



A SUSTAINABLE FOOD SYSTEM FOR THE MISSISSIPPI GULF COAST

The Mississippi Gulf Coast Food System is complex and unique. The region is responsible for 37% of the total fish sales in the nation, making aquaculture one of the key components of the region's economy. This economic base relies on the Gulf and its extensive waterway system which is constantly challenged by disasters and other environmental concerns. Developing a more sustainable food system for the region requires not only protecting and preserving existing resources, but also diversifying the food system base and more efficiently handling food processing.

Access to healthy, locally sourced foods is another key element of food system sustainability. With only 22% of Mississippian's consuming more than two servings of fruits and vegetables daily, the region is at risk for health impacts. Increasing the supply and access to fresh produce within the region can not only support healthier living, but also provides an opportunity to diversify the food system production base and economy.



KEY ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES



Access to healthy food matters – our residents are consuming less servings of healthy food than the national average.



Seafood is a cornerstone of our local economy. This presents challenges for a resilient food system due to extreme weather and changing environmental conditions.



Local demand for non-seafood based foods outpaces local supply.

17%

of Mississippians experience food insecurity. 43% of those are under the poverty line.

Rate of diabetes in Gulf Coast. Mississippi is ranked 2nd highest state in nation.

12%

32%

Obesity rate of Hancock, Harrison, and Jackson Counties. The national average is 27%.

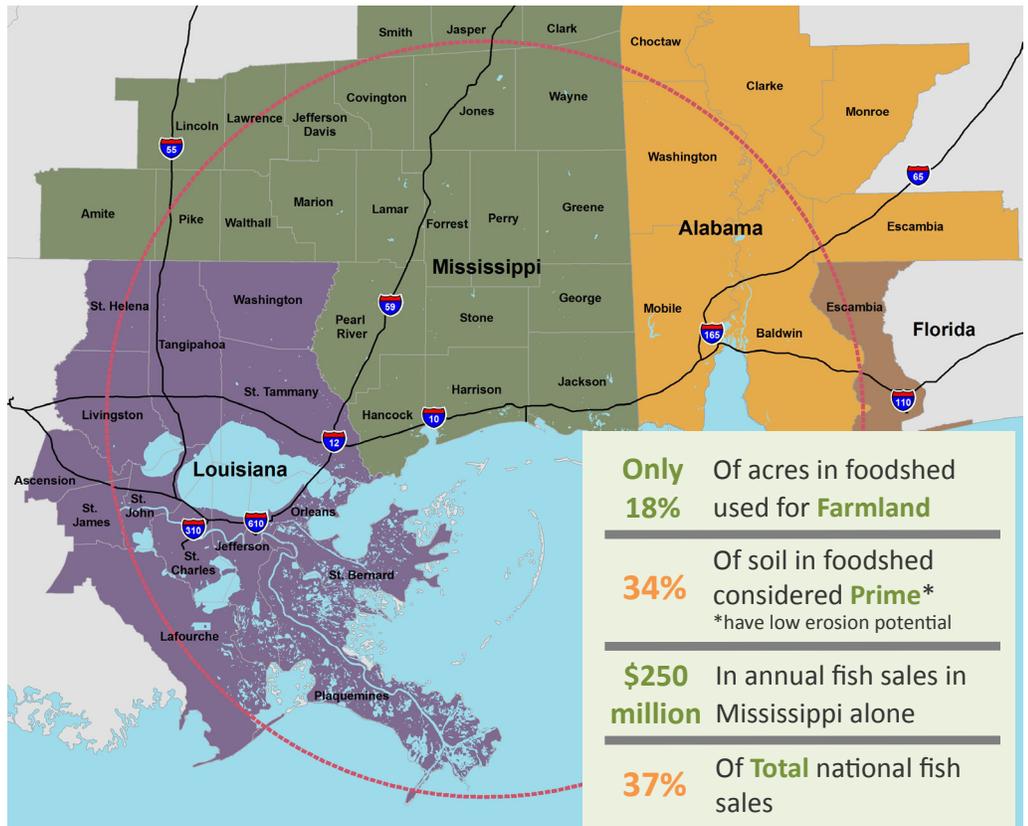
22%

Of Mississippians were consuming 2+ fruits/ vegetables per day in 2009, compared to 32.5% nationally.

44%

Of children in Mississippi are overweight or obese.

100-Mile foodshed contains 33 counties from MS, AL, and LA



STAKEHOLDER PERSPECTIVES



At one time, the Harrison County Sheriff's farm fed approximately 1,000 people between inmates and employees. The farm currently produces a surplus of produce, but reported difficulties in finding organizations to pick up the donations.

Harvest Gulf Coast community garden operates in Hancock County in partnership with Long Beach Food Bank. Harvest Gulf Coast received a Pepsi Refresh Grant of \$25,000 to build raised beds; these beds are rented out to members who are encouraged to donate their produce to area food banks.

Blueberry farmer John Aulft packages his produce on his farm and diverts 4 to 5 percent of edible waste into jellies, jams and goat feed. Aulft is working to distribute his produce locally to maximize the short shelf life of blueberries.

Teachers at Taconi Elementary School in Ocean Springs have been nationally recognized for their school garden, which has been an invaluable teaching tool. Students learn about how food is grown and are encouraged to make healthy choices and to sample the variety of produce grown within the small but abundant gardens.

PROPOSED REGIONAL GOALS AND STRATEGIES



Support access to healthy food for all community members

- Encourage crop diversification on farms
- Assist businesses located in or expanding to food insecure neighborhoods
- Expand redemption of SNAP & WIC benefits
- Expand permitting of food sales
- Launch a grocery store shuttle



Strengthen the Regional Economy

- Reestablish dockside markets
- Initiate a farm succession program
- Launch a culinary tourism mapping initiative
- Use vacant lots/buildings for community gardens, urban agriculture & aquaculture



Foster connections between stakeholders

- Create a food vendor guidebook
- Establish a regional food policy council
- Expand food business incubators
- Distribute disaster relief resources for agriculture



Promote Environmental Health

- Institute a compost Mississippi program
- Explore a sustainable oyster farming program
- Launch a renewable energy technology strategy
- Incorporate food waste recovery at public events

NEXT STEPS

The Plan for Opportunity partnership will be engaging residents and communities along the Mississippi Gulf Coast in dialogue about the role food systems and other elements play in a more vibrant, healthy and prosperous region. You can share your ideas and perspectives by visiting the gulfcoastplan.org and by taking part at festivals and community forums.

The draft plan – to be completed in the fall – will outline specific actions steps, strategies and responsibilities to address the region's needs. Making the plan a reality will take a continuing commitment of the public, private and non-profit organizations working on the Gulf Coast. Every small part contributes to a more successful and livable Gulf Coast region.

"The effort to build a sustainable regional food system depends on the individuals involved at each step in the process. Outreach efforts are an ongoing effort."

Source: Plan For Opportunity, Food Assessment, Sept 2011

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gulfcoastplan.org

The **Plan for Opportunity** is a collaborative planning project led by the Gulf Coast Regional Planning Commission that is intended to guide the economic growth and development of the Mississippi Gulf Coast and to improve housing, employment and transportation opportunities throughout the region. The Plan for Opportunity is key to strengthening the economy, improving quality of life for residents, and creating a more sustainable future for the region.



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