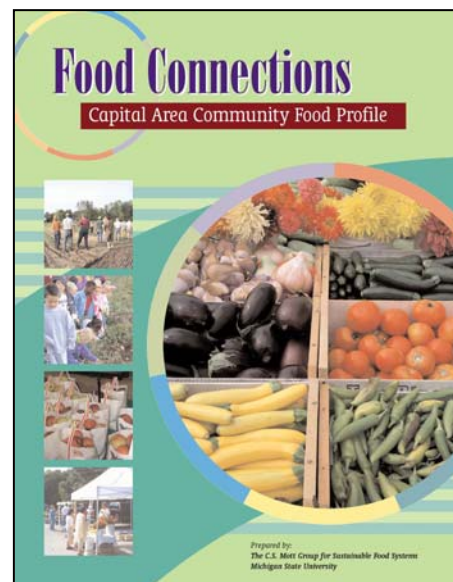


## Guide to Developing a Community Food Profile

A Community Food Profile (CFP) provides a framework for communicating community food system ideas through vignettes of the people and enterprises involved in *your* community. The C.S. Mott Group for Sustainable Food Systems at MSU has developed a CFP for the Lansing tri-county area that serves as an example (<http://www.mottgroup.msu.edu/downloads/CACfoodprofile.pdf>). We are also offering the layout from *Food Connections: Capital Area Community Food Profile* as a template for use in design and layout of your CFP. This guide details the steps and considerations in developing a CFP and using the layout template.



### Reasons for developing a Community Food Profile

A CFP can be useful to:

- Highlight examples of community-based food activities in your area
- Share a community-based food system perspective with the broader public
- Identify common goals among diverse partners that lead to multiple outcomes (helping each other so that everyone gets what they need)
- Begin the work of building food system connections within your community

### Valuing the Process

The process of pulling together a diverse group of community members to discuss their local food system has great value in itself. A systems-perspective offers new ways of looking at issues (see: [http://media.cce.cornell.edu/hosts/agfoodcommunity/afs\\_temp3.cfm?topicID=262](http://media.cce.cornell.edu/hosts/agfoodcommunity/afs_temp3.cfm?topicID=262)).

It can help a diverse group find common goals that accomplish several things at once. For example, consider a county Extension office where the Horticulture Educator is struggling to find new ways to keep small farms viable, the Nutrition Educator would like to reach an ethnic community with a message of eating more fruits and vegetables, and the Community Development Educator is working with the city to revitalize a downtown neighborhood. The office staff members decide to come together, along with their collective community partners, to discuss how the overall food system operates within their county and how it influences community well being. After identifying various parts of the local food system and sharing stories of successes and challenges, the group recognizes that they can address these seemingly unrelated problems in part by working together to enhance the struggling downtown farmers' market. One goal (make the farmers' market better), multiple outcomes (increased markets for small farms, improved access to fruits and vegetables, increased economic and social activity in a struggling neighborhood.)

Developing a CFP may provide the impetus to start this process of exploring your community's food system. But keep in mind

**"It is good to have an end to journey towards; but it is the journey that matters in the end."**

– author Ursula K. LeGuin

that the development process may be as valuable as the finished product. And it may take significantly more time than the estimates below suggest. You may need to change your goals along the way. Yet, each step of the process will likely provide its own valuable outcome, expose a new perspective, or offer a new partner. Value the journey.

The process of putting together a CFP will help you build connections within your community. By identifying local successes, visiting and interviewing people in the local food system, and asking about their opportunities and challenges, you can start to facilitate connections between different components of the food system that may not already be in contact. Entrepreneurial activities and opportunities may also surface through this process.

### Organization of the Capital Area Community Food Profile

The Capital Area CFP is organized around the Circle of Connections diagram (right), which graphically presents the components of a community-based food system and some of the potential outcomes. The remainder of the profile supports these connections through vignettes of local examples.



### Introduction

The first 2 pages (below) provide context by succinctly describing community-based food systems and why they are important. While there are some Capital-area-specific references in the template example, much of the narrative is generic and may be appropriate for other communities with little or now editing. Feel free to use the text, but think of it as a starting point – you will know best what language and perspective will engage your audience, and you certainly can improve upon our example!

### Where does your food come from?

Everyone in our community has connections to food. Food is essential to our health and well-being. It plays a central role in the social networks and cultural traditions that help define community. Agriculture is an important industry in Michigan and in the Capital Area consisting of farms, farms and food systems.

However, communities rarely see opportunities for development in the food and farming connections that make up their local food system. We see a globalized and industrialized food system, often leaving farmers and consumers separated by distance and misunderstanding. Produce enters in the Midwest through an average of more than 1,500 miles, and the typical consumer doesn't realize his meal is "imported." We don't appreciate the resources used in its production.

We see an address current pressing issues as diverse as obesity when overall economic development is just by paying closer attention to our food – what we eat, where it comes from, how it is produced, processed and distributed. Reducing our collective food habits can open a host of new opportunities.

**A Food System** includes the who, what, when, where, why and how of our food – from farm to plate.

### Outcomes

Here are some of the issues a community-based food system can influence. Which ones affect you?

**Small and medium scale farm viability**  
If current trends continue, Michigan will lose 71 percent of farms that are between 50 and 500 acres by 2040, representing nearly half of all Michigan farms. In the Capital Area, this would translate to 110 farms – 1/3 of the area's total. This loss is not just farms but also farmland, farmers, skills and infrastructure necessary for long-term food production capability. Many studies have demonstrated the importance of small- and medium-scale farms in maintaining the social, economic and environmental health of rural communities.

**Economic Development**  
People in the Lansing 05 county area spend \$1.1 billion annually on food and beverages in stores, restaurants and other eating establishments. The vast majority of these food dollars are spent on products originating outside the area. Community based food systems capitalize on opportunities for entrepreneurial farmers and small businesses to add value to local agricultural products and keep a larger portion of each food dollar within the local economy.

**Farmland Preservation**  
Community and state efforts are under way to preserve farmland from the growing threat of urban sprawl. Preserving farmland, however, must go hand in hand with ensuring farm viability. By building the food system – relying more on local and regional sources for our food needs – ensure valuable markets that help keep farmers farming on farmland and increase awareness of the importance of preserving local farmland.

**Community and Social Vitality**  
At the heart of a community based food system are relationships that build social capital, strengthen social networks and form the basis of community identity. Food is a deep moral aspect of our social interaction. In fact, the Latin root of the words community and company means "with bread." Food is an inclusive food point for rebuilding community, as when we eat in retail settings, and especially between the two.

**Environmental Stewardship**  
Food production is inextricably linked to the environment. However, the intensification and industrialization of agriculture over the past 50 years have resulted in many practices that are detrimental to environmental health. A community based food system highlights the connection between food and environment, creates opportunities for consumers to recognize and value the environmental services provided by local farms, such as water filtration and wildlife habitat.

**Jobs**  
In a time when job attainment is a painful reality for many communities, local food production and processing can create significant numbers of middle jobs. Like "Buy American" campaigns, "Buy Local Food" campaigns can foster an understanding that purchasing choices affect the economic well-being of people in our community.

**Healthy Individuals**  
Michigan is in the midst of an obesity epidemic. Sixty-two percent of the state's adults and 11 percent of high school students are overweight. In 2003, obesity-related medical costs in the state totaled \$2.9 billion. Most people become overweight from inadequate physical activity and poor diet. Community based food systems encourage healthy lifestyles by making fresh, delicious fruits, vegetables and other foods more accessible. Healthier citizens mean reduced healthcare premiums, making Michigan communities more business friendly.

## Modular components

The rest of the CFP is made up of modular components (example, right). Each consists of one page of background narrative, with supporting data and a “what you can do” box, followed by a one-page related story. These modules build on and support the introduction. They provide an opportunity to highlight the successes in your community while painting a picture of what is possible.

**Farm-to-School**

Learning Food  
Food Security  
Food Safety  
Farm Viability  
Environmental Sustainability

**What You Can Do**  
Start a school garden or composting project. Volunteer to chop-axe a classroom visit to a local farm. Prepare more fresh fruits and vegetables at home.

**COMMUNITY:** Develop a school fundraiser around healthy prepared foods. Make the local school board about farm-to-food issues.

**MUNICIPALITY:** Partner with other governmental agencies to promote healthy eating.

**A School That Grows Hope**

Commencement Secondary School lies on the rural northern edge of the Lansing School District. Commencement students are proud from an inner-city neighborhood that had its school and from a nearby trailer park. Now students come and go on their parents' bikes and scooters at bus excursions from their homes. But however at the school a high. The school is now on its 18th year of operation in three years. Still, a sense of hope, commitment and community grows from a small back corner of the schoolyard. Commencement has a garden.

It began on a way to beat from a personal loss. Dr. Louise Sharp, director of MSU's residential initiative of the Study of the Environment (ISE) Program, wanted to close her parents for gardening which she learned from her father, who had recently passed away. They helped develop the garden and has stayed around. "When this thing started, I thought it might be a way to raise the school's MAP scores," she said. "I quickly realized that the garden meant so much more to these kids."

The garden's magic began with a box of seedlings sent. A teacher's husband planted up a plot behind the school. The local seed vendor company donated a load of compost. Soon a 30 by 30 foot plot became a wealth of garden diversity: strawberries and peaches, sweeteners and potatoes, lettuce and carrots. Students now participate in garden planning and planting in the spring and return in the fall to enjoy a bountiful harvest.

Students have taken on throughout the school, offering teachers more tangible "tools" that hold the students' attention. The diverse life science lessons are there, as are hands-on experiences with wildlife such as earthworms and insects. Students also learn water conservation by selling bottled goods made from the garden's produce. Working assignments focus on describing experiences in the garden. The garden offers students a means to see, feel and taste their lessons. Commencement students are also learning that fresh vegetables aren't "gross," and that carrots aren't made in the supermarket. Connecting with the source of their food may be a first step toward lifelong healthy eating.

Field trips to the MSU Student Organic Farm give Commencement students a chance to experience the changing seasons on a working farm. Through intercollegiate collaboration with MSU, a greenhouse opened at Commencement in summer 2004, allowing the growing season to extend well into the winter and begin early in the spring.

The project has not been without its challenges. Frequent staff turnover means repeated justification that the garden is a special place where students can experience life and learning and still meet curriculum requirements.

"We're dealing with a generation that doesn't have an opportunity to connect to nature," says Sharp. "And you're not going to take care of something you don't know. That little garden in their lives, their living classrooms."

**Contact Information**  
For information on farm-to-school programs, contact Viki Lorraine at Michigan State University (517) 353-6791

For example, the topical modules in the Capital Area Community Food Profile include:

- Land Use and Farming
- Farmers' Markets
- Grocery Stores and Restaurants Focusing on Local
- Local Food Processing
- Community Supported Agriculture
- Farm-to-School
- Community-based food security programs

There is nothing unique or magical about this collection of topics. You will want to list topics that “profile” your community, represent the full extent of the food system, provide some insight about the current food system, and also suggest future directions and opportunities. Other topics that might be appropriate include:

- Food distribution (e.g., produce distributor)
- Agri-tourism
- Unique landscape qualities or unique agriculture
- Roadside farm stands and on-farm markets
- Food and ag. promotions and/or celebrations (e.g., community fairs, festivals)

Each community will probably develop its own unique list.

The modular structure makes it easy to add as many or as few topics/ stories to your CFP as desired. But be selective – a short, concise CFP will likely be more effective in engaging your audience.

The modular structure also makes it easy to update the CFP with new stories. With regular updates, your CFP can become a way to track and share developments within the community.



## Here's a rough estimate of what it will take to develop a CFP

### Estimated human resource commitment:

The time commitment necessary to develop a CFP as a team is difficult to estimate, and even harder to place a value on. As a starting point, however, a reasonable estimate might be 8-10 months at approximately ½ time (equivalent of roughly 4-5 months full time) for a individual comfortable/ competent in conducting interviews, taking engaging pictures, writing stories and accompanying text, researching place-based statistics/ information to support the stories, and developing basic layout. Of course, the tasks could be spread across many individuals in a development team, and may need to be spread out over a longer timeline to accommodate group process.

Additional resources: Computer with internet access, camera (hi-resolution digital preferred). If the intention is to use the Mott Group's layout template, a graphic designer working on a Macintosh platform (preferably using Quark software) will also be needed to insert text and graphics into the template (cost of graphic designer for this task estimated at \$500 – financial assistance may be available through the Mott Group).

### **Developing a Community Food Profile**

The following flow chart and text suggest a process for developing a CFP that mimics the structure of the *Capital Area Community Food Profile*. While the chart suggests a linear task flow (do step 1, then do step 2, etc.), you may find that, depending on available resources and personnel, you can work on more than one task at once. The chart also offers a suggested timeline geared toward a focused effort, but ultimately you will need to establish your own timeline.

Some steps in this suggested process are things that we did as we developed the Capital Area CFP. They worked well for us so we are recommending them to you. Other steps represent our learning the hard way. Our failure to do them – or to give them due attention – slowed our progress. If you have questions or comments on this process, if something is unclear or you see a way that we can make this guide or the CFP process better, please contact the Mott Group at [mottgroup@msu.edu](mailto:mottgroup@msu.edu) or 517-432-1612.

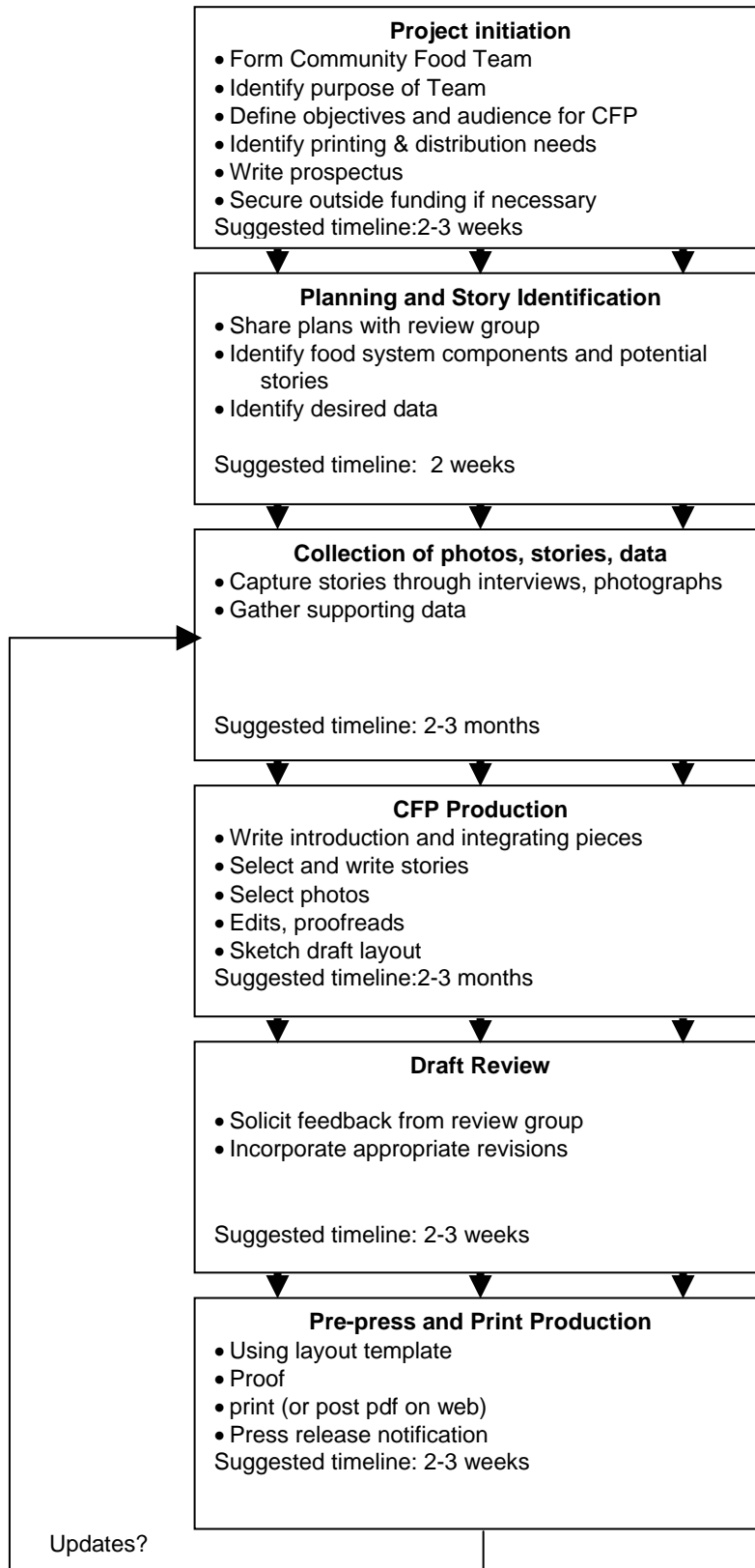
### **One way to tell the story, not *the* way**

The *Capital Area Community Food Profile* presents one way to approach sharing a community-based food system perspective. There are certainly many others, and quite likely, more appropriate approaches for your community and the audience you hope to reach. **Please take liberty in modifying, adding to, subtracting from, or reinventing this example CFP.** While we hope that the *Capital Area CFP* provides inspiration and some guidance, we look forward to seeing the creative alternatives that emerge. You may choose to use the layout as-is, and simply add your own stories, photos and data. Or you may choose to completely alter the look and feel of your CFP. We ask only that you share your process and your final CFP with the Mott Group.

“The more we meet, the more I have learned about the Saginaw Area that I did not know before ... Any meeting I go to lately seems to be concerned in some way with our food systems and how it affects our day-to-day health and welfare. I think this is a good effort to come together across programming, businesses and interests to learn from each other and hopefully make a difference.”

– Holly Tiret, MSU Extension Nutrition Educator, on developing a Saginaw Area Community Food Profile

## Community Food Profile Development Flow Chart



### Form Community Food Team

The first step in developing a CFP may be establishing a committed team of diverse community members that sees the utility of a CFP as a community development tool, can create a common vision and develop a work plan to make it happen. Inviting team members who have a vested interest in the local food system helps to keep the team committed and moving. CF team membership should also be extensive enough to allow the group to take a broad look at their community's food system and to see the many connections and relationships that exist around food in every community.

"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed it is the only thing that ever has."

– Margaret Mead

A community food team could include key MSU Extension staff members and appropriate local partners from sectors such as:

- Agriculture, including farmers, farm organizations, grower cooperative, etc.
- Public health
- Anti-hunger organizations
- Economic development and business
- Food processing, food retailing, direct food marketing (e.g., farmers' markets) and restaurants
- Environmental groups
- Local government including planners and elected officials
- Schools
- Media

### Identify purpose of Team

So you've gathered a group of community members who are concerned about the food system. What are your concerns? What do you hope to accomplish? If you are successful, how will your community be different than it is today? Identifying the broader motivations and goals of the group before taking on a project like developing a CFP will help to assure that the project is taking you toward those goals. This might take the form of developing a mission, vision and/or core values or principles. Perhaps your group has a history and much of this work is already done.

### Define objectives and audience for CFP

Clearly defining what you hope to accomplish and whom you hope to reach will provide focus and direction to the project.

Possible objectives for your CFP:

- Spread an appreciation for a community-based food system perspective
- Engage a certain audience (elected officials, decision makers) in supporting community-food system work
- Create a "home pride" feel around your local food system
- Educate consumers and encourage them to seek out and buy local foods, engage in their local food system

- Help residents better “see” a community-based food system that may currently be mostly “invisible”
- What are *your* objectives?

Possible audiences:

- General public/ consumers
- Community leaders & decision makers
- Entrepreneurs and farmers
- Local residents vs. tourists/ visitors
- What groups are *you* trying to reach?

Another part of defining your audience is defining the geographic boundary to be covered in the CFP. Remember that this is intended to be place-based, and the stories and content should, as much as possible, refer to and represent your “community.” But where do you draw the geographic bounds for your community? This could be your county, a collection of counties, a metropolitan area or some other region. Keep in mind, however, that much of the available data (e.g., Census of Ag., Business Census) is aggregated at the county level.

The objectives and intended audience will influence the language used in the CFP, the types of stories selected, the final print form, and the distribution method. If you identify several goals or several audiences, decide which is your highest priority.

#### Identify printing & distribution needs

How do you intend to distribute the CFP? What print form will work best for that distribution? This will depend on your goals, primary audience and the financial resources available. If you see your CFP as primarily an engagement tool to be used by active community members to “open doors” and start a dialogue with community leaders, elected officials, etc., then a web-based file that can be printed as needed might be the best solution. If however, your goal is to reach a large number of consumers, you may have to consider a bulk printing. There are a number of printing options with varying costs and unique requirements. Contact the graphic designer/ printer that you plan to work with and discuss options **at the start of the project**.

**Note:** The Mott Group layout template (i.e., the *Capital Area Community Food Profile*) has been developed in Quark on a Macintosh platform. Using the template will require access and familiarity with this software. If you intend to make use of the layout template, ask the designers/ printers in your area if they can work in this format.

#### Write a prospectus

Develop a one page (maybe only one paragraph) description of the project that includes your motivation, goals, intended audience and geographic boundary. Describe the finished product, and if possible offer a sample (perhaps the *Capital Area CFP*?) Developing a budget for the project should also be part of the prospectus (see “Secure necessary funding”) Use this “prospectus” to communicate the project to the outside world (potential funders/sponsors?) and for a “compass bearing” reminder of where you’re headed.

### Secure outside funding if necessary

It may be possible to fit the process of developing a CFP into existing programs and job descriptions. You may also be able to empower significant volunteer contributions from your community. Additional funding may be needed for travel to interviews, meetings, etc. and for graphical layout and printing of the final CFP. Local sources of funding and contributions should be the first option, but additional sources may be available. For assistance in identifying potential funding sources, contact the Mott Group.

### Sharing plans with review group

Sharing your CFP plans with a review will help maintain a broader community perspective in the project. Ideally the group should be comprised of a cross-section of the intended audience for the CFP – perhaps it is a group that has already formed around your food system efforts or another already organized group in the community. Perhaps you will have to invite a group of individuals to come together. Decide ahead of time what you will ask of this group – how much of their time are you asking, what do you want them to help you with? Ideally, you will be able to find a group of 5-10 people willing to meet 2 or more times (once at the beginning of the project, and once for feedback on a draft.)

Some suggestions on how to work with the review group: invite them to come together for an evening meeting (maybe a potluck!), present to them a succinct description of the CFP project, your goals, some of the stories you're thinking about including, etc., ask for their input and suggestions for stories, and then listen. You can think of this as a focus group: paying attention to their language, ideas, and understanding of the food system may give you a clearer picture of effective ways to communicate to your target audience. What is important and meaningful to these people? How do they currently relate to food and their local food system? How does the proposed CFP impact both their personal and professional 'work?'

### Identify food system components and potential stories

Look to represent as much of the food system as possible in your stories – farmers/producers, food distributors, retailers, processors, restaurateurs and chefs, ...and eaters! Six to eight stories seem to be a reasonable number for a profile, but identify as many stories as possible and pick the best ones to include.

Topics that might represent a community-based food system include:

- The connection between land use and farming
- Small scale farming, alternative or sustainable farms
- Farmers' Markets
- Grocery Stores that carry locally grown or processed foods
- Restaurants that use/ feature locally grown foods
- Local Food Processing
- Community Supported Agriculture
- Farm-to-School
- Community or neighborhood organizations working on food system issues
- Community gardens
- Urban agriculture
- Gleaning efforts
- Food distribution (e.g., produce distributor)
- Agri-tourism (corn mazes, pumpkin patches, educational tours/activities, etc.)



- Unique landscape qualities or unique agriculture
- Roadside farm stands and on-farm markets
- Food and ag. promotions and/or celebrations (e.g., community fairs, festivals)

Consider the geographic representation of the possible stories. Do they include rural and urban examples? Are they reasonably distributed across your chosen geographic “community”?

After you’ve picked likely components/ stories for the CFP, it might be helpful to sketch out 2-3 key messages or concepts to be communicated in each. For example, the key concepts to communicate for Farmers’ Markets might be:

- 1) alternative market for farmers to keep farm viable,
- 2) direct relationship between farmer and eater – “food with a face”,
- 3) community vitality and identity through weekly gathering activity.

While these certainly might change as you learn more about your local food system, clarifying these main messages at the onset can help direct information gathering, interviewing and choices for photographs (the most compelling photos will directly communicate main messages.)

#### Identify desired data

Attached at the end of this guide is a listing of places to start looking for relevant data. There are many supporting pieces of information that will be helpful in presenting a profile of your community’s food system. How many eaters are there (i.e., what’s the population)? How much do they spend on food? Where are the eaters concentrated? How many farmers? How are the type and number of farms changing? Where is the farmland located? Are there unique geological/climatic features of your area that are relevant to food production? Are there relevant historical facts that might help demonstrate the potential of a local food system? What food processing currently exists in the community?

Maps, graphs and tables of data can be effective ways to communicate ideas, but they should be used sparingly and need to be clear and simple. What would you like to communicate, and what data will you need to do it?

The Mott Group can provide technical assistance in identifying data. Contact the Mott Group at [mottgroup@msu.edu](mailto:mottgroup@msu.edu) or 517-432-1612.

#### Capture stories through interviews and photographs

Time to put on your journalist hat! The best way to develop good stories is to talk to the people who are a part of them and making them happen. Most people are happy to talk with you about what they do. When you schedule an interview, describe what it is that you are doing and give a clear indication of the amount of time you’ll need for the interview (probably 45 minutes to one hour). Remind people that you intend to identify them in the story (i.e., make sure they are okay with you using their name). **Remember to be cordial, respectful and open minded. You’re interested in hearing their perspective, not changing it.**

We suggest that you audio record the interview so that you can refer to it when you are writing the story. Ask your interviewee if this is okay.

The questions that you ask will depend strongly on who you’re interviewing and their activities, but here are a few basic questions to get you started:

- Tell me about your operation/ project/ organization. What are you doing? How are you doing it? Why? Give examples of successes and failures.
- What are the opportunities for more local food? What are the challenges?
- How is your work affecting your community?
- Who do you consider your partners/ collaborators?
- What does a community-based food system mean to you?

It will be helpful to sketch out some potential questions ahead of time, but the most revealing pieces come from follow-up questions – a question intended to clarify or go deeper into something that the interviewee mentions. There are lots of ways to tease out more of the story. Some examples include: “Can you tell me more?”, “Could you explain that to me?”, “That’s surprising! Can you help me understand?” Try to remain open to this opportunity – don’t force yourself to “stick to the script.”

Photographs Visiting farms, markets, stores, processors, etc. for interviews is the perfect opportunity to take pictures. Take lots! (digital cameras are good for this) Remember the key messages that you are trying to communicate in the story and look for photo opportunities that capture that message (e.g., if farmer/ consumer interaction is an important message at Farmers’ Markets, try to get photos that capture that interaction. If the key message in community gardens is people working together, make sure all of your pictures aren’t of individual gardeners - no matter how beautiful their garden is!)

The key is to take lots of photos – you can be choosy later when you’re putting things together.

#### Gather supporting data

Attached at the end of this guide is a listing of good starting points for finding data relevant to the food system. Please contact the Mott Group for additional assistance.

#### Write introduction and integrating pieces

The CFP layout is structured around a narrative containing general information, statistics and relevant examples for each topic, followed by a story. These pieces can actually be written before or during the interviewing process, and may help you come up with good questions to ask interviewees. **350 words is a reasonable guideline for the length of these topic narratives.**

#### Select and write stories

You’ve done the interviews, gathered some background information, now it’s time to write the stories. While the modular nature of CFP layout allows you to use as many stories as you like, 6-8 seem to be a good number in terms of length and readability. Keep in mind the audience you are trying to reach and write for them. Keep it simple!

**Stories of about 500 words (give or take 80 words) will fit reasonably in the layout template and still allow adequate space for photos and graphics.**

Keep in mind the key messages that you hope to communicate in the story. Use quotations from the people you interviewed, but make sure the quotes add to the story.

### Select Photos

Your CFP will truly come to life with the beautiful photographs you've gathered. Select photos that best represent the key messages that you've identified for the particular topic and story.

### Edits, proof reads

It will be very helpful to get as much feedback as possible on your writings from team members, colleagues, and other kindred spirits. Typically, the more eyes the better for catching typos, grammatical and spelling errors, and simply tightening the writing. You may consider using a professional copy editor.

### Sketch Draft Layout

If you decide to use it, the Mott Group layout template will help you in getting to an attractive, finished CFP quickly and cost-effectively. The graphic designer/ printer that you are working with will need clear guidance on how you want to arrange "copy" (text) and photos. You can do this by creating a rough layout (in Word or other word processor) or simply sketching out the layout by hand, identifying the places for specific copy and photos. A draft layout will also be useful (but not necessary) for soliciting feedback from a review group.

### Soliciting feedback from review group

We suggest that you "test" your draft profile on a selected review group before taking it to the next step of design and print/ launch. See [[Sharing plans with review group](#)] for tips on gathering this group.

Offer many options for your test audience to provide feedback: via email, snail mail, by phone, or at a facilitated meeting. Give them clear guidelines on the kind of feedback that you would like.

### Using Layout template

A CD-ROM containing the graphic design files created for the *Capital Area Community Food Profile* is available from the Mott Group (contact the Mott Group at [mottgroup@msu.edu](mailto:mottgroup@msu.edu) or 517-432-1612). This graphic design was developed in the Macintosh software, Quark.

A couple of tips:

1. the story pages contain a Michigan map with the county where the story takes place highlighted. A complete county map of Michigan is included on the CD, but your graphic designer will need to modify this map to highlight the county/counties of interest.
2. Color bars on each of the topic background pages correspond with colors in the Circle of Connections. You will need to select which of the food system components and outcomes are exemplified in the topic, and modify the color bars appropriately.

### Print or post on web

### Press Release!

The release of your CFP is newsworthy event that can help bring public attention to your efforts. There are many “helpful hints” for writing and distributing effective press releases. Here’s one: <http://pressrelease.lifetips.com/>

### Evaluation

What was the impact of both the process and the final CFP on your community? Your Teams’ outlook on the food system? Your ability to encourage change? For suggestions on ways to evaluate the impact of your CFP, please contact the Mott Group at [mottgroup@msu.edu](mailto:mottgroup@msu.edu) or 517-432-1612.

**CONGRATULATIONS! Your Community Food Profile will certainly be a useful tool in promoting understanding and encouraging change in your local food system. Surely, you have also learned a great deal about your community and have identified many opportunities to build on the connections that make up a community-based food system.**

**Don’t forget to share your finished Profile with the Mott Group – we can’t wait to see your good work!**



## **Appendix: Data Sources that may be useful in Developing a Community Food Profile**

### **Community Profiles** <http://web1.msue.msu.edu/countyprofiles/index.htm>

An MSU Extension resource. Offers quick profiles of county demographics, age distribution, employment, poverty rate, etc. Data is available in ready-to-use graphs.

### **Michigan Agricultural Statistics:** <http://www.nass.usda.gov/mi/index.html>

Contains links to USDA census of ag. (parsed to county level every 5 years) as well as more frequent MI statistics for some crops. Older Census of Ag. data can be found by following the “Releases and Publications” link.

Ag Census data for 1987, 1992 & 1997 can also be found here in html tabulated format at:

[http://agcensus.mannlib.cornell.edu/county.php?st\[\]=26&imgmap=agri\\_state](http://agcensus.mannlib.cornell.edu/county.php?st[]=26&imgmap=agri_state)

**Food Assistance dollars:** public and non-public food assistance spending in Michigan is tabulated (at the county level) at:

[http://www.michigan.gov/fia/0,1607,7-124-5458\\_7696\\_10775---,00.html](http://www.michigan.gov/fia/0,1607,7-124-5458_7696_10775---,00.html) or go to <http://www.michigan.gov/fia/> then follow the “News, Publications & Information” link, then “Statistics” then “Program Statistics”

**NOTE:** in these tables, “public food assistance” refers to people who receive needs-based cash assistance (such as Family Independence Program (FIP) or Supplemental Security Income (SSI)) in addition to Food Stamps. “Non-public assistance” are people who get Food Stamps but are not on “welfare.” “Food Assistance” is the new name for Food Stamps in Michigan and does not include programs such as Women, Infants and Children (WIC), emergency food, etc.

### **Agriculture and Rural Life in Michigan: A Bibliography of State and Local Literature 1820-1945** <http://agbib.lib.msu.edu/index.cfm>

may help with finding a historical perspective to food and agriculture in your community.

### **Historical Census Browser** <http://fisher.lib.virginia.edu/collections/stats/histcensus/#source>

This is a potentially very useful site for looking at historical trends in agricultural, population, and economic census data. Note that 1960 is the most recent decade contained in this browser.

### **U.S. Census Bureau American Fact Finder**

[http://factfinder.census.gov/home/saff/main.html?\\_lang=en](http://factfinder.census.gov/home/saff/main.html?_lang=en)

Starting point for population, demographic, and business census inquiries.

### **Bureau of Labor Statistics Data**

<http://data.bls.gov/PDQ/outside.jsp?survey=en>

This customized data table generator allows the selection of individual (or groups of) county(ies) as well as by industry code. For example, you could find out how many people were employed in food manufacturing jobs in your county.

### **Sales & Marketing Management’s Survey of Buying Power and Media Markets**

<http://www.cluster2.claritas.com/MySBP/Default.wjsp>

This magazine publishes an annual “survey of buying power” that, among other things, estimates retail sales in food and beverage stores, food service & drinking establishments, and a measure of disposable income. Requires purchase or magazine subscription, but may be available through a local library (e.g., MSU Libraries has electronic access to Sales & Marketing Management Magazine, and the Survey of Buying Power is included as an issue). Contact the Mott Group if you have trouble accessing.

### **Environmental Working Group’s Farm Subsidy Database**

<http://www.ewg.org/farm/region.php?fips=26000>

This database summarizes federal farm subsidies awarded from 1995 to 2003. It is searchable at the county level.

### **MI Geographic Data Library** <http://www.mcgi.state.mi.us/mgdl/>

For GIS mapping, this site contains a great deal of GIS data for the state of Michigan.

### **InfoUSA database of food- and ag-related businesses**

InfoUSA compiles proprietary databases of businesses and consumer households. In 2004, the Mott Group purchased from InfoUSA a collection of Michigan food- and ag-related businesses. This database, sortable and searchable by county, city, business type, etc., can be a useful starting point in identifying the food-related businesses in your area. For assistance in acquiring information from the InfoUSA database relevant to your work, contact the Mott Group at [mottgroup@msu.edu](mailto:mottgroup@msu.edu) or 517-432-1612.



# Food Connections

## Capital Area Community Food Profile



Prepared by:  
*The C.S. Mott Group for Sustainable Food Systems*  
*Michigan State University*

# Preface

This Community Food Profile is intended to give readers a better sense of how producing, processing, distributing, retailing, preparing and eating food influence and interconnect a community's economic, ecological and social wellbeing.

We hope this sketch of the local food system will stimulate you to consider your relationship to food and how your food purchases affect your community. Use the Profile to better understand how agriculture and food fit into your work and your daily life. When we base our food choices and food-related activities in our community, multiple benefits are possible. Allow the stories in this Profile to suggest new – and perhaps unexpected – partners as you continue to make your community a better place to work and live.

This Profile focuses on the Lansing tri-county area. However, it is our hope that it becomes a model and inspiration to develop similar food system profiles for communities across Michigan.

*“A human community, too, must collect leaves and stories, and turn them to account. It must build soil, and build that memory of itself – in lore and story and song – that will be its culture. These two kinds of accumulation, of local soil and local culture, are intimately related.”*

**Wendell Berry**



**Prepared by the C. S. Mott Group for Sustainable Food Systems at Michigan State University  
Principal author: Martin Heller**

The **C.S. Mott Group for Sustainable Food Systems** at Michigan State University works to support people and communities as they develop sustainable, community-based food systems. As public scholars, we serve as a resource for the development of knowledge, programs and policy.

**Available on the web at: <http://www.mottgroup.msu.edu>**

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# Circle of Connections

This Community Food Profile uses the “circle of connections” diagram to focus attention on the connections between food and farming in the Capital Area. Let the diagram be your lens to see new opportunities and partners – new connections – that will make your community a better place to work and live.

## Legend



**Inner ring** – food system components



**Outer ring** – community-based food system outcomes



Land Use and Farming  
page 7



Farmers' Markets  
page 10



Focus on Local  
page 12



Local Food Processing  
page 14



Community Supported  
Agriculture Page 16



Farm-To-School  
Page 18



Food Security and  
Community Programs  
page 20



# Where does your food come from?

**Everyone in our community has connections to food.** Food is essential to our health and well-being. It plays a central role in the social networks and cultural traditions that help define community. Agriculture is an important industry in Michigan and in the Capital Area consisting of Clinton, Eaton and Ingham counties.

However, communities rarely see opportunities for development in the food and farming connections that make up their local food system. We see a globalized and industrialized food system, often leaving farmers and consumers separated by distance and understanding. Produce eaten in the Midwest travels an average of more than 1,500 miles, and the typical consumer doesn't imagine his steak as "livestock," let alone appreciate the resources used in its production.

Yet we can address current pressing issues as diverse as obesity, urban sprawl and economic development in part by paying closer attention to our food – what we eat; where it comes from; how it is produced, processed and distributed. Evaluating our collective food habits can open a host of new opportunities.

## A Food System

includes the who, what, where, when, why and how of our food – from farm to plate.

This guide maps some of the food and farming connections in the Capital Area through stories, photos, facts and figures.



## Why community-based food systems?

Community-based food systems emphasize relationships between growers and eaters, retailers and distributors, processors and preparers of food. They give priority to local resources and focus on local markets. Social equity and environmental sustainability are emphasized along with efficiency and profitability, and food security is a right and responsibility of all community members. Most importantly, they rely on the participation of well-informed consumers who have a stake and a voice in how and where their food is produced, processed and sold.

**When local agriculture and food production are integrated in community, food becomes part of a community's problem-solving capacity rather than just a commodity that's bought and sold.**

By eating local and developing connections among local consumers, farmers, processors and retailers, we can have profound effects on the health and wellbeing of our community.

## Using this guide

Usually, we think of food as following a linear path from farm to table – produced on farms, processed in factories, distributed by trucks and purchased by consumers at grocery stores or restaurants. Thinking, instead, of the food system as a circle reminds us that we are all linked in multiple ways (see diagram, page 4). By paying attention to these connections and, when possible, strengthening them within our community, we begin to see that a host of outcomes are possible. The outer ring in the Circle of Connections diagram suggests some outcomes of a community-based food system (you can probably think of others). The following page details their importance.

Everyone – regardless of economic status, ethnicity or political bent; whether economic development professional, farmer, grocery retailer, public health advocate or eater – has a stake in the food system. It is indeed reasonable to ask, **“what type of food system do I want for my community?”** This Community Food Profile will help you answer that question.

# Outcomes

Here are some of the issues a community-based food system can influence. Which ones affect you?

## Small and medium scale farm viability

If current trends continue, Michigan will lose 71 percent of farms that are between 50 and 500 acres by 2040, representing nearly half of all Michigan farms. In the Capital Area, this would translate to 1120 farms – 1/3 of the area's total. This loss is not just farms but also farmland, farmers, skills and infrastructure necessary for long-term food production capability. Many studies have demonstrated the importance of small- and medium-scale farms in maintaining the social, economic and environmental health of rural communities.

## Environmental Stewardship

Food production is inextricably linked to the environment. However, the intensification and industrialization of agriculture over the past 50 years have resulted in some practices that are detrimental to environmental health. A community-based food system highlights the connection between food and environment, creating opportunities for consumers to recognize and value the environmental services provided by local farms, such as water filtration and wildlife habitat.

## Jobs

In a time when job outsourcing is a painful reality for many communities, local food production and processing can create significant numbers of stable jobs. Like “Buy American” campaigns, “Buy Local Food” campaigns can foster an understanding that purchasing choices affect the economic well-being of people in our community.

## Healthy Individuals

Michigan is the midst of an obesity epidemic. Sixty-two percent of Michigan's adults and 11 percent of high school students are overweight.\* In 2003, obesity-related medical costs in the state totaled \$2.9 billion. Most people become overweight from inadequate physical activity and poor diet. Community-based food systems encourage healthy lifestyles by making fresh, delicious fruits, vegetables and other foods more accessible. Healthier citizens mean reduced healthcare premiums, making Michigan communities more business friendly.



## Economic Development

People in the Lansing tri-county area spend \$1.1 billion annually on food and beverages in stores, restaurants and other eating establishments. The vast majority of these food dollars are spent on products originating outside the area. Community-based food systems capitalize on opportunities for entrepreneurial farmers and small businesses to add value to local agricultural products and keep a larger portion of each food dollar within the local economy.

## Farmland Preservation

Community and state efforts are under way to preserve farmland from the growing threat of urban sprawl. Preserving farmland, however, must go hand-in-hand with assuring farm viability. Re-localizing the food system – relying more on local and regional sources for our food needs – creates valuable markets that help keep farmers farming on farmland and increases awareness of the importance of preserving local farmland.

## Community and Social Vitality

At the heart of a community-based food system are relationships that build social capital, strengthen social networks and form the basis of community identity. Food is a deep-rooted aspect of our social interactions. In fact, the Latin root of the words companion and company means “with bread.” Food is an inclusive focal point for rebuilding community, in urban as well as rural settings, and especially between the two.

\*Source: Michigan Surgeon General's 2004 Health Status Report



# Land Use and Farming

Growing Food

Farm Viability

Environmental Stewardship

Economic Development

Farmland Preservation

Community Vitality

Lansing is the urban center of a largely agricultural region. In 2002, the tri-county area had about 3400 farms, representing 62 percent of the total land. But like many Michigan communities, the Capital Area is experiencing urban sprawl pressure. From 1960 to 1990, land in the area was developed at twice the rate of population growth. Much of this development has occurred in rural areas outside existing urban service areas. From 1978 to 1999, for every acre of new urbanized land, five acres of new rural residential land were developed. As the population projections in the table below indicate, such growth is expected to continue.

Across the region, efforts are under way to curb the rapid expansion of suburban and rural residential land use. For example, the Tri-county Regional Planning

Commission is working with local governments to focus growth in urban fringes while preserving farmland. However, preserving the area's farmland must go hand-in-hand with preserving the economic viability of local agriculture. Over the past 15 years, a consistent 55 to 60 percent of tri-county area farms have experienced net financial losses.

**Increasing consumer demand for food that has been grown or raised in the region, and making these foods easily accessible for purchase, is one way to enhance the viability of local agriculture.**

For the past fifty years, U.S. agriculture has been moving toward fewer and larger farms, and increasing specialization. The tri-county area is no exception.

Yet studies have repeatedly shown that a diversity of farms, including small- and medium-sized farms, is important to the social and economic health of rural communities. More small- and medium-sized farms mean more business operators and their families involved in community life. A greater diversity of farms can also provide more food choices. In many cases, smaller farms allow for better land stewardship – taking care of the ecological services that farmland provides. However, smaller farms struggle to compete in global “commodities” markets – tankers of milk, bulk grain, or mass-produced meat. Smaller farms thrive in specialty and niche markets – tailoring their production to meet changing consumer demands, adding value through processing, and selling locally grown food to local consumers. All farms in the community can benefit from developing differentiated products.



*If current trends continue, Michigan will lose 70% of its mid-sized farms by 2040.*

## Capital Area Farm Facts

- **3418 farms in 2002**
- **679,152 acres in farmland in 2002**
- **44% of farm operators worked off-farm more than 200 days in 2002**
- **\$203 million in agricultural products sold by farms in 2002:**
  - 43% from livestock and their products
- **Farms over 1000 acres increased 52%, from 92 farms in 1987 to 140 in 2002**
- **Farms of 100-500 acres decreased 36%, from 1417 in 1987 to 901 in 2002**
- **From 1987 to 2002, acres in:**
  - Corn increased 10%
  - Soybeans increased 112%
  - Vegetables decreased 51%

Source: 1987-2002 USDA Census of Agriculture

## Projected Population Growth

County	1995	2000	2035	1995-2035 %Growth
Clinton	62,012	64,754	94,454	52%
Eaton	98,952	103,654	142,123	44%
Ingham	282,763	279,326	338,605	20%
<b>Total Tri-County</b>	<b>443,727</b>	<b>447,734</b>	<b>575,182</b>	<b>30%</b>

Source: Tri-county Regional Planning Commission, Trends: 2020 and Beyond

# Land Use and Farming continued

The trend to fewer, larger farms is not inevitable – it can be changed. But it is consumers who need to act. More food purchasing at a fair price from small- and medium-sized, diversified farms will allow those farms to stay in business.

Michigan agriculture is one of the more diverse in the nation. It would indeed be possible to supply nearly all of our nutritional needs in-state, if not from the Capital Area. **Yet most of the food eaten in central Michigan comes from out of state and, increasingly, from overseas.** Some 60 years ago, a diversity of fruits, grains and livestock was grown on area farms. In 1940, 35 percent of the farms in Clinton County produced apples, 85 percent had cattle, 75 percent had chickens and 65 percent had hogs. Corn was still king, but other grains – oats, rye, barley, wheat – were also grown. Such diversity is again possible if consumers choose to support it with their dollars.

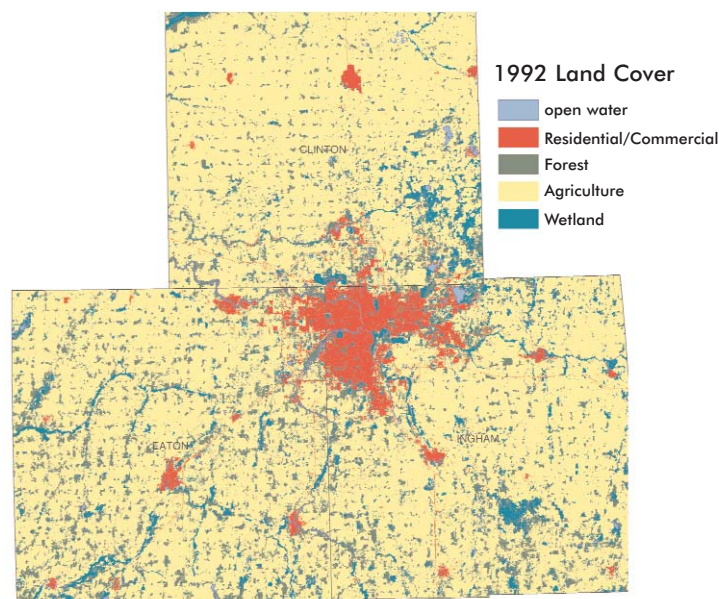
**Estimates of the farmland required to supply a typical American diet range from 0.2 – 1.2 acres per person. To feed the tri-county area locally in 2035 will require between 115,000 and 690,000 acres – roughly the land we now farm.**

Though the sprawl of urban populations into rural communities threatens farming, it also presents opportunities for farms to market directly to consumers. On-farm stores, u-pick, roadside stands, Farmers' Markets (page 10) and Community Supported Agriculture (page 16) are examples of how farmers can market their products directly. The dollar value of direct sales in

the tri-county area is still less than 1 percent of total agricultural sales, but that percentage has doubled every 5 years since 1992\*. Nearly 8 percent of farms in the Lansing area (263 farms) reported some direct marketing in 2002, for a total direct market value of \$1.6 million. What would it take to increase the amount of direct-marketed agricultural sales to 10 percent?

\*1987-2002 USDA Census of Agriculture

**What impact would \$20 million, that is, 10 percent of current agricultural sales, have on the Lansing area economy if it stayed in the area and circulated through local businesses?**



Source: USGS National Land Cover Data

## What You Can Do

### INDIVIDUALS:

Spend \$10 per week during the growing season at a farmers' market, CSA farm, or roadside farm stand.

### COMMUNITY:

Develop a local food directory to help identify places to buy locally produced food in your community. See, for example, <http://www.buyappalachian.org>

### MUNICIPALITY:

Keep your community's food system in mind when making decisions about land use, planning and development.



# Please Care for My Cow



John and Patti Warnke own a 40-acre farm outside St. Johns. They've launched a plan to support their family of seven on their acreage by milking 25 dairy cows. Even though the Warnkes' milking parlor and operation exceed legal standards of cleanliness, they do not ship or sell any milk.

Instead, they provide a service. The Warnkes operate a cow-share program called Our Farm and Dairy, L.L.C. They sell shares of their cow herd to people who want their own fresh milk. In addition to the

\$125 share price, share-owners pay the Warnkes a monthly boarding fee for feeding, milking and caring for the cows. In return, the share-owners have access to a portion of the milk – usually 2 gallons every week.

“The people who come to our farm to participate in the cow-share program probably would have their own cows if they had the space and the ability and the time, and if they knew more

about it. They want that more than anything. We're helping them get that in a safe way,” says Patti.

In addition to boarding cows, the Warnkes sell pasture-raised beef and pork and eggs gathered from their hens to share-owners and neighbors. In the summer of 2004, they offered Farm Camp, an opportunity for kids to spend a few days experiencing farm life first-hand. But, as Patti puts it, “Mostly the crop we have is grass, so we'd be grass farmers.”

This commitment to grass is a lesson learned from

Patti's parents, Howard and Mary-Jo Straub, who operate a 100-cow grazing dairy down the road from the Warnkes. In the early 1990s, the Straubs, like most dairy farmers in Michigan, kept their cows indoors and fed them grain to maximize milk production. In 1994, however, the Straubs switched to a system known as management-intensive grazing which relies on the cows to harvest most of their own feed, in the form of pasture grass. Milk production dropped, but costs and workload dropped further. The Straubs started making money and their attitude toward farming changed. Their children quickly followed their lead. Three of their four children now operate grazing-based dairies – an encouraging statistic for the Lansing area's farming future.

The Warnkes' cow-share program has grown in its first year from five cows and 20 shares to 15 cows and 90 shares. While they still have a way to go to reach their goal of 250 shares, they remain optimistic. Health-conscious shareowners drive up to 90 minutes one-way to pick up their milk.

“I think they want to know where their food comes from. They're upset with the food industry today; they don't trust it,” says Patti.

Though they look forward to the day when farming on 40 acres will fully support their family, the Warnkes also recognize the less tangible values in their chosen lifestyle, such as knowing that they are helping people obtain a high degree of health, supporting other small, local businesses with their purchases, and sharing the thrill and miracle of a newborn calf with the whole family – and maybe even a few cow owners.

**The average dairy herd in Clinton County has 215 cows. Most dairy cows in the county are on farms with more than 500 cows.**



*Farm Camp at Our Farm and Dairy.*

## Contact Information

**Our Farm and Dairy and other local farms can be found at:**  
[www.localharvest.org](http://www.localharvest.org)



# Farmers' Markets

Distributing  
Farm Viability  
Healthy Individuals  
Community Vitality

Around the country and across the region, farmers' markets offer a way for local farmers to connect directly with consumers. Fresh fruits and vegetables are the mainstay of farmers' markets, but locally produced meat, eggs, honey, maple syrup, baked goods, bedding plants and flowers, and craft items are often available.

By selling directly to consumers, farmers eliminate the middle man and maximize their profits. For many farmers, the direct connection with consumers gives them a deep sense of purpose and community. Consumers also benefit from a chance to buy the freshest food available from farmers they know and trust. Farmers' markets also generate economic benefits for the community. According to studies conducted in Oregon and Ontario, Canada, 40 to 60 percent of farmers' market customers also shop at neighboring

businesses before or after their visit to the market. In addition, spending at farmers' markets has a high multiplier effect – money circulates more times in the local economy before leaving.

Well-functioning farmers markets are vibrant social occasions, offering a meeting place and giving a community a sense of identity. The friendly, relaxed atmosphere of the market represents a valuable alternative to mainstream supermarket shopping.



*Farmers' markets, like this one in Grand Ledge, offer a vibrant community meeting place.*



*Farmers' markets make fresh fruit and vegetables more accessible.*

## Capital Area Farmers' Markets

- **Allen Neighborhood Center**
  - Corner of Kalamazoo and Allen Sts., Lansing
  - June - Oct, Wed., 4:30 - 6:30pm
- **DeWitt**
  - corner of Main and Bridge Sts.
  - June -Oct, Sat., 8am - 12
- **Grand Ledge**
  - near Island Park
  - June - Oct, Sat., 8am - 12
- **Lansing City Market**
  - 333 North Cedar St.
  - year-round Tues., Thurs., Fri., Sat., 8am - 6pm.
- **Meridian Township**
  - 5151 Marsh Rd., Okemos
  - June - Oct., Sat., 8am - 2pm and July - Oct., Wed, 8am - 5pm.
- **St. John's**
  - West side of courthouse
  - July - Oct., Sat., 8am - 12
- **Williamston**
  - Corner of North Putnam and High Sts.
  - May - Oct., Thurs., 3 - 8pm



## What You Can Do

### INDIVIDUALS:

Shop regularly at your local farmers' market; tell others about it!

### COMMUNITY:

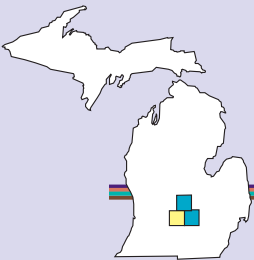
Make your farmers' market a festive community event with music, cooking demonstrations, kids' activities.

### MUNICIPALITY:

Sponsor a farmers market in your town center. See:

<http://attra.ncat.org/attra-pub/PDF/farmmarket.pdf>

# Innovative Orchardist Seeks Market



When Jane Bush bought Apple Schram Orchard from her uncle 17 years ago, two things were clear: for personal health reasons, she would manage the orchard organically, and if she were going to make a living off the farm, she would need to do more direct sales of the apples.

Apple Schram is located on West Mount Hope Highway outside Charlotte, about 20 miles southwest of Lansing. Apples, cider, apple sauce, apple butter and other farm products are sold at the farm seasonally from September through the first of November, as well as through retail outlets in the Lansing, Ann Arbor and Detroit areas.

Jane reflected on her learning curve for growing and marketing organic fruits. In the days before the Alar scare, information and resources for organic orcharding were scarce. But customers also didn't expect organic fruit to look perfect. As the demand for organic food has grown, so have the resources available to the organic farmer – and customers' expectations.

"It's just really changed over the years. A lot of the organic fruit that we can grow in Michigan is very comparable, in terms of visual effects, to conventional," Jane says.



*Both farmers and customers value the direct connection of a farmers' market.*

But apples weren't the only thing consumers were looking for. Through her interactions with retail markets in southeastern Michigan, Jane saw that the supply of local free-range eggs wasn't consistent with a demand that was "just dripping off the trees." So in 1996, she formed an egg marketing cooperative. Grazing Fields, the brand name of the Farmer's Egg Cooperative is currently made up of six egg producers within an hour's drive of Apple Schram. The other farmers supply the product and Jane provides distribution. The cooperative began with modest financial assistance from Michigan Integrated Food and Farming Systems (MIFFS). Banding together enables the farmers to maintain the consistent supply necessary to keep direct retail markets. But demand still outstrips supply.

Farmer's Egg Cooperative is currently made up of six egg producers within an hour's drive of Apple Schram. The other farmers supply the product and Jane provides distribution. The cooperative began with modest financial assistance from Michigan Integrated Food and Farming Systems (MIFFS). Banding together enables the farmers to maintain the consistent supply necessary to keep direct retail markets. But demand still outstrips supply.

In 2004, the Grand Ledge Chamber of Commerce contacted Jane to ask for help in organizing its farmers' market. After a shaky first season, members recognized that they didn't have farm connections. But the community demanded a farmers' market. So Jane secured a grant from the USDA's Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) program to recruit farmers in the Lansing tri-county area interested in expanding their direct market sales.



*Jane Bush*

Meanwhile, Jane continues to lead by example. In spring, 2004, Apple Schram erected a simple unheated hoophouse to extend its offerings of organically grown flowers and vegetables. Local organic fruits and veggies from Apple Schram, along with the wares of other farmers that Jane has enlisted, have brought new life to the Grand Ledge Farmers' Market. Apple Schram is also part of the farmers' market at the Allen Neighborhood Center on Lansing's east side. And Jane is excitedly transforming the old Apple Schram orchard into a new system of high-density plantings of low-vigor trees that require less labor for pruning and picking. When asked what a community-based food system means to her, Jane replies with the wisdom of someone who's been there.

"[It means] that there's more understanding with the consumers and the farmers, just understanding everybody's needs. Just like in any relationship, you've really got to understand the other person. And I think a community-based [food] system just multiplies that by a couple of hundred or thousand or whatever you call your community. You have to be willing to be open, to expand yourself and think about the possibilities. And have trust, and patience and sympathy for the other person."

## Contact Information

Apple Schram Orchard and other Michigan farms can be found at:  
[www.miffsmarketline.org](http://www.miffsmarketline.org)



# Grocery Stores and Restaurants Focus on Local

Retailing  
Preparing  
Eating  
Farm Viability  
Jobs  
Healthy Individuals  
Economic Development

Voting with your dollars by shopping or eating at businesses that purchase Michigan farm products is one way to help create a community-based food system.

The East Lansing Food Co-op (ELFCO) features locally grown produce whenever it is available. Produce manager Melissa Robbins explains that ELFCO members and shoppers value the connection with local farmers.

Local businesses such as Horrocks Farm Market, Van Houten Produce and Beck's Country Market (see story, next page) all began as small fruit and vegetable stands and maintain a preference for Michigan-grown products. The purchasing freedom of independent grocers allows them to differentiate themselves from supermarket chains by featuring local foods. Currently, the barriers include convenience, accessibility and often, price. Ultimately, demand for local products needs to come from consumers. Can you justify paying a few extra cents when it supports the local community and helps maintain the viability of local farms?



Produce manager Melissa Robbins enjoys purchasing from local farmers.

admits is a quagmire of ordering and paperwork, and can be a significant barrier for other chefs. But others are interested. Many chefs know that local is their freshest and most flavorful option. They're eager to support the local community and local agriculture with their

purchases. Unfortunately, current food distribution channels aren't set up to deal with local food. But there may be entrepreneurial opportunities for local businesses to get foods produced on local farms into area groceries, restaurants, schools and hospitals.

Examples from across the country show that a focus on local foods is not only for upscale restaurants. At Rudy's Tacos in Waterloo, Iowa, nearly 70 percent of the food comes from within a 100-mile radius. Owner Barry Eastman got hooked on the taste of local fresh foods, and the slightly higher cost of buying local has more than paid for itself with increased business. In Barre, Vermont, farmer Tod Murphy started the Farmers Diner with the goal of relying on local ingredients. The venture stunned investors by hitting its break-even point in the first year, and now 70 percent of the products served at the Farmers Diner are coming from area farms. And it's paying off. Customers get it and support the efforts.

**The Capital area spends \$1.1 billion annually on food and beverages. How much of this stays within the local community?**

## What You Can Do

### INDIVIDUALS:

Ask your favorite grocery stores and restaurants to buy local and Michigan foods – then purchase it from them!

### COMMUNITY:

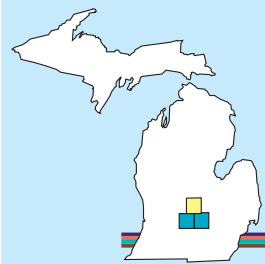
Sponsor "buy local" campaigns to encourage eaters to seek out locally grown foods. See: <http://www.foodroutes.org/>

### MUNICIPALITY:

Encourage schools, hospitals, and senior centers to regularly purchase local food to include in served meals.



# One Mid-MI Market Finds: "Everybody Wants Michigan Produce"



For Paula and Eric Wilbourn, owner-managers of Beck's Country Market, hope lies in a notion that the big supermarkets seem to have forgotten:

"Everybody wants Michigan produce. They walk in the door just for that."

This notion has been part of Beck's Country Market since Paula's father, Ben Beck, started the store in 1958. Originally, Beck's Farm Market was a small stick frame with plastic walls and a dirt floor where Ben sold locally grown produce. The business grew steadily and became a booming supermarket. Throughout the growth, Ben maintained his connections with local farmers.



*The Wilbourns offer Michigan grown produce whenever possible at Beck's Country Market.*

Paula grew up working at the store but left the family business in 1978 to become the state's first female fruit and vegetable inspector. She later took a job with a grocery wholesaler in Grand Rapids, where she met her husband, Eric.

Meanwhile, Paula's brother Bob struggled to keep the market in business after their father died in 1988. He tried to compete with the large chain stores that had moved into St. Johns, but the pressure became too much. Beck's Country Market went out of business in June 2003, and everything was sold.

Eric and Paula had been trying hard to come up with the money to keep the store open, but banks would not offer start-up loans. Unwilling to let the family history and community connections die, the Wilbourns cashed

their 401(k)'s and used every bit of their savings to remodel and reopen the store. The doors opened again for seasonal business in spring, 2004, and the Wilbourns hope to regain community loyalty by focusing on fresh, local produce.

Eric has had little trouble finding local produce to fill the store – a long history of farms that had worked with Ben and Bob Beck began calling him when the store reopened. Felske Farms in DeWitt, Anderson Farm in Belding, and Rasche Farms outside Greenville supply a wealth of Michigan fruit and vegetables including strawberries, cherries, blueberries, peaches, apples, tomatoes and corn. A host of other growers fill in with specialty crops – rhubarb, raspberries, asparagus.

"I can get things ripe first in DeWitt and then as they start to dwindle out, we can move a little farther north," Eric says about navigating Michigan's growing season. The Wilbourns do use a wholesale produce supplier in Grand Rapids to fill in the gaps and provide produce through the off-season. Brats and sausages are made fresh in the store, but regulations and lack of processing facilities make 'locally grown' in the fresh meats counter prohibitive.

For now, the Beck's Country Market will be open from May through October, reflecting both the Michigan growing season and the business of the "weekenders" who stop in for fruit and brats on their way north. But support from the local community is also essential.

"Everybody has to support the community. Or what's going to be left?" says Eric. Paula adds that, "[It's] not just the farms but the grocery stores and the schools and the barber shop and..."



# Local Food Processing and Adding Value

Processing

Farm Viability

Jobs

Economic Development

Historically, the Lansing area supported a number of local businesses such as meat and dairy processors that primarily catered to the local market. Slowly, more centralized facilities displaced most of the local shops. The 1997 Business Census lists 29 food manufacturing establishments in the Lansing tri-county area, with a total annual payroll of \$17 million. How many of these manufacturers process food that was grown on local farms? How many create products that are primarily for consumption within the region?

*“Going local does not mean walling off the outside world. It means nurturing locally owned businesses which use local resources sustainably, employ local workers at decent wages, and serve primarily local consumers.”*

**Michael H. Schuman**  
author of *Going Local*

With a growing consumer interest in local foods, are there untapped entrepreneurial opportunities in local food processing?

More small farms are adding value to their products through on-farm processing. From fresh apple cider to peppermint teas, these value-added farm products are often sold directly to local consumers.

Local food processing creates additional market opportunities for local farmers, and gives consumers more choice in purchasing products that reflect their values. Despite popular beliefs about economies of scale, locally processed food might save consumers money because of reduced shipping and handling costs. Of course, money spent at locally owned businesses stays in the community and benefits the local economy. A recent study of Chicago’s Andersonville neighborhood found that when money is spent at locally

owned businesses, 73 percent stays within the community. Only 43 percent of those same dollars remain in the community when spent at non-locally owned businesses.

Where can aspiring food and agriculture entrepreneurs go for help? MSU’s Product Center for Agriculture and Natural Resources helps develop and commercialize high-value, consumer-responsive products and businesses in the agriculture and food sectors. The Lansing Community Micro-enterprise Fund offers business plan development courses and operates a revolving loan program to help small businesses get started.

Although executive director Denise Peek hasn’t seen many food-related loan applications, she says that funds are available for any individual with a passion and a strong business plan.



*Made in St. Johns, Hanover’s Michigan Mint chocolates contain mint oil from local farms.*

## What You Can Do

### INDIVIDUALS:

**Seek out and purchase locally processed foods.**

### COMMUNITY:

**Start a community kitchen as a food processing business incubator.**

See: <http://www.uwex.edu/ces/agmarkets/kitchdir.html>

### MUNICIPALITY:

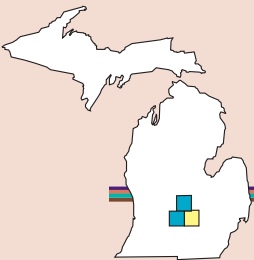
**Create opportunities and incentives for food processing businesses in your area.**



*On-farm processing adds to farm viability, increases local product diversity, and builds the local economy.*



# Where's the (Local) Beef?



When was the last time you actually paid a visit to the butcher, baker or candlestick maker? Linn Merindorf recognizes that his custom meat market in Mason is a dying breed. But as local butchers become increasingly rare, Merindorf is comfortable filling what he sees as an important niche, offering a face behind the eating experience of a delicious steak or one-of-a-kind smoked sausage.

Merindorf Meats is a small retail outlet in Mason. The store carries a host of marinating spices, barbecue sauces and a selection of convenience foods. But the focal point is the meat counter. Merindorf prides himself in offering upper choice and prime beef, along with a variety of in-house smoked and processed sausages, jerky, hams and bacon. The shop does some custom meat processing for local farmers and hunters, but regulations and a lack of local slaughtering facilities limit that activity. Linn's wife, Melinda, also runs a full-service catering business that ties in with the activities in the processing kitchens.

Linn is quick to note that he is a first-generation processor – he has no family history in the business and followed this path out of pure enjoyment. “The reason I got into the business was I enjoy making sausage, I enjoy cutting meat,” says Merindorf.

But running a business also demands time spent taking and placing orders, managing 24 employees and, more pertinent, dealing with regulations.

One of the primary reasons that small-scale meat processing facilities are now sparse in Michigan communities, as well as across the country, is the high cost of complying with regulations designed for much larger processing plants. To offer retail cuts of beef, pork or lamb, a slaughterer must be federally licensed and have a USDA inspector onsite every day of operation. Navigating the complicated federal regulations can be prohibitive for a smaller plant.

Merindorf Meats does not have a slaughtering facility, so the animals providing the cuts that go into the retail case have to be slaughtered elsewhere. The nearest federally licensed plant is outside Grand Rapids.

Merindorf is allowed to “custom process” meat for the owner's personal consumption, and these animals can be slaughtered in a “custom-exempt” facility. The nearest one is in Jackson. The custom exemption is commonly interpreted to mean that livestock producers can sell portions of the live animal to consumers before it is processed into meat. But Linn sees a consumer demand for greater meat choices that exceeds the limitations of such custom processing arrangements.

“There is a movement that people want to know where their meat comes from. I do believe that. How can the area farmers capitalize on that?” he ponders.

One way to meet the needs of local producers and the demands of consumers is to create opportunities for small, community-based food processing businesses. And, from Merindorf's perspective, those opportunities also mean stable local jobs.



Linn Merindorf



*Shopping first at locally owned businesses keeps your food dollars in the community.*

# Community Supported Agriculture

- Growing Food
- Distributing
- Eating
- Farm Viability
- Environmental Stewardship
- Healthy Individuals
- Community Vitality

Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) is a new way for farmers and consumers to connect. Typically, families or individuals purchase a share of a CSA farm through a single payment at the beginning of the season. In exchange, farmers provide weekly portions of a variety of fresh seasonal produce. Everyone benefits.

Most CSA farms in Michigan concentrate on fresh vegetables during the growing season (typically June through October), but considerable opportunities exist for extending this season and for expanding the types of food included. For example, the Student Organic Farm at Michigan State University offers CSA shares nearly year round (48 weeks). The student-operated farm uses unheated hoopouses to protect cold-hardy vegetables from frost damage and make them harvestable throughout the winter. They also store many crops such as potatoes, onions, carrots, cabbage and winter squash for distribution throughout the winter. (For more info on the Student Farm, see [www.msuorganicfarm.org](http://www.msuorganicfarm.org).) Other farms are banding together into multi-farm CSAs to offer their share members additional foods such as meat, cheese and other dairy products, eggs or honey.

## CSAs are growing in number! Surveys in Michigan found:

- 8 CSA farms in 1999
- 32 CSA farms in 2002

For more information on the CSA model, visit <http://www.csacenter.org/> or <http://tcf.itgo.com/>.

CSA farmers know their market demand – and their income – before planting. Payment before the growing season provides farmers with cash for purchasing supplies, seed and labor. By pre-paying, members join in the benefits and the risks of farming. They receive a

diversity of top quality produce as well as a sense of connectedness and interdependence with their community and their farmer. On many CSA farms, share-members visit the farm weekly to pick up their food and also help plant, weed and harvest.



CSA members at the Student Organic Farm at MSU pick up their produce share.



## What You Can Do

### INDIVIDUALS:

Join a CSA farm!  
See [www.localharvest.org](http://www.localharvest.org) for a farm in your area.

### COMMUNITY:

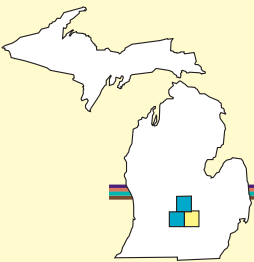
Organize centralized locations for CSA food pick-ups; promote local CSA farms.

### MUNICIPALITY:

Subsidize CSA shares for low-income residents.



# Owning a Share of the Farm



Lansing residents Melissa Hill and Gerry Ginzel hope to run a farm of their own someday.

In the meantime, however, they're happy to own a share of a local farm.

Like over 100 other families in Lansing, they were share members in Giving Tree Farm's 2004 Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) program.

The CSA works like this: during the early spring, share members buy into the farm by paying up front for five months of fresh, organic produce. Each week from late May through the end of October, they go to the designated pick-up site and collect their "share" of the week's harvest. Early in the season there are fresh salad greens and spinach, spring radishes and peas. Summer brings beans, corn, cucumbers, and tomatoes. In the fall, root crops, winter squash and Brussels sprouts abound.



*Planting lettuce at Giving Tree Farm.*

disabilities and their families to dig in the dirt and enjoy the open spaces. In 2000, a greenhouse and a horticultural therapy program, complete with part-time staff, were added. To sustain this successful program, interests turned to the rest of the farm and its potential to grow a marketable crop. Enter farm manager Susan Houghton.

Giving Tree Farm was established in 1991 with a mission to enrich the lives of people with disabilities and their families through horticultural therapy and horticultural training. Founders Bob and Carolyn Bower saw a lack of support services in the area for their own daughter who is disabled, so they donated 21 acres of rich, dark muck soil located a few miles north of Lansing as a place for people with disabilities and their families. Since 1991, an organic leisure garden has offered a safe haven for kids with

To follow Susan around the farm is a thrill.

A whirlwind of instruction, activity, sweat and dirty fingernails ensues, and when the dust settles, beautiful produce abounds. In the 2004 season, Giving Tree supplied a 104-share CSA while also providing year-round salad greens and other specialty produce items to the likes of Villegas Restaurant and the East Lansing Food Co-op.

For Susan, the CSA model offers financial stability and planting flexibility. CSA members recognize that farming depends on the weather; some crops will do exceptionally well while others will produce less than expected.

For share members like Melissa and Gerry, the CSA provides affordable, high quality, organic produce. It also reflects their values of knowing where their food comes from and that it was grown in a socially and environmentally sustainable manner.

"It's about having more direct control over our basic needs," says Gerry.

*Another satisfied share member!*



*Susan Houghton*



## Contact Information

Giving Tree Farm and other CSAs can be found at:  
[www.csacenter.org](http://www.csacenter.org)

# Farm-to-School

Growing Food

Distributing

Preparing

Eating

Farm Viability

Environmental Stewardship

Healthy Individuals

Farm-to-school programs link local farms and schools to provide increased marketing opportunities for local farmers and to build a stronger connection among children, farmers, the community and the land. In addition to direct sales by farmers to school food service programs, farm-to-school programs can include hands-on education through school gardens and composting projects, nutrition education through kitchen classrooms and seasonal eating, field trips to local farms and alternative fundraising using local farm products such as dried cherries.

*“Connecting local farmers and school food service directors is a win-win situation for all concerned. Combined with nutrition education, farm visits, school gardens and education in the classroom, children can develop healthy eating habits that will last a lifetime.”*

**Marla Moss, Food Distribution Program supervisor, Michigan Department of Education**

Across the country, farm-to-school programs represent an important opportunity to help farmers remain profitable while addressing national concerns about childhood obesity. Increased globalization has forced many farmers to identify new markets for their products. With statewide total school food service expenditures of \$200 million per year, this is potentially a huge market for Michigan farmers.

Nationally over the past twenty years, the proportion of students who are overweight has almost tripled, with more than 25 percent of Michigan youth overweight or at risk for becoming overweight.\* These children are at higher risk for chronic diseases such as diabetes, high cholesterol and high blood pressure. One way to promote health and reduce the risk for chronic disease is to eat more fruits and vegetables. However, less than 20 percent of Michigan youth meet the recommended daily minimum requirements for fruit and vegetables.

\*Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2003 Youth Risk Behavior Survey

*School gardens build a sense of wonderment and connection with nature.*



*Schoolchildren visiting MSU's Student Organic Farm learn where food comes from.*

Farm-to-school programs around the country report that **students eat more fruits and vegetables when products are brought in from local sources.** Direct interaction with farmers and hands-on experience in the cafeteria, classroom or school garden can raise children's curiosity about and appreciation for fresh, healthy food and for the farmer who grows it. Developing children's awareness of local agriculture and nutrition supports students in the development of lifelong healthy eating behaviors.

## What You Can Do

### INDIVIDUALS:

**Start a school garden or composting project. Volunteer to chaperone a classroom visit to a local farm.**

**Prepare more fresh fruits and vegetables at home.**

### COMMUNITY:

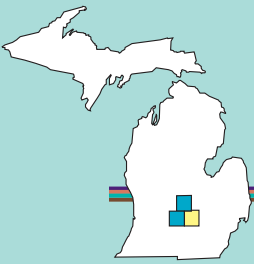
**Develop a school fundraiser around locally produced foods. Educate the local school board about farm-to-school issues.**

### MUNICIPALITY:

**Partner with other governmental agencies to promote healthy eating.**



# A School That Grows Hope



Gunnisonville Elementary School lies on the rural northern edge of the Lansing School District. Gunnisonville students are bused from an inner-city neighborhood that lost its school and from a nearby trailer park. New students come and go as their parents follow job opportunities or face eviction from their homes. Staff turnover at the school is high. The school is now on its fifth principal in three years. Still, a sense of hope, wonderment and community grows from a small back corner of the schoolyard. Gunnisonville has a garden.

It began as a way to heal from a personal loss. Dr. Laurie Thorp, director of MSU's Residential Initiative of the Study of the Environment (RISE) Program, wanted to share her passion for gardening which she learned from her father, who had recently passed away. Thorp helped develop the garden and has stayed around. "When this thing started, I thought it might be a way to raise the school's MEAP scores," she said. "I quickly realized that the garden meant so much more to those kids."

The garden's magic began with a box of outdated seeds. A teacher's husband plowed up a plot behind the school. The local solid waste company donated a load of leaf compost. Soon a 30- by 30-foot plot became a wealth of garden diversity: strawberries and popcorn, sunflowers and potatoes, lettuce and carrots. Students now participate in garden planning and planting in the spring and return in the fall to enjoy a bountiful harvest.

*Experience shows "if they grow it, they'll eat it!"*

The garden has taken root throughout the school, offering teachers many tangible "hooks" that hold the students' attention.

The obvious life science lessons are there, as are hands-on experiences with wildlife such as earthworms and insects. Students also learn market economics by selling baked goods made from the garden's produce. Writing assignments focus on describing experiences in the garden. The garden offers students a means to see, feel and taste their lessons. Gunnisonville students are also learning that fresh vegetables aren't "gross," and that carrots aren't made in the supermarket. Connecting with the source of their food may be a first step toward lifelong healthy eating.

Field trips to the MSU Student Organic Farm give Gunnisonville students a chance to experience the changing seasons on a working farm. Through another collaboration with MSU, a hoophouse erected at Gunnisonville in summer, 2004, allows the growing season to extend well into the winter and begin early in the spring.

The project has not been without its challenges. Frequent staff turnover means repeated justification that the garden is a special place where students can experience life and learning and still meet curriculum requirements.

"We're dealing with a generation that doesn't have an opportunity to connect to nature," says Thorp. "And you're not going to take care of something you don't know. That little garden is their place, their living classroom."



*Gunnisonville students inspect their school's new hoophouse filled with late fall salad greens.*

## Contact Information

For information on farm-to-school programs, contact Viki Lorraine at Michigan State University.  
(517) 353-0751

# Community-based Programs Increase Food Security

Distributing
Growing Food
Eating
Community Vitality
Environmental Stewardship
Healthy Individuals

Food security is a necessary aspect of a community-based food system. People in many communities lack reasonable access to fresh, healthy, culturally appropriate foods. Community groups in Lansing and across the state have organized around a systems approach to food security. For example, The Allen Neighborhood Center has launched a program called “Growing Food Citizens: Connecting Eastside Residents to Lansing-area

Farmers.” Through this program, the center hosts a farmers’ market (page 10), served as a CSA drop-off point for Giving Tree Farm (page 17), organizes a youth garden group, and is developing food and nutrition awareness materials. On the other side of town, the NorthWest Lansing Healthy Communities Initiative (NWLHCI) has organized a team of citizens to tackle food system issues such as recruiting a full-service grocery store to northwest Lansing and

developing additional community gardens and a neighborhood kitchen. NWLHCI also organized a Giving Tree Farm CSA drop-off point and launched an annual celebratory harvest festival in October, 2004, complete with a farmers’ market, children’s activities, and food canning and preservation demonstrations.

Food assistance programs such as the National School Lunch Program, the Food Stamp program and the Women, Infants and Children (WIC) program are important safety nets for community members. \$28.9 million in food stamps alone were issued in the tri-county area in 2003. For comparison, this represents 2.6% of the total food dollars spent in the Capital area. However, the network of private, non-profit food banks, food pantries, soup kitchens and gleaning organizations is critical to ensuring food security at a local level. Non-profits such as the Greater Lansing Food Bank play a significant role.

The Greater Lansing Food Bank (GLFB) raises funds to purchase food for 18 food pantries in the region. In 2003, the community responded by donating over \$650,000. The GLFB also runs two programs: Food Movers and the Garden Project. Started in 1992, Food Movers collects excess prepared and perishable food from licensed kitchens, local grocery stores and bakeries and delivers it to shelters, food pantries, community centers, senior citizen and subsidized housing, and human service agencies.

“It’s kind of like an ambulance for food,” quips program director Phyllis Handley. Through the work of a small staff and more than 6000 volunteer hours, Food Movers distributed nearly 500,000 pounds of food in fiscal 2003.

The Garden Project gleans from area farms, but the mainstay of their mission is to improve food self-reliance for Lansing-area residents through community gardening.



*Food Movers rescue prepared and perishable foods.*

*“Community food security is a condition in which all community residents obtain a safe, culturally acceptable, nutritionally adequate diet through a sustainable food system that maximizes community self-reliance and social justice.”*

**Mike Hamm, C.S. Mott Chair of Sustainable Agriculture, MSU and Anne Bellows, Rutgers University**

## What You Can Do

### INDIVIDUALS:

**Volunteer for a neighborhood or other community group interested in improving access to healthy food.**

### COMMUNITY:

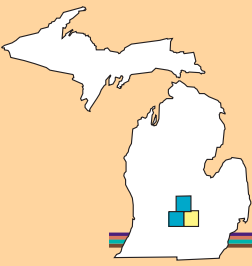
**Conduct a community food assessment. See: [http://www.foodsecurity.org/cfa\\_home.html](http://www.foodsecurity.org/cfa_home.html)**

### MUNICIPALITY:

**Start a local Food Policy Council. See: [http://www.worldhungeryear.org/fslc/faqs/ria\\_090.asp](http://www.worldhungeryear.org/fslc/faqs/ria_090.asp)**



# Growing Healthy Food, Growing Healthy Neighborhoods



On a bright, sunny morning in late September, Jim Zubkus walks the community garden plot that he had tended all summer. A few green onions and pepper plants remained among the debris of a bountiful summer. Exploring the neighboring plots, Jim tells the stories of the gardeners that tend them. One quickly realizes that this little plot of sunshine is growing much more than vegetables.

The Garden Project, a program of the Greater Lansing Food Bank, began in 1983 as an effort to improve the food self-reliance of people throughout the Greater Lansing area. Today, the project provides more than 500 gardeners with seeds, plants, compost, tools, tillage, educational support and, in most cases, a community garden plot to sow their seeds. A plot in one of the 17 established community gardens scattered across town, and the use of the necessary supplies to make it grow, are free to the gardeners. A second 25- by 25-foot plot costs \$5.



*Community gardeners build a compost pile together.*

Gleaning has been part of the Garden Project program since its inception. In 2003 more than 300,000 pounds of fresh produce, with an estimated retail value of \$230,000, were gleaned from area farms by volunteers and distributed to food pantries, human service agencies and low-income housing complexes.

Community gardens offer urban residents an opportunity to grow their own nutritious food. Community gardening also improves quality of life in other ways – by stimulating social interaction; encouraging self-reliance; beautifying neighborhoods; reducing family food budgets; creating opportunities for recreation, exercise, therapy and education; and catalyzing neighborhood and community development. Roberta Miller, director of the Garden Project, hears about these intangible benefits when gardeners say

## *The Elf Community Garden in downtown Lansing.*



“I know where my food came from,”  
“When I’m in the garden I forget about my aches and pains,” or “I did it with my family. My children helped me with this.”

Zubkus is also quick to point out that the benefits of a community garden go well beyond fresh brussels sprouts. He speaks of the garden as a social event, with lots of camaraderie and sharing. The gardens also help many people manage tight budgets. Garden Project participants grew an estimated \$42,000 worth of food in home and community gardens in 2003.

For the sizable Hmong and other immigrant communities in Lansing, the Garden Project is a tie to their home culture. Cheu Xiong of the Hmong American Community Association estimates that there are 80 to 90 Hmong families with community garden plots in the Lansing area. They often bring seeds from overseas and grow traditional vegetables uncommon in American groceries. Freezing and preserving are common.

The community gardens made possible by the Garden Project are a patchwork of cultures and experiences where people share their knowledge, seeds, produce or a simple smile. For some people, the gardens are an essential link to a healthy, affordable diet. To others, they are a reason to get out of bed. The weeds may not all get pulled, the tomatoes may not all get harvested, but the gardens continue to feed the community.

## Contact Information

For more information on the Garden Project: (517) 887-4660, or email: [gardenproject@ingham.org](mailto:gardenproject@ingham.org)

# What Does a Community-based Food System Look Like?

The preceding pages present examples of parts of a community-based food system. These examples are by no means all-inclusive, nor do they represent a required or magical combination. They are a starting point. Much like the interconnections that hold together any ecosystem, the webs of connections within a community-based food system are central to its strength. These connections create long-term stability, encourage community self-reliance and present numerous synergies and opportunities.

## What is a community-based food system like in practice?



Eating in such a system may involve purchasing some portion of your food directly from local farmers. This simple act helps to support small-scale family farms in the area by passing the greatest amount of your food dollar back to the farmer. Local farmers in turn purchase goods and services from local business people, keeping your food dollars within the community. Buying

local provides Michigan agriculture with a viable market and thus helps keep farmland in farming and curb urban sprawl. When more eaters choose a diversity of local food, the demand translates into farms that grow a wide variety of crops rather than large monocultures of corn or soybeans. These diverse farms offer local jobs because such mixed operations do not lend themselves well to complete mechanization.

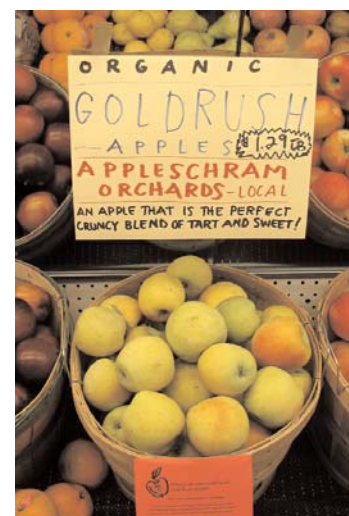
With appropriate incentives and start-up assistance, entrepreneurial on-farm and specialty food processing businesses develop and offer greater choice at the local market and bring additional jobs and stable economic development to the area. Restaurants, cafeterias, hospitals, retirement homes and schools can all commit

to buying a portion of their food purchases from local sources, presenting even greater markets for local farmers and food processors.

The interdependence that arises through this local food system creates a strong sense of community and encourages people to help one another and assure that everyone

has equal access to healthy food. As awareness of the food system increases, attention turns to diet quality as an important aspect of preventative health care. Increased access to local foods through farmers' markets, CSAs and farm stands presents many options for healthy eating – fresh fruits and vegetables, antibiotic- and hormone-free meat and eggs, locally processed jams and sauces, and more. Healthy people means a dependable work force and lower healthcare costs for employers. The strong sense of community encourages young professionals to stay in the area.

In the end, a community-based food system is a wonderful opportunity to improve public health, strengthen the local economy, and develop sound land use stewardship. But it can be done only with a large number of community members working together. Strong connections and meaningful partnerships are needed.





# Strengthening Connections

Now that you have a clearer picture of what makes up a community-based food system, it's time to begin building on the connections in your community. Much of this can be done simply by paying attention to your food choices and buying local and direct when possible. But some efforts need broader support.

Below is a list of some community leaders and decision-makers and suggestions of roles they can play. Share your ideas – and this booklet – with them. A community-based food system frame can be useful in finding common interests and building strong partnerships. Together we can build the type of food system that we want, and strengthen our community along the way.

- **County planning commissions** make decisions that affect where food can be grown and processed.
- **Local elected officials** such as mayors and township supervisors may be able to offer support in starting and building a farmers' market.
- You may consider joining the **citizen planners** in your area to advocate for including food system issues in local planning efforts.
- **Health professionals** may be interested in improving their patients' awareness of and access to healthy food.
- **Local Departments of Public Health** provide WIC participants with Project FRESH coupons for local, fresh fruits and vegetables. They also design and implement a host of public health programs that are increasingly focused on disease prevention.
- **Chambers of Commerce** can assist in building alliances around business and infrastructure development. They may also be interested in supporting a farmers' market.
- **Local and regional economic development teams** can assist in creating opportunities for food processing and other businesses. They may be able to identify potential funding sources to develop food system infrastructure.
- **Communities of faith** can help to organize CSA groups, offer space for a neighborhood farmers' market, and teach "eating as a moral act."
- **Farmers** grow the food and are essential in any partnership.
- **Schools** can incorporate food and agriculture in both curriculum and cafeteria.
- **Environmental groups** can support farming systems that preserve biodiversity, provide wildlife habitat and minimize pollutions to air and water.
- **MSU Extension** can assist with information and facilitation expertise. They can also help you identify researchers interested in community-based food systems.
- **Neighborhood groups and community organizations** can help mobilize communities and implement programs.

**This list is just the beginning. You will think of many others to involve in your work.**

# Some Community Food Systems Resources

## Capital Area

### Capital Area Community Voices

<http://www.cacvoices.org/>

### Greater Lansing Food Bank

517-887-4307

<http://www.lansingfoodbank.org/>

### Tri-county Regional Planning Commission

913 W Holmes Rd, Suite 201, Lansing, MI 48910

517-393-0342

<http://www.tri-co.org/>

### Allen Neighborhood Center

1619 E. Kalamazoo St., Lansing, MI 48912

517-485-7630

<http://www.allenneighborhoodcenter.org>

### NorthWest Lansing Healthy Communities Initiative

125 W. Main St., Lansing, MI 48933

517-483-4499

<http://www.nwlhci.org>

## Michigan

### Michigan Department of Agriculture

<http://www.michigan.gov/mda>

Click on the Michigan Marketplace tab for information and directories on Michigan grown and produced foods.

### Michigan Health Tools

<http://www.mihealthtools.org/>

A suite of websites aimed at promoting good health for all Michigan residents.

### Michigan Surgeon General's

#### Michigan Steps Up program

<http://www.michigan.gov/surgeongeneral>

### C.S. Mott Group for Sustainable Food Systems at Michigan State University

312 Natural Resources Building, MSU

East Lansing, MI 48824-1222

517-432-1612.

Email: [mottgroup@carrs.msu.edu](mailto:mottgroup@carrs.msu.edu)

<http://www.mottgroup.msu.edu>

### Michigan Integrated Food and Farming Systems (MIFFS)

<http://www.miffs.org/>

### Michigan Land Use Institute

<http://www.mlui.org/>

See especially "The New Entrepreneurial Agriculture,"

<http://www.mlui.org/downloads/newag.pdf>

### Michigan Organic Food and Farming Alliance (MOFFA)

<http://www.moffa.org/>

### MSU Product Center for Agriculture and Natural Resources

<http://www.aec.msu.edu/product/index.htm>

## Regional and National

### Center for Integrated Agricultural Systems (CIAS)

<http://www.cias.wisc.edu/>

### Community Food Security Coalition

<http://www.foodsecurity.org/>

### Land Stewardship Project

<http://www.landstewardshipproject.org/>

### Michael Fields Agricultural Institute

<http://www.michaelfieldsaginst.org/>

### Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Program (SARE), USDA

<http://www.sare.org/>

### USDA Farmer Direct Marketing Website

<http://www.ams.usda.gov/directmarketing/>

### The Food Project

<http://www.thefoodproject.org/>

### Growing Power

<http://www.growingpower.org/>

### Hartford Food System

<http://www.hartfordfood.org/>

### Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture

<http://www.leopold.iastate.edu/>

### Food Routes

<http://www.foodroutes.org/>

### Eat Well Guide

<http://www.eatwellguide.org>

### National Sustainable Agriculture Information Service

<http://www.attra.org/>