

**White House Conference on Hunger, Nutrition, and Health Ideas**

**From the MSU Center for Regional Food Systems**

[Michigan State University Center for Regional Food Systems \(CRFS\)](#) advances regionally rooted food systems through applied research, education, and outreach. CRFS work fosters a thriving economy, equity, and sustainability for Michigan, the nation, and the planet by advancing systems that produce food that is healthy, green, fair, and affordable. We do this by uniting the knowledge and experience of diverse stakeholders and communities with that of Michigan State University (MSU) faculty and staff.

[The Michigan Good Food Charter](#) (Charter)<sup>1</sup>, outlines a set of goals for an accessible, healthy, fair, sustainable, diverse and equitable, food system and was developed and updated through a statewide grassroots initiative that promotes, implements, and tracks progress toward Charter goals. The initiative is coordinated by CRFS, guided by a coalition of state and community partners, and informed by Michigan-wide and regional food systems network activities. The most recent 2022 Charter action recommendations both build upon the essential arguments of the original Charter (published in 2010) and represent the current goals, priorities, and strategies of a dynamic coalition of partners, including representatives from over 150 Michigan agriculture, food, health, education, business, and governmental organizations.

The latest iteration of the Charter increases the commitment to advance racial equity in the food system and lift power-sharing models for food systems work that embrace diversity, equity, and inclusion. CRFS and its partners have developed programs and networks to facilitate market relationships to meet the growing demand for local/regional food; cultivate strong farm to institution (including schools and early child care environments) and regional food distribution programs; grow the capacity of local food and community advocates to create positive policy environments for local/regional food; understand the work force and employment landscape of food systems jobs; and address gaps in access to financing, lending, resources, and technical assistance.

Based on internal work and learnings from the many groups across Michigan and the U.S. leading efforts to operationalize racial equity principles in all aspects of their programs, CRFS recognizes that we all, including the USDA, can advance racial justice



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<sup>1</sup> Scalera, L.J., Mickie, Q., Johnson, Y., Mensch, L., & Kelly, R.E. (2022). *2022 Michigan Good Food Charter*. Michigan State University Center for Regional Food Systems. [michiganfood.org](http://michiganfood.org)

and equity while supporting food producers and communities. To advance, federal and other food and environment programs, including grants, technical assistance and lending opportunities must continue to be reviewed, revised, and redeveloped with an equity lens. This includes acknowledgment of historical and current disparities in programs, including those of the USDA and clear transparency of how government and communities are addressing these disparities. Michigan communities of color experience disproportionate gaps in nutrition security, healthy and culturally relevant food access, technical resources and lending opportunities for food and farm entrepreneurs of color.<sup>2</sup> The impact of this work has the potential to close gaps in who owns agricultural land, who produces, processes, distributes, and sells food and who has access to it.

CRFS' vision is that Michigan, the USA and the world have thriving food economies distinguished by equity, health, and sustainability. There is an opportunity to make meaningful changes by working with organizations, food producers, and consumers affected by federal programs and policy as partners. This can be achieved through the following six broad strategies, which are a summary of the documented community informed Michigan Good Food Charter recommendations. CRFS has overlapped the Michigan Good Food Charter strategies with the five pillars that define the scope of the White House Conference on Hunger, Nutrition, and Health:

**Improve food access and affordability, integrate nutrition and health, support physical activity for all, and empower consumers to make and have access to healthy choices**

1. **Cultivate thriving local/regional farm and food businesses:** Targeted investment, policies, and technical assistance can ensure the long-term financial viability of Michigan farm and food businesses while fostering financial empowerment for those producers who have been marginalized. Programs should be designed to reach and serve racially underserved communities to increase the number of producers of color, food startups, enterprises, grocers, restaurateurs, distributors, processors, market organizers and other food system workers.
  - a. Generate equitable access to capital and maximize investment opportunities for farm and food businesses and BIPOC-led food systems initiatives.
    - i. Advocate for staff at public, private, and government lending institutions to regularly participate in mandatory antiracism and/or diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) training. Eliminate well-documented systemic inequities experienced by BIPOC,

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<sup>2</sup> Carr, K.N., Polanco, V., Tyler, S. (2020). Michigan Farmers of Color and the Future of Sustainable Food Systems. *Journal of Science Policy & Governance*, vol. 17 (1). <http://doi.org/10.38126/JSPG170102>

LGBTQIA+, veteran, disabled, and women farm and food business owners and workers.

- ii. Direct local, state, and federal agencies and private lending institutions to alleviate barriers BIPOC, small-scale, beginning, and other marginalized farm and food business owners face through farm financing programs.
- iii. Provide outreach to communities that have been identified as racially underserved. Encourage USDA staff, grantees and partners to attend events (when invited) in underserved communities to share programmatic information and drive the pipeline of citizens that need resources.
- iv. Support programs that focus on food access pipeline, primarily in racially underserved communities and in targeted industries, to drive people who need resources to those resources.
- v. Review existing and where appropriate, modify grant application narrative content and processes that encourage racially diverse community efforts to develop power-sharing models that honor the knowledge and wisdom of these communities. Such catalytic grant power-sharing models in racially underserved communities may drive larger-scale investment in these communities. Develop BIPOC- led and - focused training and technical assistance opportunities that are culturally relevant and available in multiple languages and formats.
- vi. Provide more lending opportunities that consider higher risk lending at lower amounts for the growing number of food, business startups of people of color and new and beginning farmers of color, along with other limited resource farmers who have not had historical, and generational access to farmland. For example, USDA could restructure or eliminate matching fund requirements to make grant programs more accessible to farmers, food business owners, and organizations regardless of their financial and technical capacity.

2. **Prioritize local and regional food systems within a global economy:** We can strengthen Michigan communities by growing the market for locally and regionally produced food, increasing transparency and communication in the food supply chain, encouraging values-based food purchasing strategies, and investing in local/regional food value chain infrastructure.
  - a. Develop systems, tools, and resources for marketing locally, regionally, and sustainably produced food.

- b. Invest in regional food distribution, processing, and manufacturing infrastructure to address the priorities of small- and mid-scale local/regional farm and food businesses.
  - c. Equip farmers markets with tools, resources, and policy support to create thriving marketplaces for local farm and food products.
  - d. Ensure food producers and communities are prepared for environmental, economic, and public health crises.
- 3. Support people to have real choices that lead to good food and health:** We must expand food access, foster the vitality of local/regional farm and food businesses, and address deeply rooted, systemic issues that lead to inequitable health outcomes. We can foster dignity and choice in food systems by prioritizing approaches that connect food, health, and community food sovereignty.
- a. Eliminate barriers to food and nutrition security and ensure the nutritional needs of Michigan's children are met.
    - i. Recognize first foods (foods children eat during the first 36 months) as a critical part of the food system and integrate first foods access and early nutrition into food/nutrition security initiatives, policies, and actions.
    - ii. Make Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) enrollment, recertification, and usage more accessible.
    - iii. Expand access to healthy, culturally relevant food and redemption of benefit/incentive programs within community food models such as gardens, farm stands, and other community-based solutions. Example: Tribal members who participate in the Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR) are not able to participate in nutrition incentive programs that rely on SNAP eligibility for participation.
    - iv. Provide local food producers and small farms with access to online SNAP purchasing within the state of Michigan.
  - b. Establish healthy and culturally relevant food environments in community-led, public, food service, and food retail settings.
    - i. Ensure children in early care and K-12 settings have access to nutritious meals and snacks throughout the year.
    - ii. Prioritize strategies that empower healthy food choices in marginalized communities and increase access to nutritious and culturally relevant foods for highly vulnerable populations, such as incarcerated individuals and emergency food service patrons.

- c. Design food and nutrition education to incorporate culturally relevant foodways, cultivate understanding of the connections between food and health, and foster food systems literacy.
  - i. Integrate the practice of “food as medicine” into conventional health care, including improving nutrition education for medical students, health professionals, and researchers so they are able to understand and account for social, environmental, and cultural influences on people’s health.
  - ii. Nutrition education for young eaters and their families in school, early care, and community-based settings can prioritize learning experiences that:
    1. situate schools and early care and education sites as centers for student, family, and community outreach and education;
    2. coordinate with other physical activity and built-environment initiatives;
    3. involve active learning and inclusive teaching strategies;
    4. include food systems equity as a part of the curriculum, alongside health, safety, and household food and culinary skills;
    5. emphasize the value of a good food system: healthy, fair, accessible, diverse, sustainable, and equitable; and
    6. empower families to celebrate cultural identities through food choices offered within educational institutions.
- 4. **Establish fair compensation, safe working environments, and opportunities for career advancement in food systems:** Food business owners, workers, and public and private agencies must work together to develop quality food systems jobs, design equitable career pathways, and ensure that food systems jobs protect the health of workers, communities, and the environment.
  - a. Equip farm and food business owners with adequate support to offer fair, comprehensive compensation and benefits.
  - b. Design equitable pathways to food systems employment, business ownership, and long-term careers.
  - c. Ensure that food systems jobs protect the health of workers, communities, and the environment.
  - d. Create opportunities for food systems workers to access resources to address stress, conflict management, and mental health care concerns.

**Enhance nutrition and food security research**

5. **Use the power of collaboration to dismantle racism and systemic inequity in food systems:** How we work together is as important as what we work on. Because no organization or community member can make the necessary systemic changes alone, collaboration and partnership are crucial. To successfully dismantle systemic inequities in the food system, we must increase the diversity and representation of people participating in food systems decision making at all levels.
- a. Create leadership development pathways for a diverse body of community experts to advocate and guide good food systems initiatives, networks, and policy.
    - i. Informed by the existing model in USDA Office of Partnership and Public Engagement (OPPE), increase the number of USDA liaisons that build trust, connection and sustainable partnerships with organizations based in racially underserved communities.
    - ii. Provide language-diverse assistance and education (i.e., workshops, webinars) to strengthen underserved food enterprises, food advocacy organizations and networks, food access points and food education for new Americans and bi-lingual speakers.
  - b. Invest in the continued development of cross-sector networks that support the development of good food systems.
  - c. Conduct research, education, evaluation, and advocacy efforts using equitable and antiracist principles/practices.
    - i. Raise the profile of and communicate results of projects that are operationalizing racial equity and other forms of equity so that USDA staff and USDA grantees can benefit. This action could be in the form of case studies or project bulletin(s).

**In addition to the pillars provided by the White House CRFS has documented in the Michigan Good Food Charter that climate resilience and land stewardship are relevant areas to address in eliminating hunger and promoting nutrition and health:**

6. **Foster climate resilience through equitable land stewardship:** We can invest in farmers and food producers as ecosystem stewards to protect rural and urban farmland, fisheries, and watersheds; reduce food waste; and keep plastic out of landfills. Additionally, land use policies and financial investment can improve access to land for current and future generations while advancing community food sovereignty.
- a. Leverage land use planning strategies to improve access to farmland and support community food sovereignty for current and future generations.

- b. Invest in farmers as ecosystem stewards by supporting and incentivizing food and agriculture practices that protect the integrity of our soil, water, and air.
- c. Support the development of food value chains that prioritize local and sustainably produced foods.
- d. Invest in and support food recovery and food waste reduction practices throughout the supply chain and among consumers.
- e. Minimize single-use plastic and prioritize reusable, recyclable, and compostable packaging and serving alternatives.