



*Healthy Farms,
Healthy Food,
Healthy Communities*

Thinking "Farm & Food Forum?" Hold that thought! and look forward to February 24-25, 2012, the joint ASAN + Georgia Organics farm and food conference in Columbus GA. See inside, page 3 for details.

More inside news –

Our farmer-to-farmer program is now part of a new and grand Consortium for Agricultural Newcomers Access to Learning (CANAL).

ASAN now has funding to support and develop demonstration farms . . . and we're taking applications.

Several years ago we produced a valuable comprehensive *Alabama Farms Resource Guide*, and now we're updating it.

Our *Your-Food-Was-Grown-By* project provides professionally designed signage and graphics, important for both farmers and eaters at farmers markets (as well as on the internet).

The Huntsville Farm & Food Guide is published! Bham and Mobile area guides are in process.

ASAN trains Extension professionals in organic farming practices.

What's it all about? – message from ASAN president Jim Allen.

Contact us: 559-546-1090
Email info@asanonline.org

Alabama Sustainable Agriculture Network *The Newsletter – Fall 2011*

ANNOUNCING –

THE ALABAMA STATEWIDE ORGANIC FARMING WORKSHOP

*Identifying the challenges to
and constraints on growth
of the organic food industry
in Alabama*



October 28-29, 2011, Kellogg Conference Center, Tuskegee, AL

ASAN is helping organize this first-of-its-kind for Alabama workshop. The project will gather a wide variety of Alabama farming and food stakeholders to identify organic marketing, policy, production and research challenges facing growers, retailers, distributors and consumers, and explore steps to promote growth of the Alabama organic food industry. Attendees, including state and local policy makers and representatives of key institutions such as schools, hospitals and nursing homes, as well as consumers, farmers, scientists, educators, grocers, market managers, and restaurant owners and chefs, will hear from state and local organic movement leaders and participate in small-group discussions on the issues.

Attendance has been offered free to the public, with funding provided by the USDA National Institute of Food & Agriculture's Organic Research and Extension Initiative. The program features:

- ✓ A national organic food overview presented by Mary Peet, leader of the USDA's national organic program;
- ✓ A summary of Alabama's organic industry history and current situation by Edwin Marty, founder of Birmingham's Jones Valley Urban Farm and now director of the Hampstead Institute in Montgomery;
- ✓ Development of Florida's organic program, outlined by Marty Mesh, director of the Florida Organic Growers/Quality Certification Services;
- ✓ A panel of farmers discussing opportunities and challenges encountered in organic production in Alabama;
- ✓ A luncheon talk by Tony Kleese, former director of the Carolina Farm Stewardship Association and organics consultant with Earthwise Company.
- ✓ Panel discussions on the organic market and on model organic food system programs and their applicability to Alabama; small group discussions of issues, opportunities and challenges; and an open-forum discussion aimed at prioritizing goals and determining next steps to boost Alabama's organic food industry.

continued on next page



ASAN Acquires Innovative Farm Equipment

This no-till vegetable transplanter, along with a two-stage roller-crimper for cover crop termination, a no-till grain drill, and a trailer, have been acquired through a partnership with the USDA-ARS Soil Dynamics Lab at Auburn University, with funds from an NRCS Conservation Innovation Grant. The two-wheel walk-behind tractor, shown here being used with a bed-shaper, was acquired along with a flail mower through an Auburn University SARE grant. Both sets of equipment have been used successfully to demonstrate organic conservation-tillage practices, the larger set at the Randle Farms in Lee County and the small-scale tractor and implements at Jones Valley Urban Farm in Birmingham. ASAN will be making both equipment sets available to farmers throughout Alabama for trial and demonstration purposes. Look for more information and application forms on our website (coming soon).

Organic Farming Workshop - *continued from front page*

Registration for the workshop has been handled through ASAN's website. However, seating is limited and workshop registration is likely to be closed by the time this newsletter reaches you.

IF YOU ARE INTERESTED but not able to attend, the project will be ongoing and you can participate by sending us a summary of your personal experience in producing, buying, selling or serving organic food, along with your thoughts on how Alabama's organic food industry can be improved. Results of the workshop will be reported on the ASAN website and your input will be considered. All personal information will be kept confidential, but we do ask that you provide your name, address, phone and email so we can thank you, and for possible future communication. Email info@asanonline.org or write ASAN, PO Box 102061, Birmingham AL 35210.

This project is sponsored by Tuskegee, Auburn and Alabama A&M Universities together with the Alabama Sustainable Agriculture Network and the Federation of Southern Cooperatives/Land Assistance Fund, with participation by USDA SARE and NRCS.

For additional information contact:

Dr. Kokoasse Kpombrekou @ (334) 724-4521, e-mail: kka@mytu.tuskegee.edu
 Dr. Jan Garrett @ (334) 844-2124 , e-mail: garrecj@auburn.edu, or
 Dr. Regine Mankolo @ (256) 372-4689, e-mail: regine.mankolo@aamu.edu.

Coming events not to miss

November 4-5. High Tunnel Workshop at the Federation of Southern Cooperatives Rural Training and Research Center in Epes. Presenters include ASAN's Karen Wynne and Dr. Ayanava Majumdar; Tuskegee professors Dr. Kokoasse Kpombrekou-A and Dr. Youssouf Diabate; also Paul & Alice Weidiger, of Au Naturel Farm in Kentucky. Go to: federationsoutherncoop.com/ for more information and to register. Or call 205-652-9676. Register by October 25.

November 5. Huntsville, AL. Backyard Permaculture Series: Edible Forest Gardens. Sponsored by the North Alabama Permaculture Center. 9 am - 4 pm. Call 256-858-9694.

November 12. Hampstead Institute, Montgomery, 10:00-12:00 Organic Gardening: Garden Crafts (Downtown Farm) – <http://hampsteadinstitute.org>.

November 12. Hampstead Institute 2nd Annual Farm-to-Fork Food Invasion Festival – <http://www.foodinvasion.com/>

November 17-19. Huntsville, AL. Alabama A&M University Small Farms Research Center's Annual Outreach Meeting. Contact 256-372-4970 for more information.

December 4-6. Tuskegee, AL. Professional Agricultural Workers Conference. Contact pawc@mytu.tuskegee.edu.

January 18-21, 2012. Little Rock, AR. 21st Annual SSAWG Conference – <http://ssawg.org>

February 24-25. ASAN/Georgia Organics farm and food conference – <http://georgiaorganics.org/conference/2012highlights/2012keynotespeakers>.

Food policy councils on the move in Alabama!

Last December at ASAN's Farm & Food Forum in Selma, we invited speakers and convened discussion groups on the possibilities of local food policy councils to make local food systems more economically productive, more sustainable, more equitable, and healthier for all concerned.

Since that time, more individuals and groups have taken strong interest in the movement and there is even the possibility of forming a statewide council. If you are interested in helping improve your local food system, or would like to be involved in statewide food policy discussions, send us an email with Food Policy in the subject line. And welcome to the campaign for better food for all!

Also, mark your calendar for next February 24-25 and register for the joint ASAN-GO conference. We have arranged an all-Alabama workshop session during the conference focusing on food councils, titled Food Policy Counciling in Alabama: Sharing Lessons Learned, Looking at Next Steps.

In this session, representatives from emerging food policy councils across Alabama will share their experiences and ideas. Anyone (and everyone) wanting to explore the potential of food policy councils to encourage more local-food farming, bring more and more healthy food to local markets and institutions, and improve community food security in rural and urban areas, is urged to attend.

Facilitator will be ASAN board member Gus Heard-Hughes.

To learn more about food policy councils, go to:

<http://foodsecurity.org/FPC/>



Joint Conference – Feb. 24-25, Columbus GA

ASAN will be a co-sponsor for Georgia Organics' giant farm & food conference next February - in Columbus GA, just across the river. If you've ever attended a Georgia Organics conference, you'll know to expect really useful workshop sessions and farm tours, and at least a thousand people like you (this time from both Alabama and Georgia) to learn from and network with. Plus great local/organic food. Keynote speakers will be Will Allen, founder and CEO of Growing Power, Inc., a farm and community food center in Milwaukee, and Chef Michel Nischan, food policy advocate and founder of the non-profit Wholesome Wave. Plus – you'll get a deep discount on registration if you are a paid-up ASAN member! Go to: asanonline.org/join. All paid ASAN memberships from now to the end of 2011 will count as 2012 memberships.

The conference will include Alabama farm tours, Alabama presenters (including ASAN board members Sherry Johnson and Edwin Marty), and two specifically Alabama-centric workshop sessions, one on food policy work in Alabama and the other an all-Alabama call to energize a naturally-grown/organic and local food movement where we live. Here's the description:

Growing the Alabama Local & Organic Food Movement. *Alabama has huge untapped potential for growth of a sustainable, naturally-grown/organic and local farm & food industry. If you want to tap into that potential – as a farmer or eater – or as a business, government or education stakeholder – this session is for you! We need organic & local-friendly policies, to get more of our produce into food stores, schools, etc. and more and better farmer (and consumer) education. Our farmers need better certification options and more local equipment and supplies sources. This session is your chance to share ideas with and learn from others like you, and for all of us to see what we can do together to shape a better future for farming and food in Alabama.*

Look for more details later – at asanonline.org and in our newsletters. Since we will be focusing energy on the February conference with Georgia Organics (and the Alabama statewide organic farming workshop is a two-day fall event closely aligned with ASAN's mission, we have decided to skip a separate Farm & Food Forum this year.

Note: We would NEVER try to persuade anyone not to attend the annual Southern Sustainable Agriculture Working Group (SSAWG) conference, this year held in Little Rock, Arkansas (see <http://www.ssawg.org>). SSAWG is where ASAN was born and is still the richest spring in all the South from which sustainable farming information and inspiration flow. But IF you decide (regretfully) that you can't afford to go to both Columbus and Little Rock, please consider that the Georgia Organics conference is a close second to SSAWG. And this year will be really important for Alabama! A limited number of scholarships will be available for both conferences; we'll let you know details as soon as that information is available.

A message from the president

What's it all about?

It's about Alabama ranking last in organic farms.

It's about millions of our food dollars flowing out of our communities and out of Alabama.

It's about our high-calorie processed and fast food diet putting us near the top in obesity.

It's about six Alabama counties in the top ten nationally (and Wilcox #1!) in "food insecurity" – which is USDA-speak for plain old hunger.

It's about our collective failure to adequately nurture local food systems with local small farms providing the high-quality foods that can help keep us healthy and enrich our communities by keeping our food dollars circulating in the local economy instead of flowing into someone else's out-of-state pockets.

That's what we're up against. Yes, I know it's not all bad. We're in touch with (and have provided support for) hundreds of Alabama farm families providing deliciously healthy and sustainably-grown meats and produce for their communities. And you are just one of a thousand people reading this newsletter who want to participate or are already involved in making it all about a better future for farming and food in Alabama.

Our new slogan captures in broad strokes what ASAN is about:

Healthy Farms, Healthy Food, Healthy Communities.

I'm happy to be able to point (with pride!) at the numerous projects outlined in this newsletter, and direct you to our useful website, asanonline.org. We are doing a lot of good work to help create the healthy food system Alabama needs. But there is so much more effort needed!

We have been very successful in getting the grant funding that has fueled almost all of ASAN's work until now. But grants are dedicated to specific purposes, and typically will not pay a phone bill or any administrative overhead, including staffing. Right now we have no paid staff. All our work is carried out by volunteers and independent contractors (paid with those grant funds).

Don't mistake, we intend to stay lean. But the fact is to get to the next level – extending our reach and influence, and helping more farm families and communities – we need to get beyond grant dependency. *We need significant help from people – people like you and many others like you.*

In the past, ASAN has not taken annual membership seriously. That's changed, as of now. We need you as a member. We will take you seriously (a hot-line questions & complaints phone number is high on our to-do list). And we will do serious good with the money you send. Go: asanonline.org/join/ Or mail your check to ASAN, PO Box 102061, Birmingham 35210. *Thanks!*



Jim Allen

ASAN board president
info@asanonline.org



What's this all about?

It's about an Opelika middle school cafeteria Thanksgiving meal – complete with Alabama sweet potatoes and collards. Good for the kids, and good for Alabama farmers. The photo below shows a farmers market scene of the kind that we most often associate with "local food." But there really is a wide range of needs to be met and ways to develop a local food system.

Farming for the commodity market has its place. However, global-market pressures tend to make the farmer a price-taker getting the short end of the deal. And to put more emphasis on shelf-life, transportability, and potential for processing into a higher value product, than on nutritional value or taste.

The local-food market makes farming a more family-friendly business. And whether the farmer sells to an individual, a business or an institution, it is a human-to-human transaction in which farmer and customer can negotiate prices, and in which taste and nutrition are more likely to be valued.



What Does ASAN Do?

✓ Conferences and workshops on sustainable, naturally-grown/organic farming and marketing, including development of viable local food systems., with tracks from farmers, eaters and policy makers.

✓ Field days at successful Alabama farms using sustainable practices and marketing strategies. Our most recent field days, co-sponsored with the USDA-ARS Soil Dynamics Lab at Auburn at farms in Macon and Lee Counties, demonstrated innovative minimum-tillage practices.

✓ Direct technical assistance and training for farmers, including farmer-to-farmer mentoring.

✓ Networking and advocacy in support of the organic/naturally-grown and local food movement; for example developing Farm & Food Guides for various cities; and bringing together local Food Policy Council advocates and experts at our conferences.

How Does ASAN Do All That?

✓ Much of ASAN's work is done with grant funding from USDA agencies, the state Department of Agriculture, Cooperative Extension and the land-grant Universities, and foundations such as the Ford Foundation, Organic Farming Research Foundation, and Heifer International. But grants do not pay all the bills. Individual donations from people like you who care about farms and food are the foundation for all of ASAN's work. **WE NEED YOUR HELP TOO!**



✓ **JOIN THE NETWORK:** Go to <http://asanonline.org/join> to make your tax-deductible donation. It's credit-card easy and will make you feel good. Or mail your check to PO Box 102061, Bham AL 35210. Basic membership is \$25. More will help us do more. And make you feel even better!

All memberships paid by the end of the year will count as 2012 memberships, entitling you to a hefty discount on registration for the Georgia Organics joint conference.



Meet the ASAN team! Our distinguished and active board of directors, front row, from left -

Sherry Johnson (inset photo; farm chores!), ASAN vice president, Certified Naturally Grown® farmer in Jackson County, and president of the Chattnooga Sustainable Farmers.

Dr. Ayanava Majumdar, Extension IPM entomologist especially supporting vegetable and peanut growers, and SARE coordinator, Auburn University.

Karen Wynne, organic farming consultant & soils scientist, former long-time ASAN executive director, now projects coordinator (staff, not board).

Edwin Marty, ASAN treasurer, Executive Director of Hampstead Institute in Montgomery, formerly director of Jones Valley Urban Farm in Birmingham.

Gus Heard-Hughes, Director of Initiatives, Community Foundation of Greater Birmingham; former ASAN president and Alabama Heifer Intl. field rep.

Back row, from left -

Jetson Brown, manager of the new Hampstead Institute downtown urban farm in Montgomery, agroecology program graduate, UC Santa Cruz .

Mary Catherine Barganier, communications consultant and specialist in urban and regional planning with focus on local food systems and farmland preservation.

Andy Grace, documentary filmmaker, director of Documenting Justice at UA Center for Ethics and Social Responsibility, principal in weblog *Eating Alabama*.

Jim Allen, ASAN board president, freelance agriculture communications consultant, former ag publications editor for Extension at Auburn University.

Kirk Iversen, technology transfer specialist, soil conservation equipment and practices, USDA-ARS Soil Dynamics Lab at Auburn University.

Gene Thornton, USDA certified organic farmer, Sneaky Crow Farm, and manager of Randolph County Farmers Market, retired computer scientist.

Dr. Jan Garrett, ASAN board secretary, organic farming Research Fellow at Auburn University and organic farmer, Sunbright Farm in Macon County.

Andrew Williams, retired NRCS State Outreach Coordinator and ASAN mentor-farmer, promoting sustainable farming and farmers markets in the Black Belt.



Huntsville Food & Farm Guide Published!

Our promotion program for Alabama's farms and food is taking shape. Above is the cover for the recently published Food and Farm Guide for the Huntsville area. Two more guides are in development for the Gulf Coast and Birmingham. Funding for the program is provided by the Alabama Department of Agriculture and Industries through a USDA Specialty Crops Block Grant. We plan to expand the guides to create a state-wide version in time for the Department of Tourism's 2012 Year of Alabama Food.

The 20-page Huntsville area guide lists 46 farms producing for the local market, giving their contact information and location, foods produced, venues and hours, and whether or not they have organic certification. The guide also lists restaurants serving local produce, farmers markets and other locations that sell locally-grown, and area organizations that support or promote local food. The PDF version of the Huntsville area guide is available for free downloading at: <http://asanonline.org>.

Why is local food so important?

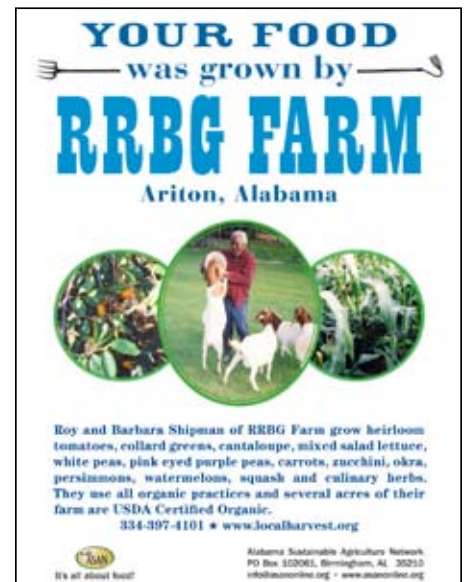
To start with, we believe that Alabama families deserve really high quality, freshly farmed local food, whether purchased directly from the farm or at a local food store, or eaten at a restaurant.

In addition to the great taste and the satisfaction of knowing where your food comes from, locally grown food offers health benefits over the highly processed and conveniently fast foods that have been shown to contribute to the near epidemic of obesity we are seeing, especially in Alabama's precious children.

Further, when you purchase standard supermarket or fast food fare, you send most of that money out of the community and out of the state. When you choose to buy locally grown meats and produce, you support local employment and local businesses of all kinds, while enhancing the governmental tax base. It's good for you and good for your community!

MS. WYNNE GOES TO WASHINGTON!

ASAN's longtime projects coordinator Karen Wynne was invited by the Organic Farming Research Foundation to attend a two-day workshop in Washington DC recently, including participating in a USDA "Listening Session" inviting input "on USDA activities and priorities related to supporting organic agriculture production, handling and markets." Congratulations, Karen, and thanks for taking our message to the policy-makers on high!



Another part of the Specialty Crops Block Grant funding the food guides (at left) is ASAN's *Your-Food-Was-Grown-By* project, providing professionally designed signage and graphics, important for both farmers and eaters at farm stands and farmers markets, and even on the internet.

If your farm, organization, or business is part of the local-food scene in your area, go to asanonline.org/foodguide.htm to see how you can get listed in the ASAN food and farm guide that will cover your area.

To get information on the *Your-Food-Was-Grown-By* project, go to: asanonline.org/yourfoodwasgrown-by (without the hyphen).



Hoop houses, also called high tunnels, are now widely used for high-value vegetable production. The technology involved in growing in-ground crops in a mostly unheated greenhouse is challenging, especially for organic producers.

One of ASAN's current programs involves training Extension professionals in organic hoop house production. Photo shows trainees at a workshop we held recently at the Cottage House facility, near Eufaula.

Hey, take a look! ASAN's website has a wealth of information and links for both farmers and eaters. Go to asanonline.org/resources.

Are you getting our e-mail newsletters? If not, you're missing out on some important information. Email info@asanonline.org to get our monthly e-letters.



October 24, 2011

A nationwide collaboration of health, education, farming and food-related organizations has launched a food-awareness campaign called *Nourish*. There is a PBS special, several DVDs, teaching materials, community organizing guides, etc. It's a continuing effort, but Food Day is a focus time for celebration, teaching and learning about food. Check it out at: <http://nourishlife.org>.

More ASAN Projects – Building Connections in our Growing Food System

We are excited to announce the creation of the Consortium for Agricultural Newcomers Access to Learning (CANAL), working with Alabama A&M, Tuskegee, and Auburn Universities, the National Young Farmers Education Association, the Alabama Green Industry Training Center, and many more partners to help beginning farmers and ranchers access the resources they need to succeed. ASAN's role includes expansion of its Farmer-to-Farmer mentoring program, development of new marketing opportunities, and continued sharing of useful resources and information.

The Farmer-to-Farmer program supports beginning farmers and ranchers with improved access to resources and training suited to their farm, assistance with farm planning, and connections with experienced growers that can help them fine-tune their plans. We hosted our first Mentor Academy in September, with 17 experienced mentors from around the state sharing their knowledge and ideas. Look for more information and applications at asanonline.org.

Demonstration Farms have been requested many times as a way for farmers to learn about sustainable production techniques. Working with Alabama A&M's Small Farms Research Center and CANAL, we are working to identify educational farms around the state to develop a comprehensive guide to existing programs. We also are taking applications to work with ten demonstration farms around the state to support their educational programs. Each farm will receive a \$2500 minigrant to help with the cost of implementing those programs. Look for applications and more information on the ASAN website.

ASAN and Alabama A&M University's Small Farms Research Center are updating the Alabama Farms Resource Guide. We will be looking for everyone's favorite resources, from production and marketing assistance to suppliers of feed, fertilizer, and equipment. For now you can share with us at (email). Check out our 2006 version at www.asanonline.org/resourceguide.html.

All the above work is being done through partnership in two USDA grants, the Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program, in which we are partnering with Tuskegee University; and the Outreach and Assistance to Socially Disadvantaged Farmers and Ranchers, with Alabama A&M University.

Another project we are conducting with grant funding through Tuskegee University is a SARE program in which we provide Organic Agriculture Training for Extension Professionals in the Southeast. We completed one training workshop in South Alabama this year and will conduct another in North Carolina in 2012. We are also in the second phase of a Ford Foundation grant program, Wealth Creation for Rural Communities in the South, in which we support two community-based organizations in the Black Belt investigating "value chains" to support development of local food systems.



The Alabama Sustainable
Agriculture Network
PO Box 102061
Birmingham AL 35210



You're a farmer? Or want to be? – look inside to find out about ASAN's farmer-to-farmer mentoring, equipment available for trial and demonstration, getting listed in your area's farm & food guide, and much more!

You're a kid? Tell your parents you don't want those High-Fructose Corn Puffs, and how you looked it up on the internet (organic-center.org) that chemical-free, naturally-grown and organic food IS more nutritious! (You can look inside too.)



You're an eater? Looking for healthier, fresher, more delicious food from farmers you trust? Look inside to find out about our farm and food guides, where to look on the internet, how a local food policy council can help, and much more!

You're an elected official, in business, or a planner or policy maker, or plain old concerned citizen? Or want to be? Look again at this beautiful food and realize that local food can be the economic development engine of your community!

Photo courtesy of Will & Laurie Moore at moorefarmsandfriends.com. We should note that isn't Laurie in the picture, it's friend and CSA customer Marilyn Bradley, and the kids Sam and Rebecca are the farm bookkeeper's kids pulled in for this very posed picture. However, there's nothing contrived about Moore Farms & Friends, voted again as the best CSA serving Atlanta (although their farm is in Alabama)!