



# FARM TO SCHOOL IN MICHIGAN: STILL GOING STRONG

## 2013 SURVEY SHOWS INTEREST AND ACTIVITY REMAIN HIGH

COLLEEN MATTS, MSU CENTER FOR REGIONAL FOOD SYSTEMS  
SUSAN B. SMALLEY, EVALUATION CONSULTANT

FEBRUARY 2014

The Michigan Good Food Charter, developed in 2010 with broad input from people across the state, established six goals for Michigan's food systems. One goal is for Michigan institutions – such as schools, early child care and education centers, hospitals, colleges and universities – to source 20% of their food products from Michigan growers, producers and processors by 2020. One way in which the Michigan State University Center for Regional Food Systems (CRFS) tracks progress toward this goal is through surveying school food service directors from all Michigan K-12 schools and school districts. A 2013 survey followed similar efforts undertaken in 2004, 2009 and 2012.

In February 2013, CRFS researchers distributed an electronic survey to all school food service directors in the state to continue to understand and track perspectives about and use of local foods in K-12 school food programs. The Michigan Department of Education provided 922 unique names and email addresses of those responsible for school meals to which we sent the 25-question electronic survey. The overall response rate was nearly 38%, with 354 fully or partially completed surveys returned; response rates varied by question.

Survey respondents represented 67 of 81 counties, with the majority of surveys returned from public school districts (62%) and non-public schools (e.g., charter, private) (30%). A lower percentage of surveys (8%) were returned by other types of institutions, most of which were youth residential correctional facilities, which serve meals to school-aged children. The mean percent of students eligible for free/reduced price meals at schools represented by the respondents (275) was 73%, much higher than the statewide rate of 48% (fall 2012). The majority of respondents' food service programs were self-operated (75%) and 24% were contract-managed. Of those, 35% identified Chartwells as their contract management company. Heat-and-serve food preparation was used most frequently (49%), while scratch-cooking and semi-prepared food preparation were used less frequently (21% and 27%, respectively) in school food service operations represented by survey respondents.

### KEY FINDINGS

- Reports of purchasing local food in the previous school year (2011-2012) increased since the 2012 survey; 68% of school food service directors purchased local foods through one or more channels, up from 54% last year. In the 2013 survey, school food service directors reported purchasing local foods through several means: 55% through full-service (broadline) distributors, 24% directly from a farmer or producer, 17% through a specialty distributor, and 11% from a farmer cooperative or collaborative.
- Similar to 2012 survey results, 34% of food service directors reported purchasing local fruits, 28% reported purchasing both local vegetables and dairy products, and less than 10% reported purchasing products in either the local meats or the dry beans categories.
- Interest in purchasing local foods remained high, with 82% of school food service directors indicating interest in buying Michigan foods for their school food service program.
- Consistent with previous surveys, the barriers to serving local food most frequently selected by respondents were limited seasonal availability (lack of products available during certain times of year) (50%), food safety concerns (41%) and available budget (38%).
- The logistical challenges associated with serving local foods selected most frequently by respondents continue to be lack of labor for preparing local food products (67%), storage (49%) and a distribution method for getting local food products to school food service programs (44%).



- Top motivators for serving local food in schools were having access to fresher food (66%), supporting the local economy and local community (59%) and helping Michigan farms and/or businesses (40%).

### INFLUENCES ON LOCAL FOOD PURCHASING

	2009	2012	2013
<b>Top Factors Motivating Local Food Purchasing</b>			
1	Helping Michigan farms/businesses	Supporting local economy	Access to fresher food
2	Supporting local economy	Helping Michigan farms/businesses	Supporting local economy
3	Higher quality food	Access to fresher food	Helping Michigan farms/businesses
<b>Top Barriers to Local Food Purchasing</b>			
1	Procurement regulations	Limited seasonal availability	Limited seasonal availability
2	Budget constraints	Food safety concerns	Food safety concerns
3	Food safety concerns	Budget constraints	Budget constraints

The percentages of school food service directors who reported purchasing local foods by category remained fairly consistent with those reported in 2012. Interest in purchasing local fruits (52%) edged out interest in purchasing local vegetables (51%). However, more vegetables than fruits were included among the list of 10 most frequently purchased local food items in 2013: in rank order, apples, milk, cucumbers, cherry/grape tomatoes, broccoli, slicing tomatoes, carrots, peppers, lettuce, and watermelon and potatoes (tied).

The most frequently selected local vegetables of interest (fresh and whole and in frozen form) remained consistent to the 2012 survey results. Cherry tomatoes, cucumbers, slicing tomatoes, carrots and peppers continue to be the most frequently selected fresh and whole vegetables; corn, green beans, peas, broccoli and carrots continue to be the most frequently selected frozen vegetables. In the 2013 survey results, sweet potatoes joined the list of the most frequently selected vegetables of interest in a processed form. School food service directors were most interested in apples, strawberries, watermelon, grapes, peaches, and pears (in rank order) in fresh and whole form. When asked about proteins, school food service directors again chose ground and formed (e.g. patties, nuggets) types of local meat (most frequently chicken, beef and turkey) over any types of whole or whole-muscle meat.

### PURCHASES AND FUTURE INTEREST IN LOCAL FOODS

Local Food Category	% Respondents who reported purchasing	% Respondents interested in purchasing in the future	% Respondents representing potential market growth
Fruit	34	52	18
Vegetables	28	51	23
Dairy	28	32	4
Meat	7	28	21

The new Michigan Farm to Institution Network, co-coordinated by CRFS and the Ecology Center, will continue working to help Michigan schools reach the Michigan Good Food Charter goal of sourcing 20% of their food products from Michigan growers, producers and processors, and translating school food service directors' interest into action through a statewide local food purchasing campaign highlighting some of the top local foods of interest. To learn more details about the Network's launch and its ongoing work, sign up for the Network's listserv by contacting Alyson Oslin of the Ecology Center at [alyson@ecocenter.org](mailto:alyson@ecocenter.org). 

For more information, visit [www.foodsystems.msu.edu](http://www.foodsystems.msu.edu) or contact Colleen Matts, Farm to Institution Specialist, at [matts@msu.edu](mailto:matts@msu.edu) or 517-432-0310.

This project was funded by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation.