

Initiative focused on local food builds economy, protects environment

By Shelby Fiegel

In 2014 the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and the Delta Regional Authority (DRA) partnered together to sponsor a program called Local Foods, Local Places (LFLP). LFLP helps cities and towns across the country protect the environment and human health by engaging with local partners to reinvest in existing neighborhoods as they develop local food systems.

Over the past four years, LFLP has worked with nearly 100 communities across the United States to support locally led, community-driven efforts to protect air and water quality, preserve open space and farmland, boost economic opportunities for local farmers and businesses, improve access to healthy local food, and promote childhood wellness. Six cities in Arkansas—Flippin,

North Little Rock, Osceola, Lake Village, McCrory, and Helena-West Helena—have participated in the program.

In Flippin, citizens came together to create a new school garden, launch a farmers market, and plan a new sidewalk connecting the city's school complex, downtown, and park. With its new action plan, the city is working toward forming a local growers' co-op and establishing a Whole Farm Conference to better connect farmers with one another.

North Little Rock, in coordination with the Arkansas Regional Innovation Hub, developed an action plan focused on creating a new food hub, enhancing the services of regional food bank efforts, and linking emerging food-related activities to boosting walkability, livability, and economic vibrancy in the Argenta neighborhood.

Osceola, the University of Arkansas, and the local school district used their new action plan to coordinate and enhance healthy foods education, including development of a new healthy foods cooking curriculum in the school district. The city is also creating a farmers market downtown, where it is working on infrastructure improvements, cleanup efforts, and establishing policies to attract investment in the area.

Lake Village explored strategies to expand the city's community garden, increase worksite wellness programs for local businesses, connect its parks with new trails to improve local food access and increase walkability, and stimulate economic development.

In Helena-West Helena, the Helena-West Helena/Philips County Port Authority will explore a potential farmers market and events space in a long-abandoned building near downtown now that underground storage tanks have been removed. The Port Authority (the local economic development entity) has acquired the site and begun cleaning up contamination from its past use as a school bus repair facility.

The city of McCrory plans to comprehensively address barriers to good nutrition and physical activity by strategically connecting and integrating multiple efforts, including a new community/school garden; a new "healthy hub" that brings clinical screening services, nutrition education classes, cooking demonstrations, prescription assistance, and food pantry distribution under one roof; and a potential farmers market and culinary incubator.



Lake Village hosted a pop-up Main Street event as part of the Local Food, Local Places initiative, which featured a pedal-powered smoothie maker run by local youth entrepreneurs.



McCrary city leaders, citizens, and LFLP partners workshop the city's community action plan.

Dr. Jennifer Conner, regional program associate with the University of Arkansas Cooperative Extension Service, believes it is important for communities to participate in programs such as Local Foods, Local Places.

"LFLP is a great technical assistance program that really helps communities explore their entire local food system—from production to consumption—and helps local leaders build on their current assets to create a better sense of place," Conner said. "At the end of the LFLP strategic planning process, communities have a solid plan of action to not only enhance food outlets and food availability, but also improve quality of life for their community members."

McCrary Mayor Doyle Fowler said, "After creating a community action plan through the Local Foods, Local Places process, our city continues to gain momentum to achieve the initiatives we identified to make McCrary a happier and healthier community. Some of the ideas we are implementing include providing healthy food

options by opening a farmers market and hosting a farm-to-table event that our whole community is invited to attend. We are also planning on making our community more walkable by replacing sidewalks in our downtown and creating a walking trail from our city core to our sports complex located on the fringes of our city. None of this would be possible without the strong partnerships we have between our city, school district, University of Arkansas Cooperative Extension Service, and ARcare."

For more information and to apply to become a part of Local Foods, Local Places, please visit: www.epa.gov/smartgrowth/local-foods-local-places.



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