



Celebrating, Networking, and Gathering Feedback: 2019 Michigan Farm to Institution Network Gathering Evaluation Report

The Michigan Farm to Institution Network (MFIN) is a space for learning, sharing, and working together to get more local food to institutions. Network membership is open to institutional food service directors and buyers as well as farmers, food vendors and suppliers, advocates, supporters, and researchers.

On Wednesday, November 20, 2019, MFIN brought together about 75 people from at least 22 different Michigan counties for a day-long gathering. This was the first time MFIN met without partnering with other networks since it first launched in the spring of 2014. The event had three goals: to celebrate farm to institution successes, to facilitate peer networking, and to gather feedback to inform the direction of MFIN beyond 2020.

The gathering included:

- **Stories** from nine farm to institution practitioners, some heartfelt and some funny, that were a big hit!
- Ten facilitators who gathered **feedback** from institutional food buyers, farmers and food suppliers, state and local government staff, and other advocates and supporters through two roundtable discussion sessions.
- Three Cultivate Michigan **awards** that were announced for local purchasing milestones reached by Friendship Centers of Emmet County, West Ottawa Public Schools, and Zeeland Public Schools.
- A [keynote by Dr. Diane Golzynski](#) and [opening](#) by Keith Soster of University of Michigan Dining that highlighted the evolution of farm to institution in Michigan and the relationships that are the heart of farm to institution programs.
- **Seasonal Michigan foods**, including more than 10 seasonal items on the salad bar, made for a colorful, hearty lunch, and caramel apples and popcorn were a fun snack.

Overall, the network gathering fulfilled attendees' expectations of networking with peers, which was one of the event organizers' three goals for the day. A second goal for the event, to celebrate farm to institution successes, also seemed successful, based on the positive feedback attendees shared both directly to MFIN management team members and anonymously through the event evaluation. Several people remarked that they enjoyed the stories shared through the day. Many attendees expressed general enthusiasm for the event and the network (see Figure 1). No one shared negative comments or expressed dissatisfaction with the event.

FIGURE 1. COMMENTS FROM MFIN GATHERING PARTICIPANTS

Several people remarked that they enjoyed the stories shared through the day. Many attendees expressed general enthusiasm for the event and the network. No one shared negative comments or expressed dissatisfaction with the event.

"I'm excited for the next five years!"

"This was great! Learned a lot!"

"This was very informative, and the information will definitely help me answer questions I get from community members."

"Emphasis on what we learned and honoring how far the work has come in the keynote was very uplifting!"

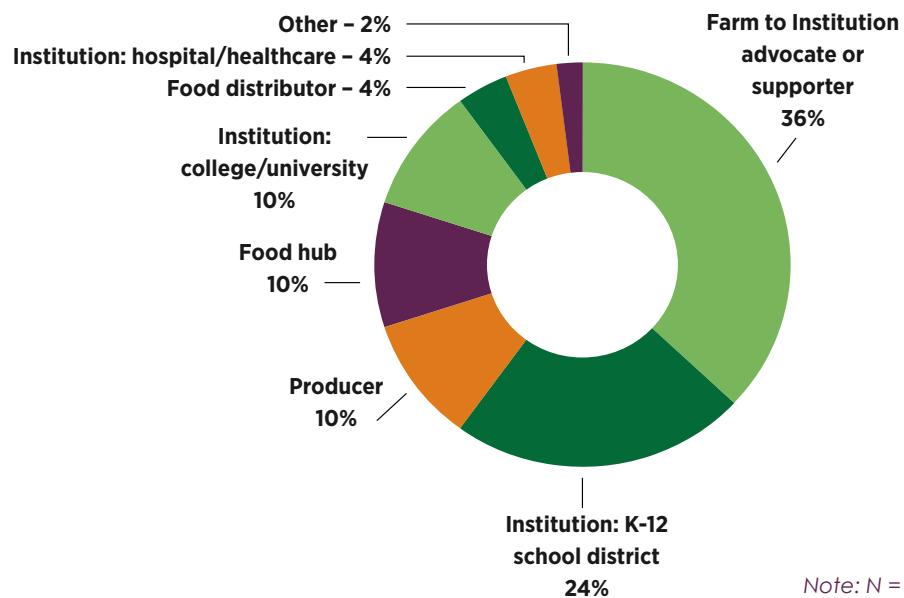
"Keep on keeping on!"

WHO PARTICIPATED?

Based on completed event evaluations ($N = 51$, response rate of 68%), the gathering brought together people with a range of affiliations who were able to network and learn from each other. The largest groups represented farm to institution supporters and K-12 schools or districts (see Figure 2).

The gathering brought together people with a range of affiliations who were able to network and learn from each other.

FIGURE 2. WHAT BEST DESCRIBES YOUR ROLE WITH MFIN?



Note: $N = 48$

WHY DID PEOPLE COME?

Most people said they came to the MFIN gathering to network and to learn what others are doing related to farm to institution (see Figure 3). More than half of attendees indicated coming to represent their institution, business, or organization.

FIGURE 3. WHAT BROUGHT YOU TO THE 2019 MFIN GATHERING?



Note: $N = 51$



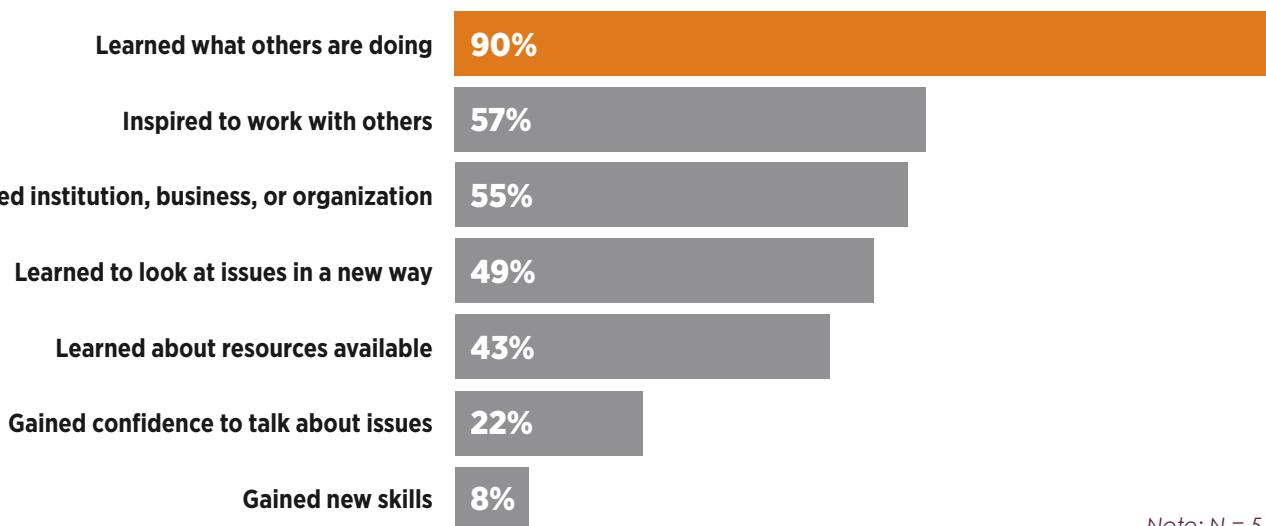
WHAT DID PEOPLE GET OUT OF THE GATHERING?

When asked "How has today's Michigan Farm to Institution Network Gathering impacted you?" most attendees indicated that they learned about what others are doing related to farm to institution (see Figure 4).

Roughly half of attendees indicated that the meeting inspired them to work with others; enabled them to represent their institution, business, or organization; helped them learned to look at farm to institution issues in a

new way; and helped them learned about resources available. Everyone indicated that the meeting impacted them in at least one of the seven ways named in the survey.

FIGURE 4. HOW HAS THE 2019 MFIN GATHERING IMPACTED YOU?



Note: N = 51

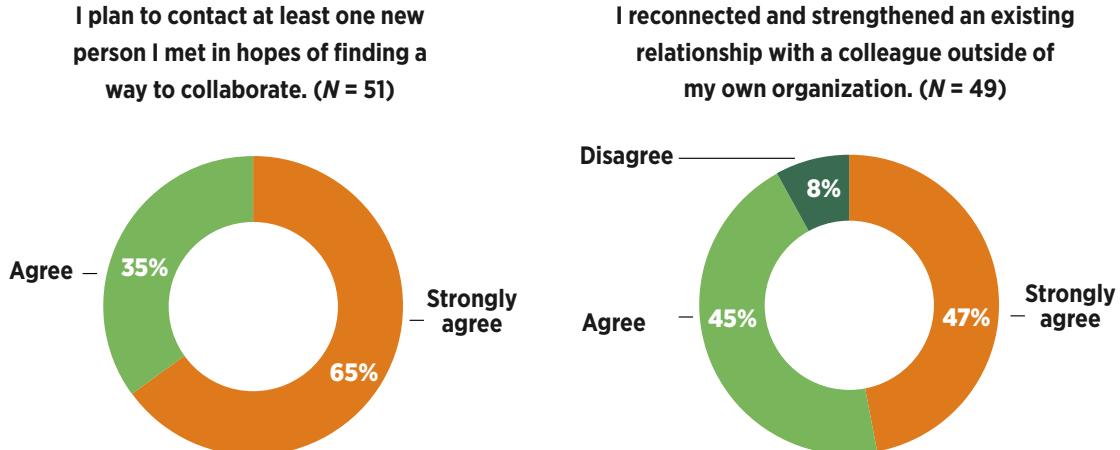
HOW MUCH NETWORKING HAPPENED?

Another way to assess the impact of the 2019 MFIN gathering is looking at the level of networking at the event. The evaluation data shows that

the event impacted both new and previously established relationships. All respondents indicated making new connections and nearly all indicated

strengthening existing connections (see Figure 5).

FIGURE 5. NETWORKING IMPACTS AT THE 2019 MFIN GATHERING



FUTURE DIRECTIONS

In addition to providing networking and peer-learning opportunities, the 2019 MFIN gathering initiated conversations among members about future directions for the network. These conversations included reflections on

the benefit of current network activities, ideas for future network activities, and thoughts on the vision and values the network prioritizes. In the coming months, MFIN will continue to gather feedback to better understand how

MFIN has served its members and can continue to do so in the future.

Stay in touch with MFIN in 2020 and beyond by signing up as a member!



The Michigan Farm to Institution Network is coordinated by the Michigan State University (MSU) Center for Regional Food Systems with support from MSU Extension. For more information about the network, visit mifarmtoinstitution.org and cultivatemichigan.org or contact info@cultivatemichigan.org.

Kathryn Colasanti
Specialist
Center for Regional Food Systems,
Michigan State University
colokat@msu.edu

Colleen Matts
Farm to Institution Specialist
Center for Regional Food Systems,
Michigan State University
matts@msu.edu

Published June 2020
Photo Credits:
Page 2 – Eat Local Food, LLC
Page 4 – Lindsay Scalera