FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
June 15, 2015

ALABAMA STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND INDUSTRIES TEAM UP TO PROVIDE FARM FRESH FOOD TO CHILDREN THIS SUMMER

Special Summer Food Service Program Kickoff Event Slated for June 16 in Foley

Montgomery, Ala. – The Alabama State Department of Education (ALSDE), the Alabama Department of Agriculture and Industries (AGI), the Bay Area Food Bank and the Coastal Alabama Farmers & Fisherman’s Market are joining together to create the first-ever Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) feeding site for children to be held at a local farmers market in Alabama.

A special kickoff event to usher in the new partnership will take place from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. on Tuesday, June 16, 2015, at the Coastal Alabama Farmers & Fisherman’s Market, 20733 Miflin Road, Foley, AL 36536.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture Food and Nutrition (USDA FNS) Summer Food Service Program makes a difference in the lives of children and teens who are at risk of experiencing hunger when school is out by providing access to nutritious meals during the summer. The USDA FNS Southeastern Regional Office asked the ALSDE to consider working with state and local agencies to pilot a summer feeding site that could both help increase SFSP participation and benefit agricultural producers in Alabama.

According to the USDA, farmers markets serve as a unique site location, providing an opportunity to further strengthen connections within the local community, while supplying a safe and educational place for children to eat. Kentucky and West Virginia have established similar partnerships with farmers markets in areas where the need for SFSP feeding sites is high.

From now through the end of July, any child under the age of 18 can receive a free lunch at the Coastal Alabama Farmers & Fisherman’s Market from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays. All meals will be prepared on site using locally grown fruits and vegetables.

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The ALSDE Child Nutrition Program Coordinator June Barrett said the Alabama State Department of Education is proud to join with the Alabama Department of Agriculture and Industries and the Bay Area Food Bank to pilot this unique partnership, which will aid in the state’s ongoing efforts to close the “summer nutrition gap.”

“In addition to providing children in the community with a free lunch, the Coastal Alabama Farmers & Fisherman’s Market is implementing activities that will help children learn about agriculture from local growers,” Barrett said. “The farmers, in turn, will hopefully see a boost in foot traffic as a result of the families visiting the market, thus gaining new and returning customers.”

Bay Area Food Bank Executive Director David Reaney echoed those remarks. “Keeping kids fed in the summer is a challenge, especially outside cities, so working with the Alabama Department of Agriculture and Industries and the Alabama State Department of Education to find places we can add to our list of summer feeding sites is an opportunity to help struggling families,” Reaney said. “Working with the farmers markets also helps bring attention to locally grown produce, and if that helps families get more nutritious food while connecting to lunches for children, I can’t think of a much better solution to improving nutrition for growing children.”

Alabama SFSP sponsors served a total of 1,995,852 meals in 2014, up from 1,650,896 in 2013. In addition, 172,173 children were served last year, compared with 137,537 in 2013. This year, the USDA FNS has set a goal of serving 200 million summer meals nationwide to children and teens who are at risk of experiencing hunger when school is out – 14 million more meals than were provided in 2014.

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