Michigan
GOOD FOOD
Equity • Sustainability • Thriving Economies

Michigan Good Food

CHARTER

June 2010

The Michigan Good Food Charter was developed with leadership from the C.S. Mott Group for Sustainable Food Systems at Michigan State University, the Food Bank Council of Michigan and the Michigan Food Policy Council. Principal funding was provided by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation.

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Cover photographs courtesy of (clockwise from top left): Marty Heller, Michigan State University Student Organic Farm, Vicki Morrone, Blandford Nature Center

Michigan Good Food

CHARTER SYNOPSIS

Michigan GOOD FOOD
Equity • Sustainability • Thriving Economies

Barely into a new millennium, the need for a thriving economy, equity and sustainability for all of Michigan and its people rings truer than ever. As part of achieving these goals, we need to grow, sell and eat "good food" – food that is healthy, green, fair and affordable.

By reemphasizing our local and regional food systems, alongside the national and global ones, we have an opportunity to create a system based on good food in Michigan and achieve a healthier, more prosperous and more equitable state.

Good food
means food that is:

Healthy
It provides nourishment and enables people to thrive.

Green
It was produced in a manner that is environmentally sustainable.

Fair
No one along the production line was exploited during its creation.

Affordable
All people have access to it.

Adapted from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation

Consider the irony:

- *Michigan has the second most diverse agricultural production in the country, and yet 59 percent of our residents (distributed across each of our 83 counties) live in a place that has inadequate access to the food they need for a healthy daily diet (based on public health recommendations). This is what anti-hunger advocates refer to as "food insecurity."*
- *Consumer interest in local foods is growing rapidly, and yet mid-sized farms are disappearing at an alarming rate and many farms cannot support themselves without off-farm work.*

What is the Michigan Good Food Charter?

The Michigan Good Food Charter presents a vision for Michigan's food and agriculture system to advance its current contribution to the economy, protect our natural resource base, improve our residents' health and help generations of Michigan youth to thrive. The charter outlines a sequence of steps we can take over the next decade to move us in this direction.

We need to enact policies and strategies that make it just as easy to get food from a nearby farm as from the global marketplace and that will assure all Michiganders have access to good food and all Michigan farmers and food businesses have entrepreneurial opportunities.

Photo by Cara Maple.

Photo courtesy of Blandford Nature Center.

What Needs to Change?

Current policies, practices and market structures keep us from realizing these opportunities. For example, some zoning regulations limit growing food in cities; high quality, healthy food is not always available at places where people use public benefits to purchase food; and institutions, especially K-12 schools, face restrictive budgets for school meals.

Michigan buyers and farmers have limited opportunities to connect directly with one another. Regulations are typically more easily implemented by large-scale farms and markets. Food safety requirements are often inflexible and can be cost-prohibitive for small-and medium-scale growers.

Farmland is unaffordable in many cases. New farmers face challenges in accessing capital to begin their operations and thus have difficulty developing a market.

What Can We Do?

We can address these barriers through specific, strategic state and local actions, and we can forge new partnerships centered on the values of good food. We can raise public and private policymakers' awareness of these issues and make Michigan good food policies and practices a priority at all levels of decision making.

The Michigan Good Food Charter presents 25 policy priorities that offer specific strategies for reaching the goals above in the next ten years. These strategies include ways to:

- *Create new economic opportunities – through opening new market channels, through supporting Michigan food and farm entrepreneurs, and through reducing regulatory hurdles.*
- *Bring good food to where people live – through utilizing strategies that will make it easier for people to access healthy, fresh or minimally processed, Michigan-grown food every day.*
- *Bring good food into the mainstream – through cultivating a culture that values good food.*

Vision and Goals

We envision a thriving economy, equity and sustainability for all of Michigan and its people through a food system rooted in local communities and centered on good food.

By 2020, we believe we can meet or exceed the following goals:

1. *Michigan institutions will source 20 percent of their food products from Michigan growers, producers and processors.*
2. *Michigan farmers will profitably supply 20 percent of all Michigan institutional, retailer and consumer food purchases and be able to pay fair wages to their workers.*
3. *Michigan will generate new agri-food businesses at a rate that enables 20 percent of food purchased in Michigan to come from Michigan.*
4. *Eighty percent of Michigan residents (twice the current level) will have easy access to affordable, fresh, healthy food, 20 percent of which is from Michigan sources.*
5. *Michigan Nutrition Standards will be met by 100 percent of school meals and 75 percent of schools selling food outside school meal programs.*
6. *Michigan schools will incorporate food and agriculture into the pre-K through 12th grade curriculum for all Michigan students and youth will have access to food and agriculture entrepreneurial opportunities.*

Michigan Good Food

CHARTER

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INTRODUCTION

Barely into a new millennium, the need for a thriving economy, equity and sustainability for all of Michigan and its people rings truer than ever. As part of achieving these goals, we need to grow, sell and eat "good food" – food that is healthy, green, fair and affordable (see sidebar). By reemphasizing our local and regional food systems, alongside the national and global ones, we have an opportunity to create a system based on good food in Michigan and achieve a healthier, more prosperous and more equitable state.

We believe that 2010 presents an opportunity to foster the health and wealth of Michigan's people and communities by expanding our food and agricultural economy through a locally integrated food system.

What is the Michigan Good Food charter?

The Michigan Good Food Charter presents a vision for Michigan's food and agriculture system to advance its current contribution to the economy, protect our natural resource base, improve our residents' health and help generations of Michigan youth to thrive.

The charter is centered on "good food" and the steps we can take as a state to significantly expand the portion of our food and agricultural system that provides good food for everyone in Michigan.

Some may recognize this as the "local food" movement, but it is far more. We believe Michigan needs a locally *integrated* food system; one with a dynamic blend of local, regional, national and globally produced good food.

At any point of food purchase – whether you are a mom or a hospital food service director – we want you to ask one simple question: could we supply that product from Michigan? If yes, then what do we need to change so that farms and businesses in Michigan do supply it?

The charter outlines this vision and a sequence of steps we can take over the next 10 years to move us in this direction.

What is a Food System and Why Does it Matter?

Consider the irony:

- *Michigan has the second most diverse agricultural production in the country, and yet 59 percent of our residents (distributed across each of our 83 counties) live in a place that has inadequate access to the food they need for a healthy daily diet (based on public health recommendations). This is what anti-hunger advocates refer to as "food insecurity."*
- *Consumer interest in local foods is growing rapidly, and yet mid-sized farms are disappearing at an alarming rate and many farms cannot support themselves without off-farm work.*

To understand why these disparities exist, we need to understand the components of Michigan's food system.

Photo by Russel Lewis.

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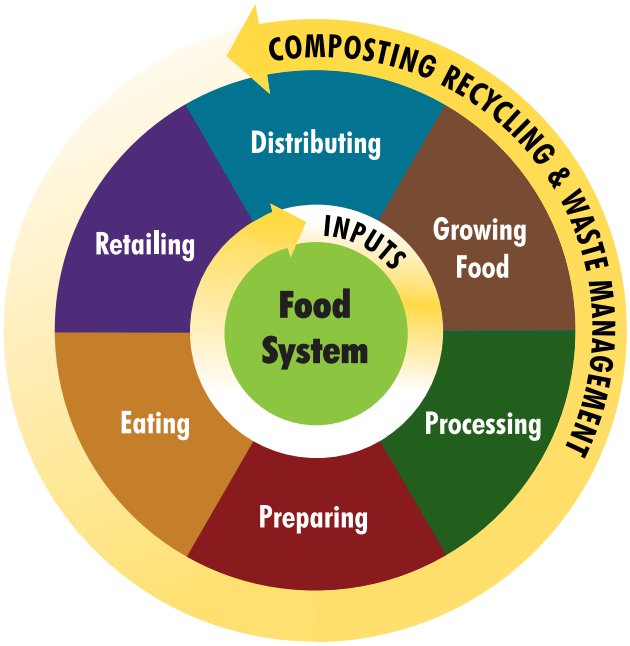
Adapted from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation

A food system is all the people, processes and places involved with moving food from the seed the farmer plants to your dinner table, your local restaurant or the cafeteria lunch line. Food systems – from farming to processing and distributing, from retailing to preparing and eating, from all the farm inputs necessary for farm products to grow well, and finally to recycling and composting food wastes at each stage – exist at global, national, regional and community scales.

The Food System



Currently, it is often easier to buy food from another continent than from a farmer in or near your community. We need to enact policies and strategies that make it just as easy to get food from a nearby farm as from the global marketplace and assure that all Michiganders have access to food from either source they choose.

The bulk of Michigan's agricultural production is currently oriented toward commodity production. But the only way to compete in a commodity market is by selling at the lowest price. Michigan farmers are efficient, but they can't compete effectively against products from places with significantly lower land and labor costs. Today some farmers, processors, distributors and others in the food system seek new, more diverse and more lucrative markets that can simultaneously preserve natural resources, enhance public health and foster vibrant communities.

We believe we can build on these efforts to expand our food and agricultural economy and to realize a better future for Michigan. We already grow, sell and eat good food in Michigan, and we can do even more. If we get this right, Michigan will be *the* place to be in the 21st century!

Our Good Food System Should be as Diverse as Possible, Providing Resilience in the Face of an Unknowable Future:

- Diverse in the people producing our food and taking it from field to plate.
- Diverse in scale, where small, medium and large farms and food businesses all contribute to our food supply.
- Diverse in production strategies so that we are constantly moving toward more sustainable production practices based on research and experience with a range of production systems.
- Diverse in the means of access so that all 10 million Michiganders can eat a healthy diet every day, whether at home or away from home.
- Diverse in markets and ownership models so that all types of Michigan businesses and social ventures have a place and an opportunity to succeed.
- Diverse in hunger relief resources so that all people, regardless of income, can eat nutritious, fresh food.
- Diverse in products so that we maintain and enhance the ability to produce a variety of farm products that provide a balanced diet.

We start from the following assumptions:

- ***Trend is not destiny*** *– Where we are now is a result of past decisions; where we will be in the future depends on the decisions we make today.*
- ***Not to decide is to decide*** *– The consequences of inaction carry risks and rewards just as the consequences of action; deciding to enhance diversity across a number of strategies (see sidebar on page 5) presents a great range of opportunities into the future.*
- ***Our economy, our environment, and our personal and community health are all connected*** *through the food system (and in other ways), and decisions in one realm affect all of them.*
- ***Food issues touch every person in Michigan*** *every day of his or her life in myriad ways.*
- *Our unique geography, our agricultural diversity, our racial and ethnic diversity, the balance between our population and our natural resources, our education system and our current economic circumstances make Michigan a place with* ***unparalleled potential*** *for sustainable urban and rural economic development with the goal of meeting more of our residents' good food needs from local sources.*
- *Economic development and Michigan residents' desire – individually and collectively – for good food are the key* ***leverage points for change*** *that will affect the food system and many other sectors.*

Photos by Vicki Morrone.

The Process Behind the Michigan Good Food Charter

Starting in September 2009, work groups began examining Michigan's current situation and developing future opportunities to advance good food in Michigan in five arenas.

At the Michigan Good Food Summit in February 2010, each work group presented a draft action agenda and invited discussion from approximately 350 summit participants.

The website www.michiganfood.org has a continually expanding set of archives, tools for providing comments and links to a listserv for people to remain up-to-date on events around charter development.

Several funders have supported this process; foundational funding came from the W. K. Kellogg Foundation. Twelve co-conveners led the work groups, and the overall process was stewarded by a planning committee and supported by an honorary advisory committee.

Next, the charter will be the focus of regional meetings across Michigan where advocates will inform and engage policymakers in advancing polices and practices that support good food in Michigan.

A VISION FOR MICHIGAN'S FOOD SYSTEM

We envision a thriving economy, equity and sustainability for all of Michigan and its people through a food system rooted in local communities and centered on good food – food that is healthy, green, fair and affordable.

Thriving Economy

Children, families, communities and businesses in both rural and urban areas are prosperous.

- *We produce a diverse abundance of food that provides jobs with fair wages, supports businesses that fuel our state's economy and affords all children the opportunity to choose school over the workplace.*
- *We provide a dynamic mix of local, regional, national and global food sources that offer opportunities for farmers and processors of all sizes.*
- *We create vibrant places, urban and rural linkages, and regional economic growth through our food system.*

Equity

All communities have the conditions needed to thrive.

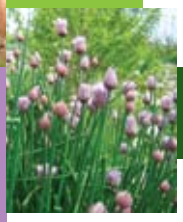
- *We provide consistent access to affordable, healthy, nutrient-rich, fresh foods for all Michigan's people.*
- *We improve the health and well-being of all our children by making high quality food available in our state's homes, schools, childcare centers and institutions.*
- *We ensure that strong local food economies benefit and empower all communities.*
- *We ensure that all who contribute to growing, producing, selling and serving good food receive a fair share of its profits.*

Sustainability

We protect our cultural, ecological and economic assets over the long term.

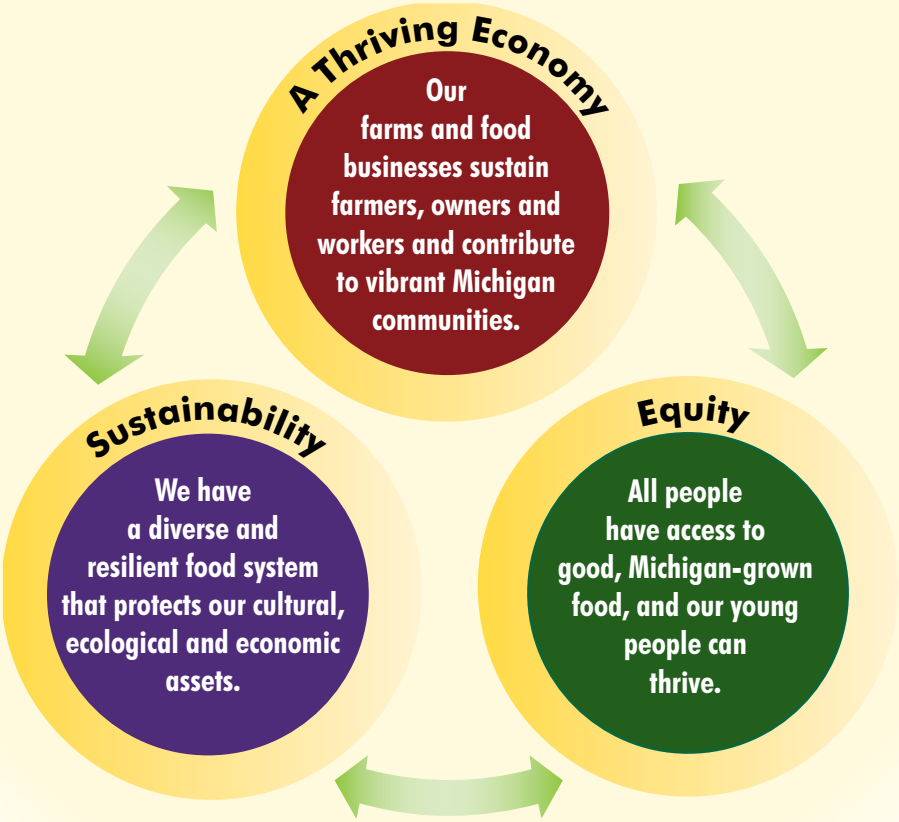
- *We build a solid base of opportunity and prosperity in food and agriculture for generations to come.*
- *We strengthen and grow our base of food and farming knowledge by sustaining today's farmers, supporting new farmers, and inspiring respect for food and agriculture through a culture of healthy eating and cooking.*
- *We protect our biodiversity and natural resources, including our land, water, soil and air, in our farming practices and throughout the food system.*

Photo by Kathryn Colasanti.



GOALS

The agenda priorities stem from three overarching goals:



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- *Michigan Nutrition Standards will be met by 100 percent of school meals and 75 percent of schools selling food outside of school meal programs.*
- *Michigan schools will incorporate food and agriculture into the pre-K through 12th grade curriculum for all Michigan students and youth will have access to food and agriculture entrepreneurial opportunities.*

HOW DO WE GET THERE?

To create a good food system, we cannot deal with food system components separately as we have done in the past. We need to recognize that all components in a system work together and affect one another, and act appropriately.

A viable farming sector is fundamental to Michigan's health and wealth. Good food access for all Michigan residents is necessary to the vitality of our people, our communities and our state. Through our schools, hospitals, colleges and other institutions, we have an opportunity to harness purchasing power to support both of these goals. To make it all possible, we need the building blocks, or infrastructure – from seeds to equipment to information access – that enable the efficient movement of food from Michigan growers and producers to Michigan consumers. And perhaps most importantly, we need a food system that provides health, education and entrepreneurial opportunities to our young people, particularly those who are most vulnerable, – the future of our agricultural economy and our state.

Photo by Kathryn Colasanti.

By the Numbers

In 2007, the average age of Michigan farmers was over 56.[1]

Michigan loses an average of 30,000 acres of farmland every year.[3]

Farms between 100 and 999 acres decreased 26 percent between 1997 and 2007.[1]

Nearly 59 percent of all Michigan residents live in what are considered "underserved areas" with limited access to healthy food.[5]

Roughly 65 percent of adults and nearly 30 percent of youth in grades 9-12 are overweight or obese.[7]

The prevalence of diabetes, a diet-related disease, is more than twice as high among blacks and American Indians/Alaskan Natives and 70 percent higher among Hispanics than among whites.[8]

Blacks make up 14 percent of Michigan's population (U.S. Census, 2006) but less than 0.5 percent of principal farm operators.[1]

Data from 2005-2007 indicate that nearly 12 percent of Michigan residents are food-insecure.[9]

By the Numbers

Only about 14 percent of Michigan farmers' markets accept Bridge Cards for food purchases.[2]

The School Nutrition Association estimates that it costs $2.90 to prepare a school meal, but the current federal reimbursement for a "free" meal for qualifying students is only $2.57.

Four beef packing companies control 84 percent of the cattle slaughtered, and five retailers (WalMart, Kroger, Albertson's, Safeway, Ahold) control nearly 50 percent of the U.S. market.[4]

USDA food safety good agricultural practices (GAP) and good handling practices (GHP) audits cost $92/hour, including travel time for auditors to get to farm locations. Total costs in 2009 ranged from about $92 to $1,600 per farm.

Michigan's 2009 benefits through the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) (formerly known as food stamps) were $2.1 billion, of which $293,000 was redeemed at farmers' markets.[7]

What are we up against?

The food system starts with growing and producing food – the fruits, vegetables, grains, legumes and animal products produced by Michigan farmers. No farmers means no food. Michigan farmers, on average, are aging, and there is little support for young people to move into farming careers. Much of our prime farmland is threatened by development. Farms of midrange size are disappearing, unable to find a niche between selling directly to consumers and large-volume commodity markets. The rights, safety and fair wages of farmworkers are too often jeopardized as a result of these constraints and competing influences.

Residents of areas in all 83 Michigan counties, both urban and rural, have limited access to full-service grocery stores and healthy food. Racial and ethnic minorities are particularly vulnerable to diet-related disease, and low-income minority communities have been excluded from meaningful entrepreneurial and job opportunities in the food system. Youth obesity is increasing, and the life expectancy of the next generation is predicted to drop rather than rise. Every day people go hungry, and numbers of people without enough to eat have increased with Michigan's economic downturn.

Photo by Vicki Morrone.

What can we build on?

Change is in the air, and with it, new opportunities we can build on. Consumer demand for fresh, or minimally processed, healthy, farm-direct food is changing market conditions. Interest in home and community gardening has skyrocketed. Parents, students and community members are calling for farm-fresh foods in school cafeterias, and some school districts are responding to these demands.[10] Likewise, institutions are finding ways to purchase from farmers in their region. A new cohort of young farmers is emerging in Michigan. Immigrants and farm workers have agricultural skills and knowledge and often a desire to start new farms. Michigan communities are embracing urban agriculture. Several recent legislative actions have supported these activities, and further actions could pave the way for more good food.

What is holding us back?

Current policies, practices and market structures keep us from realizing these opportunities. For example, some zoning regulations limit growing food in cities; high quality, healthy food is not always available at places where people use public benefits to purchase food; and institutions, especially K-12 schools, face restrictive budgets for school meals.

Agri-food market channels have narrowed and become increasingly concentrated in ways that limit new entrepreneurs. Michigan buyers and farmers have limited opportunities to connect directly with one another. Regulations are typically more easily implemented by large-scale farms and markets. Food safety requirements are often inflexible and can be cost-prohibitive for small- and medium-scale growers.

There is minimal coordination of training available for new farmers, and what exists is insufficient to meet the goals of this charter. Farmland is unaffordable in many cases. New farmers face challenges in accessing capital to begin their operations and thus have difficulty developing a market.

What can we do?

We can address these barriers through specific, strategic state and local actions, and we can forge new partnerships centered on the values of good food. We can raise public and private policymakers' awareness of these issues and make Michigan good food policies and practices a priority at all levels of decision making.

Top: photo courtesy of Blandford Nature Center; Below: photo by Vicki Morrone.

WHERE DO WE START?

We cannot, of course, achieve our vision overnight. Some changes will come easier than others; some changes will require more money than others. But we believe that all of the priorities described below are feasible to accomplish in the next decade – by 2020.

We can create new economic opportunities

We can **open new market channels** that pave the way for new and expanded Michigan farms and food businesses. We can supplement the money that K-12 schools have to spend on fruits and vegetables and channel these additional funds through Michigan farmers to circulate and multiply in Michigan's economy (agenda priority 12). Given the more than 140 million school lunches served every year, the addition of a mere 10 cents per meal spent on Michigan-produced food could mean upwards of $14 million for Michigan farm communities. If this were matched by existing school lunch funds, it would be $28 million. If we established targets for all publicly funded institutions to purchase a portion of their food from Michigan (priority 14), this impact would be even greater. To catalyze these economic opportunities, we could develop a farm-to-institution grant program (priority 18) and harness the purchasing power of our state institutions (priority 8). Other new opportunities could be created by directing some of Michigan's economic and community development funds toward investments in regional food system infrastructure (priority 15) and by establishing a state meat and poultry inspection program (priority 21). These strategies could allow many farmers and food producers to access Michigan-based markets that many currently find it difficult to enter.

We can **support Michigan food and farm entrepreneurs** by providing the training, marketing assistance, capital access and research they need to succeed. Our existing business support entities can extend their resources and expertise to regionally based food supply chains (priority 23). We can ensure that youth have opportunities to pursue food and agricultural careers (priority 9). We can expand both programs that provide training and technical assistance to new farmers (priority 20) and programs that provide access to startup capital (priority 19). We can create districts that encourage multiple food-based businesses to locate near one another (priority 5). We can provide tax breaks to farms to promote selling to Michigan institutional markets (priority 17). We can include Michigan agriculture in our state promotion campaigns (priority 22) and harness the capacity of our research institutions to provide solid data relevant to local food systems (priority 25). All of these means of support could have a tremendous impact, especially if implemented collectively over the next 10 years, in spurring agri-food entrepreneurial interests to make significant economic gains for the state.

We can **reduce the regulatory hurdles** that currently hinder local food and farm businesses from realizing their potential. We can ensure that our food and agriculture laws do not disadvantage small- and medium-scale farmers (priority 24) while maintaining and enhancing the safety of our food system. We can encourage research into new food safety strategies that would allow us to account for differences in operations and risk levels between various scales of food production (priority 16). We can change our land use policies to better protect farmland from development (priority 7) without disabling our ability to attract new residents to Michigan. We can change our property tax law so that farms installing solar or wind energy infrastructure, for example, are not taxed excessively (priority 13). These are feasible regulatory changes that we can make to foster expanding our food and agriculture economy. Some of these changes will require additional preliminary research by the Michigan Agricultural Experiment Station and other entities across the state.

We can bring good food to people where they live

We can **utilize strategies that will make it easier for people to access healthy, fresh or minimally processed, Michigan-grown food every day.** We can help finance new grocery stores in underserved areas and help make sure stores that currently sell food include healthy options (priority 4). We can encourage farmers' markets and other neighborhood-based and farm-direct strategies for making good food available (priority 1). We can make sure that low-income families and individuals have access to good food by linking public benefit programs to these strategies (priority 3). We can incorporate good food access priorities into planning and land use decisions (priority 6). For the health of our young people, we can work to limit school sales of high-fat, high-sugar foods to kids and comprehensively improve school food environments (priority 2). These strategies can help make sure that, as we establish good food as a Michigan priority, all residents have the opportunity to obtain healthy food that enables them to thrive.

We can bring good food into the mainstream

If we truly want to achieve a thriving economy, equity and sustainability in Michigan, we need to **cultivate a culture that values good food**. We can start with our young people and work to make sure all schoolchildren have an opportunity to learn about food and agriculture (priority 11). We can develop leaders who will speak to the value of good food and create programs similar to AmeriCorps or Teach for America that will expose participants to food system opportunities, bring a wealth of energy to food system work and build a cadre of people committed to good food (priority 10). In combination, these strategies can help make Michigan the place to be for culturally based, good, healthy food that is locally grown, processed and eaten.

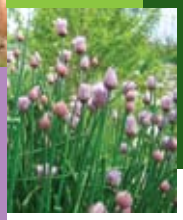
Top and opposite: photos courtesy of MSU Student Organic Farm; Right: photo by Cara Maple.

AGENDA PRIORITIES AT A GLANCE

SCALE	TYPE	FOOD SYSTEM ARENA	AGENDA PRIORITY
LOCAL AGENDA PRIORITIES	Community-based		1. Expand and increase innovative methods to bring healthy foods to under-served areas as well as strategies to encourage their consumption.
			2. Improve school food environments and reduce school sales of low-nutrient, high-sugar, high-fat and calorie-dense foods through snack and vending machines or competitive food sales.
			3. Maximize use of current public benefit programs for vulnerable populations, especially children and seniors, and link them with strategies for healthy food access.
			4. Provide outreach, training and technical assistance to launch new grocery stores and improve existing stores to better serve underserved people in urban and rural areas.
	Land use-based		5. Establish food business districts to encourage food businesses to locate in the same area and to support their collaboration.
			6. Use policy and planning strategies to increase access to healthy food in underserved areas.
			7. Review and seek appropriate revisions to state and local land use policies to preserve farmland and blend protection with farm viability programs.
	Market-based		8. Encourage institutions – including schools, hospitals, colleges and universities – to use their collective purchasing power to influence the food supply chain to provide healthier food and more foods grown, raised and processed in Michigan.
STATEWIDE AGENDA PRIORITIES	Business or non-profit-based		9. Expand opportunities for youth to develop entrepreneurship skills and learn about career opportunities related to good food that support youth and community economic development.
			10. Establish Michigan as "the place to be" for culturally based good food that is locally grown, processed, prepared and consumed.
	Legislation-based		11. Incorporate good food education into the pre-K-12 curriculum for all Michigan students.
			12. Implement a reimbursement program to provide an additional 10 cents per school meal, as a supplement to existing school meal funds, in order to purchase locally grown fruits and vegetables.
			13. Amend Michigan's General Property Tax Act to exempt certain on-farm renewable energy installations.
			14. Set targets for state-funded institutions to procure Michigan-grown, sustainably produced products.

Please note that agenda priority numbers do not reflect rank order.

SCALE	TYPE	FOOD SYSTEM ARENA	AGENDA PRIORITY
STATEWIDE AGENDA PRIORITIES	State agency-based		15. Direct $10 million to regional food supply chain infrastructure development investments through the Michigan state planning and development regions or other regional designations.
			16. Implement a food safety audit cost-share or reimbursement program targeted at small and medium-sized farms and work to ensure that audits are conducted in the context of the farm scale.
			17. Provide financial incentives for farmers and for development of food system infrastructure to support institutional local food purchasing programs.
			18. Develop a farm-to-institution grant program to provide planning, implementation and kitchen or cafeteria equipment grants to maximize the use of locally grown, raised and processed foods in institutional cafeterias.
			19. Direct state agencies to maximize capital access through state-sponsored programs that provide farm financing.
			20. Ensure that all state and higher education business, work force and economic development programs include farming and agriculture in their target audiences for programmatic development, training, investment and technical assistance.
			21. Contingent upon further market assessment, establish a state meat and poultry inspection program in cooperation with the federal Food Safety and Inspection Services (FSIS) to spur new meat processing infrastructure.
			22. Include Michigan food and agriculture in state marketing efforts, such as the Pure Michigan campaign, to build awareness of the state's great variety and quality of local food products and farm amenities.
			23. Charge business support entities, such as the 18 Michigan Technical Education Centers, with identifying and supporting the equipment and process engineering needs of farmers and other agri-food enterprises, and ensure that food and agriculture are included in state and local economic development plans.
	Research-based		24. Examine all of Michigan's food- and agriculture-related laws and regulations (food safety, production, processing, retailing, etc.) for provisions that create unnecessary transactions costs and regulatory burdens on low risk businesses and ensure that regulations are applied in a way that acknowledges the diversity of production practices.
			25. Develop systems for collecting and sharing production and market data and other data relevant to regional food supply chain development.



AGENDA PRIORITIES – A CLOSER LOOK

1: Expand and increase innovative methods to bring healthy foods to underserved areas as well as strategies to encourage their consumption.

A variety of creative access strategies based on a community's unique social, cultural and economic characteristics is essential to healthy food access and can complement grocery stores by expanding access to healthy foods directly from farms. Examples of such strategies include:

Farmers' markets
We can provide resources to enhance the ability of Michigan State University, MSU Extension and the Michigan Farmers' Market Association (MIFMA) to provide technical assistance and identify sources of startup funding to increase the number of farmers' markets.

Community garden programs
We can provide education and startup funding to help people and communities grow and market foods. Local universities and community gardening organizations could establish partnerships to provide gardening information and assistance to residents, organizations and institutions seeking to establish gardens. Already successful gardening organizations could share knowledge and experience. Startup funding, perhaps from local foundations, may be needed to purchase tools, seeds, fencing and other supplies.

Food delivery programs
We can invest in innovative food delivery models that have documented success in increasing healthy food access. The Fresh Food Partnership in northern Michigan, which purchases produce from area farmers and delivers it to food pantries, shelters and meal programs, and the Michigan Neighborhood Food Movers Project, which provides support to entrepreneurs to develop mobile produce markets, are two examples. Colleges and universities as well as the Michigan Agricultural Experiment Station should help to assess the impact of these new food delivery programs and create a database of effective community food delivery strategies. Community organizations, foundations, and colleges and universities could help scale up effective strategies by providing business plans, financing strategies, and marketing and outreach tools.

Incubator kitchens
Incubator kitchen development should be encouraged across Michigan as a tool for small-scale processing and new product development. An inventory of certified kitchens across the state should be developed and those resources surveyed to identify their value as incubator spaces. In addition, new facilities should be encouraged that have a clear strategy for fiscal solvency.

Community kitchens
Michigan State University Extension and non-profit organizations should establish and support community kitchens around the state that offer places for community groups, churches and others to teach residents about fresh food cooking, storage and production.

Photo by Kathryn Colasanti.

2: Improve school food environments and reduce school sales of low-nutrient, high-sugar, high-fat and calorie-dense foods through snack and vending machines or competitive food sales.

Many schools sell foods outside the school meal program to generate additional revenue. Often these are foods that contribute to an unhealthy school food environment because they are not required to meet the same USDA nutrition guidelines that school meals must meet. We can use school and community partnerships to transform school environments to reflect eating habits that will ensure Michigan students a healthy future.

New strategies for competitive foods

To support widespread adoption of the proposed Michigan Nutrition Standards[a] for foods served in schools outside of meal programs, the Michigan Department of Education, the School Nutrition Association of Michigan and other concerned groups could look for ways to make school food service less dependent on competitive food and vending sales and to expand opportunities for offering healthy food. Such strategies must address the fiscal constraints of food service directors without compromising access to quality, healthy food in schools.

Farm-to-school

We can provide professional development training in local purchasing and access to farm-to-school purchasing guides and manuals (see www.mifarmtoschool.msu.edu) to increase the number of schools purchasing local food from Michigan growers and the variety of fresh and minimally processed fruits and vegetables served in school meals.

Photo by Russel Lewis.

Develop grant guidelines for public and private agencies

We can encourage public and private granting programs to place priority on school-based nutrition education and community food projects that:

- *Use schools as centers for student, parent and community outreach and education.*
- *Increase school partnerships with organizations such as non-profits, Michigan State University Extension, the Michigan Nutrition Network and others to support and augment efforts of teachers, school administrators and staff toward building healthy school environments.*
- *Coordinate with other physical activity and built-environment initiatives ("complete streets," for example).*
- *Emphasize good food values: green, fair, healthy and affordable food access.*
- *Engage youth directly in meaningful and contributive ways.*
- *Emphasize the value of knowing who grows your food and how it is grown.*

Youth engagement

The Michigan Department of Education and community organizations focused on engagement and inclusion could partner to develop and provide training and resources to school districts that support meaningful participation and effective engagement of youth in school food health initiatives.

[a] *See "Presentation on the Michigan Nutrition Standards Recommendations for all Foods Available in Michigan Schools": http://www.michigan.gov/documents/mde/MI_Nutrition_Standards_final_in_Word_2_287416_7.pdf*

3: Maximize use of current public benefit programs for vulnerable populations, especially children and seniors, and link them with strategies for healthy food access.

Millions of public dollars are spent on food in Michigan each week. Strategies that encourage the use of these dollars on fresh fruits and vegetables could help increase access to good food for Michigan's low-income residents. Examples include:

Farmers' market coupons
We can strengthen the potential for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and Farmers' Market Nutrition Program (Project FRESH) benefits to support the purchase of fresh fruits and vegetables by seeking philanthropic support for matching purchases. A Detroit pilot program, "Michigan Mo' Bucks," provided up to $10 per week to shoppers who used their Bridge Cards[b] to purchase Michigan-grown food from Detroit farmers' markets. If additional funding were available, programs like these could be integrated into SNAP as enhanced benefits so that all Michigan SNAP recipients could have greater access to Michigan-grown produce.

Expanding SNAP benefit application opportunities
In August 2009, applications for SNAP were made available via the Internet. We can further improve the accessibility of SNAP benefits by installing Internet kiosks in well-trafficked non-profit and community-based organizations across the state and training organizational representatives to assist clients in applying.

Bridge Card acceptance at farmers' markets
We can increase the number of farmers' markets that have the technology and staffing to accept Michigan Bridge Cards. The Michigan Farmers' Market Association and the Michigan Food Policy Council have been working to increase the number of farmers' markets that can accept the Bridge Card. Local foundations with a focus on human services and ending poverty could assist MIFMA in securing funding to continue these efforts.

Photo from Shutterstock Images.

Implementing WIC regulations at corner stores
We can assist corner stores and markets to implement the new Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) requirement for participating stores to stock fresh fruits and vegetables. As of August 2009, Michigan's approximately 2,000 WIC vendors are required to have on stock at all times at least two varieties of fresh fruits and two varieties of fresh vegetables. Local community organizations, residents, WIC vendors (store owners or managers) and industry groups such as the Association of Food and Petroleum Dealers could partner to assess the needs of local WIC vendors in stocking fresh produce to help them comply with this new requirement.

Maximizing public benefit programs
We can maximize underutilized U.S. Department of Agriculture-funded programs to increase access to good food for vulnerable children and senior citizens. Seniors are under-enrolled in SNAP. Outreach through senior centers and neighborhood associations could increase enrollment of all underserved populations in SNAP and other food subsidy programs.

Michigan Agricultural Surplus System (MASS)
To ensure that Michigan's most impoverished residents can have access to fresh, healthy food, we should continue to support the Michigan Agricultural Surplus System (MASS), which procures unmarketable fresh produce for use in Michigan's food banks. We should also educate businesses about the Good Samaritan Food Donation Act, which protects businesses donating food products from liability.

[b] *In Michigan, the electronic benefits transfer (EBT) cards used in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program are referred to as "Bridge Cards."*

4: Provide outreach, training and technical assistance to launch new grocery stores and improve existing stores to better serve people in urban and rural underserved areas.

According to the Michigan Department of Agriculture, nearly 59 percent of all Michigan residents lack reasonable access to retail grocery stores that offer healthy and affordable fresh produce, meat, poultry, milk and dairy products.[5] Increased grocery store access and quality will improve healthy and affordable food options. Linking farmers and the development of regional food system infrastructure to Michigan grocery stores, both small and large, will also help ensure that more people have the opportunity to choose Michigan-grown and -produced foods and our retailers support Michigan farmers and agri-food businesses. Strategies include:

Improving and increasing grocery stores

We can increase the number and quality of supermarkets and grocery stores and expand their purchases of Michigan foods. P.A. 231, passed by the Michigan Legislature in 2008, calls for commercial property tax incentives to "encourage new or expanded qualified retail food establishments in underserved areas."[5] The Michigan Department of Agriculture estimates that the potential exists for a minimum of 20 new supermarkets to be built in these underserved areas in the next two to three years.

The Detroit Fresh Food Access Initiative is providing technical assistance, research, assistance to secure financing, and communication with residents and city government to launch grocery stores. This may prove to be a promising strategy for other areas. It will be important for local residents to be included in programs of this type so that all communities, especially those that are marginalized or vulnerable, have an opportunity to benefit. The Detroit Grocer Project, which aims to address the historical racism that denied many black Americans business opportunities, represents one strategy for broad inclusion in grocery store initiatives.

Healthy corner stores

We can transform corner stores into neighborhood markets with a wide range of healthy foods. This will involve a range of strategies, including developing infrastructure (such as refrigeration units and display bins), capacity (such as delivery options) and financing so that corner stores can stock fresh produce and other healthy foods. In some cases, urban farms or farms near city outskirts may be able to supply corner stores. These strategies, along with market research, promotion and education, can help encourage neighborhood residents to shop at these stores and purchase healthy foods.

5: Establish food business districts to encourage food businesses to locate in the same area and to support their collaboration.

Food business districts create clusters of products and services, which attract buyers and encourage business operators to cooperate and work together. They can serve as local and regional hubs for good food entrepreneurship and infrastructure development.

Detroit's Eastern Market is an example of how food business clustering can lead to food business growth. At this site, not only do shoppers and farmers get to know one another but small-scale retail and food processing businesses located nearby also work with farmers and one another to develop products and pursue market opportunities. Another example is a new project to build a major retail/wholesale urban market as part of Grand Rapids' downtown revitalization. Less urban locations could also use this food district strategy to boost town centers and local commerce. The strategy combines well with other revitalization strategies such as brownfield redevelopment and incentives for reuse of vacant commercial properties.

Ideally, the proposed food business districts would involve local and regional authorities working with state-level programmatic support. The resulting designation and plan for organizing these districts can help communities attract funding for such projects.

Above: photos by Vicki Morrone.


Photos by Vicki Morrone.

6: Use policy and planning strategies to increase access to healthy food in underserved areas.

Food access is rarely considered by most planners and local appointed or elected officials, but there is great potential for them to take a proactive approach to policy, planning and land use to enhance food access in underserved areas by increasing opportunities for urban agriculture and integrating food access criteria into planning and development. This could be achieved though a number of strategies:

Food policy councils
We can establish local food policy councils to include community residents, farmers, businesses, local units of government, and food, health, anti-hunger and food justice advocates. Such councils could help review public policies and decisions on the basis of food access priorities and could advocate for policy changes. Food policy councils can provide a forum to address the food system as a whole rather than in a fragmented way.

Zoning for urban agriculture
We can update zoning and other ordinances to allow and promote urban agriculture and other initiatives that expand access to good food.

Communities throughout Michigan have ordinances that date back decades, some to the 1950s or earlier, that need to be reviewed and updated to align with new models of farming and food production being developed across Michigan.

Planning for food access
We can take strides to integrate good food access into state, regional and local planning related to housing, transportation, employment and economic/community development. Planners, housing developers and others can be encouraged to assess how policies and land use decisions affect community residents' access to healthy food.

7: Review and seek appropriate revisions to state and local land use policies to preserve farmland and blend protection with farm viability programs.

Michigan's farmland is critical to our food future. Potential growth in food and agriculture will depend on our ability to protect it from development, make it affordable to farmers, and protect existing farmers' assets. Strategies to better protect farmland include:

- *Introducing Public Act 116 lien recapture legislation as an incentive to farmers to pay back their liens. There are currently $12.8 million in outstanding P.A. 116 liens stemming from property that was previously enrolled in a tax credit program under P.A. 116 but has since been converted from farmland and therefore prior tax credits must be repaid. Legislation could be introduced to provide discounts for lien repayments and the repayment money could be targeted towards the State Agriculture Preservation Program for farmland preservation.*
- *Widening options to raise funds for farmland preservation by amending state law to enable local real estate transfer taxes.*
- *Targeting farmland preservation on the basis of highest vulnerability to development and local government partnerships and plans for maintaining agricultural viability.*

8: Encourage institutions – including schools, hospitals, colleges and universities – to use their collective purchasing power to influence the food supply chain to provide healthier foods and more foods grown, raised and processed in Michigan.

The buying power of institutions, particularly if harnessed collectively, represents a strong opportunity to use the market to drive change in the food system and promote the serving of healthy fresh and processed foods.

School food service professionals in Michigan have expressed strong interest in obtaining locally grown foods. They are motivated by a number of factors, including student preference, support for local farmers and affordable prices,[11] and this interest can translate into new market opportunities. As an example, St. Paul Public Schools in Minnesota were able to purchase more than 110,000 pounds of fresh produce grown on Minnesota farms within a 100-mile radius of the city within the first six weeks of the 2009-2010 school year by forming partnerships with produce distributors and local farmers. These items, at a cost of $76,000, represented 56 percent of the school district's fresh produce purchases.[12] St. Paul Public Schools also demonstrated the ability of cooperative efforts among schools in a given region by using a combination of survey research and coordinated discussions with vendors to decrease the sugar content of flavored milk by 20 percent.[13]

School food purchasing groups in Michigan could likewise survey their member institutions to determine the changes in products of most interest to institutional food service directors and buyers. Purchasing groups could then help organize their member institutions to ask for these changes from their suppliers. The collective buying power of multiple institutions will present a significant incentive for farmers and food manufacturers to change, to continue or, in some cases, to begin supplying institutional customers with the foods they want in the forms they need.

9: Expand opportunities for youth to develop entrepreneurship skills and learn about career opportunities related to good food that support youth and community economic development.

Exposing youth to food and agriculture is an important avenue for career development. We can form partnerships among colleges, universities, local food businesses, non-profits, and work force development and college preparatory/outreach programs to develop opportunities for youth to explore potential careers and ventures related to good food. Potential strategies include:

- *Launching a Michigan Good Food Corps initiative that matches Michigan students to apprenticeships with farmers, food system entrepreneurs and non-profits through the Michigan Works! Summer Youth Employment Program.*
- *Developing career exploration and job shadowing opportunities focused on good food through Junior Achievement, Gear UP, Upward Bound, 4-H, the Michigan State University Multicultural Apprenticeship Program and similar programs.*
- *Building on agriculture, food and natural resource education efforts such as secondary agriscience and natural resource programs – Agriscience, Future Farmers of America (FFA) and Supervised Agricultural Experience (SAE). For example, we could promote experiential learning in specialty crop or pasture-based livestock production and direct marketing (such as community-supported agriculture, farm stands and farmers' markets) through SAE and FFA community learning projects.*

10: Establish Michigan as "the place to be" for culturally based good food that is locally grown, processed, prepared and consumed.

We can inspire a cultural transformation that will empower community leadership and engage consumers to bring a Michigan good food system into the mainstream. Tapping the power of residents, opinion leaders, academics, media, government and other leaders to transform food access will stimulate new businesses and programs that increase expectations for and access to good food. Strategies could include:

Innovation angels

We can create a team of "innovation angels" – venture capitalists, businesses, and others – to establish and support sustainable businesses that increase access to healthy food. Organizations such as the Michigan Chamber of Commerce, the Michigan Economic Development Corporation or university business schools might convene a group of potential funders from venture capitalists, successful entrepreneurs and other investors, along with community businesses, farmers and fledgling food entrepreneurs, to generate innovative ideas for growing food, improving access in communities, and creating new businesses and jobs. The group would develop funding for the most promising ideas.

Cultural leaders

We can identify and cultivate leaders, including community experts, to help Michigan residents make more forward-thinking choices and promote a love for gardening, cooking and good food. Organizations such as leadership academies or non-profits, with funding and support from foundations, could help shape a culturally, ethnically and racially diverse body of community experts who could advocate on behalf of good food and offer community-based and culturally appropriate consumer education.

Food and Farming Corps

We can create a Food and Farming Corps, similar to City Year or AmeriCorps, that utilizes college students and recent graduates to help create a new food and farming culture and support community-based food system development. A local Michigan college or university could convene a collaborative to develop a pilot Food and Farming Corps.

Photo by Vicki Morrone.

11: Incorporate good food education into the pre-K through 12th grade curriculum for all Michigan students.

Most Michigan youth have little or no formal educational exposure to agriculture or the food system. Using classroom curricula and extracurricular programs, we can meet core curriculum standards in new and engaging ways and expose students to an essential component of their health and the state's economy.

Agriscience and natural resource education programs, including 4-H and FFA, can serve as models for developing sustainability- and biodiversity-based curricula for all Michigan youth. Just as health and safety are interwoven into current teaching around curriculum standards, tools and activities that teach where food comes from and how it moves from farm to fork could be incorporated into school curricula to expand student understanding of agriscience, highlight agriculture career opportunities, and graduate youth who are informed and enthusiastic good food system participants.

These tools and activities do not have to be standard across the state. With encouragement and minimal official coordination from the Michigan Department of Education, local educators can partner with good food advocates and practitioners in their communities to develop district-level curricula suited to their needs and interests.

The National Research Council is currently crafting next generation science standards for elementary and secondary education. Educators and advocates could participate in the 2010 process in order to integrate a curriculum based on good food concepts into these standards.

Because no review process is currently under way or anticipated soon for social studies standards, we could instead engage with social studies educators to identify points where current curriculum standards might interface with good food concepts and publicize the findings to Michigan elementary and secondary school teachers.

The Michigan Department of Education, Michigan State University and other stakeholder groups can develop good food tool kits for use in school districts that:

- *Enable local districts to assess the needs and resources found locally to support integration of good food concepts into curriculum.*
- *Facilitate district planning and implementation of food-system-based K-12 curriculum with state, local and community partners.*

12: Implement a reimbursement program to provide an additional 10 cents per school meal, as a supplement to existing school meal funds, in order to purchase locally grown fruits and vegetables.

Tight budgets are often the biggest constraint to school expansion of local food purchasing. Local food is not always more expensive, but schools have little flexibility in their procurement procedures and limited budgets for fresh and minimally processed, locally grown produce or other products. Additional reimbursement funds made available through public-private partnerships could ease school food service budget constraints that can make it difficult to purchase fresh Michigan products, and increase school-children's access to and consumption of locally grown fruits and vegetables.

A portion of such funds could come from state designation of economic development funds to match the 20 to 30 cents that schools typically spend on fruits and vegetables for school lunches with an additional 10 cents intended specifically to purchase Michigan-grown fruits and vegetables. If such a program were fully funded, it would contribute millions of dollars annually to local economies across Michigan and would circulate through the state's economy. The 10 cent increase to the per meal budget for fruits and vegetables, if applied to the 142 million lunches served in Michigan in the 2008-2009 school year, would represent $14 million for Michigan farmers. If the full 30 cents per meal budget for fruits and vegetables were designated for Michigan-grown produce, it would represent more than $42 million.

Photo by Kathryn Colasanti.

13: Amend Michigan's General Property Tax Act to exempt certain on-farm renewable energy installations.

Currently, Michigan taxes on-farm business installations of renewable energy technologies as personal property. Yet reducing energy costs through renewable energy generation is a key survival strategy for farms, particularly greenhouses with the potential to raise vegetables year round.

Only certain methane digester electric-generating systems are exempt. Making geothermal, micro-hydro, bio-based co-generation, wind and solar installations exempt also would encourage innovation on farms, particularly to reduce energy costs and carbon emissions, and contribute to profitability through both higher efficiency and the ability to market based on the use of renewable energy sources.

This item should receive support from those involved in Michigan's green energy sector. This recommendation would also support Michigan's strategy to become a manufacturing hub for renewable energy equipment.

Opposition to reducing tax revenues may come from lawmakers and others concerned about Michigan's fiscal crisis. Proponents can overcome these objectives by making the case that encouraging such innovation will build the state's tax base; farm entrepreneurs will be more likely to make green energy investments if the state stops penalizing such innovation by taxing on-farm renewable energy installations as personal property.

14: Set targets for state-funded institutions to procure Michigan-grown, sustainably produced products.

To be profitable, farms need responsive and accessible markets. Schools, correctional facilities, hospitals and other publicly funded institutions serving food present underrealized markets that statewide targets could catalyze for Michigan farmers and producers. These targets could be set to align with the goal of sourcing 20 percent of food products from Michigan growers and producers by 2020. To the extent possible, these targets should give preference to small- and medium-scale farms using sustainable practices (e.g. verified by the Michigan Agriculture Environmental Assurance Program) to grow healthy products. Institutions should explore the potential to utilize grower agreements to encourage local farmers to produce the types of food they need and to minimize farmers' risk in transitioning to new markets.

Such preferences for small- and medium-scale farms would not be without precedent. The 2009 Washington State Legislature funded the Washington State Department of Agriculture to identify the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats to agriculture and make recommendations back to the legislature that would keep farming in Washington competitive and profitable. One of the recommendations was to revamp the state's food system to revitalize Washington's small-farm sector, shift Washington's large-scale farm sector toward increased service of the domestic market, and reduce any negative environmental, economic and social impacts.[14]

In the past five years, several states such as Illinois, Wisconsin, and Vermont, have passed legislation designed to improve the economic climate of their state through initiatives for institutional procurement of local food. Each state's legislative language has provided a benchmark from which to measure change. Michigan can learn from the efforts of these other states.

15: Direct $10 million to regional food supply chain infrastructure development investments through the Michigan state planning and development regions or other existing regional designations.

Funds authorized by the Michigan Legislature in partnership with investments from philanthropic foundations should be targeted toward strategic regional food system development based on regional assessments and plans. Funds could be distributed on the basis of the following parameters:

- *Funds should go to qualified regional authorities for regional investment rather than to individual grantees scattered statewide.*
- *Regional authorities would make funds available to public and private initiatives in the context of a regional strategy with input from food, farm, and other business and community development interests. Competitive applications would require business investment and collaboration that fit the regional strategy.*
- *Regional authorities would also grant other incentives available for improving food system infrastructure, such as tax credits for equipment purchases.*

16: Implement a food safety audit cost-share or reimbursement program targeted at small and medium-sized farms and work to ensure that audits are conducted in the context of the farm scale.

Food safety certification programs are set up with large-scale growers in mind and can be cost-prohibitive for small and medium-sized growers. To meet the need for food safety assurance, we must encourage farmers to get third-party food safety certification when it is appropriate or required by their buyers. Yet, we also need to level the playing field for small and medium-sized farmers.

One way to do this could be by developing a flat rate or sliding-scale reimbursement program for small and medium-sized farms to offset costs of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Good Agricultural Practices/Good Handling Practices and other third-party food safety audits. The New York State Good Agricultural Practices/Good Handling Practices Certification Assistance Program can serve as a model for a similar program in Michigan, which could be funded by the USDA Specialty Crop Block Grant Program and implemented and managed by the Michigan Department of Agriculture. We can also ensure that standards are applied in a manner that recognizes specific circumstances and alternative strategies for achieving the same end – a safe food supply with minimal levels of risk to the consumer.

The Food Safety Modernization Act (S.510), currently being considered by Congress, would strengthen federal enforcement of food safety rules for industry and would also significantly affect farmers. The Michigan Department of Agriculture has established an advisory committee to explore a self-audit assurance process for farmers whose markets do not currently demand third-party food safety assurance certification. A self-audit process would provide guidance on voluntary implementation and would guide the farmer in preparing for third-party food safety certification if the need arises.

17: Provide financial incentives for farmers and for development of food system infrastructure to support institutional local food purchasing programs.

Though institutions offer stable, steady markets, they may provide smaller profit margins to farmers than other markets. To encourage farmer participation in institutional markets and increase both the supply and infrastructure available to institutions, financial incentives are needed. These incentives may be needed only temporarily until market forces allow for increased institutional volume to offset the profit margin differentials.

One possibility is to offer tax incentives for the development of local food storage, processing, packing and distribution facilities. Another is to develop a grant or low-interest loan program to facilitate farmers' transition from production of commodity crops to production of specialty crops for sale to institutions.

18: Develop a farm-to-institution grant program to provide planning, implementation, and kitchen or cafeteria equipment grants to maximize the use of locally grown, raised and processed foods in institutional cafeterias.

By helping communities develop and implement farm-to-institution projects, we can maximize the use of locally grown, raised, produced and processed foods in institutional cafeterias. Initial investments in farm-to-institution projects can also help communities realize economic development gains from utilizing the purchasing power of institutions to support Michigan farmers.

This agenda priority would require the creation of a new program administered by the state or a public-private alliance. Philanthropic organizations could also play a role in generating funding. Grants could be directed to institutions for planning, implementation and equipment for local food purchasing and use in cafeterias. The Rozo McLaughlin Farm to School Grant Program in Vermont, which is coordinated by the Vermont Agency of Agriculture, can serve as a model for a Michigan-based grant program.

19: Direct state agencies to maximize capital access through state-sponsored programs that provide farm financing.

Lack of access to capital is often the chief obstacle to starting or expanding a farm. According to several farm-development programs – including California FarmLink, the Minnesota Land Stewardship Program and the Intervale Center in Vermont – increasing numbers of new and first-generation farmers choose to maximize credit card debt rather than approach financial institutions such as the USDA Farm Service Agency or Farm Credit Services. Many new farmers have little equity in their businesses or may have no assets at all. Some believe they will be turned down for loans and do not want to go through what might be perceived as an onerous process. Others have not received help in preparing business plans. For reasons such as these, new and promising farmers face undercapitalized startups that present performance challenges and missed market opportunities. State agencies could expand capital access for new farmers in several ways:

Agriculture Individual Development Accounts

We can establish an Agriculture Individual Development Account Trust Fund (AgIDA) to be endowed by philanthropic and public funds and subsequently self-funded through application fees and interest on the initial endowment. A $2 million endowment that generated 3-4 percent annually would generate up to $80,000; a portion would remain in the endowment with a portion used to leverage an equal amount of money from the federal Department of Health and Human Services' Assets for Independence program. This AgIDA Trust Fund would assist beginning and limited-resource farmers to acquire collateral for farm loans by matching their personal savings on a 2:1 basis with endowment funds and federal dollars. If the Agriculture IDAs were linked to a beginning farmer loan fund, additional dollars to support the endowment could come through application fees.

Beginning farmer loan fund

We can create a Michigan beginning farmer loan fund through bond sales. Once established, the program would be self-funded with borrower application and closing fees. Beginning farmers with a net worth less than $500,000 would be eligible. Loans could be made through local lending entities that apply for the funds and demonstrate capacity to loan to beginning farmers.

Loan guarantees

We can encourage more banks to lend to new and beginning farmers by using the Michigan Economic Development Corporation (MEDC) Capital Access Program (CAP) to partially underwrite their loans. We can expand the number of banks and credit unions that are able to apply for the agriculture CAP by assisting them to develop a plan for loaning to new and beginning farmers. As part of this strategy, we could expand the MEDC Angel Investment tool to include agricultural production and related businesses.

Farm financial planning

The Michigan Department of Agriculture could set aside a portion of Michigan's 2011 (and subsequent years) specialty crop block grant funds to support small-scale farmers with whole farm financial planning. Small-scale farmers, a growth sector in Michigan, lack tools to collect data on their production costs and market potential. Commercial lenders cite this information as the most critical indicator of loan repayment capacity. The ultimate goal is to develop tools which can be utilized for financial planning by many Michigan farmers, thereby increasing the availability of loan capital into this developing sector.

20: Ensure that all state and higher education, business, work force and economic development programs include farming and agriculture in their target audiences for programmatic development, training, investment and technical assistance.

Strategies to make farming more accessible to new entrants are essential to respond to opportunities for a green economy and to replace our aging farmer population. Farm workers, immigrant and refugee populations, young people currently growing up on farms and other potential new farmers could benefit from this support. Strategies include:

Regional alliances
Green Sector and Regional Skills Alliance funds in the Department of Energy, Labor and Economic Growth (DELEG) could be used to create a new statewide sustainable agriculture sector alliance focused on career opportunities in food and farming. It would include regional alliances of farmers and other supply chain employers.

Farm apprenticeships
A portion of DELEG work force development funds could support paid farm apprenticeship programs created by regional alliances. These apprenticeships could be coupled to programs at Michigan State University (MSU) to link academic training and practical experience.

Expanded farmer training programs
With support from MEDC and DELEG, MSU could partner with other organizations to expand its successful Organic Farming Training Program to offer a comprehensive beginning farmer program to new farming entrants from a range of backgrounds across the state.

Research on season extension
MSU research and outreach could increase efforts to address Michigan's seasonal limitations through projects on topics such as season extension for intensive crop production in unheated passive solar greenhouses, and explore and promote urban farming opportunities. U.S. Department of Labor State Energy Sector Partnership and Training Grant funds could be used to support the expansion of year-round farming and explore opportunities for developing bio-based materials for use in manufacturing season-extension structures.

Emerging markets
State agencies, MSU and farmer organizations should encourage Michigan producers to seek out and supply emerging markets at state and regional levels. Two of these markets provide particularly great opportunities: certified organic production and pasture-based animal products. MSU Extension, the Michigan Agricultural Experiment Station and appropriate state agencies (Michigan Department of Agriculture, DELEG, Department of Natural Resources and Environment and others) can help producers respond to these opportunities.

Photo by Vicki Morrone.

21: Contingent upon further market assessment, establish a state meat and poultry inspection (MPI) program in cooperation with the federal Food Safety and Inspection Services (FSIS) to spur new meat processing infrastructure.

The federal government allows for state MPI programs that provide inspection services that are "at least equal to" federal inspection. Meat slaughtered under state MPI programs can be sold as retail cuts. A new provision in the 2008 federal Farm Bill would allow for such state-inspected meat to be sold across state lines for the first time.[15]

Most of Michigan's smaller scale livestock producers must use "custom-exempt" slaughter facilities, because federally inspected facilities are often too far away. This means they must pre-sell the animal prior to slaughter by wholes, halves or quarters rather than selling retail meat cuts. The growth of local and sustainable meat and poultry businesses in Michigan is limited without more accessible federal inspection or equivalent state inspection for retail sales.

States that have reinstated federal-equivalent meat inspection services in recent years have experienced increases in the number of small and mid-sized plants that go into business and grow.[16] State inspectors can provide one-on-one service to small- and midscale meat processing businesses that that is more responsive than USDA can provide, thereby enabling these businesses to grow.

Michigan can target limited funding for a state MPI program by focusing on gaps in service across the state and on particular market needs and opportunities in meat processing. Steps to take include assessing the capacity and geographic accessibility of meat processing facilities and estimating the number of new processing facilities, including lower cost mobile units, that markets would support and the scale at which they could operate profitably.

22: Include Michigan food and agriculture in existing state marketing efforts, such as the Pure Michigan campaign, to build awareness of the state's great variety and quality of local food products and farm amenities.

Photo by Cara Maple.

Much of the new food system infrastructure needed to achieve the Good Food Charter vision will develop from sales of Michigan products to Midwest neighbors, including Canada. Consumers in those areas may not know that Michigan peaches, plums, asparagus and other produce rival any they currently purchase from other places. Even Michigan consumers are largely in the dark on this fact.

Good food entrepreneurs are changing these perceptions, but state and local marketing support is needed to help them tell the Michigan story in food markets. Sales of Michigan food and agricultural goods to surrounding states will also bring additional revenue into Michigan to support economic growth and create new jobs.

23: Charge business support entities, such as the 18 Michigan Technical Education Centers, with identifying and supporting the equipment and process engineering needs of farmers and other agri-food enterprises and ensure that food and agriculture are included in state and local economic development plans.

The state's many business and technical assistance entities have capacities in engineering, logistics and other areas of expertise needed in the food system. Equipment and processes are designed almost exclusively for the large-scale, global tiers of the food system. Shorter supply chains require different types and scales of equipment and processes. Technical assistance providers can support food system entrepreneurs in their work to develop equipment and process solutions.

Policymakers at all levels can take the lead by requesting that entities that provide technical assistance investigate and support the food system infrastructure development needs of all players – small, medium and large. Policymakers can also help ensure that representatives from food and agriculture sectors are included in discussions and plans for state and local economic development.

24: Examine Michigan's food- and agriculture-related laws and regulations (food safety, production, processing, retailing, etc.) for provisions that create unnecessary transaction costs and regulatory burdens on low risk businesses and ensure that regulations are applied in a way that acknowledges the diversity of production practices.

Most of the state's food and agriculture regulations put farms and food businesses of all sizes and types under the same rules irrespective of their relative risk. The typical one-size-fits-all approach is generally geared to higher risk situations; less risky operations must comply with requirements for equipment, processes, and other investments of time and money that exceed real needs. For example, a regulatory requirement for a bathroom for workers is reasonable, but requiring a family to add portable restrooms in a 2-acre garden, when a house bathroom is close by, is not. This regulatory mismatch can stymie food system infrastructure development because unduly burdensome regulations present significant barriers to market entry and market development.

Federal and state laws must be revised so that local and state authorities charged with protecting public health and natural resources can match the level of oversight with the level of relative risk. The state's academic institutions can take the lead in assessing the impact of current food- and agriculture-related laws and regulations on farm and agri-food businesses of various sizes.

Photo by Cara Maple.

25: Develop systems for collecting and sharing production and market data and other data relevant to regional food supply chain development.

We need to provide agri-food entrepreneurs and technical assistance providers with information they need about the size, potential and status of markets for local and regional good food. To meet the needs of institutions, farmers, processors and distributors involved in local purchasing programs, we need to track the extent and growth of local food purchasing as well as our capacity for producing food for local markets.

Part of this data collection should include a state-level survey program to collect, manage and analyze food purchasing data from Michigan institutions. The Michigan Food Policy Council could assist state agencies to incorporate questions on local purchasing into current reporting mechanisms. Michigan Agricultural Experiment Station researchers could manage data collation and analysis.

The Michigan Department of Agriculture (MDA) can use its long-standing collaboration[c] with the USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service to initiate a series of surveys to provide benchmark and ongoing information such as the number of farms engaged in local and regional food markets and the market value of sales and production volume involved. USDA interest in collecting this information has increased in recent years – for example, statistics on direct marketing and organic farming have been added to the Census of Agriculture.

Lawmakers and MDA officials can also work with Michigan State University to establish benchmarks and ongoing information about local and regional food demand, including attributes that consumers are looking for and whether supply is meeting that demand. Federal funding for agricultural research could be leveraged for the upfront cost of developing and establishing such data collection.

Photo by Russel Lewis.

[c] *Since 1919, the Agriculture Statistics section of the Michigan Department of Agriculture's Executive Division and the U.S. Department of Agriculture have collaborated on collecting information useful at both the state and national levels. For more, see this MDA overview at http://www.michigan.gov/mda/0,1607,7 125 2961_2963 ,00.html (accessed March 29, 2010).*

A CALL TO ACTION

There are many dimensions of Michigan's food and agriculture practices and we recognize that this charter does not address all of them. Some people will find causes near to their heart that are not represented here. We do not mean to minimize the importance of other issues, however, we do believe that the agenda priorities presented here represent opportunities that are both high priority and feasible within our current social, political and economic reality.

Others will no doubt charge that our state's budget crisis leaves no opportunity to address anything other than economic development and that any calls for new money are simply untenable. We recognize that not everything proposed in these pages is possible in the short term. However, we believe that all of the proposed agenda priorities are opportunities for economic development that will also lead us to a healthier, more equitable, more resilient and more attractive state.

We invite you to envision with us a thriving economy, equity and sustainability for all of Michigan and its people through a food system rooted in local communities and centered on good food. And we invite you to use these pages as a road map for moving towards this vision.

Please see **www.michiganfood.org** for further resources and information.

Above: photo by Cara Maple; Right: photo by Kathryn Colasanti.

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Photos (clockwise from top left) by: Vicki Morrone, Russel Lewis (2), Cara Maple (2).

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