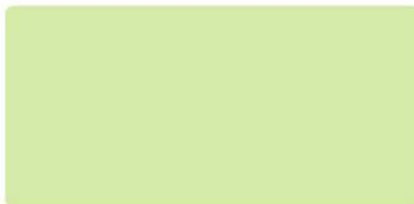
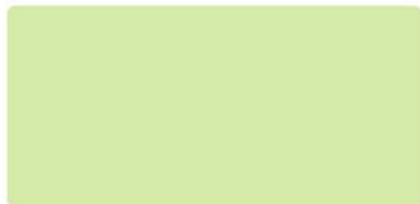
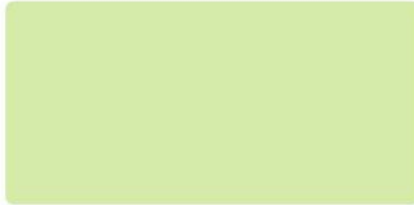




# LOCAL FOODS, LOCAL PLACES

## Technical Assistance Program



Strengthening the  
Local Foods System  
and Downtown  
Revitalization:

An Action Plan for  
Clarksdale, Mississippi

July 22, 2015



## Community Story

Clarksdale, Mississippi is a city of just over 17,000 people located on the banks of the Sunflower River in the heart of the Mississippi Delta, approximately 75 miles south of Memphis Tennessee and 150 miles northwest of Jackson, Mississippi. It lies amidst a region of prime farmland and is noted for its contributions to the development of Delta blues music the civil rights movement. Among Clarksdale’s assets are its historic architectural legacy in the downtown, its role as the trading center of an agricultural region and the more recent heritage tourism interest and activity centered on the city’s legacy of historic blues music.

The city’s population has seen a steady decline, from over 20,000 in the 2000 census to 17,000 in the 2010 census. Poverty has steadily risen in the recent years, resulting in 40% of the population living below the poverty line. Most of this poverty is generational, resulting in a young population experiencing similar malnutrition, joblessness, abuse, and various social challenges as their parents. In addition, access to local fresh food is limited. A former farmer’s market located in downtown Clarksdale closed and the nearest farmer’s market is located in the neighboring town of Lyon, MS. While being surrounded by fertile farmland, with a number of entrepreneurial local growers emerging in the surrounding area, residents of downtown Clarksdale have very limited access to fresh food. There is a need for comprehensive and holistic education about the linkages between diet, lifestyle and a host of health problems such as diabetes and obesity among the most economically disadvantaged residents. Local traditions of backyard farming, canning and cooking which thrived in Clarksdale a generation or two ago are rapidly disappearing and younger people are losing their link to the self-sufficient food growing and preparation practices of their grandparents.



Figure 1 - Historic Music Venue in Downtown Clarksdale

In response to the social and economic problems created by these circumstances, a number of local initiatives have emerged. Since Clarksdale is a USDA Strikeforce county and Delta Regional Authority is located in Clarksdale, there are a number of good local resources and partners. Some of current and potential local resources and include:

- Coahoma Community College,
- Clarksdale Chamber of Commerce,
- Delta State Healthy Initiative,
- MS Delta Council,
- Delta Bridge Project,
- Center for Population Studies at Mississippi State University,
- Mississippi Sustainable Agriculture Network (MSAN).

In addition, the Southern Bancorp Community recently completed a HUD sustainability plan for the area which indicated youth engagement as a priority. There is clearly interest through a number of local initiatives and local projects to address these social and economic issues in the broader Mississippi Delta Region.

One of the most thriving of these local initiatives is Griot Arts, Inc. in Clarksdale itself. Griot was created in 2011 by a group of local citizens concerned about the youth living in poverty in Clarksdale. The mission of Griot Arts Inc. is “to foster engagement with the arts in Clarksdale and connect people to pursue beauty, justice, and healing with students actively engaged in making the world a better place through the arts and community service.” For the last three years, Griot has focused its programming on an after school arts program for high school students. The success of that program and the apparent need for job training for young adults has led to the development of a new program. The Meraki job training program created in 2012 will help address two of the major issues facing young people in Clarksdale by providing hands-on job training and access to healthy foods.

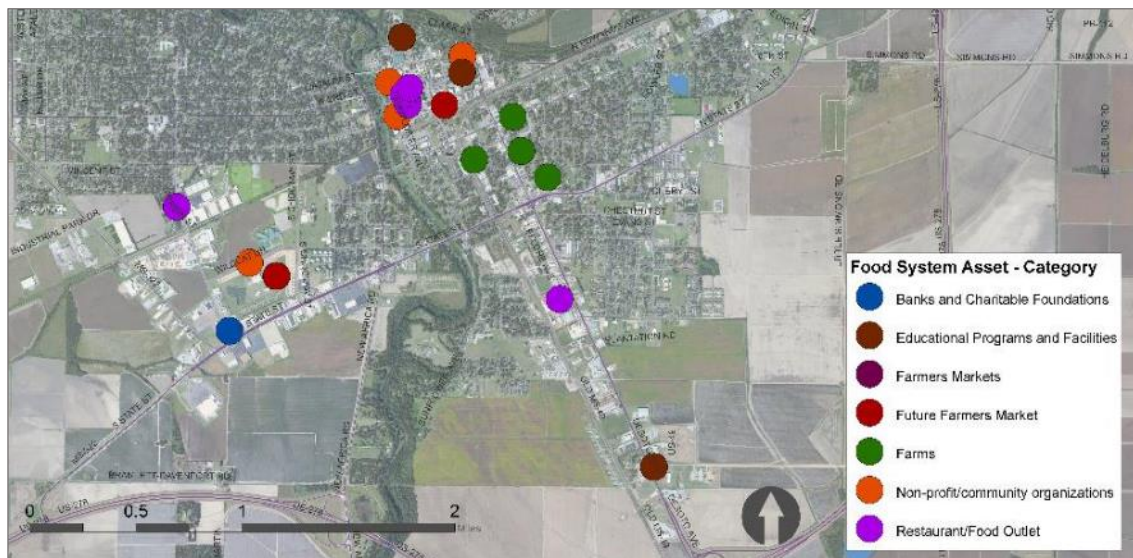


Figure 2 - Map of Downtown Clarksdale with Food System Asset Mapping Results. Complete results are in Appendix C.

The two-year job training program will allow young adults to attend weekly classes and meet with a personal mentor while getting hands-on job skill training. The job training program is founded upon a strategy for new food-based platforms to both address the local food deficit and provide job training opportunities which includes community gardens and farms, the downtown farmers' market, and the possibility of a future cafe serving food made with fresh local produce.

In the first year, the vision for the job training program is that the participants will work a minimum of 20 hours per week building and tending community gardens, working in the kitchen, preparing shelf-stable foods to sell at the farmer's market, and preparing dishes to be served at the cafe. The participants will be paid for the hours they work. They will also work with staff to develop and run a weekly farmers market to boost economic opportunities and bring locals to the downtown area. After the participants graduate from the program, they will be aided in finding a permanent job with the recommendation of the program and their mentor. The job program participants will also host a summer camp and workshop on their 3 acre vegetable farm for students to learn about growing food and preparing it. The goal of the program is to reach 200 K-12th graders in these camps and workshops.

As well as providing job training, the cafe and the farmers market are intended to boost economic opportunities for farmers, giving them an opportunity to sell their produce and aid in transportation of goods. The farmer's market location will be re-established in downtown Clarksdale, an area that is in close walking distance from the poorest neighborhoods in the city. By locating it in a central place and providing options for WIC and food stamps, the intent is to provide access to affordable and healthy foods to many people who have not previously been served.



*Figure 3 - Workshop in the Historic Train Depot*



*Figure 4 - Historic Greyhound Station in Downtown Clarksdale Across from Local Ice Cream Shop*

In 2014, Griot Arts, Inc. requested assistance through the Local Foods, Local Places program to develop an action plan for achieving its vision. The program is supported by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT), the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC), and the Delta Regional Authority (DRA). These agencies worked with the community to develop the following action plan. Implementing the actions described later in this plan can bring several benefits to the community including:

- More economic opportunities for local farmers and business.
- Better access to healthy local food, especially among disadvantaged groups.
- A revitalized downtown that is the economic anchor of the community.

## Engagement

A two-day technical assistance workshop was held on March 28<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup>, 2015 at the Historic Train Depot, which currently houses the Coahoma County Tourism Office, at 326 Blues Alley, in Clarksdale. The workshop brought together a group of local community stakeholders, including Griot Arts staff, local farmers and growers, community revitalization specialists and other local stakeholders, along with a team of federal agency staff and consultants. The focus of the workshop was to develop an Action Plan that would enable Clarksdale to implement key priorities as outlined in their application for the technical assistance.

1. Plan for the creation of a functioning and vibrant farmers market in downtown Clarksdale, and;
2. Support the Meraki two year local-foods based job training program with the following elements including community gardens and the possibility of a local foods café in the longer term.

The venue chosen for the workshop was the Train Depot, which was convenient since the location identified for the farmer’s market was the parking lot and green space adjacent to the Train Depot itself. The location allowed workshop participants to walk and talk about aspects of the site and planning and design elements during the workshop.



*Figure 5 - Site Chosen for Farmer's Market*

The workshop began with a small group of committee members and federal staff/consultants taking a community tour to key sites and locations in Clarksdale, and meeting with local officials including the mayor and the coordinator for the local gardening program in the County school system. An evening meeting with local organizers and stakeholders followed the tour that included presentations of case studies and lessons learned from Local Foods, Local Places workshops around the country.

As discussions evolved in the first day of the workshop, it was decided by the participants to focus more on the first objective and to develop as concrete a strategy as possible for the first objective so that it could serve as a primary catalyst for additional future work on the second objective. As a result, considerable work was done in the workshop on detailing a strategy for a farmer’s market, including a physical plan and detailed action and operating strategies.

The evening session concluded with two interactive exercises for participants: one to develop a vision of the ideal future for the Clarksdale farmer’s market and other initiatives in the form of a story telling exercise, and the second to review the draft goals around which to frame the action planning for the second day of the engagement process.



*Figure 6 - Workshop Participants*

The second day of the engagement process consisted of an all day workshop with invited stakeholders and local officials, followed by an evening Community Meeting to present the outcomes of the work sessions with local citizens.

During the early part of the day, there were presentations on local foods concepts, what other communities have done to enhance their farmers markets or to revitalize downtowns, and hands-on exercises designed to work on individual goals.

- Discussion and examination of lessons learned and cases studies from other communities, including advice from farmer’s market founders and operators in Mississippi.
- A functional programming exercise for the farmer’s market and walkabout and on-site discussion of physical opportunities and constraints of the depot site.
- A conceptual design exercise to lay out a draft site plan and three-dimensional visualization of the potential future farmer’s market
- An action plan and next steps program for implementing the farmer’s market.

## Vision

As the workshop progressed, prioritization among the set of goals shifted. In the end, development of a Farmer’s Market on the Train Depot site became the top priority for immediate pursuit. This will be a part of the multi-faceted strategy to bring local education, job training, economic support and healthy food choices to Clarksdale. Key components of the Farmer’s Market goal include:

- Developing an organization and management framework
- Discussing production and coordination with growers
- Marketing, education, publicity and outreach to community
- Identifying and addressing physical space and equipment needs
- Programming and activities



*Figure 7 - Walking Tour of Site*



*Figure 8 - Interactive mapping and design exercises with participants*

A conceptual Physical Plan of the Farmer’s Market site was developed by the consultants and participants following a walking tour of the site and discussion of the opportunities for various elements to be included. The design program for the Farmer’s Market and ancillary activities as defined by workshop participants included:

1. Market area in the green space in the center of the parking lot with vendors on both sides and circulation path in the center.
2. Tent vendors (those who sell from freestanding tents) should be on the grass along the southern curb line.
3. Truck vendors (those who sell from the back of their trucks) should be in the parking spaces along the north curb line with the backs of their trucks facing the green space.
4. Parking in the south lot (by the Train Depot) should be prohibited during market time. This could be a space for kids to ride bikes and play, and overflow area if all vendor areas on the green space are full.
5. Welcome station with information and vendor map in the central brick-paved seating area
6. Health station with displays and educational materials about healthy living and food choices
7. Animal station where local animal shelter can set up a station for animal adoption
8. Local Services station where local craftsmen can provide services while-you-wait such as knife sharpening.
9. Station for local Food Corps
10. Depot covered area (facing train tracks) could be used as a rain location rainy market days (with appropriate signage)



11. Depot breezeway could be used for demonstrations of cooking skills and local recipes. Different restaurants could rotate demonstrations on market days. Parking lot in front of breezeway could be set up with temporary café tables for relaxation and sampling of food.
12. Initial target for market day is Thursday afternoon or Saturday morning (if there is a conflict with the Thursday time).

The design concept plans were developed in phases. The first draft was called Plan A, which was reviewed and discussed as a group. The complete set of plans graphics and illustrations are available in Appendix B. The final concept plan, called Plan B (see Figure 9 below), was created by making adjustment to Plan A. Plan B is workshop’s final concept plan for the market. Though Plan B was the final concept produced at the workshop it’s intent was to be an initial concept piece to help local residents move forward. It is expected that these plans will be continually revised and revisited to best meet local and market place needs going forward.

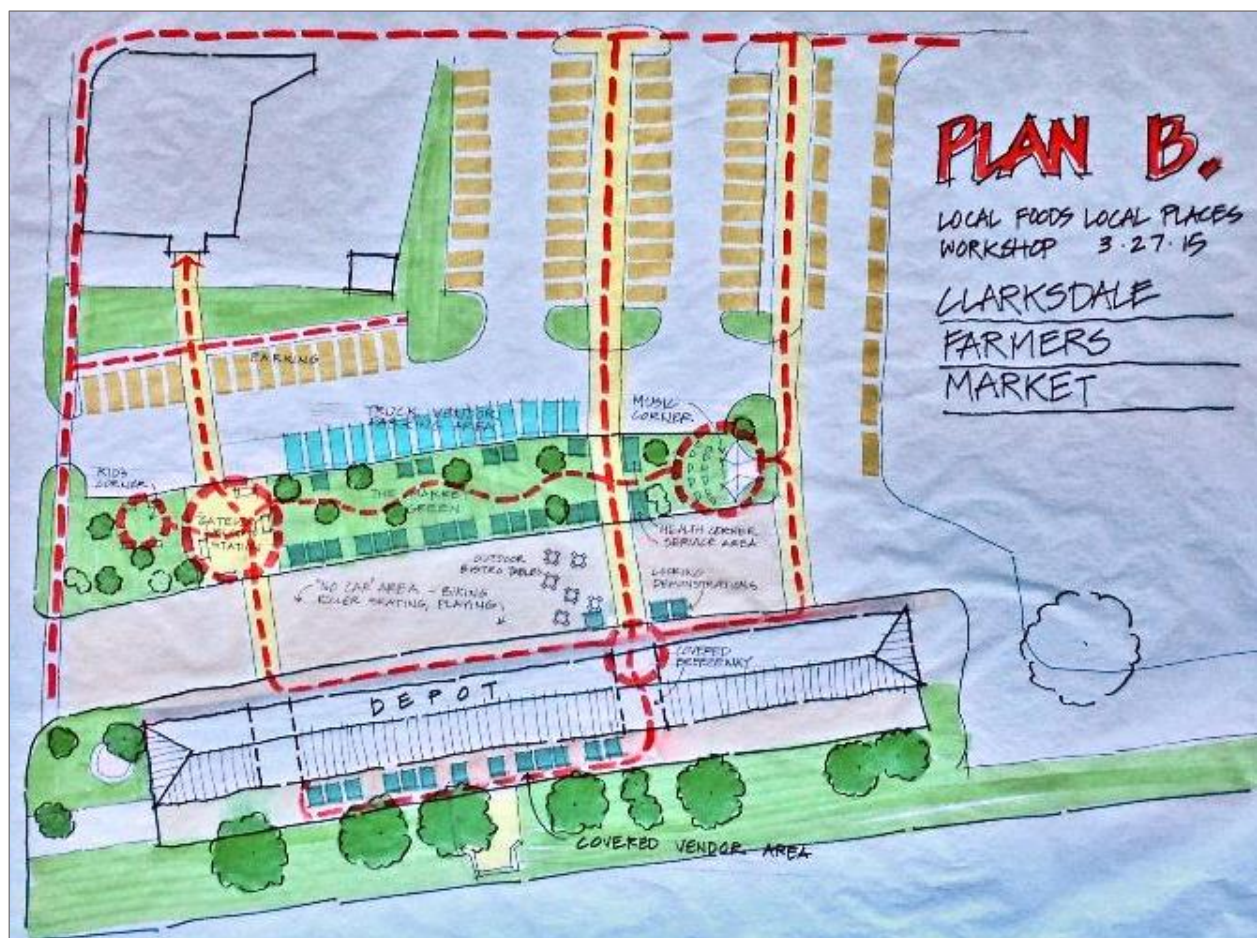


Figure 9 - Final, Refined Concept Plan for the Farmer's Market (Plan B.)

The final Concept Plan features all the elements of the Design Program drawn generally to scale over an aerial photo of the site. The plan shows the elements of the Design Program elements disposed along the main axis of the green space, with vendor areas lined up along both sides, truck vendors to the north and tent vendors to the south. It also shows a Tot Lot adjacent to the Welcome Station, for where parents can more easily supervise kids in an area they will enjoy. At the far end of the Market, a “Music Corner”

is shown, which was another idea brought up by participants as a way to expand the appeal of the Market and tie into the extensive local music culture.

The consultant team also worked with participants to discuss potential connections between the farmer’s Market and adjacent complementary uses or businesses that were in walking distance. A map of the immediate area around the Market, with notes on nearby complementary connections is shown below in Figure 10.



Figure 70 - Area Plan of Complementary Uses and Sites within Walking Distance of the Market

Finally, a perspective sketch of the potential Farmer’s Market, as well as an initial concept for naming and branding the farmer’s market was completed, see Figures 11 and 12.



Figure 81 - Perspective sketch of the Potential Farmer's Market



Figure 92 - One Concept for Naming/Branding of the Farmer's Market. Following the workshop it was decided to call the market the "Clarksdale Farmers Market" and drop the Blues Alley from the name.

Discussions continued around the naming and branding of the Market and will need to continue to ensure that the Clarksdale brand is clear identifiable for branding purposes.

Concurrently with the physical design exercise, workshop participants in another group were working on detailing the various goals and associated actions needed in short and long term time frames to make the vision for the project into a reality. The goal areas identified below were created to group and divide up actions into appropriate target areas that included growing the supply side of the market, market mechanics and operations, outreach and promotion, and job training next steps. A summary of the four goal areas and actions are below and are contained in detail in Appendix A.

## Action Plan

Goal 1: Farmers Market: Identify, grow, mobilize and support vendors. Enhance the supply-side of the local food system.

- Action 1.1. Advertise with local flyers with good graphics. Greenwood (within 60 miles radius)
- Action 1.2. Attract more vendors (both farmers and arts/craft vendors)
- Action 1.3. Conduct business training for new farmers and vendors.
- Action 1.4. Identify 1-2 anchor vendors.

Goal 2: Farmers Market Mechanics, Organizational Framework. Resources & Roles, Programming, Site, Location, Design

- Action 2.1. Determine dates/times
- Action 2.2. Identify Department Managers
- Action 2.3 Hire Manager
- Action 2.4 Set up System for EBT/SNAP

Goal 3: Increase Demand through Promotion, Marketing, Branding & Outreach

- Action 3.1. Cooking education. Make it good, traditional and local. Make it quick and easy
- Action 3.2. Set up SNAP/EBT capacity at Market
- Action 3.3 Use traditional and social media to market the market and advertise and stores and schools
- Action 3.4. Partnerships with Churches
- Action 3.5 Assist with transportation to the market or otherwise distribute farmers' market goods to neighborhoods.
- Action 3.6 Doctors prescriptions for healthy food program.

Goal 4: Job Training, Community Gardens: next steps and actions

- Action 4.1. Build a community garden and expo center
- Action 4.2. Develop other community gardens at New Roxy and in Neighborhoods!
- Action 4.3. Educating the wider community. Provide youth activities that increase nature appreciation and environmental education.
- Action 4.4. Design gardens

## Implementation

The workshop was followed by three follow up phone calls to review this report, report on any near term implementation and to discuss how to best position the action plan for mobilizing action and resources. Mention projects already funded or underway. Here are some immediate follow up steps accomplished following the workshop and relating to the action plan:

- Clarksdale Revitalization Inc. worked hard to prepare for the farmers market which opened on June 18<sup>th</sup>. There has been strong cooperation with County Tourism for access to the buildings (storage, restrooms, electricity and water) on the Historic Depot site. About 15-20 vendors have consistently participated. The market included weekly music events, a kids area, arts and crafts, portraits, healthy eating education booths and more. Appendix I contains a collection of images from the market’s 2015 season in pictures, and provide a visual testimony of its popularity and success this year.
- Clarksdale Revitalization Inc. attempted to get a Local Food Promotion Program grant in by the May 14<sup>th</sup> deadline but ran into technical difficulties and were unable to make the deadline. However, they were encouraged by USDA to pursue a larger SNAP grant for \$250,000, the deadline of which is June 18<sup>th</sup>, consequently the same day as the Farmers Market opening.
- Clarksdale Revitalization Inc., requested \$25,000 from Delta Regional Authority/USDA RBEG to initiate an annual six-month Farmers Market and year-round job training initiative in Clarksdale, Mississippi. The Farmers Market will provide space for local commerce, provide support for job training of local citizens, and provide health education to community members of all ages. The Farmers Market will be centrally located, in downtown Clarksdale, making these services accessible to community members across the income spectrum.

KEY PROJECT PERSONNEL / BUDGET
Farmers Market Manager - \$10,000 for 6 months - 20 hours a week.
Strategy Consultant - \$1,000 for 10 hours total Farmers Market Development
Clarksdale Revitalization Inc., supplies and overhead- \$2,500
Food Corps service member- \$5,000
Griot and Meraki Job Training Staff - \$3,000
Community Gardens - \$1,500
EBT/Credit/Debit combo costs - \$2,000

### Livability and Local Foods, Making the Connection

The smart growth dimensions of this action plan reside in the strong community investment in making existing and historic places vibrant, economically enhanced and expanded opportunities for training, education, and community vitality. This was accomplished by the decision and partnership with the Tourism office to locate the market at the Historic Depot at Blues Alley, a location that strongly connects the market to the area’s music heritage. The focus on design incorporated connectivity and walkability features of place-making, with an emphasis on designing an activity center that is enjoyable and easy to access and navigate both for customers and vendors. The community has a high level of civic engagement, and partnerships between various non-profits, local government, churches and community groups already exist before the workshop but were strengthened and in some cases established during the workshop.

## Appendices

- Appendix A – Action Plan
- Appendix B – Design Exercise Drawings and Illustrations
- Appendix C – Local Food System Asset Mapping
- Appendix D – Workshop Sign In Sheets
- Appendix E – Workshop Photo Album
- Appendix F – Funding Resources
- Appendix G – References
- Appendix H – Presentation Slides
- Appendix I – Clarksdale Farmers Market Summer 2015 in Pictures