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Opportunities for Local Food Systems Research and Extension in the South – A Land Grant University System Initiative

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Abstract

Acknowledging regional differences in the development of Local Food Systems across the United States, Southern Experiment Station Directors and Extension Directors decided to commission the development of an effective collaboration plan between southern Land Grant University (LGU) faculty in the area of Local Food Systems (LFS). The United States southern region's unique characteristics, such as the historically large concentration of underserved and small farms (Goodwin 2013), could impose unique challenges and opportunities for the development of LFS, and therefore a regional approach to addressing this region's unique needs may be appropriate.

With the support of the Southern Risk Management Education Center (SRMEC), the SRMEC Local Food Systems Work Group was created in 2013. During the first two years, this group identified research and extension priorities for LFS in the south. The ultimate goal of this group is to establish LFS programming that can help the southern LGU system more effectively address key factors supporting the successful development of LFS in this region.

This group identified ten research and extension priorities for LFS in the south, also represented graphically in Figure 1, from the perspective of agricultural economics and risk management: 1) market and supply chain logistics; 2) financial and risk management for LFS; 3) economic, social, and environmental outcomes; 4) consumer demand; 5) food safety; 6) financial and risk management for enterprises; 7) food security; 8) food access; 9) food system policies; and 10) general knowledge associated with LFS.

A complete discussion of identified priorities one to five was published in an invited issue of *Choices* entitled "Developing Local Food Systems in the South" (Goodwin 2013). In this issue, the SRMEC LFS Work Group specifically discussed the role of the LGU system in supporting each of the priorities identified. For example, this group highlights the important role the southern LGU system plays in the development of LFS-focused education and capacity building programs to support LFS development (Woods et al. 2013). Additionally, this group acknowledges the importance of creating a network of researchers and extension professionals providing objective feedback on research areas that could guide the allocation of resources for the development of LFS such as the evaluation of social, economic, and environmental outcomes associated with LFS (Lamie et al. 2013).

Future plans of the SRMEC LFS Work Group include expanding the discussion of priorities six to ten, as well as the identification and implementation of research and extension outreach collaboration opportunities.

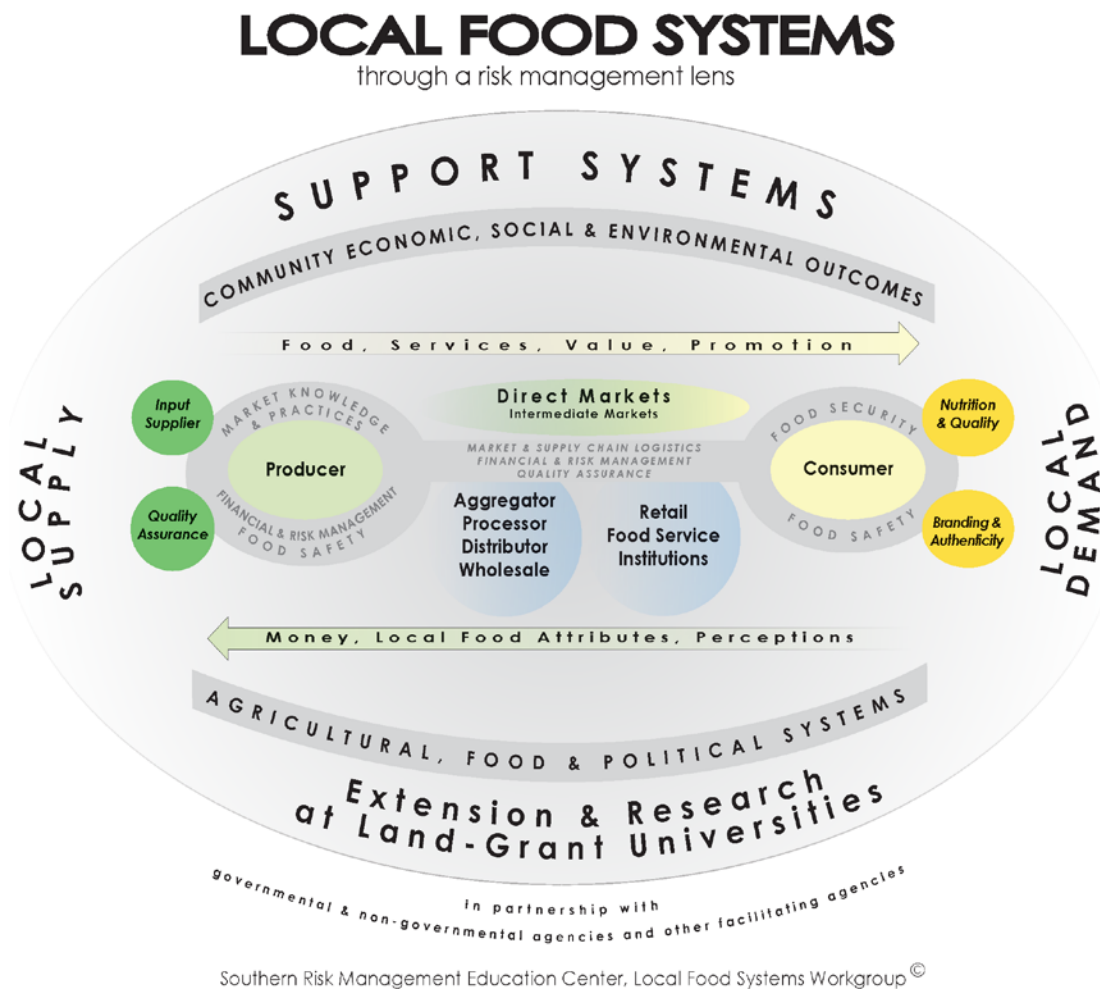


Figure 1. Info-graphic Relating LFS Operations and LGU Priorities.

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