

Genesee County Food Systems Economic Analysis

A report by

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A localized food system is one where a greater proportion of food produced in a region stays in the region to be processed, distributed, sold and consumed (Buck, 2007). Food systems account for all stages of the food chain, starting with agricultural inputs for production (such as fertilizer, seeds and machinery) and ending in consumption. Genesee County has a significant agricultural sector. The purpose of this project was to provide a better understanding of the Genesee County's current food system and assess its potential to spur county-wide economic growth if it were localized. This report was developed in partnership between undergraduate and graduate students from the Michigan State University Urban and Regional Planning Practicum Program and the Community Foundation of Greater Flint. The analysis focuses on production and consumption of produce in Genesee County and how gaps between them may be alleviated.

An economic analysis was conducted, contrasting production and consumption of produce in Genesee County, utilizing the City of Flint and City of Burton as snapshots of existing conditions within Genesee County. This knowledge helps understand the current level of access that residents in Genesee County have to produce grown there. The food industry sub-sectors make up 16% of establishments (or businesses), 17% of paid employees and 8% of annual payroll for employees in Genesee County. In comparison, industries not engaging in food activities which have 84% of establishments, 83% of paid employees and 92% of annual payroll in Genesee County. Food industries make up a greater portion of Genesee County's economy than that of the State of Michigan as a whole: 12% of establishments in Michigan belong to the food industry, 13% of paid employees and only 6% of annual payroll.

It was determined that, although there is significant agricultural production in Genesee County, production predominantly consists of cash crops and a small percentage is dedicated to fruit and vegetable production. Additionally, it was determined that residents in Genesee County in general

consume less than the recommended amount of fruits and vegetables. The availability of fresh fruits and vegetables grown in Genesee County is extremely limited in retail outlets, making it challenging for residents to consume local produce. There are substantial gaps in available data pertaining to where local produce is sold and in what quantity it is consumed. Future analysis focusing on obtaining this information is important to fully understand the food system in Genesee County.

As the Community Foundation of Greater Flint and other local organizations work to create greater food access and justice for residents in Genesee County, there are a number of initiatives that may be undertaken to strengthen the local food system and increase overall health:

- Gather better data to help measure production and consumption of local produce in Genesee County
- Develop a local produce directory
- Redefine what “local” food means to Genesee County
- Develop a food policy council
- Develop a regional food hub
- Review local ordinances and remove barriers
- Continue to build youth and community education programs for healthy, local foods

Enacting these measures will provide stakeholders in Genesee County with policy and institutional structures to assist the local food system and people’s access to local foods.