



REAP Reporter

Newsletter from REAP Food Group . SUMMER 2017



From left: Fannie Lou Hamer tied civil rights to land rights; a Black Farmer Cooperative in Memphis, TN circa 1919.

Using History to Improve Food Systems:

o A Conversation with Dr. Monica White o

REAP's Communications Director Hannah Wentz sat down with Dr. Monica White, longtime food justice advocate to talk about how her research is informing community food system development.

Q: What are Freedom Farms? Are they present today?

A: Freedom Farms was an agricultural cooperative in the late 1960s to mid-1970s. It started in Sunflower County, Mississippi by Fannie Lou Hamer who created an agricultural cooperative of hundreds of families over 680 acres. The group of former tenant farmers and former sharecroppers were able to purchase land together and create a community based around agriculture. The space was home to community gardens, healthcare, education, and agricultural retraining for those formerly employed by the agricultural industry. The group was able to pool resources. They shared labor, seeds and other farm inputs as an alternative to an economy that excluded them.

The idea behind Freedom Farms is driving ag-related change in several communities including Detroit, Chicago, Milwaukee, and parts of New York. Many groups in Detroit are working develop new food systems, and connect folks. People are returning to agricultural roots as a way to build sustainable communities. The economic bottom has fallen out in our society, so food becomes a mechanism for pulling people together. The idea behind these projects is that if we can grow food to feed ourselves and others in our community, what else can we do? We can create education programs and identify other ways to care for each other. Then food becomes an instrument to build community.

My archival work in the history of Black agricultural cooperatives helps identify and share the kinds of organizing communities have engaged in previously so that we are able to learn from historical examples.

Q: How can places like Madison build upon and learn from farming networks in the South and Detroit?

A: What Wisconsin can learn from the South is how to utilize cooperatives and collaboratives. We need to reinvigorate a commitment to farm organizations that support small family farms and do outreach to under-resourced communities.

There is an interesting relationship between Madison and Detroit. Communities are growing a lot of food in both of these places and there are ways to connect the two communities. In Detroit, community organizing is building agency and resiliency to reform food delivery so that it is more affordable, accessible, and gives people more control over food options. In Madison, we need conversations that encourage community based food system development by those who are food insecure. The ones who are food insecure need to be driving the responses to the problems of food access and insecurity. Sustainable solutions need to come from people who experience various food conditions. This is called the roots and shoots approach, instead of what typically happens in Madison which tends to be top-down food policy.

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Monica White is an assistant professor of Environmental Justice at the University of Wisconsin-Madison in the Gaylord Nelson Institute and Department of Community and Environmental Sociology.

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Q: Who are your role models in the “food world” and why?

A: Ms. Fannie Lou Hamer is a role model for me because of her involvement in developing Freedom Farms in Mississippi. Ms. Shirley Sherrod is also a great role model – she has dedicated her life to organizing farmers and growers around food as a strategy for community wellness. She wanted to create a mechanism for farmers to be able to afford a living. Sherrod has overcome a lot, and her resolve and resilience helped connect the issues of food access and civil rights.

Mr. Ben Burkett, President of the National Family Farm Coalition, and the Federation of Southern Cooperatives, has also been an inspiration. His family has owned the land he lives on since the 1800s. He would not have land if it weren't for an agricultural cooperative, so he is committed to working together, sharing information and a love of the land.

Q: What one fact do you wish the average person knew about food/agriculture?

A: To feed people – you need farmers. I think the question of food production is often taken for granted. We are collectively pretty clueless about the conditions in which food grows. I wish the average person knew a producer. I wish the average person knew how much time and energy goes into the food on our table. I feel like we're so removed from food production until a crisis happens. People need to understand that we have no food system without growers/producers. People put in hard labor for our food – they need to be shown more appreciation.



Keep Growing Detroit's goal is to help Detroiters eat fruits and vegetables grown primarily within the city limits. Photo courtesy of Keep Growing Detroit's Facebook page.

What Can You Do? 1) **Commit** to having at least one conversation with a grower that you have never met. Ask them why they grow what they do, what they're most excited about, or how they became a farmer. 2) **Visit** a market that you don't normally frequent. 3) **Look** for Dr. White's *Freedom Farmers: Agricultural Resistance and the Black Freedom Movement*.

SUMMER FOOD PROGRAM ENSURES KIDS EAT ALL YEAR-ROUND

With REAP's New Farm to School Food Truck



Above: REAP AmeriCorps member Rissa helps hand out meals at the Summer Food Program Kick-Off on June 20 in Elver Park. Elver is one of 50 sites in the MMSD summer program.

An enormous boon to our Farm to School Program came in the form of a **food truck**, generously donated in May by **Roth Cheese**, a devoted supporter of REAP. The vehicle is outfitted with refrigerators, a stove top, oven, flat top griddle, sinks, and more! While we have big plans for future mobile farm to school programming with the truck, it is currently being used daily to serve free summer meals at Southdale and Elver Parks. This truck greatly enhanced REAP's Farm to Summer program this year, while serving as a traveling billboard for the Summer Food Program.

The MMSD Summer Food Program was well attended at schools, community centers, and parks this June through August. At Southdale Park and Elver Park, the REAP Farm to School program distributed lunch to families and provided educational activities every weekday.

During the eight-week program, REAP provided about **1,400 kids meals** at Southdale and Elver Parks, as well as **268 adult meals** thanks to sponsorship by the City of Madison. The meals always included fruits and vegetables and featured fresh, locally-grown foods such as snap peas, cherry tomatoes, peppers, green beans and cucumbers.

The meals have been a hit in the neighborhoods, especially at the new Southdale Park site. As one mother put it, “My kids love coming out here. They get to eat lunch and play games. I like it because it gets them out of the house to do something educational.” Another parent said, “This is a really great program. Not only do the kids get a healthy meal, it brings families in the community together.”

In addition to parents, children have also expressed their excitement for the summer meals program. A 6-year old Frank Allis student said, “I plan to come back to try all the different types of food!”

Research shows that access to nutritious meals in the summer sets kids up for academic achievement during the school year. A survey conducted by REAP at food pantries earlier this year found that 80% of respondents did not know about the program. This led to increased marketing efforts in 2017, including yard signs and bus advertisements.

Heard at Elver Park:

Q: “Do your children enjoy the educational activities?”

A: “The activities and quizzes are important, the kids now know more about plants and they are able to name things when we go to the Elver Park farmers’ market.”

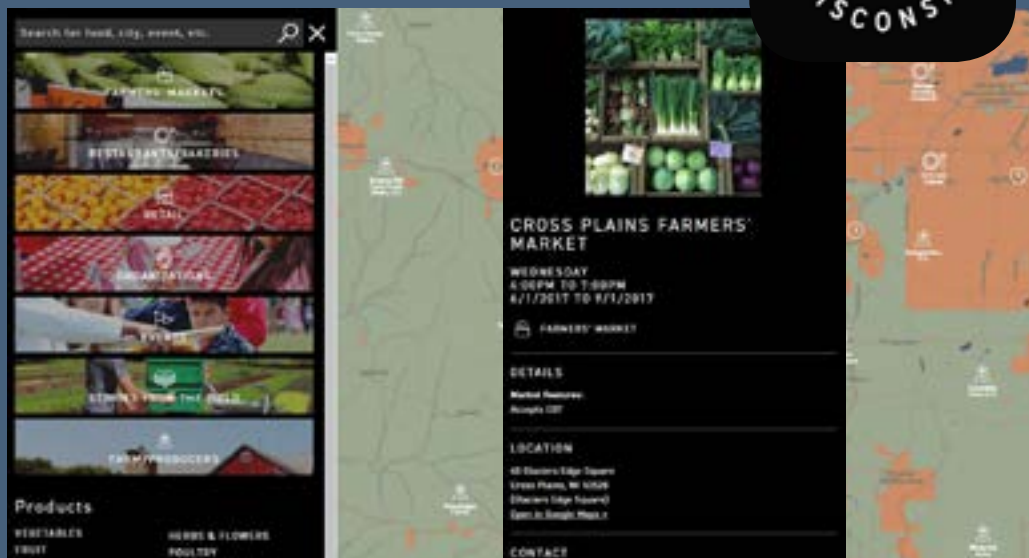
FarmFreshAtlas.org Puts Sustainable Food at Your Fingertips

With over 800 listings, the Farm Fresh Atlas website is a one-stop shop for finding local food in Wisconsin. Whether you are a longtime Wisconsin resident or a visitor, this easy-to-use website will help you find a CSA to buy, farmers' market to attend, a grocery store, or restaurant to eat at to support Wisconsin farmers. It also includes retailers, organizations, businesses that support local farmers.

The new site currently features 378 farms and food producers, 225 farmers' markets, 87 restaurants and bakeries that serve local food, 58 retail locations that sell local food, and 36 organizations that support local growers. The site also houses local food events from farm tours to chef demonstrations. Author Julie Garrett's *5 Minutes on the Farm* podcast is featured in Stories from the Field so people can hear interviews with sustainable farmers.

REAP received a United States Department of Agriculture Farmers' Market Promotion Program grant in October 2016 to develop a unified statewide website, evaluate the economic impact of Farm Fresh Atlas, and implement a marketing campaign to promote the website and print publications. The goal of the project is to increase local food sales throughout the state and encourage residents and visitors to take part in Wisconsin's rich

food culture by visiting farms, farmers' markets, local food events, and more. Each listee commits to the Farm Fresh Atlas pledge which encompasses: environmental sustainability, fair labor, animal welfare and ensures products are grown or produced on a family/cooperatively-owned farm in Wisconsin. Start exploring at farmfreshatlas.org.



CELEBRATING LOCAL FOOD AND FARM TO SCHOOL



FAMILY FOOD FEST

"It was a great event that engaged families in important conversations."
-Organic Valley

- 36 vendors
- 18 volunteers
- 11 sponsors
- 5 student performance groups
- 3 food carts
- 2 stilt walkers
- 1 bike-powered smoothie blender

BURGERS & BREW

- \$47,000 raised for Farm to Business programs
- 1,713 attendees
- 25 restaurant partners
- 24 breweries
- 89 volunteers
- 19 sponsors
- 4 local bands



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REAP Food Group



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REAP Food Group nourishes links between land and table to grow a healthful, just, and sustainable local food system.

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reapfoodgroup.org

FALL 2017 REAP EVENTS - SEE YOU THERE!



PIE PALOOZA
Sunday, October 22
9:30 a.m. - 1:30 p.m.
Goodman Community Center

FARM TO SCHOOL NIGHT OUT
Wednesday, October 4 2017
Lunch and dinner - times vary
City-wide at participating restaurants

BUY TICKETS:
reapfoodgroup.org/events

BECOME A SPONSOR:
Email info@reapfoodgroup.org