

2018 Michigan Good Food Summit

Breakout Session #14: Michigan CSAs: Opportunities in Supporting Food Access and Farm Viability through Community Supported Agriculture

1:45 pm

Speakers: Garrett Ziegler, MSU Extension; Erin Skidmore, Access of West Michigan; Kate Heflick, MSU Student Organic Farm

Key Points:

- **Garrett Ziegler**
 - Michigan Statewide CSA Network
 - MIFFS and MDHHS facilitation and support
 - Other members – Groundwork for resilient communities, taste the local difference, hazon, west mi growers group, csa coalition
 - Developed logic model and strategic plan
 - Key Goals: better understand CSA farms, increase collaboration across organizations supporting CSA farms
 - Develop and share models for increased CSA access
 - Statewide CSA Farmers Survey
 - Understand current situation of CSA farmers
 - Developed with input from farmers and csa from around the country, network partners.
 - Distributed through statewide listservs, MSUE contacts, farm organizations
 - Collected data from spring 2018 to summer 2018
 - Results:
 - age (25-34 highest category),
 - gender (majority female),
 - race/ethnicity (high white) demographics,
 - level of education (highest in four year degree),
 - Geographic distribution of responses – primarily lower MI
 - Lots of variation of farm types – 1 year to 187 years old, 67% 10 years or less. 1 acre – 1000 acres, 56% are 20 acres or smaller. Majority own farmland.
 - Certifications/verifications: majority follow organic but not certified. Equal Certified organic and MAEAP Verified.
 - Food Safety: majority have no formal program. Food Safety Plan is most engaged.
 - Programs: average number of shares - 39, average price - \$523, 10 have workshare csa, standard value – 8-12 items or 20-30 dollars/week, 63% have add-ons
 - CSA distribution: on farm pick-up and farmers market are most common.

- Viability: about two-thirds yes, off farm income dependence – majority yes.
 - Food access strategies – accept food assistance, subsidized or sliding scale shares
 - External organizations involved: two thirds have no outside involvement
 - Broad conclusions: diverse CSA farms, opportunities for organizations to support csa farms, variety of definitions for viability and goals, needs to grow local eaters and change the way we eat.
 - Survey next steps: work with results, capture over time, allow for other csa responses, reconvene network.
- **Erin Skidmore:** Access of West MI: Cultivating holistic solutions to poverty.
 - Background: poverty workshops, faith congregation engagements, food systems initiatives. 40 years of existence. Charity and emergency service focus. Shift to food resource centers.
 - Values for good food systems: invest in the local food economy, convening food and faith conversations, growing health, equipping community partners.
 - Farm to Pantry program: Collective impact and collaboration is key - Many partners involved. Organizational change desired from AWMI and food pantries. Charity has gotten stuck. Creative visioning to convene faith groups, growers and pantries. 5 pantries throughout/across Kent County
 - CSA Cooking Clubs/classes (obtained through health department grant): Full price CSAs, 12 week cohorts, average 15 members, general pantry absorbs additional shares, farm field trips, embedded community organizing. *Willing to share cooking class and agro-ecology curriculum*
 - Successes: All five pantries had class facilitators from community. Pantries are developing programs creatives and in their own ways. CSAs have been able to adjust and vary.
 - challenges: low capacities of farmers and pantry participants to do additional work. Creating sustainability away from grants.
 - Future: Would like to see relationships solidify and/or grow their self-sustainability.
- **Kate Heflick:** MSU Student organic farm CSA
 - Background: cultivate knowledge and human capacity in organic and sustainable agriculture for students, farmers and educators. Education: training program and farmer field school. Production: CSA since 2003, 15 acres certified organic, 23,500 sq ft hoophouse space, \$250,000 in sales.
 - Advantages for farmers – guaranteed income, fair prices, shared risk, community connections, loyal customer base
 - Disadvantages: competition, administrative work, complex crop planning, crop failures, not a consistent flow of income, liabilities.
 - Year-round model: on farm pickup, buffet style, 48 weeks, \$1.28/person/day for a family of 4.

Questions and Answers:

How early does winter production start?

Two week plantings from August to mid-October.

Item distribution?

6-8 storage crops

4-6 fresh items

What are retention rates?

50-60% leads to a lot of time spent getting and maintaining members

Seek to retain cohorts at pantries. Strong attendance from some places this previous year.

Strong leadership might be the reason.

70-80% for SOF. Changes season to season.

How was farm viability defined in survey?

Many factors were surveyed. Also self-defined.

How long did it take to get SOF CSA to a viable state?

Not present since beginning. Cashflow is more important than profitability. Consistent 75-100 members

Payment plans have changed cashflow a little bit. Brings in some different types of customers.

Are pantries opening classes to more clients or are they more restricted?

Restriction is natural. Some expansion has occurred and self-development has occurred.

Overlap of client involvement.

Economic insecurity is common to farmers and pantry clients.

How did these two groups come to see themselves as partners?

There are many relationship building opportunities and experiences. Farmers have started CSAs to build community.

Share: CSA environment at pickup is awesome.

Was there any discussion of hybrid CSAs in the survey?

Many farmers are no longer doing CSA farming. Strong competition. Choice built into CSA perhaps does not improve retention. Small Farms Central – Harvey Software System

CSA Demographics – concerned about low representation of black farmers that responded to CSA survey. Perhaps one reason for low numbers is that there is land ownership inequity.

How does a farmer manage CSA produce choice? Are there creative solutions to pantry funding that has been outside of grants?

Community Food Centers Canada has a lot of great ideas and resources. Pantry farm beds.

Pantry wish lists. Shifting payment structures. Love inc. program – educational classes for CSA

vouchers. Using "faith land" to supplement food generation. CSA no-pickup is donated to pantry. Pantry paid labor for harvest of extra produce. Coalition of pantries.