

## **Heifer International and Delta State Host Regional Farmers Market Meeting**

Cleveland, MS, 2007 – On November 9, a Delta region farmers’ market meeting was held at the Delta State University Center for Community and Economic Development (CCED). Heifer International, in partnership with Delta State’s Institute for Community-Based Research, hosted the meeting to cultivate a regional farmers’ markets network. Farmers’ market representatives from the Mississippi, Arkansas, and Louisiana Delta region were invited to attend.

The meeting brought together market representatives to focus on the development of farmers’ markets on a regional and community level. Representatives were asked to share stories of their greatest success as well as their greatest challenge with their market. At another point, they shared what they envisioned would be the perfect market in the Delta. The representatives also exchanged ideas on how to attract the Delta community to the farmers’ market.

In an effort to attract more people, Mississippi farmers’ markets are currently a part the WIC Farmers’ Market Nutrition Program (FMNP), which is associated with the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC). “FMNP was established by Congress in 1992, to provide fresh, unprepared, locally grown fruits and vegetables to WIC participants, and to expand the awareness, use of and sales at farmers’ markets” (<http://www.fns.usda.gov/wic/FMNP/FMNPfaqs.htm>) At the meeting, participants discussed how to better utilize the program, and how other markets could apply.

Jesse Strassburg, Heifer International’s South Central Field Coordinator, has taken the lead in the creation and development of a regional farmers’ market network. Assisting in the effort is Delta State’s Institute for Community-Based Research and its founding director John J. Green, PhD along with Sallie Simmons. They both agree that the creation of a regional network is important because farmers’ markets that share a similar region also share similar challenges with similar solutions.

The effort also intends to create momentum for the advancement of alternative food markets in the region. Examples include community supported agriculture, farm-to-school programs, and more regional institutional purchasing, such as local restaurants or casinos buying food directly from Delta producers.

The creation of the Delta farmers’ market network as well as alternative markets stems from Heifer’s much larger international initiative to create community-based just food systems. Heifer International’s mission is to work with communities to end hunger and poverty and care for the earth. To find out more about the Delta farmers’ market network and markets in your area, or to learn about community-based just food systems, please contact Jesse Strassburg of Heifer International at 662-843-3870 or by email at [Jesse.Strassburg@heifer.org](mailto:Jesse.Strassburg@heifer.org).