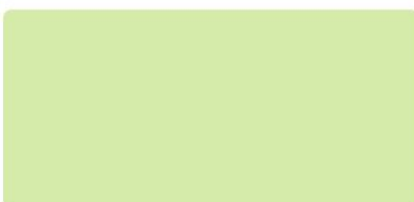
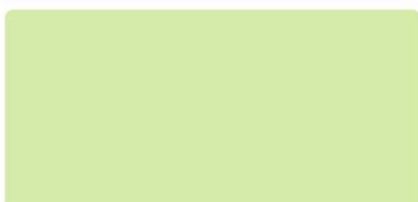
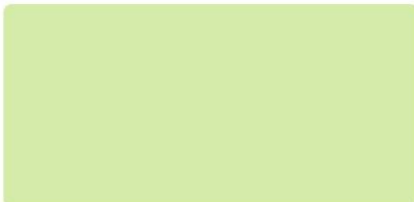
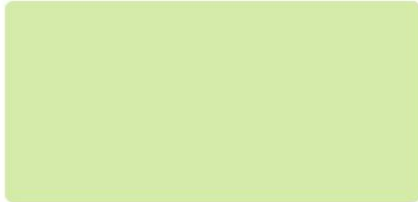
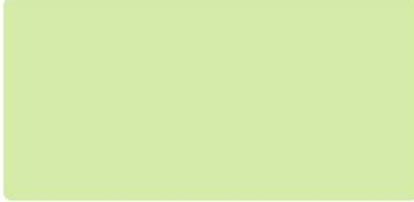




# LOCAL FOODS, LOCAL PLACES

## Technical Assistance Program



## Building Our Local Food Economy Workshop

### A Strategic Action Plan for the Acadiana Food Alliance

June 12, 2015



## Community Story

Acadiana is a collection of seven parishes in south Louisiana known for its strong French Acadian culture, language, and food traditions. The City of Lafayette is the geographic, civic, and cultural center of the Acadiana region – Cajun and Creole Country – and home to such food and music festivals as the Bayou Food Festival, Festival International de Louisiane, Festivals Acadiens et Creoles, the South Louisiana Blackpot Festival and Cook Off, Gulf Brew beer tasting festival, and the state's second largest Mardi Gras celebration, among many others.

Lafayette is a city of about 123,000 people located on the Vermillion River and the seat of Lafayette Parish. Known as “Hub City” for its historical function as a railroad hub and as the center of Cajun and Creole Culture, Lafayette is home to the University of Louisiana at Lafayette, the state’s second largest university with about 17,000 students. The city also has a compact and walkable downtown that is undergoing redevelopment. The downtown has many historic buildings and the recently constructed Rosa Parks Multi-modal Transportation Center, which serves as a transfer point for local bus service, regional Amtrak service, community meeting space, and consolidated City-Parish government offices.

Acadiana agriculture and food products have grown quickly in national identity in the last several years, and Acadiana has been recognized as a rich agricultural area that often uses traditional cooking of the Deep South and offers value-added Cajun and Creole food products. In the past two years, Lafayette was deemed a Top 10 Foodie City by Livability.com and received the title of Tastiest Town by *Southern Living Magazine*. Lafayette and its surrounding cities are part of a small community with international cuisine and festivals. The Cajun and Creole culture revolves around food and music. A



Figure 1 - Photo series by Denny Culbert  
<http://www.dennyculbert.com/>



Harvard study published in 2014 using data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention named Lafayette as the happiest city in America.

There has been a growing realization that the Acadiana region contains many pockets of excellence in local foods, but they are not all connected. Many different people contribute to the local food economy and culture, but the wide variety of roles, perspectives, and resources are not well coordinated. Key stakeholders – including farmers, chefs, community organizers, and agencies focused on planning, economic development, and downtown development – want to create a mechanism that brings the different elements of the food economy together in order to boost economic growth, enhance the sense of regional identity, strengthen food security, and provide new educational opportunities. A group of 20-30 of these stakeholders began meeting in 2014 to connect the dots and identify the most important things to focus on, with the objectives of defining a strategic plan, projects, and an organizational framework to advance the initiative.

Thus was created the Acadiana Food Alliance (AFA), which led to the community’s application for technical assistance from the federal Local Foods, Local Places program. The Local Foods, Local Places is a program supported by EPA, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT), the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC), and the Delta Regional Authority (DRA) to help create more livable places by promoting local foods. Lafayette was one of the 26 communities of more than 300 applications nationwide in 2015 that were awarded this technical assistance.<sup>1</sup>

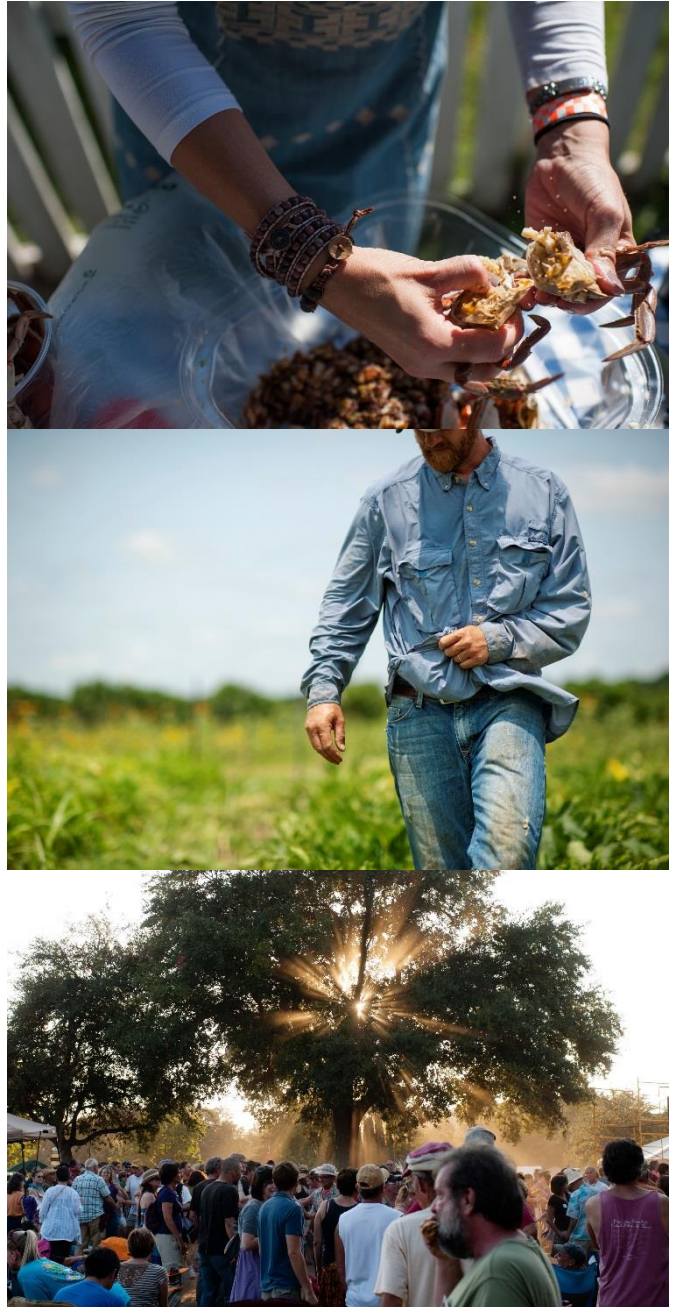


Figure 2 - Photo series by Denny Culbert  
<http://www.dennyculbert.com/>

<sup>1</sup> [http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/announcement\\_-\\_local\\_foods\\_local\\_places\\_2014\\_final.pdf](http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/announcement_-_local_foods_local_places_2014_final.pdf)  
<http://www.epa.gov/smartgrowth/sp-local-foods-local-places.html>

AFA's goal is to create a productive regional hub in Lafayette that promotes and advances Acadiana farmers' diverse growing capacity and the region's unique food culture - Cajun and Creole cuisine and value-added products. AFA aims to capitalize on the increasing demand for local food while fostering a healthier, more sustainable community and Acadiana region. The Alliance aims to:

- Provide resources and technical assistance to the region's farmers.
- Foster entrepreneurship by boosting economic opportunities for local farmers and businesses.
- Revitalize the downtown and local communities by improving access to local, healthy food and local food enterprises.
- Promote and teach about traditional cooking and healthy alternatives.

## Engagement

The Lafayette Consolidated Government, in partnership with the Lafayette Convention and Visitors Commission, the Lafayette Economic Development Authority, the Downtown Development Authority and other partners, hosted a small team of federal staff and consultants for a two-day Local Foods, Local Places workshop on March 3-4, 2015, to help develop a strategic work plan, timeline, roles, and responsibilities for the Acadiana Food Alliance. The workshop, entitled *Building our Local Food Economy*, included representatives of the Lafayette Economic Development Authority, Lafayette Consolidated Government, the Lafayette Downtown Development Authority, the Lafayette Convention and Visitors Center, community-based advocacy organizations, such as EarthShare Gardens, the Lafayette Farmers and Artisans Market, business owners, farmers, area hospitals, the University of Louisiana at Lafayette, and the Lafayette Parish School Board. Federal agencies participating in the workshop included the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD).

The workshop began with a tour of the Gotreaux Family Farms, a 25-acre operation in Lafayette Parish that provides organic local produce to area restaurants and direct to customers at their own market. Participants then visited Acadiana High School, where teacher Brandon Broussard demonstrated the school's agriculture curriculum, facilities, and greenhouse, and discussed ideas for expanding the curriculum to other schools in the region. Those visits were followed by visioning, brainstorming, and action-planning discussions among a diverse group of citizens and local, state, and federal stakeholders. These discussions helped participants identify the community values that underlie the action plan for their local food initiatives, which include solidifying a structure for the Acadiana Food Alliance. These discussions also clarified how local foods can help make Lafayette and the Acadiana region healthier, more resilient, and economically vibrant by further developing and showcasing the regional food culture. Participants identified obstacles to and solutions for expanding access to local foods and created the action plan described in this document.



Figure 3 - Group photo, end of day two

The technical assistance conducted for Local Foods, Local Places has three phases. The tours and the two day workshop are the middle phase. Three calls were held before the workshop and four calls were held after the workshop. The graphic below illustrates the phases of work:

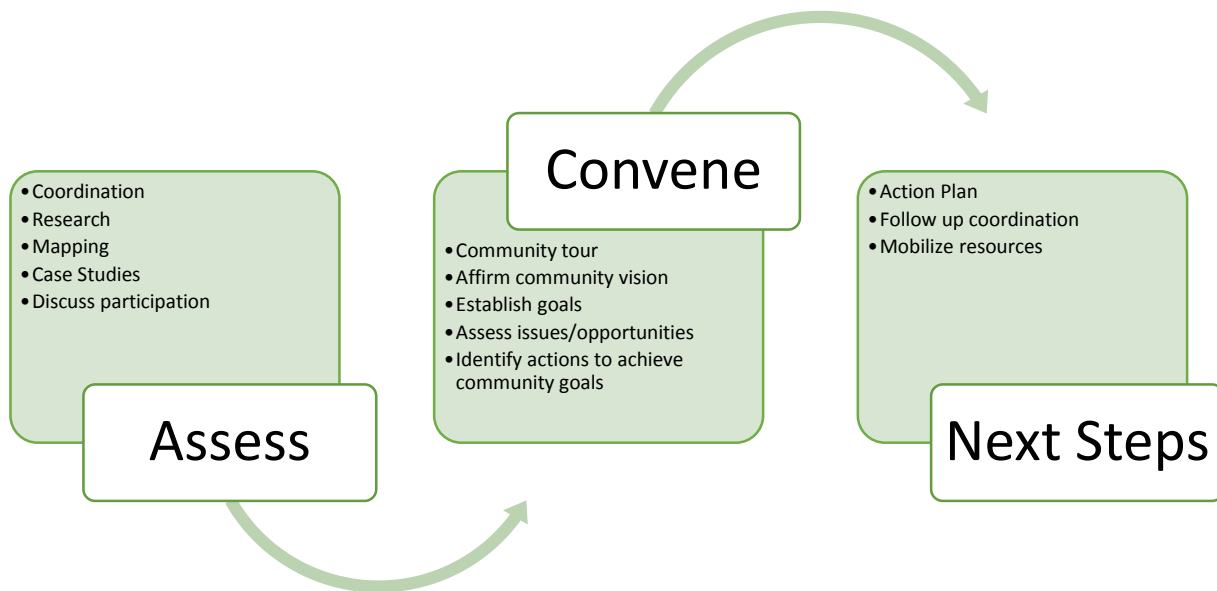


Figure 4 - Technical Assistance Process Diagram

## Vision and Values

The first night of the workshop began with exercises to have participants share their core values and beliefs. Values drive aspirations for the future, and voicing these are key to developing a more detailed action plan the following day. In the first visioning exercise, participants were asked to individually stand and say something they believe about their community and the potential for the Acadiana Food Alliance. The statements bulleted on the next page were all preceded by “This I Believe.”



## Local Foods, Local Places Technical Assistance Workshop

- *Acadiana loves food.*
- *Working together will make great things happen.*
- *Students are our future.*
- *There is momentum in our community.*
- *Acadiana is the motherland of food and culture.*
- *These aren't new ideas but revisiting ideas our relatives had.*
- *We're going to eat some good food.*
- *Brian Gotreaux will grow it.*
- *Acadiana is so uniquely interesting.*
- *We are a caring and rallying community.*
- *Cajun culture can be a healthy culture.*
- *We can impact health by going local.*
- *A lot of traditional knowledge but have to cultivate or encourage.*
- *We can support our local farmers*
- *We can do this!*
- *Surmounting obstacles producers have.*
- *We don't realize how unique and valuable what we have is.*
- *Will really help our youth!*
- *Experienced farmers can teach youth.*
- *If it is going to be done right it will be done here.*
- *Small farms can feed our community.*
- *If we envision it we can make it happen.*
- *This is a microcosm of the comprehensive plan.*
- *We can provide healthy food to neighbors and elders.*
- *We invited the right people to this meeting.*
- *We need to connect dots.*
- *Together we can provide.*
- *We are fortunate to have a year-round growing season.*
- *Healthy food is a right.*
- *Create another festival around food.*
- *Innovation is necessary.*
- *We have a resilient culture that's capable.*
- *Our community is invested in understanding the full circle.*
- *Small farmers are on their way back in this part of Louisiana.*
- *Culture of celebration and eating everything in sight.*
- *We are the worst state in the union for heart disease.*
- *Tonight marks the beginning of making it happen.*
- *We have the ability to close the gap for food insecurity.*
- *People want to eat better food but some just don't know it yet.*
- *Educating the community about the problem is the best way to solve the problem.*

In the second visioning exercise, participants were asked to create a headline for a story from the future where something good had just happened. The headlines are listed below; more detail on each one is provided in Appendix B.

- **Public Health of the State of Louisiana is No. 1 in the Country**
- **Small Farms in Acadiana Succeed with Community Support**
- **Community over Commodity**
- **Healthiest Region in the Country**
- **Ragin' Cajuns Lead Louisiana to #1 in Fresh Produce Consumption per Capita**
- **CADE Farm Celebrates 20 Years of Research and Education**
- **Acadiana Declared the Nation's First Food Oasis as Its Final Food Desert is Eliminated**
- **Lafayette Named Healthiest City in U.S. – Population Demands Local Sourcing at Restaurants Action Plan**



Figure 5 - Day two of the workshop

The primary product of the workshop was a strategic action plan to guide implementation. The plan is composed of goals and actions to meet those goals. Appendix A contains the full action plan. The five goals developed during the workshop and a supplementary goal established after the workshop were derived largely from the list of 22 previous objectives set by the Acadiana Food Alliance in 2014.

The purpose of the workshop was to further clarify, prioritize, and define roles and responsibilities for moving forward. A prioritization exercise was conducted to elevate the five most crucial next steps for action, with the understanding that all 22 objectives still hold importance for the future and are not necessarily being discarded. The goals and actions that are part of this plan are summarized below. Appendix B provides the results of the prioritization exercise.



Figure 6 - Working group completing an action plan table.

### Goal 1: Establish the Acadiana Food Alliance

The Acadiana Food Alliance represents a cross-spectrum of organizations and people in Lafayette and the surrounding rural areas of Acadiana who see local food as a potential catalyst for economic and community development. Representatives of local governments, planning commissions, nonprofits, existing and beginning farmers, chefs, restaurants, food manufacturers, retail outlets, schools, and health services are looking for comprehensive strategies that boost our region’s food production and consumption and build better communities. The actions below outline some strategies to establish and build an organizational structure that will help move the Acadiana Food Alliance forward.

- Action 1.1: Investigate fiscal sponsorship.
- Action 1.2: Create a board to guide and establish the AFA.
- Action 1.3: Research and establish the financial, organizational, and operational structure of AFA that will provide for long-term success.
- Action 1.4: Hire a director to implement the AFA food system plan.
- Action 1.5: Establish a yearly Alliance Summit/Workshop that will provide a report to the membership and provide input for adjustments to the plan.
- Action 1.6: Secure appropriate local, state and federal grants to ensure Alliance funding.

### Goal 2: Grow Acadiana! Campaign

The mission of the “Grow Acadiana” Campaign is to educate the public about local farmers and their produce and where they can buy or dine on the produce. If successful, the public will know about local “celebrity” farmers, where they grow their produce, and how they can purchase it. This campaign will

inform and remind the target audience that buying local produce results in better health, a better environment, and increased economic development.

- Action 2.1: Develop a branding and marketing effort, with logo and tagline, social media, and other outreach and promotion.
- Action 2.2: Create a Certification System to identify and validate local food producers, suppliers, and purveyors (logo, sticker, decal, media, promotion).
- Action 2.3: Initiate kick-off events for Grow Acadiana Campaign.
- Action 2.5: Create a regular radio/TV/Internet segment highlighting movement, people, and actors.
- Action 2.6: Coordinate with Acadiana Food Circle on local foods directory, support, and promotion.

### Goal 3: Assist Schools in Creating Food Literacy Programs

By integrating food literacy programs into school curriculums, the Acadiana Food Alliance offers future generations the cultural knowledge to preserve our region's unique food heritage, the nutritional education required to make healthy eating choices, and the practical skills necessary to find meaningful work as agricultural and culinary professionals in Acadiana.

- Action 3.1: Create a "food immersion" (regional culinary arts) program like the French Immersion programs at a school.
- Action 3.2: Expand LSU AgCenter food literacy and garden program to more schools.
- Action 3.3: Implement a Pilot Farm to School Program

### Goal 4: Create a Beginner Farmer Internship, Resource, and Toolshare Program

The Acadiana Food Alliance supports future and beginning farmers by developing programs that teach the business of farming and policies that address existing barriers to small-scale farming endeavors, local food production, and distribution. Further, we strive to enhance agricultural infrastructure so farmers have the tools they need to succeed.

- Action 4.1: Assess existing farmer development programs and internship opportunities.
- Action 4.2: Start farmer apprenticeships on local farms.
- Action 4.3: Develop resource and informational support system for new farmers.

### Goal 5: Establish Acadiana as Louisiana's Local Food Storage & Distribution Hub

Support the establishment of area food hubs in the region. Food hubs will develop and grow the food economy by aggregating, distributing, and marketing local produce. Ultimately, food hubs will provide for a more efficient food system to better serve the Acadiana Region.

- Action 5.1: Conduct a market study and a Food Hub Feasibility Study
- Action 5.2: Develop and adopt a plan for long-term food hub development in the Acadiana Region
- Action 5.3: Support Establishment of Food Hubs in Acadiana



### Supplementary Material: Associated Efforts by Acadiana Food Alliance members

- Action A-1: Launch Acadiana agri-business project to train beginning farmers.
- Action A-2: Establish a pilot “food hub” at GoFarms (design & collaboration) – Brian Gotreaux.
- Action A-3: Research the viability of a downtown food hub – John Panaro.

## Implementation and Next Steps

Since the workshop, there have been ongoing calls and collaboration among the participants. Most notably, a working group met to draft a mission statement for the Acadiana Food Alliance. . The group developed three final drafts and voted on them using the [www.surveymonkey.com](http://www.surveymonkey.com) web-based survey. This was the most popular final mission statement:

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*The Acadiana Food Alliance unites people, ideas and resources to grow the culture and economy of our regional food system.*

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In addition to the mission statement, a draft organizational structure was created by a workshop subcommittee. This initial structure is described in Appendix H.

Following completion of the report and appendices, the LCG planning staff will share the completed plan with all AFA partners, relevant agencies, the media and the community.

In May 2015, the Alliance partners submitted a grant application to USDA entitled “Building Community Food Systems in Southwest Louisiana.” The Southwest Louisiana Area Health Education Center supported the proposal. If the application is accepted, the grant will fund a feasibility study to determine the market viability for aggregation, storage, and distribution enterprises that connect growers and buyers in Southwest Louisiana.

## Appendices

- Appendix A – Strategic Action Plan
- Appendix B – Workshop Exercises Documentation (Storytelling and Prioritization)
- Appendix C – Workshop Participants
- Appendix D– Workshop Photo Album
- Appendix E– Funding Resources
- Appendix F – References
- Appendix G – Presentation Slides
- Appendix H – Structure of the Acadiana Food Alliance