**Project or Activity Number:** SERA-47

### Title: Strengthening the Southern Region Extension and Research System to Support Local & Regional Foods Needs and Priorities

**Period Covered:** September 2017 – September 2018

**Annual Meeting Dates:** September 18 & 19, 2018

**Participants by institution:**

**Clemson University –** Leslie Hossfeld, Dave Lamie

**Louisiana Ag Center –** Carl Motsenbocker

**Mississippi State –** James Barnes, Christine Coker, Russ Garner, Elizabeth Gregory North, Steve Turner, Rachel Welborn

**North Carolina State University –** Meredith Weinstein

**Oklahoma State University –** Quisto Settle

**University of Arkansas –** Amanda Philyaw Perez

**University of Arkansas Pine Bluff –** Iris Crosby

**University of Maryland Eastern Shore –** Virginie Zoumenou

**University of Puerto Rico** – Vivian Carro

**University of Tennessee – Knoxville –** Janie Burney

**Virginia State University –** Debra Jones

**Virginia Tech** – Eric Bendfeldt, Ed Jones, Joyce Latimer, Karen Vines

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**Brief summary of minutes of annual meeting:**

Four working groups - Top 10 issues group finished Delphi study and disbanded in 2017. Quisto Settle shared findings which were presented in the SERA 47 Delphi Report (Settle & Morrison, 2017).

Introductions.

**Working group reports:** Full reports were shared with the SERA group prior to the meeting.

**Successful Models Working Group** – Dave Lamie, supported graduate student to do work. Focused on branding in innovative way, especially in online presence with expert in field, James Barnes. Analyzed Extension web presences across southern regions in all types of organizations and reported back related to local foods. Each state will eventually receive a “report card.” Committee deciding how to help implement information to state organizations. Findings may benefit beyond food systems work throughout the University.

**Learning Communities Working Group –** Leslie Hossfeld – This work group provided a learning community workshop at Southern Sustainable Agricultural Working Group (SSAWG) in 2018 in which producers, agents, specialists, and researchers participated. Issues emerged from this presentation which corroborate findings from the top 10 issues study. The Learning Community work group participates in virtual working groups training provided from within the southern region to prepare for development of future learning communities. For future proposals, the learning community work group will work to create a learning community within the southern region on the topic of community food systems change. This will respond to the research question – Does training county Extension agents on food systems change opportunities lead to local food system implementation?

**Strengthening Impact Evaluation Working Group –** This work group has compiled a list of over 200 metrics that have been used in state and federal reporting systems, in academic and professional literature, and used by other stakeholder groups in the area of local foods. This list has been sorted based on the SERA 47 top 10 issues list as well as sorted by SERA 47 values. The list is currently being refined to a set of 20 indicators that will be recommended for use across the southeastern states in order to establish common measures and combined effort reporting across the southeast. The indicators list will also include operational definitions to increase consistence in reporting across states. This work group made progress during the annual meeting to identify future work group activities to include an analysis of secondary data related to local foods systems and a network analysis examining connections between local foods system activities being undertaken via land grant institutions and community groups to the Local Food Vitality Index (Woods, Rossi, & Davis, 2017).

**Resource Bank Group –** Elizabeth Gregory North - Pilot-tested a survey. Having difficulty determining best way to distribute survey throughout the region. Also, working to develop a curriculum to help develop local agents/educators to cover various areas around regional and local foods. Have permission to use similar approach to curriculum developed by North Carolina.

**Grant Proposal Development:** As a SERA we are beginning work on an AFRI proposal. Need to revamp previous proposal, strengthening research component for this year. Have been approved through letter of intent to submit a proposal. Extension, leadership plan, collaboration were all beneficial in the original proposal. Will need to write letter to accompany proposal indicating the changes that have been made since last year. Being submitted as a CARE grant. Due October 22, 2018.

**Values Around Local Foods:** Based on discussion at last year’s meeting. Survey conducted of all participants. Intent to assess the mission, vision and values driving the SERA-47 work. Amanda Philyaw Perez presented findings. Conducted small group discussion, review of existing work. Team conducted Zoom session and determined they were comfortable with Vision and Mission from earlier work, but wanted to work on values. Used survey to work on values. Graduate student analyzed qualitative data around 4 questions. Mission for SERA-47 remained but added systems. Also in vision, added fish and seafood to represent coastal products. Draft values were identified.

We value and seek to promote:

* Justice and fairness
* Thriving farms, food businesses, & local economies
* Improving food access and security
* Supporting agro ecology
* Healthy people and communities
* Local identity and culture
* Community-driven and evidence-based

The group suggested that we may need to define agro ecology or consider use of sustainable rather than agro ecology. May need to indicate environmental sustainability. Concern about combining health and local foods due to difficulty proving link. Perhaps talk about access to fresh food. Major topic was justice and fairness – question of how you connect this to local foods system. Is there another descriptor that may help define this? USDA talks about equitable distribution of benefits. Question around food sovereignty and food justice. Criticism of local foods movement is that it may set out to do these things, but may not achieve these in the process of the work. Recognize every program will not meet all of these values, but should seek to achieve them. Need for definitions, but want to keep document simple. Possibly add “for all” after food access and security. Need to recognize these are values and not outcomes. Meredith suggested the evaluation group would like to try to connect indicators to each of the values. Also interest in including food literacy in the list. Idea that you can access local food that is not healthy and healthy food that is not local.

Vision: 1) A safe, healthy, and affordable supply of meats, poultry, fish and seafood, fruits, and vegetables is accessible to all consumers, schools, and food-service businesses. 2) Farmers, ranchers, and food businesses are able to profitably market their products locally and regionally. 3) People and communities are empowered to purchase, grow, prepare, preserve, and consume nutrition foods through local markets and institutional outlets, community and backyard gardening, healthy cooking, and canning and food preservation.

Concern that vision statement around empowerment may be too specific. Also, question of what is local or regional? No mention of increasing capacity although it is mentioned in mission. Need to reference community engagement. Possibly refer to sustainable local foods for item 1 to be more general. Examples were added in response to earlier criticism that the statement was too general. Question of safety – possibly local (i.e. community garden, personal garden) not as safe. Question of narrative trying to support. Need to include sustainable. Third bullet basically is community engagement – how do we edit this to indicate this? Is it possible that empowerment occurs through engagement? Possibly add through collaboration following local <and regional> markets. Suggestion that soil health and water quality need to be considered – fits under agro ecology, possibly also sustainable. Change supporting agro ecology to supporting agricultural, economic, community sustainability.

“Communicating shared values make technical information more relevant and accessible. – Charlie Arnot, Center for Food Integrity

**Opportunities with USDA – Debbie Tropp – Deputy Director -**

Connection of USDA/AMS to local foods. Flows from Agricultural Marketing Act of 1946. Not new or faddish. Concern with fairness and profitability of production. In 1976 the agency shifted focus to direct marketing to producer. Small group working with direct marketing. Host four directories – Farmers Markets, CSAs, Food Hubs, On-farm markets. Conduct regular surveys of members of directory. Working on more reliable approach beyond voluntary participation. Continue doing research around food hubs. Worked with Tim Woods on project related to CSAs. Have staff architect that provides free site assessment and design services through facility design program. Also interest in green roof economics and sustainability. Many publications have been developed related to local foods, food hub, food value chains. Collaborating with Federal Reserve Board, Federal Reserve Bank, AMS and Rural Development to provide training to funders. Latest specialty block grants have been announced. University of Arkansas, Clemson, Virginia Tech, and Puerto Rico all are new recipients. Farmers Market and Local Food Promotion Programs have been divided up in order to increase administrative efficiency. Farmers Market programs look at direct marketing while local foods are sold through intermediary. Specified that agritourism, generally with a food component, is included in farmers market promotion program. Success in producers receiving income sufficient to bring home a second generation through agritourism activities. Website exists that outlines all USDA programs in the local food supply chain. Slides will be shared with the group.

**Local Food System Vitality Index: Measuring Residents’ Perceptions of their Food System –** Tim Woods & Jairus Roosi, University of Kentucky – AFRI funded project. Interested in objective measurement of local food systems across the south. Many institutions involved. Want to identify 16 diverse in size, communities’ active in developing a local food system to test fit of model in different communities. Quantitative measure using likert scale with 20-25 components assessed by residents in addition to a measure of overall vitality of the food system. Use component scores to explain vitality measure. Mailed paper survey and provided online option to Lexington residents in March of 2017. N=333. Also did national online survey of resident food consumers, n=576. Compared Lexington to national. Low income communities not being evaluated very well around connection to local food. Questions around involvement of low income consumers in the local food system. South Carolina metropolitan areas have indicators around quality of life, so connection to local food is not being addressed and may be beneficial and use this as introduction to ag and food systems. Still misses questions of food access and equitable distribution of food. Following up with case studies. Discussion ensued about how this study may tie into the pending AFRI proposal.

**SERA 47 Leadership, February 27, 2018**

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**Reference**

Settle, Q., & Morrison, C. C. (2017). *SERA 47 Delphi Report*. Retrieved from SERA 47 Dropbox:

Woods, T., Rossi, J., & Davis, A. (2017). Local Food Vitality Index: Measuring Consumer Attitudes toward Food System Attributes. *Journal of Food Distribution Research, 48*(1), 33-41.