

**LOCAL/ORGANIC FARMING INCUBATOR:
A PPA recommendation
December 5, 2006**

“Ethics start with food.” This is a statement made by Vandana Shiva a leading thinker, author, and activist who was a guest lecturer last October at Emory University. The way we treat, think about, and produce our food suggests a lot about our society as a whole. Is our food fast, cheap, and does it promote chronic illness? Or do the systems that we create and support allow us to generate the most nutritious and sustainable food supply possible for the greatest number of people? Who benefits from the food systems that are in place, and why do the structures that are in place exist? Are communities, health, and individuals honored and respected by these structures? Or do they disenfranchise people, their health, quality of life, and options in order to meet objectives that are too narrow in their scope and vision? What does this say about us? Such questions are driven by a desire to live in an ethical and just society, and are closely aligned with the issues that have motivated Athens to generate ‘*Partners for a Prosperous Athens*’. A theme that has risen out of our community’s dialogue is how synergistic and inter-related the problems are that we are dealing with. Simplistic definitions, sound-bite slogans, and isolated projects are not the solution. Holism is required. Social, political, religious, and economic factors must all be considered and addressed in relation to each other in order for us to begin to effectively deal with the issues at hand. If implemented *creatively* and *persistently* a local gardening and farming initiative could incorporate and address most of the components leading to persistent poverty that we have identified so far. This initiative could then be used as a model around which other kinds of livelihoods could be integrated and pursued.

NOTE: Local farming should be the emphasis, and should be encouraged to be organic, but not organic farming exclusively. It is an expensive and complicated process for an individual to have their products (plants or animals) become certifiably organic. Many small farmers have production strategies that are more stringent and result in healthier and more environmentally friendly products than those utilized by growers that are ‘officially’ certified as being organic (insert relevant references here). We want to make our local community more stable financially and healthier overall, not use poor people’s micro-enterprises to pay for the bureaucracies that generally serve the interests of major food corporations, not small farmers and their businesses (insert references here).

COMPONENTS

I. Farmer’s Market:

- a. key features
 - i. Its *location(s)* must be based on accessibility. Accessibility should be defined and determined by the results of a comprehensive food assessment (insert relevant references) such as has been proposed

by the *Culture of Poverty* sub-committee. Where are the places that poor people are willing and able to go to get food and why? If anyone needs to go out of their way to frequent a market it should be people with the means to do so.

- ii. *Food Stamps* should be able to be used at said markets from their inception, many communities have been able to obtain funding for the equipment to do so in recent years (insert references here).
- iii. The Athens community (poor and wealthy) should be encouraged to cultivate a *sense of ownership* over the market. This can be accomplished by making the farmer's market a center of community activity. It could be surrounded by and share property with institutions such as Head Start and The Boys and Girls Club, churches that operate soup kitchens and service the poor in their immediate neighborhood, and community gardens that specifically provide for and instruct low income people of all ages.

Town meetings and community-wide events should be held at, and possibly even during, market times. This would increase the possibility of people from various social and economic settings being able to interact and better understand one another and the problems that we face.

- iv. A farmer's market should facilitate the formation of *networks*. Market places have been important places for people to exchange information and goods for thousands of years. At the local level they can still function effectively under the right circumstances. A well-supported farmers market can be a site in which home-gardeners can exchange produce that they have extra quantities of for other goods or services. It can be a place in which farmers can exchange experiences and ideas about how to successfully grow and market their products. Where school children can learn to market products that they have created in conjunction with schools and/or churches and be identified by potential mentors. Where chefs/cooks/caterers can identify potential sources for specific events and menus.
- v. A community-based farmer's market should have an educational component. Regular programming could occur during market times educating people (of all ages and backgrounds) on how to prepare and plan meals inexpensively, and that are healthier. Groups like La Leche could mentor mothers and assist them with diet and nutrition issues. Such achievements will help alleviate illness, and therefore healthcare costs and absence from work and/or school.

II. Foster a Culture of Entrepreneurialism via Farming:

- a. Develop programming specifically directed at youth in schools.
 - i. Garden-to-table projects (insert references) that reinforce concepts learned in Earth Science, physical science, and agricultural curriculums.
 - ii. Such active learning experiences result in higher literacy. The process is frequently highly tactile (which children like) and the end results are obvious and observable. They may be learning to roast a chicken, but they also have to practice reading a recipe, count, measure, and learn how to follow instructions. In addition, they have opportunities to be creative and experiment at the same time.
- b. Facilitate access to resources that allow people to process and package value-added products from their or their neighbor's produce.
 - i. This could be through certified kitchens located in local churches,
OR
 - ii. A community owned facility (preferably next to the farmer's market) where people can rent space on an hourly or daily basis.
- c. Include programming on entrepreneurial resources and opportunities in farmer's market and community garden activities.
- d. Develop a youth leadership program, "Partners Building Leadership to Create Legacies" in order to develop strong leadership skills and to help follow-up on youth-centered PPA recommendations. Incorporate this programming into farming and farmers market, and school programming.

III. Community-wide Reinforcement:

- a. Businesses, churches, and other organizations can synergistically reinforce the above objectives, thereby increasing their rate of success.
 - i. EXAMPLE: The Rolling Pin could sponsor children's cooking classes during the summer (when low income children typically have no structure and their parents have a difficult time working because the kids are out of school and childcare is expensive). The children could be selected and transported to the store for 'cooking camp' by an insured organization such as Family Counseling Services, Boys & Girls Club, Community Connection, or DFACS. Such opportunities could be supplemented by other businesses such as Farm255 and Full-Moon Cooperative. A camp could be focused around the foods prepared in cooking camp and how to raise them. Through such vehicles individuals could be identified and selected to intern with local growers, chefs, restaurants, or people who sell value-added products related to these endeavors.
- b. Barriers to growth for start-ups and existing small businesses in Athens-Clarke County must be removed.
 - i. Access to bilingual consultants is necessary.

- ii. Require that anyone applying for a business license for the first time go through a free workshop of some sort that outlines resources and facilitates the start-up process? The goal being to reduce the current failure rate in the county.

IV. Strengths of Approach:

- a. Builds on existing strengths.
 - i. Goodwill Industries – many graduates of their Hispanic Entrepreneurship classes are interested in farming.
 - ii. Many Hispanic people have some kind of horticultural experience.
 - iii. There are a lot of resources and institutions present in the county that can provide advice and facilitate projects (UGA, Local Food Banks, Locally Grown, Full Moon Farm Cooperative, Cooperative extension, Daily Grocery, Tim Johnson with Communities in Schools/Family Connection.)
 - iv. Local Food and organic farming is a growth market.
 - v. ACC School District just adopted a new Food Policy.
 - vi. There are currently foundations seeking to fund these kinds of initiatives...

- **WRITE THE COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION** (limit focus to one subject or action item, more than one recommendation may be needed to address a particular learning):**

Create a program that fosters entrepreneurship and small business around farming in Athens.

- **Identify any research, or other kinds of information that was used to craft this recommendation.** (add additional sheets as necessary)

Organic farming is a growth market and an area to engage potential entrepreneurs.
ACC School District just adopted a new Food Policy.

- **Identify additional research or information that could help clarify this committee recommendation. List potential sources if possible.**

Heifer International provides technical assistance and grants to communities creating community supported agricultural projects.

Federal Government is funding projects that support local agriculture.

Atlantis Hydroponics in Atlanta supports organic basil programs in schools that sell to restaurants.

Project for Public Spaces, Inc. (PPS) is pleased to release our second Request for Proposals (RFP) to support individual farmers markets as part of our "Diversifying Public Markets and Farmers Markets" program. This round, we will be awarding approximately \$400,000 in funding from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation. Grants resulting from this RFP will be awarded in early 2007 and will be for one year. The deadline is coming up quickly on Nov.13th

- **Indicate people or groups that we need to talk to help clarify this committee recommendation. List any recommended locations.**

Goodwill Industries- many graduates of their Hispanic Entrepreneurship classes are interested in farming.

UGA, SBDC, Local Food Banks, Tim Johnson with Communities in Schools/Family Connection, Farm 255, Full Moon Farm Cooperative- Dr. Jordan

- **What kind of action or resources would be necessary to implement the recommendation?**

Local Market

Supplying Restaurants

Home-based Businesses

Community Gardens

Regional approach- engage Madison, Oglethorpe, Oconee (Athens MSA)

- **Indicate what forces and influences are likely to occur that will support or oppose implementation.**

Forces that support (please list):

Forces that oppose (please list):