ State and local governments should enhance the profitability of small- and medium-sized farms in Alabama by supporting direct farm marketing, sustainable agriculture, and agri-tourism efforts.

If other food production issues are important to you please list them below:

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5. Overall, please rank (a) school food, (b) nutritional quality of food available in communities, (c) hunger, and (d) local food production in order of their importance to you when you consider the food system in your community. That is, put a “1” next to the most important factor, a “2” next to the second most important, and so on down to “4”. Please no ties.

\_\_\_ Improving school food

\_\_\_ Increasing the nutritional quality of the food available in communities

\_\_\_ Reducing hunger

\_\_\_ Increasing local food production

A **food policy council** is a diverse group of citizens from across the food system that seeks to educate citizens about the food system, collaborate to identify and address issues in the food system, and advocate for policy changes that would improve the food system, such as the ones above.

6. If a food policy council with these goals existed in Alabama, would you be willing to become a member by paying annual dues?

\_\_\_Yes

\_\_\_No

*If yes, what annual dues would you be willing to pay for this organization?*

\$25

\$50

\$75

\$100

\$200

*Would you be willing to pay annual dues that are more than the stated amounts? If so, how much per year would you be willing to pay?*

---

7. In order for a food policy council to achieve their stated goals, many activities and skills are needed. Please rank the following volunteer activities based on your preferences and comfort level. That is, put a “1” next to the most preferred and a “3” next to the least.

\_\_\_ Meeting with city, county, or state officials to discuss food policy issues

\_\_\_ Hosting a discussion in your community or at a school about food policy issues

\_\_\_ Attending monthly meetings to organize efforts of the state food policy council in your community

*Is there any other way you would be willing to volunteer for the food policy council? If so, list briefly below:*

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8. Given the opportunity to volunteer by doing your top ranked activity, how much time a month would you dedicate to that activity on behalf of the food policy council?

- An average of one hours per month.
- An average of two hours per month.
- An average of five hours per month.
- An average of 10 hours per month.

*Would you be willing to volunteer more time per month than the stated options? If so, how many hours per month?*

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9. What percentage of the food shopping do you do for your household?

- 0-25%
- 26-50%
- 51-75%
- 76-100%

10. What does the term “local food” mean to you?

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11. Do you care where your food is produced?

- Yes
- No

12. When you purchase food, how often do you buy at the following locations?

	<b>Very rarely</b> (0 to 5 times a year)	<b>Rarely</b> (6 to 11 times a year)	<b>Monthly</b> (12 times a year)	<b>Regularly</b> (2 to 3 times a month)	<b>Very regularly</b> (4 or more times a month)
At a Supercenter such as Wal-Mart or Target	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
At wholesale stores such as Sam’s Club or Costco	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
At a typical grocery store such as Kroger or Winn-Dixie	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
At convenience stores such as Kangaroo or Circle K	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
At a large specialty grocer such as Whole Foods or Earth Fare	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
At a small health/natural foods store or a food co-op	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
At a Farmers’ Market	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Directly from a producer’s farm	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>



	Strongly Agree						Strongly Disagree
Most Americans would support a state or local policy to reduce food insecurity.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
If I supported a policy to reduce food insecurity I would tell my family.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
We need state policies to increase local food production for local economic growth	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Most people who are important to me think I should support a state policy that would reduce food insecurity.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

**And now a few background questions to help us know if we've surveyed all different kinds of people in Alabama.**

15. What month and year were you born?

\_\_\_\_\_MM  
 \_\_\_\_\_YYYY

16. What are the first three digits of your ZIP Code? \_\_\_ \_\_ \_

17. Politically, how do you consider yourself?

	Conservative		Moderate			Liberal	
I am .....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

18. What is your gender?

- Female
- Male

19. Are you Spanish, Hispanic or Latino?

- Yes
- No

20. Do you consider yourself . . . ? (feel free to select more than one)

- Asian
- Black or African American
- White
- Other (please specify)\_\_\_\_\_

**21.** What best describes your highest level of education?

- Less than 12<sup>th</sup> grade
- High school or GED
- Some college, no degree
- 2 year college degree (Associate, Technical, etc.)
- 4year college degree (Bachelor's)
- Graduate or professional degree (Master's, Ph.D., M.B.A., etc.)

**22.** Are you married?

- Yes
- No

**23.** How many children live in your household?

\_\_\_\_\_ Number of children 0 to 6 years old  
\_\_\_\_\_ Number of children 7 to 17 years old

**24.** How many adults, including yourself, live in your household?

\_\_\_\_\_ Number of adults 18 to 64 years  
\_\_\_\_\_ Number of adults 65 to 84 years  
\_\_\_\_\_ Number of adults 85 and over

**25.** Which Congressional District do you live? \_\_\_\_\_

District 1 Rep. Jo Bonner

District 3 Rep. Michael "Mike" Rogers

District 5 Rep. Mo Brooks

District 7 Rep. Terri Sewell

District 2 Rep. Martha Roby

District 4 Rep. Robert Aderholt

District 6 Rep. Spencer Bachus

**26.** Religious Attitude

Is religion an important part of your daily life?

Yes \_\_\_\_\_

No \_\_\_\_\_

Not at all

Very much

My personal religious beliefs are important to me.

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

**27.** What category best describes your current employment status?

- Employed full-time
- Employed part-time
- Employed part-time, but seeking full-time employment
- Unemployed
- Unemployed, but seeking full-time employment
- Retired
- Student

**28.** Which category best describes your family's total income?

- Less than \$9,999
- \$10,000 to \$24,999
- \$25,000 to \$50,000
- \$50,000 to \$74,999
- \$75,000 to \$99,999
- \$100,000 or more

**29.** If you have any additional thoughts about food in Alabama, please share them here.

**Thanks again for completing this survey!**





Coming to the Table

**Now that we have had a discussion of food issues in your community. Please repeat the ranking exercise.**

1. When discussing the food in your community, *school food* may be a consideration. Please rank the following proposed policy recommendations meant to improve school food. That is, put a “1” next to the most preferred recommendation, a “2” next to the second most preferred, and so on down to “4”. Please no ties.

\_\_\_ Local, state, and federal governments should encourage school nutrition directors to buy from local farmers when possible.

\_\_\_ Schools should have proper equipment so that foods are cooked on campus and not just warmed up.

\_\_\_ Vending machines should either not be permitted on school campuses or those schools that choose to have vending machines should establish strict health standards for items offered.

\_\_\_ School garden programs should be developed to provide fresh fruits and vegetables to school lunchrooms.

If other school food issues are important to you please list them below:

---

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2. When discussing the food in your community, the nutritional quality of the food available may be a consideration. Please rank the following policy recommendations that are meant to *improve food quality* in your community. That is, put a “1” next to the most preferred recommendation, a “2” next to the second most preferred, and so on down to “4”. Please no ties.

\_\_\_ Convenience stores, gas stations, grocery stores, and farmers’ markets should carry locally produced foods.

\_\_\_ Communities should consider setting aside public property and creating zoning for community gardens and neighborhood farms in development plans.

\_\_\_ Government and civic groups should work with seniors to ensure they can access Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program benefits online

\_\_\_ Foods grown and processed in Alabama should be purchased and prepared in public institutions such as hospitals, prisons and senior centers.

If other food quality issues are important to you please list them below:

---

3. When discussing the food in your community, hunger (food insecurity) may be a consideration. Please rank the following four policy recommendations proposed to reduce hunger in your community. That is, put a “1” next to the most preferred recommendation, a “2” next to the second most preferred, and so on down to “5”. Please no ties.

*People who are food insecure lack access to both an adequate quantity of food and food that is wholesome and nutritious.*

- \_\_\_ State and local governments should work with food banks, food pantries, and other charitable organizations, including faith-based groups, to increase and improve programs that reduce food insecurity.
- \_\_\_ State and local governments should make public transportation available and efficient so people who are food insecure can better access nutritious foods.
- \_\_\_ State and local governments should offer incentives to *locally owned* companies that choose to open new grocery stores in areas that currently lack access to nutritious foods.
- \_\_\_ State and local governments should offer incentives to *any* company that chooses to open new grocery stores in areas that currently lack access to nutritious foods.
- \_\_\_ State and local governments should help more retailers, including farmers’ markets and roadside stands, accept food stamps (SNAP).

If other hunger issues are important to you please list them below:

---

4. When discussing the food in your community, local food production may be a consideration. Please rank the following four policy recommendations proposed to increase local food production in your community. That is, put a “1” next to the most preferred recommendation, a “2” next to the second most preferred, and so on down to “4”. Please no ties.

- \_\_\_ Grants and tax incentives should be offered to farmers and processors who produce high quality foods that meet community needs.
- \_\_\_ State and local governments should reduce regulations that make local food production and processing difficult.
- \_\_\_ State and local policies should encourage local food production and processing as a means of job creation.
- \_\_\_ State and local governments should enhance the profitability of small- and medium-sized farms in Alabama by supporting direct farm marketing, sustainable agriculture, and agri-tourism efforts.

If other food production issues are important to you please list them below:

---

5. Overall, please rank (a) school food, (b) nutritional quality of food available in communities, (c) hunger, and (d) local food production in order of their importance to you when you consider the food system in your community. That is, put a “1” next to the most important factor, a “2” next to the second most important, and so on down to “4”. Please no ties.

\_\_\_ Improving school food

\_\_\_ Increasing the nutritional quality of the food available in communities

\_\_\_ Reducing hunger

\_\_\_ Increasing local food production

**A food policy council** is a diverse group of citizens from across the food system that seeks to educate citizens about the food system, collaborate to identify and address issues in the food system, and advocate for policy changes that would improve the food system, such as the ones above

6. If a food policy council with these goals existed in Alabama, would you be willing to become a member by paying annual dues?

\_\_\_Yes

\_\_\_No

*If yes, what annual dues would you be willing to pay for this organization?*

\$25

\$50

\$75

\$100

\$200

*Would you be willing to pay annual dues that are more than the stated amounts? If so, how much per year would you be willing to pay?*

---

**7.** In order for a food policy council to achieve their stated goals, many activities and skills are needed. Please rank the following volunteer activities based on your preferences and comfort level. That is, put a “1” next to the most preferred and a “3” next to the least.

- Meeting with city, county, or state officials to discuss food policy issues
- Hosting a discussion in your community or at a school about food policy issues
- Attending monthly meetings to organize efforts of the state food policy council in your community

*Is there any other way you would be willing to volunteer for the food policy council? If so, list briefly below:*

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**8.** Given the opportunity to volunteer by doing your top ranked activity, how much time a month would you dedicate to that activity on behalf of the food policy council?

- An average of one hours per month.
- An average of two hours per month.
- An average of five hours per month.
- An average of 10 hours per month.

*Would you be willing to volunteer more time per month than the stated options? If so, how many hours per month?*

---

## **APPENDIX C: Listening Session Discussion Guide**

# COMING TO THE TABLE:

**Assessing Our Food System and Making First Steps**

Discussion Guide

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## About

### **What is the purpose of this guide?**

This document is a discussion guide to be used for the Alabama Food Policy Council listening sessions, to be held in late 2012.

### **What is the Alabama Food Policy Council?**

The Alabama Food Policy Council is a group formed in conjunction with various stakeholder groups, including the Alabama AARP, Alabama Sustainable Agriculture Network, Alabama Cooperative Extension System, Auburn University, Bay Area Food Bank, Greater Birmingham Food Policy Council, the Hampstead Institute, Food Bank of North Alabama, and the North Alabama Food Policy Council, . We'll discuss more about what a food policy council is and what they do on page 5.

### **What is the goal of this listening session?**

*The goal of this listening session is to identify priorities for the Alabama Food Policy Council's work, as well as to identify areas of local and statewide capacity to execute that work.*

Citizen input is vital to improving the food system through food policy councils, and we look forward to your active participation at this stage, and your continued participation as the Alabama Food Policy Council begins working to improve Alabama's food system.

We're measuring your participation today in two ways-- the Auburn's surveys and your input in the listening sessions. The surveys are voluntary, and while you are encouraged to participate, it is not required.

# Sample Agenda

This is a sample agenda for the statewide listening sessions. Your facilitator may have an event-specific agenda which he or she may use to guide the session, which will be provided to you.

## AGENDA

### **Welcome and Refreshments** (30 minutes)

- *Participants sign-in and receive agenda*
- *Provide food and drinks*
- *Auburn distributes Food System survey*

### **Food Policy Councils and the Food System** (15 minutes)

- *A brief primer on food policy councils and the parts of the food system/ and or panel discussion.*
- *Using as many local examples as possible to explain what is 'Food Policy', what are Food Policy Councils, and what things can Food Policy impact.*

### **Opportunities for Our Food System** (30 minutes)

- *Break into three small groups and identify challenges and opportunities within our food system.*
- *Facilitator documents ideas on poster boards*

Each group tackles the first question:

*1. What are some of the challenges facing the sectors of a food system? (Give an example of a challenge to help guide the discussion, e.g., finding ways to provide sustainable, healthy, affordable, responsible and equitable available food).*

Each Small Group facilitates one of the following 3 questions -

*2. What are some approaches to resolve these challenges; e.g., opportunities for growth in the local food system and possibilities of ways to alleviate hunger, increase economic development and create jobs through strengthening our local food system?*

3. *Who should be involved in addressing and seeking resolutions of these challenges -- community organizations, schools, churches, governments, civic groups, food banks, etc.?*

4. *What policy changes, if any, would be necessary to implement these changes and should discussions of these changes be conducted locally or statewide?*

### **Improving our Food System** (30 minutes)

- *Regroup in the main room*
- *Facilitators post ideas from all three groups on the walls – “challenges facing the sectors of the Food System”*
- *Participants use sticky dots to ‘vote’ on issues they feel are most critical*
- *Facilitators present information from the break-out sessions about the 3 other questions. Facilitators lead discussion. Ideas are documented on poster board.*

### **Next Steps** (15 minutes)

- **Discuss Future Listening Sessions**
- **Announce State-wide Food Policy Council events (if any)**
- **Food and Farm Forum – presentation of feedback from state-wide listening sessions at the Alabama Sustainable Agriculture Network’s annual conference in Gulf Shores on October 25<sup>th</sup>, 2012**
- **Distribute AU post survey and Workshop evaluation**

### **Follow Up**

- **Facilitators take pictures of poster boards and event itself.**
- **Facilitators summarize small group discussion and priorities**
- **Facilitators send this information to Auburn (developing a white paper) and ASAN (presenting at conference and posting on web site).**

## Table Manners

When you were younger, more than likely your parents had rules for what kind of behavior was appropriate at the table.

We have similar rules for this conversation, called our Table Manners:

- Give everyone a chance to speak.
- Be respectful of others.
- Speak from your own experience.
- Be aware of your assumptions and talk about them.
- Address one another, *not* the facilitator.
- Build on, clarify, or, if necessary, provide factual correction to previous discussion points.

Facilitators and participants should feel free to add more Table Manners as they feel necessary.

# Food Policy Councils and the Food System

## What is a Food Policy Council?

A food policy council is a diverse group of citizens from across the food system that seeks to *educate citizens* about the food system, *collaborate to identify and address issues* in the food system, and *advocate for policy changes* that would improve the food system.

Food policy councils can focus on different areas of the food system and they can exist at multiple levels, but all are interested in improving their local food system in a way that is beneficial to their stakeholders.

For example, while the North Alabama Food Policy Council may focus on knowing and supporting local farmers, the Greater Birmingham Food Policy Council may focus on recruiting grocers to serve the area's many food deserts. Typically, food policy councils focus on issues such as hunger, food service and standards within public schools, economic development and job creation, community gardens, or agricultural education, just to name a few.

While statewide food policy councils focus on similar issues, they work to address them at a state level. Typically, this involves providing a voice to those advocating for food system changes to state governments, facilitating collaboration by local food policy councils, and informing state and US Congressional delegations about issues relevant to the food system in their home districts, so as to inform Federal policy on issues that impact local food systems.

## **What is the Food System?**

The Food System is what it takes to make sure that food is available. It consists of five main elements: Production, Processing, Distribution, Consumption, and Waste.

The food system is more than just a supply chain. It is a complex, adaptive system that is comprised of various parts, even within the five we've named.

Ideally, the food system integrates elements to enhance environmental, economic, social, and nutritional health for all.

# Assessing the Local Food System

## Our Local Food System

Now that we have a good idea of what the food system is, let's find out what it looks like in our community. On the next page is a worksheet where the food system is broken down in parts, and an Alabama example is given for each piece of the system. Try to identify the parts of the food system within your community, keeping in mind that the food system can look different everywhere, and keeping in mind opportunities for growth within the food system.

# Local Food System Worksheet

SYSTEM SECTOR	ROLE	ALABAMA EXAMPLES	LOCAL EXAMPLES?
Production	Growing plants and raising animals.	<b>Snow's Bend Farm</b> Coker, AL <b>Belle Chevre Goat Cheese</b> Elkmont, AL	
Processing	Transforming and packaging food.	<b>Coosa Valley Milling</b> Wilsonville, AL <b>Sister Schubert's Rolls</b> Luverne, AL	
Distribution	Transporting, storing, and marketing food.	<b>Kelley Food Distribution</b> Elba, AL <b>SRA Foods</b> Birmingham, AL	
Consumption	Purchasing, preparing, and eating food.	<b>Star Market</b> Huntsville, AL <b>Homegrown Alabama Farmers Market</b> Tuscaloosa, AL	
Waste	Composting, or simply discarding food.	<b>Alabama Gleaning</b> Birmingham, AL	



## Questions about the Local Food System

*Facilitators can use these questions to move the conversation along.*

- Do you, or do you know someone who works in the food production, processing, distribution, consumption, or waste sectors of the food system?
- What is good about the local food system now?
- What are some of the challenges and unrealized opportunities specific to these sectors? What are some of the issues specific to those sectors in your community?
- How do you interact with your local food system on a daily basis? Do you try to eat locally produced food? Shop at locally owned grocery stores?
- Are there people that struggle to get adequate and/or appropriate food within your local food system? Are there people who fall through the cracks of the food system?
- What are the opportunities for growth in your local food system?
- What opportunities exist to alleviate hunger through strengthening your local food system?
- What opportunities exist to increase economic development and create jobs through strengthening your local food system?
- What do those opportunities look like? What would it take for these opportunities to become reality?
- Do these opportunities change how the food system enhances environmental, economic, social, and nutritional health for all? If so, how?

# Opportunities for Our Food System

## What can we do?

*Here, facilitators can have participants break up into small groups where the opportunities developed in the previous exercise are deliberated upon. Facilitators should encourage participants to identify and think through pros and cons of each opportunity.*

*Have each small group identify and write down 2-3 opportunities for the local food system. Once small group time has elapsed, bring the larger group back together and have each smaller group present their opportunities. Encourage them to discuss pros and cons briefly as they did in the small group, and allow time questions and answers.*

*Here, participants should vote using “sticky dots” which will be provided to the facilitator, indicating which opportunities presented they would prefer to see implemented.*

# Opportunities Work Sheet

SYSTEM SECTOR	ROLE	LOCAL OPPORTUNITIES	PROS AND CONS
Production	Growing plants and raising animals.		
Processing	Transforming and packaging food.		
Distribution	Transporting, storing, and marketing food.		
Consumption	Purchasing, preparing, and eating food.		
Waste	Composting, or simply discarding food.		

## Questions about our Opportunities

*Facilitators can use these questions to move the conversation along.*

- What are the pros and cons of these possibilities within the food system?
- What community organizations would be involved in implementing these possibilities? Schools? Churches? Governments? Civic Groups? Food Banks?
- What kind of policy changes would be necessary to make these possibilities happen? Would this be an issue best discussed locally? Statewide?
- Does Federal law play a role in making this possibility happen? Does anyone have experiences speaking to a Senator or Member of Congress or?
- If these possibilities were implemented, how would it change how the food system enhances environmental, economic, social, and nutritional health for all? If so, how?

## Next Steps

*Here, facilitators build upon the conversation in the last section, and encourage participants to take what they've learned and implement some of the more locally-based solutions.*

*Additionally, facilitators should actively encourage participants to identify local anchor organizations and individuals who may be pivotal in their efforts, especially if they were not present.*

*Participants should be thanked for taking the time to attend and give their extremely valuable input to the AFPC.*

*Participants taking the pre- and post-session surveys should be encouraged to complete the post-session survey and turn it in.*

*Information about the ASAN October meeting should be distributed.*

# Acknowledgements

AARP Alabama

Alabama Cooperative Extension System (ACES)

Alabama Sustainable Agriculture Network (ASAN)

Auburn University

Bay Area Food Bank

Emerging Changemakers Network, Inc.

Food Bank of North Alabama

Greater Birmingham Community Food Partners

Hampstead Institute, Inc.

North Alabama Food Policy Council

Oregon Food Bank (and their Community FEAST Model)