

The Food Security Partners of Middle Tennessee “Cultivating an Agenda for Change”

By: Jennifer R. Hagan-Dier

Although you will not find the term “food security” in the dictionary, there is growing attention both locally and nationally to the idea of “community food security” and the dramatic impact the matter of food security has on a host of issues from the increasing rate of obesity and the safety of our food supply, to organic and sustainable agriculture, climate change and the strength of our local economy. In recognition of the many issues of food security affecting our community, Food Security Partners of Middle Tennessee (FSPMT) brings people together to create and sustain a secure and healthy food system for their region, from farm to fork. The vision of FSPMT is a Middle Tennessee in which all residents obtain a safe, culturally acceptable, nutritionally adequate diet through a sustainable food system that maximizes community self-reliance and social justice. Made up of over 100 partners and members who are committed to sharing information and resources, FSPMT is working to fulfill its vision by generating a comprehensive strategy to address many of the ills affecting our society and environment due to an unsustainable and unjust food system.

On Saturday, February 16, 2008, FSPMT took its first step in developing its strategy and realizing its vision by hosting the first Food Security Summit: “Cultivating an Agenda for Change.” This free, public event held in Nashville, Tennessee brought together over 250 people from across Middle Tennessee and all levels of the food system from government officials to farmers and eaters to discuss the key issues of food security and explore the connections between food, farming, health, economic development and the environment. Attendees of the Summit spent the first part of the day participating in a series of panel discussions focused on “Exploring Our Food System,” with topics ranging from “Health Impacts of Our Food System” and “Barriers to Food Access in Middle Tennessee” to “Environmental Impacts of Our Food System” to “The Power of Policy and the Reality of Food.” The second half of the day focused on learning from three national experts who came to share their individual experiences of leading food systems change in very different parts of the country from California to inner-city Chicago to the Appalachian Mountains. Through individual breakout sessions with these experts, Summit attendees were provided with an opportunity to focus on and consider how these successful ideas, actions and experiences might be used or adopted to spark change in the Middle Tennessee food system.

The Summit culminated with all attendees joining together for the “Cultivating an Agenda for Change” session where attendees broke into small groups to discuss what they had learned during the Summit and what they thought are the biggest issues related to food security in Middle Tennessee. Even with 250 very different people participating in small groups, the consensus was clear —our community must first address food security issues through public education and increased access and availability of locally grown foods. Working together, Summit attendees began to identify and connect shared priorities for creating a more healthy, just, and sustainable food system for Middle Tennessee. But, this is just the beginning. FSPMT is now

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compiling and analyzing the information and ideas generated at the Summit for what will become the “Agenda for Change” report, which will be released this spring. Stay tuned.

Jennifer R. Hagan-Dier was appointed in September 2007 by Governor Bredesen to the position of Assistant Commissioner for the Department of Revenue as the Liaison to the Department of Economic and Community Development (ECD). Jennifer is the co-founder and President of The Friends of the Nashville Farmers' Market, a founding Partner and member of the Advisory Council for the Food Security Partners' of Middle Tennessee, a member of the Community Health and Wellness Team and is currently serving as the 2008 chairperson for the Nashville Earth Day Festival. This article has been provided courtesy of the Green Living Journal, a project of the Center for Holistic Ecology and the Cumberland Green Bioregional Council.