

BLUE PAPERS

Sustainable Agriculture

Sustainable agriculture is the fabric of a sustainable society. A sustainable society is one that prospers over the long term because its members stay within the Earth's environmental limits for regeneration of resources. Louisiana's agricultural economy must be based on stewardship of its basic resources—soil, water, biodiversity.

Louisiana's family farms have become highly industrialized over the past fifty years. Agricultural commodities represent 10.2% of the State's economy. This economy is primarily based on non sustainable use of our basic resources and on non sustainable methods and technology:

1. Operations dependent upon costly chemical inputs and mechanization, mono cropping, expanded leased or purchased acreages to offset costs of production
2. Soils that are highly erodible and depleted of biological life, organic matter and minerals
3. Farm lands devoid of biodiversity and clean waters
4. Prime farmland owned by investors, not farm families

To redirect Louisiana's family farms to a more sustainable economy, it is critical to change policies on state and national levels to prioritize the survival and economic wellness of family farmers and a sustainable domestic food system. Such policies include:

- Preserving agricultural land for sustainable horticultural and commodity crops and animal production and providing incentives to new and existing small farmers to access land for farming
- Providing cutting-edge research and technical assistance that support a sustainable and profitable farm economy.

It is urgent that commodity-based family farms 1) have practical, in-the-field research, resources and training to transition to sustainable use of our soil, water, and biodiversity and 2) diversify agricultural production, add value, farm fewer acreages and have greater economic return. In the long term such a redirection of family farming leads to a stable farm economy, food security and contributes to sustainable, rural communities.

Grants and financial incentives from government and private sources need to support sustainable agricultural production and broad-based access to and ownership of farm land. Institutions and community development corporations that have a track record and mission of promoting sustainable rural communities should be given priority to receive such funding. Louisiana's land grant institutions have not gotten the job done.

Louisiana's semi-tropical location, its delta soils, rich marshlands and abundance of water make it uniquely suited for domestic production of food for our nation. In a time of heightened national security, Louisiana can produce abundant, safe and high quality food products.