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**COMMUNITY IMPACT 2012-2013**

**DELTA FRESH FOODS INITIATIVE (DFFI) – COMMUNITY PROJECTS**

Delta Fresh Food Initiative has taken a capacity building approach to the development of community projects. Building infrastructure for local farmers transitioning to sustainable methods, supporting trainings for new growers, developing farmers’ markets and the use of EBT to purchase local produce are all strategies deeply rooted in pre-existing community assets. Farm to School (F2S) is also identified as a key strategy in DFFI’s Strategic Plan. Our mission to build strong local food systems includes this focused effort to increase production of locally grown foods and to get more fresh, local food into school cafeterias in the MS Delta. Following are highlights from the Delta Fresh Farm to School project.

**Delta Fresh Farm to School project**

Our Delta Fresh Farm to School pilot projects demonstrated that sourcing local foods provides opportunities for economic development, improved health and nutrition and social equity in the MS Delta. Further, our pilot F2S efforts helped food service directors overcome barriers and fears about sourcing locally. To this end we partnered with MS Food Policy Council on the development of a purchasing guide for food service directors which provides step by step instructions and answers to FAQ’s to de-mystify local sourcing.

Over the past year, DFFI has laid the foundation for a strong Farm to School Network connecting food service directors and local growers in the rural MS Delta. Successful pilot projects last fall focused on three school districts with a combined total of nearly 6,000 students where we kicked off Mississippi’s first ever “Farm to School Week” by facilitating sales of nearly 10,000# of fresh, locally grown watermelon, sweet potatoes and turnip greens equaling 14,200 servings.

DFFI partnered with the MS Food Policy Council to convene a statewide conference promoting Farm to School in October 2012. 150 participants including food service directors, local growers and grower groups, health and ag educators and local food advocates spent a full day in training and networking workshops to foster coordination and growth of farm to school efforts.

At the DFFI Harvest Celebration in late October 2012, local farm to school efforts were recognized for their pioneering efforts to increase the quantity of local foods in their school cafeterias.

DFFI conducted an on farm workshop in April 2013 where 26 participants including food service directors were introduced to the benefits of purchasing sustainably grown fresh produce and connections were made with local growers eager to partner with schools in their communities.

DFFI partnered with My Brothers Keeper to build or enhance six school gardens in the Delta during the past year. Raised beds on these campuses give both students and faculty hands on opportunities to strengthen their understanding of fresh, nutritious food production and are an important component of our comprehensive F2S efforts. On going partnership with My Brothers Keeper and others in the region adds solidarity and strength to a growing movement in the Delta to build sustainable, equitable, community based food systems in the MS Delta.

**OUTCOMES**

The Delta Fresh Farm to School project has impacted the lives of children who live in some of the poorest school districts in the MS Delta (Coahoma and Bolivar) by getting nutritious locally grown produce into school cafeterias. In both these counties, nearly 100% of their students qualify for free and reduced school lunch.

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| **Children Fed per Year\*** | **Families Fed per Year\*** | **Total Individuals Trained\*** | **Schools Impacted** | **Community, School, and Home Gardens Installed** | **Total Individuals Reached\*** | **Additional Results** | **Estimated Meals Provided Per Year\*** |
| **5,700** | **N/A** | **350** | **17** | **6** | **2,500** |  | **14,200** |

\*unduplicated