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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**FOOD AND SUSTAINABLE PROSPERITY  
FOR THE HOUSTON REGION**

**A Conference on Farming, Land Use, Community Food Security, and Local Food.**

(Houston, TX) – United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon recently said “the world faces three simultaneous crises: a food crisis, a climate crisis and a development crisis. The three crises are deeply interconnected and need to be addressed as such.”

Here in Houston our food travels over 1500 miles on average from where it is produced, we have repeated food safety issues, and we are losing prime farmland at an alarming rate. How will this all play out as we face rapidly rising transportation costs and our own emerging food, climate, and development problems? We are going to need innovative ideas to counter our own current and future food issues.

An extremely fertile region surrounds Houston, and most food was once supplied from a hinterland no further than about 100 miles out. Today, the prime farmland that supplied that abundance is rapidly disappearing, and little of the human infrastructure that could turn the soils into truck farms remains. Yet we have a fast-growing interest in farmers’ markets all across the region. How will supply keep up with demand, and how will we assure that we have the land and people to feed ourselves in a changing world?

On September 4<sup>th</sup>, the Gulf Coast Institute, Urban Harvest, Houston-Galveston Area Council, and Texas A&M Sea Grant will host a conference called “Food and Sustainable Prosperity for the Houston Region.” It will cover farming, land use, community food security, and local food. Additional issues include the contribution of food-based energy to rising food prices, safety concerns like the recent tomato scare, and food insecurity. Sponsors include the Gulf Coast Economic Development District and the Gulf Coast Small Business Finance Corporation.

John Ikerd, Professor Emeritus of Agricultural Economics at the University of Missouri, will provide a keynote address on the crises and opportunities for the new American agriculture in an era of fossil fuel scarcity. John Park, Associate Professor and Extension Economist at Texas A&M University will provide a more regional view of constraints and opportunities for local food production and supply in the Houston area.

U.S. Representative Nick Lampson will be the distinguished luncheon speaker. He currently serves on the House Committee on Agriculture; the Subcommittee on Department Operations, Oversight, Nutrition, and Forestry, which oversees the USDA; and is the Chairman of the Subcommittee on Energy and the Environment.

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Following the keynote, there will be two panel discussions, “Where are we *now*?” and “Where *should* we be going?” Smaller breakout sessions will offer further group discussion about topics such as New Ruralism, creating a Food Policy Council for Houston, as well as state and federal food and farm policy. For a full list of speakers and topics, please see the website at <http://www.houstonfood.net>.

Speakers and Topics so far:

A Perfect Storm of Change, *David Crossley, Gulf Coast Institute*

Keynote: The Relocalization of America's Food, *John Ikerd, University of Missouri Columbia*

A Marketing Perspective on Trends Toward Local Food, *John Park, Texas A&M*

Regional Strategies for Agricultural Economic Development, *Chuck Wemple, Houston-Galveston Area Council*

The Bio-Physical Architecture for a Healthy Houston Region: Soil, Farm, Community, *John Jacob, Texas Sea Grant*

Shifting to Locally Produced Food, *Bob Randall and Gary Edmonson, Urban Harvest*

The Reality of Hunger in Houston *John Krieger, The Houston Food Bank*

Distinguished Luncheon Speaker: *U.S. Representative Nick Lampson*

The tentative set of breakout sessions will include (*facilitated by in italics*):

New Ruralism: Back to the Land, *David Crossley, Gulf Coast Institute*

State and Federal Food, Farm, and Land Policy, *Geri Wells, Gulf Coast Institute*

Regional Economic Development and Education, *Chuck Wemple, Houston-Galveston Area Council*

Toward a Food Policy Council in Houston, *Christine McCullum-Gomez and Kathie Easterly, Urban Harvest*

Urban Farming and Education, *Gary Edmondson and Bob Randall, Urban Harvest*

Preserving Texas Land, *John Jacob, Texas A&M Sea Grant*

Quality Food for EVERYONE in the Next Ten Years, *Brian Greene, The Houston Food Bank*

K – 12 Nutrition, Gardening, and Farming Education, *tba*

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The conference will be held Thursday, September 4, 2008, from 8:30–5:30 in the Crystal Ballroom at the Rice Lofts at 909 Texas Avenue. Registration is \$50 before August 28, and \$75 thereafter. Included in the registration fee is breakfast and lunch, featuring local food. All are welcome to attend the conference; no prior knowledge of food or sustainability issues is necessary. The conference will conclude with a cash bar reception from 4:30–5:30 on the balcony surrounding the Crystal Ballroom.

The Gulf Coast Institute can arrange interviews by phone or in person with any of the speakers as well as local farmers, gardeners, and chefs, given adequate notice. We also can arrange locations for photo shoots and footage at farmer's markets, farms, and community gardens.

Possible topics for stories related to this conference include: rising fuel prices, rising food prices, food contamination issues, the growth of the local food market, the popularity of community gardens, global climate change and emerging changes in the costs of transportation, and the rising popularity of quality food.

If you would like more information or to schedule an interview, please contact Jay Blazek Crossley at the Gulf Coast Institute, 713-523-5757, or [jay.crossley@gulfcostinstitute.org](mailto:jay.crossley@gulfcostinstitute.org). Sponsorship opportunities are available.

### **About the Gulf Coast Institute**

The Mission of the Gulf Coast Institute is to improve the quality of life in the Houston region, through research, publication, and education for decision makers and citizens.