

Nutrition Center seminar speaker inspires formation of sustainable food advocacy group

Being in the right place at the right time is sometimes all it takes. For people interested in local food, the time was breakfast, prepared from the foods of several local farms by a local chef. The place was a roundtable on USC's campus where Dr. Darcy Freedman, faculty member in the College of Social Work, had invited a wide variety of organizations and university faculty to discuss community gardening with Dr. Alice Ammerman.

In the spring of 2011, Dr. Ammerman was the featured speaker for the seminar series hosted by the Center for Research in Nutrition and Health Disparities. Ammerman, a Professor in the Nutrition Department at the University of North Carolina, presented *Sustainable Food Systems and Public Health: Access and Health Disparities*.

Ammerman's presentation highlighted various strategies to promote sustainable food systems and improve access to healthy foods, including low income communities. University and community leaders then participated in a roundtable discussion with Ammerman. The discussion resulted in a consensus to organize support for sustainable local food systems within the state to create healthier communities.

Freedman said, "This meeting provided a chance for those of us interested in creating food systems change to come together, learn from peers in North Carolina, and mobilize for change in our community."

Over the next several months, membership and interest continued to grow, and members formed the Local Alliance for Fresh Foods (LAFF). Current membership represents a variety of disciplines including faculty and staff from the Arnold School of Public Health, School of Medicine, College of Hospitality, Retail and Sport Management, College of Education, and Green Quad Learning Center. Community organizations represented include the City of Columbia, Sustainable Midlands, and Gardening Renaissance.

"There are challenges in working with so many well connected, knowledgeable individuals from the differing backgrounds, but there is also satisfaction in knowing that when a group like this starts to move forward on an issue, there is a far-reaching and impressive impact," said, Jason Craig, Sustainable Carolina Assistant Director.

The LAFF mission is to encourage policies that support access to healthy sustainable local food systems in the Midlands region of South Carolina. The mission will be accomplished through the promotion of community gardens, coordination of innovations and programs, education, empowerment through food organizing, and building coalitions to promote awareness and advocacy.

"There are various interests represented within the mission. Thus, there are a variety of groups that may work separately to accomplish their interest within the mission statement," said Dr. Sonya Jones, Arnold School of Public Health faculty member and Deputy Director of the Center for Research in Nutrition and Health Disparities.

The LAFF group meets to discuss initiatives of interests and to provide updates on individual projects. Members have found that the Alliance is designed to provide a vehicle for members of the University and community to work together to provide creative strategies that can impact decisions on funding, trainings, evaluation, education, and policy.

“In the coming year, the Alliance hopes to host a Foodshed Summit that would allow us to better understand how food comes to and distributed in the city and what opportunities we have for building the local food movement,” said Jones.

For more information about the LAFF group, please contact Holly Pope, Director of Communications at the Center for Research in Nutrition and Health Disparities at hpoppe@sc.edu