

INCREASING UNDERSTANDING OF THE MICHIGAN GOOD FOOD CHARTER NETWORK

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► BACKGROUND

Network Development in Food Systems Work

Network development within and between states, as a means to strengthen local and regional food systems in the United States, has been growing. Food system networks tend to follow the concept of collective impact as described by Kania and Kramer (2011),¹ where organizations from different backgrounds can work together under a common agenda, shared measurement systems, mutually reinforcing activities, continuous communication, and with leadership that acts as backbone support.

Shapiro, Hoey, Colasanti, and Savas (2015)² scanned a number of network initiatives that have developed across the United States and suggested that most tend to function under the collective impact theory. They also suggested that, while each initiative has its own unique structure and vision, there are several themes reported by each that span the initiatives studied, including time required, trust building and engagement, and development of strategy for the network.

The literature suggests that food system networks are developed to combine the diversity of organizations across the system and are successful through a number of commonly identified themes, including but not limited to a common understanding, trust, strategic thinking and planning, and solid communication.

The Michigan Good Food Charter

The Michigan Good Food Charter is a policy document that was developed in 2009 by Michigan organizations that identified a need to develop a food system that is healthy, green, fair, and affordable (Colasanti et al., 2010).³ It has provided a common agenda for a diverse range of organizations, and since its inception, organizations and individuals have been invited to sign a resolution of support (ROS) for the Charter. Through the resolution, it is thought, decision-makers and policy makers will be encouraged to support growing, selling, and buying good food across Michigan.

In 2015, a study was conducted to better understand the network of organizations that have signed the ROS for the Charter. The Michigan State University (MSU) Center for Regional Food Systems (CRFS) focuses some of its efforts on network development to support the achievement of the goals of the Charter. A better understanding of the effectiveness of these networks and how they have an impact will guide network development in the future.

1 Kania, J., & Kramer, M. (2011). Collective impact. *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, 9(1), 36–41.

2 Shapiro, L. F., Hoey, L., Colasanti, K., & Savas, S.A. (2015). You can't rush the process: Collective impact models of food systems change. East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Center for Regional Food Systems. Retrieved from foodsystems.msu.edu/resources/collective_impact_models_of_food_systems_change

3 Colasanti, K., Cantrell, P., Cocciarelli, S., Collier, A., Edison, T., Doss, J., ... Smalley, S. (2010). Michigan Good Food Charter. East Lansing, MI: C. S. Mott Group for Sustainable Food Systems at Michigan State University, Food Bank Council of Michigan, Michigan Food Policy Council. Retrieved from michiganfood.org/uploads/files/Charter.pdf

Understanding the Michigan Good Food Charter Network

The signatories of the Charter can be divided into organizational signatories (organizations that have signed the ROS) and individual signatories (individuals who have expressed support for the Charter without specific affiliation with an organization). For the purpose of this study, we looked at the network among the Charter's organizational signatories.

The number of organizational signatories has continued to grow; 261 were recorded in early 2014 and 342 in early 2015. MSU CRFS believes that several networks, such as the Michigan Farm to Institution Network, the Michigan Food Hub Network, the Michigan Local Food Council Network, and the Michigan Meat Network, are growing. There are somewhat informed assumptions that the number of people working toward the goals of

the Charter is increasing and that the work within the Michigan Good Food movement is building momentum. Some fundamental questions arise from this change, which were asked in this study:

- What does it mean to have increasing numbers of organizational signatories to the ROS?
- What factors are required to maintain a network such as the organizational signatories to the Charter ROS?
- How do organizations work together within the Charter ROS network?

A survey was conducted to better understand the organizational network that supports the Charter.

METHODOLOGY

Organizational Survey

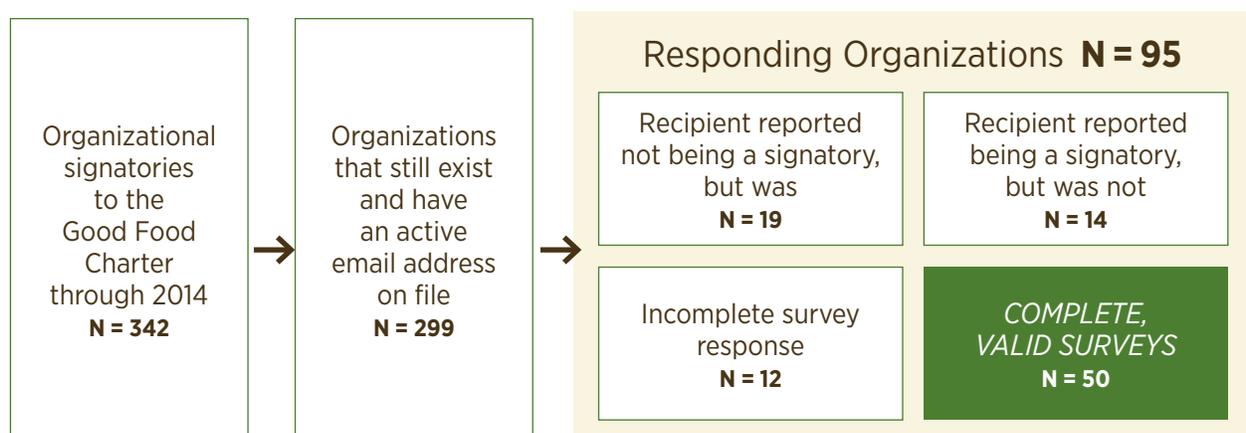
In March and April 2015, the faculty and staff from MSU CRFS and MSU's Department of Psychology conducted a web-based survey of organizations that had signed the Charter through 2014. To build a population frame, the research group started with the Charter's 342 organizational signatories but removed organizations that no longer existed and organizations with no contact information registered with MSU CRFS, which manages the Charter. This yielded a population of 299 eligible organizations (see Figure 1). An invitation to complete a brief online survey was sent to each of these organizations at the email address that was on file and used to sign the Charter. To boost response rates, we followed up with nonrespondents by email four times during the data collection period.

In addition to collecting demographics about each organization, including its age and size, the survey asked respondents to identify other Charter signatories with which their organization had interacted (a) to share information, (b) to share material resources, (c) to share data or collaborate on research, and (d) as required by law. Within each domain, respondents were presented with a roster of other signatories and were permitted to select an unlimited number of interaction partners. The

survey generated responses from 129 individuals representing 95 organizations. When multiple individuals reported on the same organization, because each person may represent different organizations through different collaborative partnerships, their responses were pooled.

These responses fell into four different categories (see Figure 1). First, representatives from 19 organizations reported that their organizations were not signatories to the Charter, despite MSU CRFS having recorded their organization's signature and having an active email contact on file. These cases may be the result of high organizational turnover, leading newer members to be unaware of the organization's signatory status, but could also include cases where an organization had signed and since rescinded its support of the Charter. Second, representatives from 14 organizations reported being signatories to the Charter but, in fact, their organizations were not Charter signatories. These cases may occur when a signatory organization dissolved and its representative has since affiliated with a new organization that he or she erroneously believes to be a signatory. Third, representatives from 12 organizations provided incomplete survey responses.

Figure 1. Population and Response Rate



Finally, representatives from 50 organizations provided complete, valid survey responses.

This yields an observed response rate of 16.7% (50/299). However, the fact that some organizations reported not being Charter signatories when they were and others reported being Charter signatories when they were not suggests that the population of eligible organizations may in fact be smaller than 299. Of the 95 organizations that provided some response, 33 (35%) did not meet the eligibility criteria for inclusion in the population. If approximately 35% of the 299 organizations we initially contacted were not eligible, this suggests the actual population is nearer to 195, yielding an inferred response rate of 25.6% (50/195).

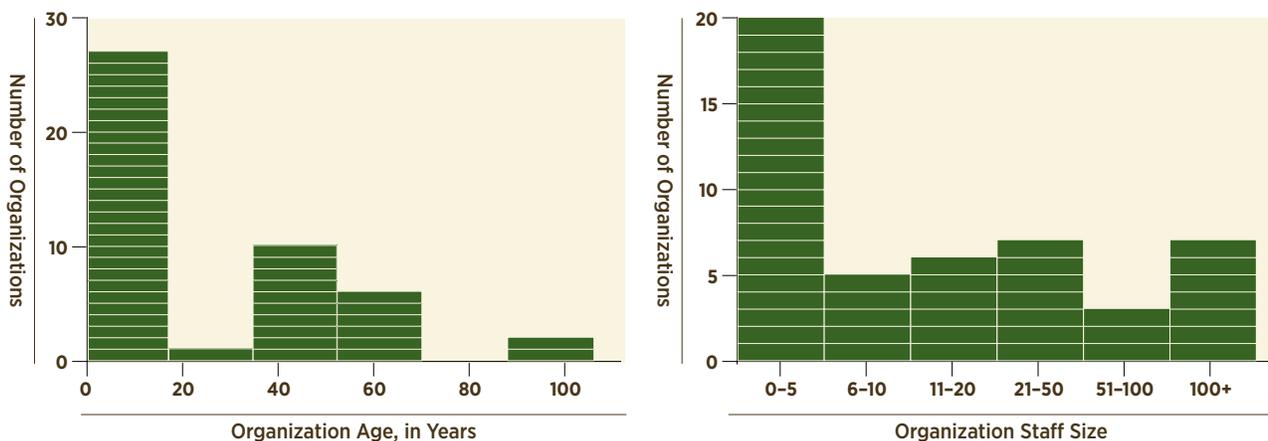
Survey Sample

All organizational signatories to the Charter are classified as (a) businesses, (b) nonprofit and community groups, (c) farms and farmer associations, or (d) social services, including schools, hospitals, and government. Table 1 shows the distribution of organizations by type in the population and sample, which are nearly identical. The sample included organizations with a range of ages (see Figure 2), from 0 to 106 years (mean, M , = 25.7; standard deviation, SD , = 26.4), and a range of sizes (see Figure 2), from fewer than six employees and volunteers to more than 100 (M = 2.72 on a 6-point scale, SD = 1.85). These sample characteristics suggest that, despite a modest survey response rate, the risk of nonresponse bias due to organizational type, age, or size is limited.

Table 1. Michigan Good Food Charter Organizational Signatories, by Organizational Type

TYPE	POPULATION	SAMPLE	OBSERVED RESPONSE RATE
Business	65 (22%)	13 (26%)	20%
Social Service	75 (24%)	10 (20%)	13%
Nonprofit	96 (32%)	17 (34%)	18%
Farm	66 (22%)	10 (20%)	15%
TOTAL	299 (100%)	50 (100%)	17%

Figure 2. Age and Size of Organizations in Network of Michigan Good Food Charter Signatories



► FINDINGS

Survey Results

The survey identified how many signatories interacted with each other and the nature of their collaborative interaction. Results (see Figure 3) show that on average, signatories that responded interacted with 21 other signatories. This figure is representative of all organization categories across the network, with the exception of farms that have much smaller networks.

The main collaboration of different signatories was mainly seen through information sharing. Collaboration required by law was the least common type, although a few organizations were legally required to collaborate with each other in the network. Compared to other types of organizations, social service organizations had the most legally required interactions.

We observed that not many of the Charter organizational signatories that network do so to share resources and data.

The diversity of the collaborations was investigated with respect to the type of organization (see Figure 4). Social service organizations that responded had the highest homophily (the percentage of partners that are the same type of organization), showing that they were most likely to collaborate with organizations similar to themselves. Businesses and farms tended to work and collaborate with more different types of organizations.

Of the respondents, the distance between all categories of organizational signatory that collaborated was not great (see Figure 5). Signatories that responded collaborate mainly with other nearby signatories; no signatory respondents collaborated with another that was more than 159 miles away from its location. Businesses had the widest geographical networks, and farm networks tended to be the most localized.

Figure 3. Number of Signatories Interacting with Other Signatories and the Reasons for Their Interaction

	ALL SIGNATORIES	BUSINESS	SOCIAL SERVICE	NONPROFIT	FARM
Any Interaction	21.0	26.0	23.5	20.6	12.9
Information Sharing	9.3	11.0	11.4	8.6	6.2
Resource Sharing	3.1	3.7	3.4	3.3	1.6
Data Sharing	3.9	3.1	4.5	5.3	1.8
Legally Required	1.1	0.8	2.6	0.4	1.0

Figure 4. Homophily Between Signatory Partnerships

	HOMOPHILY
Business	31.2%
Social service	46.3%
Nonprofit	42.8%
Farm	30.9%

Figure 5. Distance Between Collaborating Organizational Signatories

	MEAN (in miles)	MAXIMUM (in miles)
Business	84	136
Social service	62	159
Nonprofit	49	134
Farm	52	121

CONCLUSION

What We Can Conclude

Despite a limited response rate, this survey showed several items of interest that can help give a better understanding of the Michigan Good Food Charter network and guide thinking as Michigan develops a network structure to affect local and regional food system development.

Having increasing numbers of signatories supplies those engaged in work with the Charter with an idea of the support for its goals, but we can conclude from this study that, despite increasing numbers of organizational signatories, organizations are not necessarily up to date with their Charter signatory status. This could be due to high turnover of employees, a lack of sharing Charter goals within the organization, or a change in strategy and buy-in to Charter goals. The Charter signatory organizations tend to be young and small, which may contribute to a higher turnover of both personnel within the organization and the organization itself. Greater commitment to the Charter by organizational signatories may be achieved by asking organizations to renew their support for the Charter through a signature on an annual basis. As identified by Shapiro et al. (2015), significant time is required to maintain this level of commitment both from the backbone organization (MSU CRFS) and by the organizations within networks.

Signatories interact with each other within the Charter network, but these interactions are underutilized for sharing information, resources, and data. The signatories committed to the goals of the Charter by signing the ROS and have regular offerings of listservs, newsletters, social media, and a biannual conference (The Michigan Good Food Summit⁴). However, the signatories do not have regular in-person meetings, as occurs with other networks in Michigan, although they are informed of existing networks in which they may want to participate. Requesting a greater commitment to the Charter on a more regular basis through the renewal of signatures and more in-person interfacing may help with sharing of information, resources, and data.

The survey showed that organizational signatories to the Charter mainly interact with organizations that are similar to themselves. This was mostly seen in the social service sector. Although this is likely to be expected, it does lend to a risk of fragmentation within the network; to reap more benefits of a network, we identified a potential need to promote more in-person interfacing to assist with network building, resource sharing, and providing more opportunities for signatories to meet the goals of the Michigan Good Food Charter.

As a statewide group that is supporting the goals of a state policy document, it was interesting to observe how intensely local the interactions of signatories were. This may be of benefit to achieving goals for moving local food, but it would be helpful, as other Michigan networks develop, to understand how far afield network interactions need to be and whether there is a benefit to more statewide networking.

It should be noted that organizations are feeling overly surveyed, which may have contributed to the lower response rate of this survey. This is something that should be well considered as further network analysis is conducted with Michigan networks. Evaluation studies at end-of-network in-person meetings that better analyze the workings of the entire network may support a clearer understanding of the needs of network development in Michigan.

⁴ Michigan Good Food Summit: michiganfood.org/summits

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