



Savor the Coast:

A Recipe for a Sustainable Coast

June 2011



Source: Jennifer Evans-Cowley

Goal 1: Support access to healthy food for all community members

Current Status:

Stakeholders identified the need to expand access to fresh food items. Throughout the Mississippi Gulf Coast there are neighborhoods that have inadequate access to stores that sell fresh food. Following Hurricane Katrina many grocery stores did not return, leaving neighborhoods without convenient access to fresh food. Residents may shop at corner stores, but these stores often lack fresh food and when they have fresh food it is typically much more expensive than what one can find at a grocery store. The result is a food insecurity rate of 17 percent across the coast.

¹ Food banks and pantries noted that they do not have adequate donation of fresh food items, while grocery stores and distributors reported that they have a significant amount of edible food waste that is sent to landfills. The incidence of obesity and diet related diseases has been on the increase, with more than 11 percent of preschoolers in coastal counties who are obese. School districts reported that they would like to include more fresh local food items, such as fish, as part of school lunches. There are positive efforts, such as the Farm to School program, local farmers'

markets and health education programs that seek to support the needs of the regions.

Objectives:

- Support production of healthy food
- Enhance consumer access to healthy food
- Expand food diversion to food banks and food pantries

Indicators:

- Increase fruit and vegetable consumption
- Increase the number of people living less than a mile from grocery store
- Decrease in diet-related diseases
- Increase volume of food available through food banks



Source: Greg Overberg

Goal 2: Foster connections between stakeholders

Current Status:

The Mississippi Gulf Coast's food system currently demonstrates positive but limited existing collaboration among stakeholders, with the potential for many more connections. As with any food system, partnerships within and between food sectors here present significant opportunity for innovation, increased access, economic growth, and environmental sustainability. Many of the obstacles cited by stakeholders can be addressed through stronger connections. Stakeholders identified the need for increased communication with regulators, focused direct marketing efforts, and infrastructure for food waste diversion as examples of simple connections that could be made to bridge gaps in the food system and to optimize productivity, efficiency, and growth.

Objectives:

- Support local food entrepreneurs
- Improve producers' and consumers' access to markets
- Amplify communication among stakeholders
- Educate consumers about the food system

Indicators:

- Increase food production businesses
- Increase seafood lunches in schools
- Reduce site violations by fishers
- Achieve MSC certification

Successfully integrating producers and other food entrepreneurs into existing markets will shorten the local supply chain, strengthen the bond between fishers and consumers, and encourage local consumption.

Guides should be multilingual, incorporate intuitive visual graphics and be locally produced.

7. Expand information resources for fishers

The Department of Marine Resources offers phone-in hotlines site conditions for oyster and shrimp harvesting in English. This service can be expanded to other languages to support the diversity of the fisher community. Over time these alerts can be expanded to offer mobile device text alerts or a mobile app to allow for increased access across multiple communication mediums. Information should also be visually communicated for fishers with low literacy. These can be featured on the webpage in a user- friendly interface accessible to non-native and native English speakers alike.

8. Guide the future of the seafood industry

The Gulf Coast seafood industry must work together to adapt to changing conditions. For example, many major seafood retailers are turning to third party certification programs to assure their customers of seafood safety and quality. The Gulf Coast should seek third party certification to ensure access to major retail outlets. Another topic for discussion is privately leasing oyster beds, which is uncommon in Mississippi State waters. Private leases are thought by some experts to be an important component in conservation and water quality improvement. Finally NOAA is developing a policy to guide large-scale open sea aquaculture operations in federal waters. Although the Gulf of Mexico currently has a comprehensive open sea mariculture policy from the Gulf Coast Fisheries Management Council, changes in federal policy indicate that expanding the mariculture industry in the United States is a priority.

In order to address these challenges and opportunities, round-table discussion between stakeholders throughout the seafood supply chain should be held to discuss the future role of mariculture in the region and to identify barriers to implementing sustainable harvesting and processing practices. Stakeholders may include, but are not limited to, regulatory agencies, seafood

processors, fishers, distributors and consumers. The Regional Food Council should take the ideas and knowledge generated from these discussions and advocate for the necessary policy level changes to prepare fisheries for certification and to prepare for an increase in mariculture activity in federal waters.

9. Establish a Sea to School Program

The Sea to School concept that brings fresh locally caught fish into school lunches. Schools would subscribe to participating fishers and receive a weekly or biweekly allotment of fresh seasonal seafood. This program would be useful during times of increased seafood consumption such as Lent. This initiative could expand to include hands on education opportunities for students.

10. Institute a Food Business Incubators and Public Market

To support food entrepreneurs, a food business incubator would provide facilities and technical support to startup their business. A certified commercial kitchen would allow food entrepreneurs a space to prepare their food products. The space would also provide an environment for food entrepreneurs to network and exchange ideas. The local market would be a direct outlet for businesses and serve as a hub and nexus for the region's food system, with on-site production, processing, education, retail, and sustainable waste practices. Combining elements of public market, commercial kitchen, business incubator, and culinary tourism destination, the food center or market would offer a tangible celebration of all aspects of the region's food system.

11. Start a School Garden Demonstration Project

The School Food Demonstration Project would expand upon existing school-based community gardens to create a network of gardens. School garden projects will educate the region's youth about the interconnectedness of the food system, as well as the opportunities for producing and consuming healthier foods. Public events and partnerships will extend the impact of the demonstration projects beyond the schoolyard. To provide education about the interconnectedness of the food system, these demonstration projects should include food waste diversion and composting projects that utilize food waste from the school.

A potential pilot effort for the demonstration project network



Source: Jenna Silcott

Source:

Goal 3: Strengthen the Regional Food Economy

Current Status:

The Mississippi Gulf Coast has been hit with major disasters in the past decade that have dramatically affected their economy. Many Gulf Coast businesses are supported by the large tourism industry. Hurricane Katrina and the oil spill scared tourists away and they have been slow to return, leaving food businesses such as fishers and restaurants struggling. The oil spill also affected fishers who lost at least a season's worth of income and are now facing concerns as flood waters threaten to wipe out the oyster crop. Approximately 84 percent of seafood in America is imported. Increasing marketing of Gulf Coast seafood will better enable fishers to provide more seafood to Americans. There is an opportunity to strengthen the local food industries to keep local dollars local. The majority of local food businesses in existence employ less than five people. Local food industries will be more likely to invest back into their communities so strengthening these businesses strengthens the local economy.

Objectives:

- Stimulate purchasing and consumption of locally produced food
- Increase marketing of local foods
- Promote economic efficiency through resource reuse

Indicators:

- Increase total number of food system jobs
- Increase farmers' markets sales or direct sales
- Increase in farm-related employment
- Increase # food retail businesses
- Reduce the average age of farmers

Recommended Strategies:

1. Support expansion of the Market Ready Program

The Market Ready program assists farmers with conducting market assessments, preparing to market their products, and reaching restaurants to directly sell their food products. This provides farmers with a wholesale market which is different from the direct to consumer market they may have been in before. The Market Ready program is emerging in Mississippi with two key people at the forefront, one at MSU Extension and one at Alcorn Extension that have gone through a training program. There are plans in place to conduct a train the trainer event in the Gulf Coast Region. This program will also provide a market for farmers diversifying their crops by providing a wholesale market.

2. Initiate a Farm Succession Program

Farmers nearing retirement report challenges in transferring their farm to the next generation. The Farm Succession program assists farmers in setting up a succession plan. A staff member would assist farmers in developing a succession plan and organizing meetings between the retiring farmer and the new farmer. This will help ensure residents have access to local foods and foster connections between new and experienced farmers. There were 208 applications and contracts to the NRCS EQIP program from beginning farmers. This is a clear indication that the next generation is interested in farming but need help getting started.

3. Support the establishment of Mobile Meat Processing facilities

Mobile meat processing units process livestock at a specific farm at a scheduled time and customize the service to the farmer. This would reduce the time, transportation and cost associated with processing meat. This would also allow meat producers to market their product as locally produced and processed. Additionally, the low volume would allow the resulting waste products to be collected for compost or energy production through bio-digesters.

4. Launch a Culinary Tourism Mapping Initiative

The establishment of a Mississippi Coastal Foodways map that

identifies important food locations on the coast would support culinary tourists in finding local food businesses. This would support state and federal agencies are currently working together to develop a regional seafood marketing initiative. The websites or marketing products could emphasize the distinctive culinary traits of the Mississippi Gulf Coast generating tourist interest and instill local pride.

The Southern Foodways website maps foodways and could host a Mississippi Gulf Coast map highlighting restaurants and other seafood venues. Plugging in the Biloxi shrimping community as well as other unique culinary sites such as restaurants, bakeries, retailers, and breweries would generate a culinary tourism map that can be distributed to tourists and locals. Other information would include a “one-stop shop” directory of supply-side stakeholders and articles highlighting personal stories from fishers, the health benefits of seafood, the economic impact of local purchasing and other relevant topics.

5. Expand Mississippi seafood marketing

A marketing campaign that expands information available on Gulf Coast seafood would help connect consumers, fishers, retailers/restaurants, and others in the food system. The marketing would build on efforts by the DMR in a campaign that could include a Mississippi focused seafood site that would provide information on the economic impact of seafood, seafood as a sustainable resource, celebrating the tradition of seafood, hazards of imported foods, differences between wild caught and farm raised seafood, the uniqueness of Mississippi seafood, the health benefits of seafood, and where Mississippi caught seafood can be found, recipes for home preparation, and upcoming festivals. The site can also provide resources for fishers such as information and links to MarketMaker and other online initiatives being undertaken by Gulf States Marine Fisheries Council.

6. Reestablish dockside markets

New dockside markets will provide an opportunity to directly market fresh seafood to consumers. Dockside markets would include permanent infrastructure and temporary space for both vendors and the public to utilize daily. Possible locations for this dockside market include Biloxi small craft harbor, Pass Christian harbor, Ocean Springs harbor, and Waveland as a supplement to the current fishing pier. Additional uses and activities can be



Source: *istockphoto*

Goal 4: Promote environmental health

Current Status:

The Mississippi Gulf Coast is a vibrant and diverse region with a variety of ecosystems and animal species. Seafood is a major component of the regional economy and 90 percent of commercially significant seafood species spend at least part of their lifecycle in the estuaries. This coastal environment is constantly challenged by both natural disasters and unforeseen events. Hurricanes uproot vegetation and disrupt farmland, while the 2010 Deepwater Horizon oil spill and 2011 Mississippi River flooding threatened sensitive estuaries and marshlands. Stakeholders identified the importance of maintaining the overall health of coastal and inland waterways to protect the seafood industry. From the fresh water estuaries that act as nurseries for young, underwater species to the transition zone of diverse, brackish tidal marshes to the harvesting waters of the Mississippi Sound, protection of these wetland ecosystems is essential for the future of the Gulf Coast. Other stakeholders were concerned about the volume of food waste sent to the landfill. There are efforts focused on shoreline protection, such as the Living Seashores Initiative and efforts to divert food waste.

Objectives:

- Protect, preserve and conserve natural resources supporting food production
- Increase awareness of human impacts on the food system
- Integrate adaptation and mitigation measures to accommodate changes in the region's climate over time
- Foster a waste conscious culture

Indicators:

- Increase annual permit issuance for living shorelines
- Increase # businesses receiving 3rd party certification
- Number of square or linear feet of coastal shoreline stabilized
- Regional increase in food scraps diversion
- Increase in oyster production

Strategy and Implementer

Funding Source

Encourage Community Supported Fisheries

LEAD IMPLEMENTERS:

Mississippi Gulf Coast Fisherman’s Association, Mississippi Department of Marine Resources (MDMR), Mississippi State Department of Health (MSDH), Real Food Gulf Coast

CSFs require little funding outside of the cost of subscription. Start up costs would minimally include insulated containers for seafood pickup and marketing resources. Because start up costs are low, the CSF is a good candidate for a micro loan through the United States Small Business Administration, which is allocated by state-run SBA offices. In Mississippi, these micro loans are set aside to assist minority and women-owned businesses. Additionally, the Capital Access Contract Loan Program is another resource for small businesses in Mississippi.

More Information:

<http://www.mississippi.org/index.php?id=337>

Create a vendor guidebook

LEAD IMPLEMENTERS:

Mississippi Department of Marine Resources (MDMR), Mississippi State Department of Health (MSDH), Cities, Counties, Regional Food Policy Council

While the production of a vendor guidebook would be best lead through a public-private partnership, the USDA Agricultural Marketing Service offers a Farmer’s Market and Local Food Marketing grant to improve and expand domestic farmer’s markets. The Food Council or Real Foods Gulf Coast could undertake such promotional materials.

More Information:

<http://www.ams.usda.gov/AMSV1.0/FMPP>

Expand information resources for fishers

LEAD IMPLEMENTERS:

Mississippi Department of Marine Resources (MDMR)

Currently, information hotlines exist for English-speaking fishers, and therefore, little cost would be associated with adding Vietnamese or Spanish options; much in the same way callers can select specific voice mailboxes. Spanish or Vietnamese speaking MDMR staff could provide translation services, which should be covered under normal administrative services.

Guide the future of the seafood industry

LEAD IMPLEMENTERS:

Regional Food Policy Council, Mississippi Department of Marine Resources (MDMR), Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries, Fishers, Seafood Processors, Mississippi State University (MSU)

Numerous funding opportunities exist to support a sustainable seafood industry. Presently, NOAA and the Department of Commerce offer grants that advance climate adaptation, sustainable seafood, coastal and marine spatial planning, Gulf of Mexico restoration, and/or ecosystem-based management. Additionally, the MS AL Sea Grant Consortium funds research that contributes to a safe and sustainable seafood supply

More Information:

<http://www.masgc.org/page.asp?id=20>

Strategy and Implementer

Funding Source

Establish a Sea to School Program

LEAD IMPLEMENTERS:

Fishers and School Districts

Multiple funding sources exist to support sea to school programs. In 2010, the USDA Food and Nutrition Agency awarded millions of dollars to research improving or strengthening local food-sheds. The Donors Choose program is an innovative platform that might help fund the educational component. Furthermore, Newman's Own Foundation provides millions of dollars in grants to projects that have an impact on future generations.

More Information:

<http://www.fns.usda.gov/cga/PressReleases/2011/0199.htm>

<http://www.donorschoose.org/>

<http://www.newmansownfoundation.org/giving/>

Institute a Food Business Incubators and Public Market

LEAD IMPLEMENTERS:

State and local Development Commissions, Mississippi Department of Agriculture and Commerce (MDAC), Southern Mississippi Planning and Development District (SMPDD), Mississippi Gulf Coast Alliance, Regional Food Policy Council

Possible funding sources include USDA Community Food Project Grants and USDA Know Your Farmer, Know Your Food grants. Other options may include Mississippi Department of Agriculture, or Conservation Block Grants offered through the Mississippi Development Authority as part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009. There is also opportunity available through the USDA and the Farmers' Market Promotion Program that makes available funds for agricultural cooperatives, producer networks, producer associations, local governments, nonprofit corporations, public benefit corporations, economic development corporations, and regional farmers' market authorities.

Start a School Garden Demonstration Project

LEAD IMPLEMENTERS:

School Districts, PTAs, Mississippi Environmental Education Alliance, Master Gardenerse

Multiple revenue sources are available to implement garden demonstration projects in schools. Money saved from waste reduction could be diverted to fund the project. In tandem, the National Gardening Association Youth Garden Grants program targets child-centered garden programs. Also, the website kidsgardening.org is a clearinghouse for school garden grant programs. The MS Office of Healthy Schools administers USDA Team Nutrition School Garden grants, available to Team Nutrition schools, of which there are several in the region. The Captain Planet Foundation will soon be launching a Learning Gardens grant program. Additionally, the US EPA's Environmental Education grants support environmental education projects that enhance the public's awareness, knowledge, and skills to help people make informed decisions that affect environmental quality.

More Information:

<http://www.kidsgardening.org/grants.asp>

<http://assoc.garden.org/grants/>

Strategy and Implementer

Funding Source

Support the establishment of Mobile Slaughtering Units

LEAD IMPLEMENTERS:

United States Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service (USDA-NRCS), Mississippi State University (MSU) Extension, USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS), Mississippi Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ), Mississippi Board of Animal Health (MBAH), and Local Municipal Solid Waste Authorities

The USDA, Farm Bureau, and other private interests groups may be able to defray initial start up costs. A successfully operating unit will be able to generate funds through processing costs. Start-up grant options may include Southern Sustainable Agriculture Research & Education (SARE) Producer Grant, National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) grants, and Rural Business Enterprise Grants (RBEG).

Launch a Culinary Tourism Mapping Initiative

LEAD IMPLEMENTERS:

University of Mississippi Southern Foodways Alliance, Mississippi Restaurant and Hospitality Association

While the initial start-up would require some administrative time, the maintenance of this project would require minimal staff time. Currently, the Southern Foodways Alliance offered to host the culinary tourism map and the Mississippi Restaurant and Hospitality Association and Mississippi Gulf Coast Convention and Tourism Bureau could provide assistance populating the map's data.

Expand Mississippi seafood marketing

LEAD IMPLEMENTERS:

Mississippi Department of Marine Resources (MDMR), Regional Food Policy Council, Mississippi Gulf Coast Convention and Visitors Bureau, Mississippi Restaurant and Hospitality Association

The Seafood Marketing initiative would expand projects undertaken by the Mississippi Department of Marine Resources. Endeavors such as website redesign, could be handled under MDMR's normal organizational purview with partnerships from local schools or the Gulf Coast Community Design Studio who could provide oversight and technical support. With that said, this would be a good opportunity for student interns in computer science or design at regional schools.