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*Dr. Amanda Staudt - NWF*

*Green is the lunch counter issue for the 21<sup>st</sup> century... clean energy and clean jobs are not issues of equity but of the survival of the human species*

*Reverend Yearwood - Hip Hop Caucus*

*Southeastern Green Network Inc. (SoGreen Network) celebrated its one year anniversary by convening farmers, landowners, government officials, grassroots organizations, and environmental advocacy groups from throughout the Southeast at its first Greening The Southeast Summit 16-17 April in the beautiful city of Savannah, Georgia.*

SoGreen Network, an environmental education organization, goal is to provide both rural and urban communities with the practical tools to “make the change to green”.

This Summit was convened to hear the voices and opinions from those that represent these communities on how best to reach that goal, create a regional “common agenda” and most importantly get clarity on the definition of “green “.

#### 225 Participants On Earth Day Weekend

SoGreen Network’s inaugural meeting convened over 225 participants from the Southeast. Participants ranged from our senior citizens, to our baby-boomers, to our high school students. Both presenters and participants shared their expectations and visions on how to create a green regional plan and what the role of the individual, grassroots organizations, government agencies, and educational institutions are in establishing and implementing that plan.

#### *Participants Included:*

- Farmers, landowners and grass-root organizations that work with these groups in our regional rural communities
- Advocacy Groups All Walks of Life (AWOL), the Atlanta Metropolitan Black Chamber of Commerce, African American Family Farmers (AFFI), Federation of Southern Cooperatives, Southeastern African American Farmers Organic Network (SAAFON), National Wildlife Federation (NWF), American Indian Mothers (AIMI), Savannah Local Food Collaborative (SLFC), Hungry Club Forum, and Step Up Savannah.
- Business Sector representatives including architecture, communications, environmental law, evaluation, green consulting and policy

- Governmental Representatives, included the City of Savannah, Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), US Forest Service, Georgia Forest Service, SARE, Risk Management and Education (RME), Risk Management Agency (RMA) and the City of Port Wentworth
- Students and Professors from the region included Florida A&M University, Fort Valley State University, Tuskegee, Morehouse College, Savannah College of Art and Design, Savannah State University, Clemson, University of Arkansas, Spelman College, Kentucky State, and city of Savannah local high schools.

### What Are The Particular Challenges for The Southeast?

Florida A&M University's Dr. Marcia Allen Owens framed the issue of environment in the Southeast as 'Where You Stand Depends on Where You Sit.' "The Southeast has the highest emission rates in the United States" according to Dr. Amanda, Staudt, presenter and climate change expert from the National Wildlife Federation. "If the Southeast were a country, it would rank fifth between India and Japan for carbon emissions." The region had the largest number of billion dollar weather and climate disasters in the US between 1980 and 2008. These disasters are core indicators of environmental degradation and suggest a trend toward increased drought and flooding.

### Participants – Core Issues

The two-day summit covered the expanse of green personal, community, institutional and political issues impacting the Southeast. Recognizing the value of participants as experts, general and breakout sessions were facilitated and highly interactive. A consistent question posed to the participants was 'What Does Green Mean to You?' Some of the core issues that emerged were:

- Clarifying the term 'green' and the language associated with the green arena to make it more accessible and meaningful to members of both the rural and urban communities.
- Creating an educational outreach that addresses individual and institutional/business steps toward reducing consumerism and waste
- Going beyond focus groups and listening sessions to include the voice *and* involvement of disenfranchised and underserved groups in the decision making processes
- Forging collaboration across diverse and seemingly incongruent constituencies
- Lifting the voice of youth in the green movement through engagement and quality educational opportunities from pre-school through college
- Knowing what green certifications are recognized and credible as well as how to identify green scams
- Using scientifically-based trend data to understand how future climate trends will affect human life, infrastructure development, and the implications for the larger environment

- Understanding how environmental policy can affect communities, businesses and municipalities
- Accessing green planning based on successful pre-existing models in the region
- Identifying policies that can be implemented to develop construction, transportation, city planning, and other projects that are community inclusive and have environmentally sound frameworks

### Participant's Perspective and Summit Focus Issues

One conference participant noted at the closing that *'green is no longer just about recycling to me. I now see how we live and what we do affects me and I am ready to take action.'* The conference was framed to broaden thinking about the complex interactions between people, environment and quality of life. With focus on issues of:

- Sustainable Agriculture/Organic Growing and the development of our forest with projects like the Long Leaf Pine Project and the significant role they play in the greening of the Southeast.
- HBCU's and 1890 Land Grants participation in developing a strategic green plan for the region.
- Implementing sound sustainable planning for our regional cities.

### Closing Session

**Reverend Lennox Yearwood** of the Hip Hop Caucus, suggested that green is *"the lunch counter opportunity of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Clean energy and clean jobs are not issues of equity but of the survival of the human species."* His clarion call was that *"we come together as the human race to organize, mobilize and energize for those who don't exist yet."*

If you would like to learn more about SoGreen, visit us online at [www.sogreennetwork.org](http://www.sogreennetwork.org).

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