



FARM TO SCHOOL IN MICHIGAN: STATEWIDE RESPONSE SHOWS WIDESPREAD ACTIVITY

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The Michigan Good Food Charter, developed in 2010 with broad input from people across the state, established six goals for Michigan's food systems. One goal is for institutions – such as schools, hospitals and colleges – to source 20% of their food products from Michigan growers, producers and processors by the year 2020.

LOCAL FOOD PURCHASING BY MICHIGAN SCHOOL FOOD SERVICE DIRECTORS

To track perspectives about and use of local foods in K-12 school food programs over time, the Michigan State University (MSU) Center for Regional Food Systems (CRFS) (known previously as the C.S. Mott Group for Sustainable Food Systems) distributed surveys in 2004ⁱ, 2009ⁱⁱ, 2012ⁱⁱⁱ and 2013^{iv} (by mail in 2004 and electronically thereafter) to Michigan school food service directors using contact information provided by the Michigan Department of Education (MDE). Responses from the 2009 survey indicated that nearly 70% of school food service directors reported interest in purchasing local foods; by the 2013 survey, nearly the same percentage (68%) reported purchasing local foods through one or more channels (through full-service/broadline and/or specialty distributors, directly from farms, or through a farmer cooperative/collaborative). Interest from school food service directors in purchasing local foods in the future remained high at 82%.

Response rates from the three surveys conducted from 2009 to 2013 ranged from 28% to 38% of approximately 900 Michigan school food service directors. In an effort to increase school food service director response rate, MDE added an optional two-part question to the 2014-2015 school year School Nutrition Program application within the Michigan Electronic Grants System Plus (MEGS+) online application system. Responding to this application was a requirement of all Michigan schools/districts participating in the National School Lunch Program. Eighty-one of Michigan's 83 counties were represented by respondents.

In 2014, over half of the applicants (470 of 878, or 54%) responded affirmatively that they currently purchase local foods for their school food program. In the dataset, "No" responses from this optional question were indistinguishable from answers left blank; 97 respondents who did not provide a "Yes" answer to the initial question but still marked a source of local foods in the follow-up question are excluded from this count. Therefore, the actual number of school food service directors purchasing local foods may be higher than our reported number.

The 470 school food service directors who reported purchasing Michigan foods did so through a variety of suppliers.¹

- 80% purchased local foods through their full-service (broadline) distributor.
- 58% indicated that they source Michigan foods through federal food programs available to schools, including the Department of Defense Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program, the USDA Foods Program and the USDA Fresh Produce Pilot Program (piloted only in Michigan and Florida).
- 34% purchased local foods from a local grocery store or farm market.


¹ Percentages add to more than 100% because respondents could indicate more than one source for local food purchases.



- 14% purchased local foods directly from a local farm or farmer (farm direct).
- 5% purchased local foods through a farmer cooperative.
- 3% purchased through a food hub.

TAKING STOCK AND LOOKING FORWARD

Asking school food service directors about local food purchasing in the 2014 MEGS+ online application system returned responses from a more complete set of Michigan school food service directors than previous surveys and gives a broader picture of current levels of local purchasing. The high number of affirmative responses demonstrates that many school food service directors have translated their previous interest in local food purchasing into action.

The Michigan Farm to Institution Network (MFIN), co-coordinated by CRFS and the Ecology Center, is working to help schools and other institutions reach the Michigan Good Food Charter goal of sourcing 20% of their food products from Michigan growers, producers and processors by the year 2020. Cultivate Michigan, a project of MFIN, is a statewide campaign to help institutions increase local food purchasing by highlighting Michigan featured foods on a seasonal basis, connecting to local sources for these foods, and promoting these foods with marketing materials designed for institutional settings. The Cultivate Michigan website also offers individual institutions an online dashboard to track their progress in local food purchasing. To learn more about MFIN and Cultivate Michigan, visit www.mifarmtoinstitution.org and www.cultivatemichigan.org. 

For more information, visit www.foodsystems.msu.edu or contact Colleen Matts, Farm to Institution Specialist, at matts@msu.edu or 517-432-0310.

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ⁱ Izumi, B.T., Rostant, O.S., Moss, M.J., and Hamm, M.W. (2006) Results from the 2004 Michigan Farm-to-School survey. *Journal of School Health*, 76(5), 169-174.

ⁱⁱ Colasanti, K., Matts, C., and Hamm, M.W. (2012) Results from the Michigan Farm-to-School survey: Participation grows from 2004. *Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior*, 44(4), 343-349.

ⁱⁱⁱ Matts, C. and Smalley, S. (February 2013) Farm to School in Michigan: 2012 Survey Shows Interest in Purchasing Local Foods Continues to Grow. Retrieved from <http://foodsystems.msu.edu/resources/fts-2012-survey>.

^{iv} Matts, C. and Smalley, S. (March 2014) Farm to School in Michigan: Still Going Strong. Retrieved from <http://foodsystems.msu.edu/resources/mi-fts-going-strong>.