

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 project reports of any SARE grants search the data base at www.sare.org.**

Consumers who realize the security risks of long-haul food systems have become major supporters for family farms and often figure prominently in SARE projects.

"Increasingly the big grocery chains are controlling our food choices," says Sue Weant of Partners for Family Farms in **Kentucky**. "Consumers are going to have to help save family farms in order to have access to safe, fresh food, and that's what food security is all about."

Partners for Family Farms is a non-profit organization that builds relationships



A SARE producer grant helped the New North Florida Farmer Cooperative determine that their best business option was to remain a supplier of fresh produce to schools rather than branch out to supplying Department of Defense institutions. For more information search the SARE project data base for FS00-121.

between farmers and consumers. The group was started with help from a Southern SARE PDP grant led by the Kentucky's Commodity Growers Cooperative.

Grant activities included producing workshops to bring together farmers, chefs and consumers so they could learn together about food security issues. They produced all-Kentucky banquets where local farmers provided all the ingredients. Chefs and farmers were paired at local farmers markets for cooking demonstrations. Through these kinds of working partnerships, farmers learn what chefs want and chefs find out about farmers' limitations.

As the organization matured, they conducted their own SARE projects including a major on-farm poultry processing research and education activity in cooperation with Heifer Project International, which resulted in farm-friendly policy change in Kentucky.

Individual farmer members cooperated with university researchers or conducted on-farm research through SARE producer grants in topic areas as different as fresh water shrimp raised in farm ponds and breeding heirloom turkeys.

For more information search the SARE project data base for ES97-026.

Southern SARE administers seven 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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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.”

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.

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



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

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 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.