



**STATE OF MISSISSIPPI
DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND COMMERCE**

ANDY GIPSON
COMMISSIONER

PRESS RELEASE

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Ag Commissioner Gipson Announces Mississippi S.A.F.E. Plan to Strengthen Food Supply Chain

PHILADELPHIA, Miss. – Commissioner of Agriculture and Commerce Andy Gipson announced the Mississippi Strategic Agriculture Facilities Expansion (S.A.F.E.) Plan today at the Neshoba County Fair. The Mississippi S.A.F.E. Plan is a generational food supply and economic development plan for Mississippi based on our state's largest industry, agriculture. The S.A.F.E. Plan would rebuild the state's agriculture infrastructure to strengthen its food supply chain and food security by expanding local and international market opportunities for agricultural products, increasing capacity for value-added processing, and creating economic development opportunities for local communities.

According to the MSU Extension Service, Mississippi farmers produced an all-time record value of production in 2022 of \$9.72 billion in farm-gate value. But that is just part of the story. A 2023 study by Feeding the Economy (feedingtheeconomy.com) demonstrated that Mississippi agriculture accounts for 211,833 direct jobs; \$6.56 billion in direct wages; \$5.3 billion in business taxes paid; \$1.04 billion in exports and \$29.72 billion in direct economic output.

"In predominant measure, Mississippi farmers, agricultural workers and businesses - as taxpayers - have funded the surplus of taxpayer funds available today to the Mississippi Legislature. The Legislature has the opportunity to return these funds in a meaningful way to the people of Mississippi to whom they belong. Once implemented, the S.A.F.E. Plan will result in further growth of our State's largest economic sector in the form of more jobs, more wages, more economic development, and in fact, the S.A.F.E. Plan will pay for itself at the same time as we rebuild Mississippi's food security through investing in long-term infrastructure," said Commissioner Gipson.

"Agriculture and our world's food supply faces serious, unprecedented challenges. Farmers understand that feeding ourselves and the world is a one-year-at-a-time proposition. Recent events have reminded us of the challenges we face today and in the days ahead. Food security is national security, and I am convinced food security is the number one challenge we face today as we look to the next decade," said Commissioner Gipson. "Fluctuating weather patterns, record inflation, the global pandemic scare and resulting supply chain issues, the Russia/Ukraine War, the Mississippi River's successive flooding and going dry, and on top of all this, radical federal and international environmental regulations are creating

global food supply challenges for our farmers, ranchers, food producers, and ultimately, for all consumers.”

The Mississippi S.A.F.E. Plan proposed by Commissioner Gipson encompasses a statewide approach to rebuilding Mississippi’s agriculture infrastructure at the regional and local levels. The S.A.F.E. Plan comprises three focal areas for rebuilding our state’s agriculture and food supply infrastructure.

- **Creates Regional Food Hubs Across Mississippi**

The S.A.F.E. Plan creates strategically placed local food hubs in the three regions of the state. The food hubs will provide a centralized location for farmers to bring food products for public sale, wholesale and retail, and for aggregation, packaging, storage, cold storage and distribution in preparation for being sold into commerce through markets such as retail, food service, and direct to consumer sales.

- **Expands Local Farmers Markets and Upgrades County Agri-Centers and Multipurpose Centers**

The S.A.F.E. Plan provides infrastructure funds to counties for the expansion of local farmers market facilities and upgrades to existing county agri-centers and multipurpose centers. Mississippi is the home to 21 farmers market certified through the Mississippi Department of Agriculture and Commerce, and these markets serve as a critical feature for local access to Mississippi’s abundant food resources. Expansion efforts include the development of cold storage and transportation infrastructure at farmers markets; the development of packing, storage and distribution capability at participating farmers markets including mobile processing; and the roll-out of mobile farmers markets to address issues with food deserts in urban areas.

The S.A.F.E. Plan calls for upgrading Mississippi’s existing, aging 56 agri-center/multipurpose facilities that were built with funds provided by counties and the State of Mississippi. The plan will improve these facilities to enhance and expand ag-related events and will allow for these facilities to serve a role in food supply aggregation and storage through the development of food innovation centers with commercial kitchens for use by producers and the public. The plan also calls for upgrades to our Mississippi State Fairgrounds’ multipurpose facilities including the replacement of our dilapidated 70-year-old barns and building new world class livestock and horse facilities for our next generation ag leaders.

- **Invests in Middle of the Food Supply Chain Equipment and Infrastructure**

The Mississippi S.A.F.E. Plan would make infrastructure funds available to producers, cooperatives and private and public sectors to strengthen our State’s middle food supply chain. Funds will be invested for value-added processing equipment on-farm, distribution, wholesale or retail locations. For example, this will allow for the capability to expand cold storage capacity at our ports and harbors and key transportation hubs from North Mississippi, to Vicksburg, Meridian, Hattiesburg and the Mississippi Gulf Coast. Imagine the construction of a farmer-owned sweet potato processor in the state.

The Mississippi S.A.F.E Plan will return taxpayer resources to the taxpayers. It will represent an investment not just in agriculture, but an investment in our State and the future and wellbeing of our people. Implementing the S.A.F.E. Plan will result in increased access to healthy farm-raised food products, new markets for farmers and food producers, creation of economic development opportunities, creation of additional jobs, enhanced tourism and agritourism opportunities, and expanded and new marketing opportunities for Mississippi’s agricultural products.

On behalf of Mississippi families and consumers, Commissioner Gipson urged the Mississippi Legislature to get behind this, support it, and fund it. “I am calling upon our Mississippi legislative leadership to make the S.A.F.E. Plan a top priority in 2024. Catch the vision to understand the most important infrastructure we can invest in is Mississippi’s agriculture and food supply infrastructure. This is already our state’s largest economic driver. With the Legislature’s support, we can double the value and economic impact of Mississippi agriculture through these wise infrastructure investments. We have this one opportunity to set a bright stage for the next generation of future Mississippi agriculture leaders, our children and grandchildren.”

Commissioner Gipson also outlined several major accomplishments of the Mississippi Department of Agriculture and Commerce since taking office in 2018. These accomplishments include the development of Genuine MS®, Mississippi’s flagship state branding program; an increase in agricultural exports surpassing \$1 billion annually; increased efficiency through the consolidation of three agencies; passage of the Future of Mississippi Agriculture Act which created the nation’s first Wild Hog Control Program; drilled a water well and established a multi-agency law enforcement security plan for the Mississippi State Fairgrounds; hosted two record Dixie National Livestock Show and Rodeos; completed multiple renovations at the Ag Museum, Coliseum and Fairgrounds; and implementing new Youth and Workforce Development initiatives to address Mississippi’s greatest challenge.

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