

LOCAL FOOD COUNCIL NETWORK

May 27, 2015 | MEETING SUMMARY

On May 27, over 20 people met at the MSU Surplus Store and Recycling Center for our first meeting in 2015. The agenda included an overview of the goals of the network, an update from CRFS on Good Food activities, a brief on federal policies from Senator Stabenow's office, an overview of the ICC sub-committee on Food, a report on the findings of the Urban Livestock Workgroup and discussions on the Network's role in statewide policy and agenda for our next in-person meeting. Below is an overview of each item and links to more information.

Goals of the Network

Megan Masson-Minock, one of the network coordinators, shared the history of the network and following goals of the Network:

- Provide a space for local councils to network with one another
- Connect local councils to statewide policy information, issues, and actions
- Assist local councils in building capacity
- Provide hands-on training to local food councils
- Connect local policy information, issues, and actions to other parts of the state
- Connect local councils to national policy information, issues, and actions

Attendees offered additional goals:

- Leverage opportunity to leverage what is learned in Michigan with others
- Provide resources and support to start a new Local Food Council
- Expand food access opportunities
- Be a collective voice for the ICC

Click [here](#) to access the power point used during the meeting.

CRFS Good Food Charter Update

Rich Pirog and Liz Gensler of CRFS shared information about the upcoming launch of the Michigan Good Food Fund and the Michigan Good Food Charter Shared Measurement Project. The [Michigan Good Food Fund](#) is a new public-private partnership loan and grant fund that will provide financing and business assistance to good food enterprises that benefit underserved communities across Michigan. Local food councils can connect enterprises in their community with the Fund for financing opportunities.

The [Michigan Good Food Charter Shared Measurement Project](#) is an effort to collectively measure statewide food systems change in Michigan. The project is currently undertaking a pilot shared measurement data collection system. Local Food Councils can become key contributors of data from their communities.

Federal Policy Update

Mary Judnich from the office of U.S. Senator Stabenow shared a [handout on urban agriculture resources](#). She noted that the piece of food-related legislation Sen. Stabenow's office is currently focused on is the Child Nutrition Reauthorization Act, which expires in September.

She discussed best ways to influence legislation on the federal level. The thrust of her advice was do not hesitate to contact the Senator's office or the office of any member of the U.S. Congress. While volume of responses on a certain issue is powerful, especially close to a vote, she shared that comments directly from the constituent showing their understanding of the issue, perhaps attached to a form letter or in the comments of an on-line petition, is one of the most compelling means of communication. She also advised Network members to contact the Michigan offices as well as the DC office.

Mary also encouraged people, when applying for a federal grant, to let Sen. Stabenow's MI regional staff know and they can get letter of support from Senator Stabenow.

ICC Sub-Committee on Food

Lori Yelton from Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development gave a [presentation](#) on the Interdepartmental Collaboration Committee (ICC) Sub-Committee on Food Policy, the successor to the Michigan Food Policy Council. The ICC structure reports directly to the Governor and has 6 sub-committees. The Food Policy Subcommittee has a high level access to the MDARD Director and the Governor's Office. The new ICC Group coordinates state agency activities with partner activities. MSU Center for Regional Food Systems and Good Food Charter Steering Committee have seats on the Sub-Committee, representing non-government actors.

Food Councils are welcome to bring issues to the Sub-Committee and to attend their meetings. In either case, contact Lori at yeltonl@michigan.gov. The Sub-Committee is well suited to resolve rule overlaps or bureaucratic challenges. For instance, the Sub-Committee has brought organizations and departments together to discuss how to allow WIC to be offered at additional grocery stores. Their next meeting is August 25, 2015 at 9:30 in Lansing. Keep up to date on the Sub-Committee at their [website](#). Lori promised to add a button to the website where visitors could submit items for the Sub-Committee's agenda.

Urban Livestock Workgroup Report

Erin Caudell, an urban commercial farmer, talked about the Urban Agriculture Work Group process and subsequent [report](#) released in March 2015. She served on the work group, which was made up of farmers, MDARD officials, Michigan Farm Bureau, Michigan State Extension, and elected and appointed officials on the municipal level and state legislators. She talked about the process, how the group had difficulties coming to consensus and the structure of the report with a majority and minority reports. The 21-person workgroup was invited to participate by MDARD. While Erin is listed in the report as one of many small commercial farmers, she reported that she was the only farmer whose enterprise was located in an urban area and that no racial minorities were represented in the workgroup. The workgroup met 5 times and worked in concert with a Technical Group. The report notes recommendations where the majority (75% or more of the group) agreed and the minority view or

recommendation on the same topic. The final report recommends the development of an Urban Agriculture Act to support local efforts to raise livestock in urban/suburban areas, as well as guidelines for agricultural production of plants in urban/suburban areas. The majority of the workgroup recommended the Urban Agriculture Act be introduced in the 2015/2016 Legislative session. The report was submitted to State Senator Hune and MDARD Director Jamie Clover Adams. State Senator Rebekah Warren and State Representative Adam Zemke served on the workgroup. Erin had not been informed on any further legislative action based on the report.

During questions and answers, meeting participants expressed surprise about the lack of diversity in terms of race and urban farmers and gardeners on the workgroup. Network coordinators and Michigan State Extension representatives also clarified that the recent changes to the Generally Accepted Agricultural Practices (GAAMPs), creating a new class of livestock exempt from Right to Farm, was different than the recommendations in the report. Participants felt that an Urban Agriculture Act would be a major piece of legislation affecting local food systems in Michigan and would want the group developing the Act to represent the diversity of people and growers in Michigan.

Network and Local Council's role in statewide policy (small group discussion)

Megan Masson-Minock reported that, in meetings with the Steering Committee and the ICC Subcommittee on Food Policy, the request for the MLFCN to address statewide policy as a group was made. However, as the network coordinators, Megan and Andrea were unclear as to whether the members of the group wanted to take on that role.

Participants broke up into small groups to discuss whether the MLFCN should address statewide policy as a group. One group felt the Network should define its role on an issue by issue basis. Therefore, a structure for the Network to communicate, and then perhaps take action, is needed. A process to endorse or mobilize actions, like the sign-on process in Washtenaw County, is needed. Also, a map or matrix of the current issues being addressed by individual Councils would be helpful. Current statewide issues that could be acted upon were water and urban livestock. The second group varied in opinion. One part of the group, mostly involved in policy change already, felt the Network needed to have a statewide focus. Another portion felt that the Good Food Charter Steering Committee played this role. However, a member of the Steering Committee said that they would like the Network to bring issues to them. Others were neutral but stressed that with so many voices already clamoring for legislators' attention, the entity advocating for statewide policy change needs to have solid backing from a variety of groups in order to be effective.

During discussion with the entire group, a member expressed that the Network should address policy on the federal level as well.

Agenda for upcoming Network Meetings (large group discussion)

The network coordinators announced that the Detroit Food Policy Council will host the next in-person meeting of the network on Thursday, October 8, 2015. Michigan Association of Planning's annual conference is being held in Detroit at the same time. Coordinators asked the meeting participants whether they would like to meet with officials from their area who are at the conference, training offered at the conference or any other possibilities. Participants said they needed more time to think

about what they would like to see at that meeting. Megan will follow up with a survey.

The question was asked if only one representative from each Council should attend or whether these meetings should be advertised to all Council members. Megan replied that all are welcome and encouraged Councils to invite their entire membership in order to spread knowledge and grow leadership.

Megan also announced a webinar with Jean Doss, CRFS' state legislative liaison, on public policy advocacy will be scheduled for later in the summer.

OUTCOMES:

- Over 20 people from 6 Local Food Councils and other agencies and businesses had the chance to network and learn from each other.
- Increased network knowledge about how to advocate to federally elected officials
- Increased network knowledge about the ICC Sub-Committee on Food Policy
- Increased network knowledge about the Urban Livestock Workgroup Report and possible Urban Agriculture Act

GOALS FOR NEXT MEETING:

- Hands-on training activities
- Sharing of knowledge between Food Councils

The Michigan Local Food Council Network is sponsored by the MSU Center for Regional Food Systems, made possible through a grant from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation. Network coordinators are Megan Masson-Minock at ENP & Associates and Andrea Brown with Lauren Carlson at Michigan Association of Planning.