

Food travels an average of 2000 miles between farm and fork, which explains why chefs and farmers don't speak the same language, and most consumers think chicken comes from the supermarket.

Many SARE projects support local food systems through research and education. Go to www.sare.org and type "local food" into the national project data base to get a list of more than 300 grants SARE has awarded in this topic area.

The portfolio of imaginative ways grantees have used SARE funds is impressive. There's at least one experiment to compensate farmers for distributing surplus crops through a local food bank. Another project developed infrastructure for supplying college cafeterias with locally grown food. One community tackled the job of making it easier for recipients of food stamps and WIC dollars to purchase fresh produce from a farmers market. Another project supported marketing efforts aimed at preschool and after school programs.

The continuing and completed projects not only serve as a springboard of ideas for future applicants but also offer models for individuals and communities seeking to assert more control over their own food supply. Just a few of them are highlighted below. **To read full reports of these and other projects just search "local food systems" in the project data base at www.sare.org.**

On a trip to Africa, Julia Sampson of Arkansas enjoyed daily excursions into local food systems. She relates one such meal:

"On one field trip to the Dogon Village in Mali, our group of 12 stopped at a rooftop restaurant for our evening meal. The views from our rooftop perch included nearby housing compounds with goats, chickens and cows. We placed our dinner orders, and shortly thereafter, I saw the cook carry two live chickens to the kitchen. Now, that's the absolute best of fresh and local."



Sometimes marketing is as basic as attracting customers to the farm for entertainment along with their fresh produce. SARE grants can fund agritourism efforts such as the Harvest Weekends at Hickory Nut Gap Farm in western North Carolina funded by producer grant FS06-197

Upon returning home, she coordinated a SARE project called the All Ozark Meal. While the project didn't give diners the full local experience Sampson had in Africa, it did connect chefs and producers to serve almost 1000 people at 11 wildly successful meals around Fayetteville, AR. The events ranged from a sit-down dinner at an upscale restaurant to casual gatherings at a local food co-op deli to communal meals at a church kitchen.

Like all good meals, the planning started long before the cooking and eating. The gargantuan effort included working with chefs to develop menus that would use available local food, arranging timely deliveries and managing publicity. This all had to happen months before the first meal could be served in July 2003. By the time the last satisfied guest pushed away from the table in November, the team's mission had been accomplished—a whole lot of consumers and chefs were ready to sign up for fresh local food. After the project ended a growing number of Fayetteville residents continue to work toward a more local food system.

For more information search the SARE project data base for project CS03-04.

Southern SARE administers six different grant programs with staggered calls for proposals and submission dates.

To view the calls and yearly schedule of submission dates see www.southernsare.org or contact Southern SARE at:

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When officials of rural Santa Rosa County Florida noticed that more than half the crops produced (53% to be exact) were commodity items: cotton and peanuts, they became interested in diversifying the agricultural base for the sustainability of their farm economy. To further complicate their system, locally grown food was exported out of the county and was not available to Santa Rosa residents who were purchasing long-haul produce at the grocery stores.

The Santa Rosa Agribusiness Committee tackled the problem with a two-pronged approach to start developing a healthy local food system. They created the Riverwalk Market in downtown Milton in 2002 to help local producers and consumers find each other. They also began looking into how they could support larger volume sales to regional institutions, perhaps by building a food processing and distribution center.

They applied for and won a Southern Region SARE Sustainable Community Grant for outreach activities in connection with the market, particularly to promote brand recognition of the Santa Rosa Fresh label. Grant dollars were used to create a logo, develop a website, advertise on local radio stations, erect a billboard and produce flyers, signs and a newsletter.

For more information search the SARE project database for project CS03-010.

Several Southern SARE projects in the counties bordering Virginia and Tennessee have cultivated a thriving local food industry, from farming to processing, packaging and shipping. Appalachian Sustainable Development is the umbrella organization that has worked for years among the small tobacco farming communities around Abington, Virginia. As the prospect for tobacco farming grew dimmer, community leaders foresaw a future of youth flight and loss of farmland.

Using grants from SARE and other agencies, they began an aggressive introduction of small scale sustainable agriculture to help tobacco farmers diversify with high-value



Local food systems include farm sales direct to consumers, chefs, grocery stores and community institutions such as nursing homes and schools.



Several SARE grants contributed toward farm friendly legislation in Kentucky making it possible for farmers with proper training to add value to crops by processing certain foods in their home kitchens. See projects ES02-063 and ES04-072.

crops suitable for the rocky hillside operations. As many as 25 organic production workshops were held in a year as the farmers learned to grow lettuce, grape tomatoes, edamame soybeans and other crops in high demand.

More grants followed to help the farmers learn to cooperatively process, package and market their organic produce under their own Appalachian Spring label. Eventually they acquired an abandoned school building and turned it into a full-scale community kitchen where surplus fruit and vegetables are cooked into salsas, jams, and other value-added products and then shipped through their own Appalachian Harvest web site. For more information search the SARE web site for projects LS97-084 and FS02-155.

Local food systems are about more than just marketing surveys, adding value and building infrastructure. They need a foundation of solid science such as graduate student Casey Owens' production comparison of slow-growing poultry breeds and faster-growing Cornish Cross. Flocks of both breeds were raised in both conventional and free-range conditions. Feed efficiency, yield and mortality rates were among the characteristics measured. This kind of research helps producers make informed decisions about choosing breeds best suited for their operations.

Research that helps farmers transition to organic production is a boon to local food systems since customers interested in organics usually prefer to buy fresher, locally grown produce. In South Carolina extension agent York Glover used a On-Farm Grant to help three experienced conventional farmers make the switch to organic production and marketing. A Southern SARE Research and Education project helped farmers learn to grown organic seeds for their own use and for sale. They conducted workshops, coordinated a growers network and produced organic seed production manuals. Project OS03-013.

In Virginia Patricia Stansbury used a producer grant to determine which edamame soybean varieties were best suited for a market garden in the Richmond area. Eight varieties were ranked for ease of production, yield and taste. The project was so successful that Stansbury began selling to a health food store and was asked to increase her supply the next season. Project FS06-210.