



***Lessening the Distance from Farm to Fork***  
**Michigan Community Food Systems Initiative**  
**October 1, 2004 – September 30, 2006**  
**Final Report**

Prepared for  
The North Central Region Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education  
Professional Development Program  
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## Executive Summary

Throughout Michigan, local groups are broadening the scope of our food system to include health, access, and local economic value. And why not? With Michigan ranked second in the country for diversity of agriculture product, these community groups are connecting food consumers with food growers such that they spur economic vitality of local farmers, create access to healthy foods in some of Michigan's underserved, densely populated communities, and link food with overall community revitalization.

In actualizing its mission of "supporting a healthy future where sustainable Michigan farms feed Michigan people and Michigan people support these farms", the CS Mott Group for Sustainable Food Systems at Michigan State University (Mott Group) partners with community groups, policy makers, researchers, growers and consumers to innovate and catalyze a food system that demonstrates access equity, health promotion, and sustainable practices with local vibrancy. As one of its first statewide learning demonstrations, the Community Food Systems Project, funded at **\$75,000 over a two-year period through the North Central Regional Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Professional Development Program (NCR SARE PDP)**, enabled the Mott Group to partner with thirteen Michigan communities to stimulate and support community approaches to lessening the distance between food production and food consumption. This report shares the process, outcomes, and implications for investing in this broadening scope of our food system.

The report is divided into five sections and an Appendix:

- I. Project Description
- II. Project Components
- III. Project Outcomes
- IV. Highlights of the two-year initiative
- V. Leadership roles provided by MSU Extension in the formation and implementation processes

### Appendix

- A. Map
- B. Brief case studies on local community food teams
- C. Policy Consultant Final Report
- D. Retreat Agendas

## **I. Project Description**

In October 2004, the Mott Group, with support from the USDA Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Professional Development Program (SARE-PDP), had the opportunity to invite individuals representing thirteen far-reaching Michigan communities to come together to pursue community food systems development. Thirteen community food teams, representing MSU Extension and community partners, came together over the course of two years to awaken and cultivate direct connections between consumers and food growers. By addressing specific issues in the community that marginalizes the value of healthy food, groups of individuals, as teams, launched initiatives that had the potential to connect local growers with local consumers... and turn people on to healthy, tasty, and accessible food. What would be learned in the process among these team partners would then be shared with others inside and out of MSU Extension. Key outcomes of the initiative were three-fold:

1. Local food teams organized and pursuing community food systems approaches
2. A developed and disseminated community food systems policy agenda
3. A cadre of MSU Extension staff members whose community food systems work interface with traditional agriculture practice

The focus of the communities' work was varied, but each touched elements in the food system: production, distribution, consumption, and recycling of food. Issues of land availability, emerging and transitioning farmers, and access were addressed through the lens of a sustainable food system. (*Please See Appendix A for map of site locations*).

## **II. Project Components**

The Community Food Teams' projects had several dimensions, each designed to build connections among people. Strategic relationship-building within each component of the food system could create networks of people, companies, and institutions that, through their interaction, would increase local supply to meet an increasing local demand. The following describes each of the project's components.

### **DESIGN TEAM**

A design team was assembled to develop the original concept, determine appropriate processes to achieve the desired outcomes, and provide advice and support through the project. The design team was comprised of CS Mott Group staff, an MSU student, MSUE county representatives (Washtenaw, Cheboygan, Leelanau), and a community partner from Grand Rapids. Together, this group outlined reachable goals for the project, suggested effective strategies to engage groups across the state, tools to help newly formed teams create community food system action plans, suggested methods for continuous networking, and were available to assist with the policy agenda development.

### **COMMUNITY FOOD TEAMS**

Fifteen communities already engaged in local food development such as community gardens, neighborhood based farmers markets, community supported agriculture, and had MSU Extension staff members interested in providing leadership around local foods were contacted. Participation hinged on the acceptance of that local leader's willingness to bring a team together for a retreat, and to act as a liaison for future contact.

### **INFORMATION EXCHANGE & RETREATS**

Two retreats were organized: an initial organizing retreat and a follow-up learning exchange one year later.

The first retreat brought 13 community teams together. Farmers, MSU Extension, consumers, neighborhood organizers, credit unions, market masters, economic development organizations, and others across the food system were represented. The goal for each team was to leave the retreat with both the collective will and knowledge to address specific issues that impact the sustainability of each team's local food system. Specific issues were unique to each team but related to health and nutrition, sustainable agriculture, community development or an integration of all three.

Of specific value was the Community Food Guide, developed by CS Mott staff member Marty Heller. ([www.mottgroup.msu.edu](http://www.mottgroup.msu.edu)) The Community Food Guide, first piloted within Ingham County, Michigan, showcased Ingham County's community food system. Introduced early into the retreat, the Community Food Guide served three purposes:

- 1) Displayed purposeful interactions characteristic of a community food system
- 2) Provoked thought about ways to engage the larger community in what makes a community food system compelling
- 3) Acted as a template from which other groups could borrow

The second retreat was held one year later. The retreat served as a learning exchange, where teams could share in-depth experiences, outcomes, future plans, and policy implications. (*Please see Appendix D for retreat agendas*)

### **LOCAL ACTION PLANS**

Each team submitted an action plan at the end of the retreat. Each action plan was typed and sent back to the group with an initial schedule for follow up conference calls once the local team had expanded. The action plans were used as guides for activity throughout the first year and provided the basis for mini-grants.

### **MINI-GRANT PROGRAM**

Each team was awarded a mini-grant of \$1,000 after submitting their community food systems action plan. Over an 18 month period, each team receive technical assistance tailored to their plan

### **TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE AND TOOLS:**

Teams were encouraged to communicate directly with one another throughout the project. Structured activities included:

- ❑ Farm or related visits; teams from around the state were invited to join the host community over the course of eight months following the first retreat. Host communities included Kalamazoo, Muskegon, Cheboygan, and Sault Ste Marie,
- ❑ A listserve (FOODSPEAK) was initiated and used extensively to share information, & describe introduced legislation at both the federal and state level, announce funding opportunities, and market direct marketed fruits and vegetables.
- ❑ Frequent team-based conference calls were scheduled to encourage policy issue discussion and organizing efforts for providing testimony to key legislative committees, and for each team to share their progress/barriers implementing their original plans.
- ❑ A Community Food Guide ([www.mottgroup.msu.edu](http://www.mottgroup.msu.edu)) template and users' guide were made available to each community. Technical assistance from the Mott Group was available to teams who wanted to use the Guide as a way to collect information about local food as well as to market local amenities.

## **POLICY**

A policy expert, Ms. Jean Doss, consulted directly with community food teams. Via training, follow up site visits, conference calls, and the listserv, the policy expert offered technical assistance in the following arenas:

- 1) Drafting strategic public policy plans
- 2) Developing message for testimony and other forms of public comment
- 3) Identifying opportunities to share public policy concerns with policy makers
- 4) Identifying and sharing of individual team's expertise with other teams

The policy expert's technical assistance enabled the local teams to accomplish the following: ***(Please see Appendix C for the Policy Consultant Final Report)***

Completed shared public policy agenda: *"Michigan Community Food Policy Teams' Policy Recommendations"*

- Presented testimony and/or public policy recommendations at:
  - November 4, 2005: Michigan Food Policy Council Task (MFPC) force on Enhancing Agricultural Viability.
  - January 28, 2006: Michigan Food Policy Council "Listening Session" held at the Northern Michigan Small Farm Conference, Grayling, MI.
  - February 22, 2006: Senate Health Policy Committee Hearing in Lansing. Presentation by Dr. Mike Hamm, and members of the Community and School Gardeners Association (membership overlaps with some local food policy teams) on expanding access to locally grown food & gardening as one tool to address the epidemic of Childhood Type II Diabetes.
  - March 9, 2006: Senate Agriculture Committee, Committee Chair convened a special committee hearing for a panel presentation by local food policy team members.
- A representative of a local food policy team participated in press conference in the fall of 2005 on proposed cuts in Congress to the Food Assistance Program. The coalition included Food Bank Council of Michigan, Center for Civil Justice, and Marianne Udow, Director of the MI Department of Human Services.

- Public comments (see above) made by local food policy members before various MFPC taskforces, have (in words of staff) *“facilitated development of task force recommendations to the full MFPC.”*
- Local food policy council policy concerns to be reflected in the final MFPC Report and Recommendations to the Governor (released October 12, 2006).
- Local food policy members, via listserv alerts and communication, greatly expanded discussion of a bill pre-empting local control over genetically modified seeds, SB 777. Jeff Cobb, Chief of Staff to Sen. Van Woerkom, Chair of the Senate Agriculture committee indicated: *“We expected to have one hearing, but instead had four or five hearings...we were surprised by the amount of interest in this bill.”*
- After various presentations of the *Michigan Community Food Policy Teams’ Policy Recommendations*, a number of state legislators have indicated an interest in learning more about the economic impact of state-sponsored meat and poultry inspection program.
- Chippewa County Food Policy Team member Cindy Dutcher was invited to participate in round table, facilitated by Michigan Food & Farming Systems (MIFFS) and the MSU Product Center, on re-establishing state inspection program for small to medium size chicken and poultry producers.
- Executives from the Department of Agriculture, after visiting the Saginaw Farmers Market, asked the local food policy team member for more information on the development of the market and its guidelines, in order to incorporate this information in other economic development grants, such as the “Cities of Promise” program.
- Chair of Senate Health Policy Committee, Sen. Bev Hammerstrom, solicited ideas for legislation addressing childhood obesity. Dr. Mike Hamm provided input on one concept that could increase local food purchasing capacity by schools. Concept may be incorporated in legislation this fall.

### III. Project Outcomes

#### 1. Local team development and on-going food system development:

Of the thirteen community food teams who came together, eleven community teams are still actively engaged and/or have expanded their efforts in community food system development. Two of the teams had challenges that curtailed their efforts: high economic downturn that saw persons selling or moving out of the area; a perceived failure in a small community farmers' market that seemed to take the wind out the team's sails. Criteria for being considered an active community food system development group includes:

- Local teams in place
- Localized approaches tested
- Impact information available
- On-going sustainable agriculture activities underway

## **2. Policy Framework and Information Dissemination**

The community economic development impact of community food systems and implications for future investment at the local level was the theme of four state legislative level hearing testimonies by team panels and/or individuals. Local food teams from Michigan's upper and lower peninsulas assembled to provide testimony to the following groups:

- Two at-large public Michigan Food Policy Council hearings
- One strategically-held hearing before the Michigan Senate Agriculture Committee (organized by the policy consultant)
- Two testimonies on two separate occasions to Senate and House Committees on Agriculture and Nutrition/Health

Another accomplishment is the development of a Food Systems Policy Agenda formulated over the course of a year by the local food teams (see appendix).

## **3. MSU Extension Leadership Capacity**

At the first retreat, participants were given a survey measuring their own personal interest, their personal knowledge, and the importance in their communities of various issues pertaining to food, health, land use, environment, and community and economic development. The survey used a Likert-type scale of 1 (very low) to 5 (very high) to measure their responses. Survey results indicated:

- Participants expressed the highest interest in food and farming in economic development (mean score of 5);
  - Other issues with "interest" mean scores greater than 4.2 include diet and health, hunger and food security, access to healthy and local food, respectively, farmer and family farm health, food safety, loss of both farmland and open space, environmental impacts of farming, local processing, where money spent on local food goes, food and community celebration, and farmer loss.
- Participants expressed the highest knowledge in access to healthy foods.
- The most important issues to community members (as identified by participants), on average, were diet and health, and access to healthy foods.

In a follow up survey (September, 2006) all MSU Extension staff represented in the community food teams across the state were asked to self-report their personal awareness of food and agriculture issues, their personal knowledge of consumer preferences and market niches, and level of interest in sustainable agriculture both before and after the project. Of the ten MSUE leaders involved in the community teams, eight responded to the survey. The responses, shown in the chart below, show that across all areas, the level of understanding, knowledge, and personal interest in sustainable agriculture and food systems grew. All MSU Extension staff thought that as a result of the project the local food system in their communities had been enhanced. A majority of MSUE staff thought that the local food system had been expanded in their community, and a similar majority thinks there is greater public awareness of food issues locally. However, the support at the governmental or municipal level was deemed weak or non-existent by the majority of respondents.

<b>Question Category</b> (Scale 1-5: 1= very low; 3=aware; 5 = very high)	<b>Pre- Project</b> (Mean)	<b>Post Project</b> (Mean)
Rate your own personal understanding and awareness of Michigan food and agriculture issues	2.9	4.25
Rate your own personal knowledge of consumer preferences and market niches	3.25	4.25
Rate your own personal level of interest sustainable agriculture and community development efforts	3.9	4.75
<b>Question Category</b> (Scale was strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree, strongly agree.	<b>Response Tally</b>	
As a result of this project, there is greater public awareness of food issues in my community.	1 = Disagree 7 = Agree	
As a result of this project, there is greater emphasis on food policy efforts in my community by government officials.	2 = Disagree 3 = Neutral 3 = Agree	
As a result of this project, the local food system in my community has been expanded	1 = Disagree 1 = Neutral 4 = Agree 2 = Strongly agree	
As a result of this project, the local food system in my community has been enhanced.	5 = Agree 3 = Strongly agree	

## **V. Observations and Opportunities:**

A challenge for us is trying to penetrate the food system locally such that the changes are evidenced provincially and ripple within the region. Although the profile of each community food team in the Appendix of this report provides progress highlights, the majority of the food teams were able to see some evidence of a shift toward an increased connection between consumers and their source of food in the followings ways:

- an increase in access to fresh and local foods
- an increase in the percentage of growers' household income through farm sales
- an increase of customers at direct markets
- the capacity of local farmers to meet increased demand
- a distribution system that can accommodate this agriculture shift
- local and state policy support

There was consensus among all thirteen community food teams in the following potential for community food systems:

- 1) Community members are eager to pursue an amenities-approach to sourcing food locally. Teams used different methods to inventory local growers, survey consumer preferences in order to assess grower capacity or identify food niche opportunities.
- 2) Never underestimate what can happen through the determination of a few people; but, at the same time, no one romanticized how few resources there are to make

- changes in our food system. As much as there is pride in small and medium sized farmers' ability to be self-sustaining, these same farmers are very vocal about capital, technical assistance, and incentive disparities in rural areas.
- 3) Engaging people who truly have a stake in a change being made is only the first step; when farmers sell out at markets, or land a contract to expand their product, or market shoppers find consistent product, the will to continue support increases exponentially.
  - 4) Not everyone on the team has the same definition of what is successful. If you truly have a cross section of people who share the mission but have different needs (a farmer has land use and up-front production costs; everyday consumers have budget issues; a market master has coordination issues; city officials have downtown development issues; restaurants or other institutions trying to source locally have consistency issues; neighborhoods have crime issues; retail institutions have distribution issues, etc.), then it is important to agree on the intersection of what is possible, while not compromising the mission and standards of the food system.
  - 5) Don't get stuck by equating what was planned and what evolved. For example, Cheboygan was focused on its farmers' market location. The location, to everyone but the vendors, was convenient for the vendors but was deemed "off the beaten track" for incidental traffic (tourists). Nothing would change the vendors' minds; so the farmers' market stayed in the same spot, had some increase in sales, but not the potential the team thought it may have. This was considered somewhat a "failure", until the team recognized that two of the farmers had garnered contracts with local institutions including a regional chef's collaborative, such that they tripled their production, and one of the farmers began season extension growing through a greenhouse; and finally, a new farmers' market emerged in a neighboring community.
  - 6) Groups across the state are hungry for more than information; farmers, consumers, health practitioners, neighborhood organizations, city planning officials are witness to the burst of farmers markets, the proliferation of farm stands, local restaurants offering organic selections, mid-size and large grocery stores increasing organic produce and meats, and school and community gardens. These groups will collaborate with other regions and even other states because they won't wait for traditional agriculture-related technical assistance entities to debate the value of sustainable food systems.
  - 7) A few MSU Extension offices recognize the gap in emerging farmers and transitioning farmers. They also recognize that small farmers, though increasing in number, will never meet the growing demand for both certified and non-certified organic product. The new Emerging Farmer programs go beyond helping a grower put together a business plan. Land access, capital access, peer support, cultivating markets, collaborating on distributions systems, must be part of the total program efforts to enable affordable farm growth.
  - 8) Inasmuch as the Michigan Food Policy Council has made recommendations to the Governor, community food teams desire policy makers to visit home turf. There is recognition that unless policymakers listen to local farmers and consumers, there will be a dis-investment in local sustainable food development

## **Added Value**

An important result from this project is a project funded by USDA CSREES' Small and Medium Sized Farm viability program.\* This project responds to opportunities identified by three Community Food Team members: Jim Lucas of Sault Ste. Marie (SSM), Chippewa Co., Chris Bedford from the Sweetwater Market in Muskegon, and Mike Score, Washtenaw County MSU Extension in southeast Michigan. This Small Farm Project will test the economic viability of hoop houses, unheated high tunnel green houses, as a season extension technology on Michigan family farms. Farmers participating in this project will serve three local farmers markets (SSM, Muskegon, and Ann Arbor) that are at different stages of development. Another component of this project will conduct market research to measure consumer's willingness to attend and support extended season farmers' markets, to ensure coordinated growth in supply and demand for locally grown produce.

\* Project Title: Enhancing Small and Medium Farm Viability through Season Extension Technologies: Economic and Environmental Implications. Principal Investigators are David Conner and Michael Hamm, CS Mott Group for Sustainable Food Systems at MSU

# APPENDIX







more food through backyard gardens. We are finding out from consumers that they want local, fresh, and organic.. whether certified or not. Having said this, the logistics of small growers becoming viable enterprises is a bit of a nightmare. You cannot quit your day job by growing enough for a farm stand. You cannot increase your volume on the hope that you will meet individual consumer demand. There is no doubt that the demand is there, but you have to have large scale demand to invest in increasing volume. Small scale is working to meet individual consumer demand, but we have to find ways to help farmers land the larger contracts. We are thinking about cooperative farming, incorporating the small farm, and other ways to work together to solidify demand sources. For the first time, the MSU County Director will sit on the County Economic Development Corporation (EDC). This will help the EDC develop local economic initiatives using a food lens. He can then share back with other MSUE staff his experience, as well as share within the EDC his experience due to the SARE initiative. Agriculture 101, the new agriculture enterprise education program begun by Ben, is a program for new producers. The majority of participants are women; Ben would like to put together a "Women in New Agriculture" resource medium. He sees this as one of the new faces of emerging farmers.

## **Chene-Ferry Neighborhood Buyers Club** **Detroit, MI**

Detroit's Chene-Ferry neighborhood is a food desert. There are no grocery stores within a seven-mile radius in this neighborhood characterized by abandoned storefronts, dense residential population, unemployment, and high drug sales and use activity. Who would have thought that in two years, a food buyers club comprised of recovering addicts would pool food stamps to purchase local produce in one of Detroit's lowest income neighborhoods. Peacemakers, a 501©(3) provides residential accommodations for former drug addicts and serves as a local food bank. In a partnership with MSU Extension agent Mike Sore, Peacemakers is resolved to create viable access to fresh fruits and vegetables. As easy as this may sound, fresh produce in a food desert poses a dilemma: would food stamp recipients buy produce in enough volume to warrant local delivery of local farmer product?



- The Chene Ferry Neighborhood Buyers Club, through Peacemakers, set several goals:
1. Increased the availability of local and/or regionally grown food
  2. Establish partnerships among MSU Extension, Peacemakers, the MSU Product Center, and community residents that brought about job creation and the establishment of new businesses
  3. Provide educational workshops in neighborhood on the food system, nutrition, food processing and entrepreneurship
  4. Cultivate leadership among Peacemaker volunteers and staff such that one person would coordinate the food buyers club
  5. Effectively involve up to 1,100 people during the first year of operation

**Highlights:**

- ❑ Established buyers' club with weekly sale of vegetables and 20 local food buyers
- ❑ Established an urban garden that supplies buyers club with seasonable produce
- ❑ Established rabbit and guinea pig production small business with sales to local pet stores
- ❑ Conducted entrepreneurship training for 20 neighborhood residents
- ❑ Activated EBT machine

In his works, Mike Score talks about Chene Ferry...

When I started working with this community it was through an invitation to develop a written business plan for a poorly defined, poorly constructed idea. A group of people from outside the Chene Street neighborhood wanted to make money by providing high quality fresh produce to chronically poor residents in a food desert.

In the process of designing the plan and helping the group attempt their business launch I met some of the neighborhood residents. I also met and began working with Peacemakers, a small and amazing church ministry. As the original project withered and faded, I began working with neighborhood residents to develop and implement a neighborhood-planned initiative to identify nutrition needs, establish a new food retail business, and build on that business to address a broader range of local economic needs.

When we began the local food system consisted of a gas station/convenience mart, a Coney Island hot dog restaurant, a sandwich shop, a liquor store with a lousy grocery section, and a free food distribution that handed out very starchy and processed food donated by regional food businesses. Produce distributed through the free-food program varied in quality, but was mostly nearly expired stuff that didn't hold up well.

The first year or so of my efforts seemed fruitless. While I got to know neighborhood residents better during that time, we could not get to a point where we were growing local food, or selling food consistently at affordable prices. We spent more than a year working to get an EBT machine so we could accept food stamps (based on neighborhood statements that this is essential). Our best volunteers would suddenly disappear back into the world of drug addiction.

In 2005 we got some good breaks. A pet store owner in Novi heard about our efforts through my colleague, Melinda Curtis. He offered to create a new small business to produce rabbits for his pet store. He bought the materials for cages, the breeding stock, and rabbit food. Matt Shane from MSUE worked with me to help community members build the cages. We taught them the basics of rabbit production. Now the rabbits are well cared for and very productive. The pet store continues to buy bunnies as they are weaned. This puts cash into our program and has really encouraged neighbors, showing that something can be done in this neighborhood.

We also established an urban garden in the shell of a building. The garden is well maintained. It is a real showplace. Produce harvested is sold in the small retail produce business that is run through Peacemakers.



3. Develop regional leadership team through which a comprehensive strategic plan for agri-food economic development in SE MI is created and initiates viable projects
4. Series of field trips to showcase breadth of food system components
5. The FSEP created five principal program areas to reach their goals:

1. Market Research and Development

The purpose of the Market Research and Development Program is to create a knowledge base and strategy for local agrifood supply chain and market development. The goals of the program are to develop a quantitative picture of our current food system reality, suggest realistic changes to all levels of government to enhance local agricultural economic viability, define key sub sectors with high growth potential and/or impediments to growth, and promulgate useful datasets and software tools to help create linkages between entrepreneurs and markets.

2. Local Ag/Food Business Innovation and Networking

The purpose of the Local Ag/Food Business Innovation and Networking Program is to provide a support center for entrepreneurs to launch and expand local supply chain business. The goals of the program are to work with an existing pool of entrepreneurs and attract new entrepreneurs/investors, launch special demonstration projects, provide research-based tools and assistance with business planning, facilitate business-to-business supply chain linkages and help with marketing, and work with interest groups (e.g., farmers) to understand new markets that improve profitability and meet community needs.

3. Farm-to-School Demonstration Project

The purpose of the Farm-to-School Program is to demonstrate the feasibility, community impact and potential of local food supply chain systems, and specifically to increase the amount of local farm foods in schools and improve the health and education of children and their families regarding the food system. The goals of the program are to facilitate the establishment of a viable farm-to-school program in pilot school districts or schools in SE MI, work collaboratively to bring together school officials, food service directors, contracted food service vendors, distributors, processors, and producers to establish creative mutually beneficial relationships that result in locally produced and processed food being eaten by students in our schools, help maintain and facilitate these relationships through the implementation period, evaluate the results of the pilot project, and based on what was learned, develop materials for use by other schools districts that would enable them to establish successful farm-to-school programs, and reach out to and partner with other organizations with specific and needed expertise, relationships, and knowledge.

4. Education and Outreach for Change

The purpose of the Education and Outreach Program is to reach out to stakeholders and participants with information and tools to increase understanding of and demand for local supply chain systems and products. The goals of the program are to Educate FSEP leadership and membership about issues and opportunities so that they may be ambassadors for the organization to their respective communities, educate consumers

and the general public about issues in the current food system, how their choices affect the quality of the food system, and how to improve access to local foods, and educate political decision makers about the food system and recommend agri-food policy solutions that may enhance community and economic development.

#### 5. Leadership/Membership Building

The purpose of the Leadership/Membership Building Program is to improve and strengthen the social bonds among all members of FSEP so that the mission, values, and vision have the greatest possibility of being realized. The goals of the program are to recruit and orient new members of the Leadership Team, plan internal membership building activities as part of work plan, facilitate challenging discussions, work to develop all aspects of FSEP membership.

#### **Highlights:**

- Planning, Research and Education:
  - Leveraged three county contributions as one-to-one match to secure a \$30K planning grant from MEDC. This grant is being used to study the agri-food supply chain in the region and identify areas for economic development. This study is recently underway.
  - 2006 FSEP Conference – over 150 participants. 99% reported better understanding of local food system and opportunities for development. Conference participants reported value of the project, e.g., new Northwest Detroit farmers market was “inspired” by FSEP conference.
  - Secured \$6K grant from Project GREEN and conducted survey of farmers, processors, distributors, retailers and consumers to assess interests in local grain products, produce, meats, dairy and other local farm products. Several opportunities have been identified (e.g., direct to processor sales, organics, etc.), but this study is still underway by the UM graduate student team.
  - In partnership with MSU and MSUE Jackson County, conducted a study/report of restaurants in the five-county region to identify barriers and opportunities for local farm to restaurants projects. Outputs – report on opportunities and possible avenues for new market development (\$2.5K project)
  - In partnership with MSU and MSUE Jackson County, conducted a study/report of independent grocery stores in the five-county region to identify barriers and opportunities for local farm to grocers projects. Outputs – report on opportunities and possible avenues for new market development (\$2K project)
  - Working with UM graduate team to develop Community Food Profile, in line with CS Mott Group guide, for our region. The student team expects a draft to be completed within the next month or so. Output – broadly applicable tool for educating public about food system issues and opportunities, describing current state of the system/region
- Demonstration Project:
  - Interviewed and identified 2 school districts and 1 charter school that have expressed commitment to be “pilot locations” during 06-07 school year for a local farm to school food project. This project has the

participation of public health, farm groups, institutional partners, universities and local school administrations.

- Local purchases and networking:
  - Three farms in and around Jackson County are now selling products to area restaurants as a direct result of restaurant study focus group sessions where farmers and chefs/restaurateurs were introduced as part of the process.
  - The Henry Ford has significantly increased local farms it buys from (I have no concrete numbers on this).
  - The University of Michigan (East Quad Dining Residential Dining Hall – pilot hall for local food initiative) is buying weekly from 1-2 area farmers (apples-10-12 bushels per week, honey, tomatoes- 12 bushels per week, peaches, etc.). I brokered the connections between the farmers and the Chef at the dining hall. They hope to take this pilot effort university-wide.
  - Three farmers were connected to Sysco following up after FSEP March conference (again, not sales numbers available).
  - Numerous entrepreneur networking contacts have directly occurred – local meat processing facility grower owners linked up with food entrepreneur (now sits on Board)
- Business development - numerous entrepreneurs have been supported with business plan development in partnership with MSU Product Center counselors, including:
  - Food buyers cooperative in Detroit
  - Henry Ford label products
  - Meat producer marketing (several of these)

Michael DiRamio, Director of FSEP, shares his thoughts about FSEP...

The Food System Economic Partnership (FSEP) is a community-based organization that was established to address chronic social, economic and environmental issues relating to our food supply and agricultural economy in the five county Southeast Michigan region including Jackson, Lenawee, Monroe, Washtenaw and Wayne Counties. The organization is founded on the premise that the quality of our food supply, the sustainability of agricultural production, and the strength of our regional economy are interdependent. FSEP has been established to confront disturbing trends and consequences of the current food system including:

- Eroding infrastructure and connections between farms and communities/markets
- Dwindling supply of local farm products to regional markets and food banks
- Conventional market channels are presenting obstacles to farmers and threaten the next generation of farmers
- Loss of farmland that coincides with a rise in sprawling land use and development
- Dramatic rise in food-related health problems and “food deserts” in urban neighborhoods
- Urban neighborhoods are struggling to provide viable work opportunities and maintain healthy environments for people and their families

FSEP was established to support efforts that address these issues because these issues have not been alleviated by current market forces nor have they been

adequately or successfully addressed by any existing public, quasi-public or private entity. FSEP is unlike other organizations in our region because we address the entire food system from farm to table, intentionally reaching out to and attracting the participation of all relevant players and sectors. This allows us to systematically address the chronic issues and trends outlined above. Other organizations in our region address one or two sectors only, with limited impact on the variety of interconnected issues we seek to address.

## **Allen Neighborhood Farmers Market Ingham County Community Food Team**

Allen Neighborhood Center (ANC) used MSU research findings about their eastside Lansing neighborhood being a food desert as an impetus to correct this food access imbalance. (Thomas, 2004). As a drop off site for both grocery store surplus and local Community Supported Agriculture shares on Friday afternoons, ANC noted that local residents wanted to know how they could bring home the beautiful fresh produce instead of the surplus bread and pre-packaged food that was available for free. These very community residents became the planning committee for the ANC Farmer's Market. This neighborhood-based community food team's dual goals of both getting fresh produce into the homes of local residents and to ensure a viable economic base for local farmers have been accomplished... and then some.



### **Highlights:**

Allen Neighborhood Center Farmers' Market

Market Attendance:

- As of 8/29/06: 7495 market patrons have attended 15 market days; average attendance is almost 500.
- 2005 comparison: average was 268
- 2004 (first market) average was 109.

Farmer/Vendors

- 2006: 10 to 12 farmers a week. 3 local "market gardeners" have participated and unfortunately, I have had to tell two people we were no longer accepting farmers due to our lack of space and requests by farmers not to flood the market with vegetables. We have 2 baked goods vendors, one prepared food vendor and 4 to 5 craft vendors.
- 2005 we had approx. 7 farmers, one baked goods vendor and one prepared food vendor

Food Stamp Users:

- The number of food stamp transactions/EBT has stayed consistent but the amount of money in EBT transactions has jumped a great deal this year.
- 2006: This year we have had 146 transactions total (average of 10 a market) with \$1546.77 in EBT \$ reimbursed to farmers. We are averaging \$103 in EBT sales each market.

- In 2005 we had a total of 252 EBT transactions (average of 11 transactions per market totaling \$1,641.36 an average of \$71.00 a market).

Other redemption:

- Project FRESH:
  - 2006: collected \$960.00
  - 2005: collected around \$358.00. It is important to note that this year, WIC extended it Project FRESH program to senior citizens as well.

Each week, Kate Nault or Joan Nelson send out a notice of the Farmers Market...this is a story in and of itself...

## Hello to All!

Our **Grill and Green Festival** will take place **September 6th** and **we are looking to borrow one or two propane grills** to use to cook food samples at our market. If anyone is interested in lending us one or even doing some actual veggie grilling please let me know. I suppose it would be best if the grill came from someone in the neighborhood since it may easier to walk the grill to the market rather than loading it in and out of a car. We do have some muscles around here if they are needed.

**The Tomato Festival was hit!** We broke another record in attendance with 743 patrons!

Congratulations to **Phil of Wildflower Farms** for winning the Tomato Tasting Contest! His "**Sungold Cherry Tomatoes**" received 54 votes. Jane's (Apple Schram) "Red Tomatoes" came in second with 31 votes and Wildflower's "Gold Medal" variety came in third with 20 votes.

**September is a great month for planting perennials and our Wes Clark of Clark Sugar Bush has the best plants at the best prices.** He doesn't use any chemicals. Nothing but his tender loving care. Here are just a few of the plants he'll have this Wednesday: Hollyhock, Mallow, Sedum, Butterfly Bush, Candy Lilies, Balloon Flower, Cone flower (aka echinacea), Hostas, Ostrich Japanese Painted Ferns, Blackeyed Susan, Citronella, Sweet Potato Vines, and Hardy Hibiscus.

In my opinion, the BEST and EASIEST TO USE book on gardening is the **Michigan Gardener's Guide by Bolan, Coit and Hair** (it has a purple aster on the cover, don't confuse it with The Michigan Gardening Guide). The authors are all local yokels and you can find it at our neighborhood bookstore Everybody Reads 2019 E. Michigan Avenue. **GET DIRTY, MAKE BEAUTY!**

Kate Nault  
Farmers Market Manager

The Allen Street Farmers Market takes place every Wednesday until the end of October, from 2:30-6:30. We are located on the corner of Kalamazoo and Allen Streets, about 1 mile West of US 127 and less that 1 mile East of Pennsylvania.

## Kalamazoo County Community Food Team

The Kalamazoo People's Coop, Fair Food Matters, and Growing Matters Gardens teamed up to address a recurring issue in Kalamazoo: over 50% of City of Kalamazoo households run out of food monthly. Food pantry or surplus food was seen as an inadequate solution to the lack of nutritious options in the city of Kalamazoo. So, the Kalamazoo Community Food team determined that an increase in the availability and direct market purchase of fresh produce in Kalamazoo was an achievable goal. Evidence of reaching that goal were:



1) A consistent, steady supply of product grown locally

- 2) A food systems inventory of the surrounding two counties
- 3) A local base for consumer education and advocacy around food access
- 4) Local growers linked with local eaters through variety of gardening and market outlets

The People's Food Coop set a co-op goal of sourcing 40% of produce locally; have increased from 11% in 2004 to 15% in 2005. To do this, the Coop created a small internal loan pool to help local growers invest in technology associated with seasonal extension growing.

Chris Dilley, Manager of the Kalamazoo People's Food Coop shares his story....

The Growing Matters Garden just finished its 5th successful season of teaching local, urban kids about gardening. We've expanded to include an elementary school year-round in our project. So, that part is just getting started.

The Kalamazoo Community Kitchen project is starting to heat up. We've mailed out surveys to several hundred potential users, and expect to have a better idea of what people will want and need in a community kitchen.

We've made partnerships with a neighborhood as a possible site for the kitchen; the neighborhood also currently hosts the farmers market. A good possibility.

The Farms-to-Kalamazoo College partnership has made some impressive strides in its first year. We've made progress with getting the College food service agent (Sodexo) invested in making changes toward more local foods. We hosted a "local food showdown" in May to get people interested and aware of the project, as well as starting to make good connections to local growers. We've had visits from MIFFS and Sodexo regional staff that make me think there are some good possibilities there.

Our Harvest Fest happens on Sept 17, and promises to be a blast. 4th annual.

## Kent County Community Food Team

Based on 2000 USDA Agriculture Census, Kent County has lost 25% mid-size farms since 1982. Importing food for consumption, yet losing local farmers is a disconnect for food security in the region.

Several strategies were suggested as part of their action plan:

- 1) Adoption of a regional food charter
- 2) Increase local urban growers
- 3) Stimulate consumer awareness and participation in local food systems issues
- 4) Collaborate with others to improve region's food system
- 5) Conduct feasibility study of local food center



### Highlights:

- 1) Provided entrepreneurship program for emerging farmers
  - Enrolled 20-25 growers intending to farm full time
2. Development 8-county region food guide
3. Created directory of food system partners as a resource guide to emerging local food systems
4. Conducted fourth annual "Rooted in Community" conference in March 06

## Muskegon Sweetwater Markets

### Muskegon County Community Food Team

This west coast region of Michigan has no market for local farmers whose products are humanely and healthy (no GMOs, pesticides, antibiotics) grown. The Muskegon County Community Food Team designed a five year vision of an established, vibrant local food economy, built around the concepts of "healthy, humane, homegrown". They believed this was achievable. Emboldened by the fact that just an increase in household spending of \$10 a week would produce an overall increase of local farm income of over \$80 million, the team of local farmers and a zealous, experienced market master formed a 501©(3), planned, opened and operated the Sweetwater Local Foods Market in June 2005.



### Highlights:

- ❑ Michigan's first farmers market (the Sweetwater Local Foods Market) to exclusively sell locally raised fruits and vegetables grown according to organic standards, eggs, meat and cheese produced from humanely raised animals.
- ❑ Prepared a newspaper type tabloid on the promise and operation of the market and community food systems for mass distribution at events and within institutions.
- ❑ Scheduled co-presentations about food, cooking, and health with health support groups and with local chefs at the market during market days.
- ❑ Produced a 12-18 minute videotape about Select Michigan Organic, the market, local+ food production, and economic development.

- ❑ Established a Board-run, 501 © (3) Farmers Market that had specific vendor and product standards
- ❑ Produced a 26 minute film entitled, "What Will We Eat?" on the development of a healthy local food system in West Michigan. This film has been featured in three Michigan film festivals and shown at over 50 consumer events throughout the region.
- ❑ Become the first farmers market in West Michigan to acquire an EBT machine to allow Bridge Card holders the opportunity to shop at the Saturday Sweetwater Market.
- ❑ Worked with the Muskegon Heights Public Housing Authority to arrange free van rides for senior citizens living in subsidized housing to the Sweetwater Saturday market to shop.
- ❑ Developed a series of educational displays about food production and the benefits of healthy, humane, homegrown food to educate consumers who shop at the Sweetwater Markets.
- ❑ Identified over 300 regular customers that receive regular emails on the availability of food at the Sweetwater Markets.
- ❑ Operate a Community Health tent at the Saturday market to allow health professionals to offer free consultations to market customers.
- ❑ The two markets together attract between 800-1000 consumers weekly. Farmers report growth in their income and consumers tell us stories of how eating healthy local food has, indeed, transformed their health..
- ❑ Market operates on a non-profit all volunteer basis, recruiting over a dozen consumers and farmers to do its work.
- ❑ First farmers market in West Michigan to use an Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) machine to allow Bridge Card holders to shop at the Saturday Sweetwater Local Foods Market

In Chris Bedford's words...

The Sweetwater Local Foods Market is Michigan's first farmers market that exclusively sells locally grown animal products and fruits and vegetables raised in a manner that enhances biological diversity, builds soil health and promotes animal welfare. The market was founded by a coalition of farmers and consumers. It operates on a non-profit basis. All work is done by volunteers.

In its second year, the Sweetwater Local Foods Market opened a second market at Hackley Health's new hospital campus on Harvey Road. This market is Michigan's first regularly scheduled weekly farmers market at a healthcare institution. We are currently exploring ways to integrate healthy, humane, homegrown food into Hackley Health's wellness programs.

The goal of the Sweetwater markets is to transform the local food system in Muskegon and neighboring counties – raising the health and ethical standards of locally produced food to the highest quality possible. To this end, the market volunteers work very closely with a dozen farmers, inspecting their operations, and helping them improve their standards. In 2006, those standards are attested to by "The Sweetwater Local Foods Market PLEDGE TO OUR CUSTOMERS."

The PLEDGE and profiles of our farmers can be found at the Sweetwater Market's website --- [www.sweetwaterlocalfoodsmarket.org](http://www.sweetwaterlocalfoodsmarket.org).

Musicians regularly perform at the Saturday market making it increasingly a place where people meet their friends, have a cup of coffee and an organic scone together, and shop for their food. The Sweetwater Market is at the center of a rapidly growing community of Muskegon, Ottawa, Oceana, and Kent County residents seeking to reconnect their eating and their lives to nature and to each other.

## Northwest Michigan Regional Food Team

Northwest Michigan was represented by seven counties in the region. The Food Team determined that taking an inventory of local farmers' capacity & infrastructure needs to create a regional food system would be their undertaking. Each of the issues listed below were addressed by potential strategies:

1) The continuous loss of farmland which is foundation for local economy

- Helping farms develop new opportunities

2) Boost supply and demand by focusing on building the local systems that enable an economy between people buying and farmers selling... building market bridges 2005 Strategies:

- Food marketing campaign (*Taste the local difference, select northwest Michigan*)

3) Farm to Cafeteria: Partner with local schools

- School cook training Partnerships with restaurants to promote local growers:

### Highlights:

- Sixty regional retail partners (grocers, caterers, resorts, restaurants)
- Distributed 25,000 guides to eating local: drew 30,000 visits to the website for local produce
- Surveyed farms: from 2004-2005, increased number of customers through marketing
- Succeeded in working with Traverse City area public school systems in getting local apples into 14 of 23 district schools
- Documented tripling amount of apples consumed – directly related to better taste of apples;
- Other products tested are local pears and potatoes. As a result , agreements reached with four other districts to source local foods
- Local chefs – school cooks collaborative training. Through a healthy kids grants, chefs area work with local school cooks about adapting recipes and labor saving ways to cook healthy.



## Saginaw Farmers Market Saginaw County Food Team



The city of Saginaw's east side is a food desert. The Saginaw County Food Team's dual goals of increasing the viability of small and medium scale growers in region while also creating increased access among lower income consumers were trying to be met through one avenue: the Saginaw Farmer's Market.

### Highlights:

- Two nonprofit organizations are new vendors, which demonstrates farmers' markets' potential to help non-profit organizations become entrepreneurs
- Engaged nine new vendors all from same town who formed collaborative, spinning off new farmers' market in nearby community. 100% of the vendors at the new farmers market are sharing their sales receipts.
- Sales from Saginaw Market are so strong that they are able to sustain 4 days a week.
- Point of Sale recipe cards provided to farmers market vendors highlighting Michigan grown produce adapted from the Project Fresh Market Basket Cookbook. Local AG-Facts were included on the backs to increase awareness of agriculture in our community.
- Formation of the Saginaw Local Foods Initiative Network (SFIN) including representation from: MSUE, SVSU, local farmers, farmers markets, Michigan Farm Bureau, Michigan Bee Keepers, and other local food producers.
- "Junior Market Master" Coupons distributed to local child care homes. Children were able to redeem them for local produce at the Farmers Market. Day care providers and parents brought children to the market.
- Additional grant funds sought and received to expand the Saginaw Food Security Through Family Gardening Nutrition Education Project to 11 Counties in the Watershed
- Invited child care providers to bring children to the market for field trips – a letter went out to 35 child care providers
- Provided children in those child care homes with Junior Market Master Coupons to purchase locally grown produce at the Market – of the coupons sent out approximately 1/3 were redeemed.
- Raffling a home made quilt - proceeds from raffle for market \$57
- Designed a PRIDE Cookbook with local produce recipes
- Initiative Network to help low income families start vegetable gardens in their yards, apartment complexes, and communities.
  - Hosted a lunch for social service providers, educators, businesses, and medical professionals to distribute the Local Food Guide and Brochure, and the Tri County Walking Guides.
  - Secured funds to bring Senior Project Fresh to Saginaw County in 2005 and in 2006.
  - 2005 distributed over 500 coupon books (30% of the States total distribution), to local low income seniors, with a redemption rate of 95%, higher than the state's average.
  - 2006 to date over 600 coupon books have been distributed with one more distribution date scheduled for mid September.
  - Additional grant funds sought to develop and distribute local walking guides including the importance of consuming fresh fruits and vegetables for the Tri County Area.

Dan Keane, Saginaw Farmers Market Master, shares his story...

The Saginaw Farmers Market has expanded to be a venue for a variety of entrepreneurs and a shopping center for an expanded customer base. We have non-profit organizations who are now growing locally to increase their entrepreneurship; we have spin off farmers' markets like the one just opening in Hemlock. We engage new farmers like women who collaborate for increased sales in fiber (they have sheep and llama farms). The vendors do not compete and these are all new farmers to the market. Sales are strong and farmers are interested in increasing their volume. We have been able to expand the number of days the market is open.. and you cannot do that if farmers are not having strong enough sales. We have also lengthened the season by 6 weeks. We have added flowers. We pulled in more people to create a Community Food Guide.

In her words, Holly Tiret, MSU Extension Educator shares her story...

When we first formed our team I have to admit I was skeptical. Our team originally consisted of our local Farmers Market Master, our MSUE County Extension Director, the grant writer for the Saginaw Family Childcare Network, and myself an MSUE Extension Educator in Family and Consumer Sciences. I was not sure what goals we had in common or how we would work to bring about any change. But we attended the workshop with an open mind and were inspired to start something. Looking back, that little partnership has blossomed into quite a few related projects, all having to do with the general theme of increasing local area food production and consumption of locally produce products. It has impacted not only our Saginaw community, but the Tri Counties (Saginaw, Bay and Midland), and 11 counties in the Watershed Initiative Network. Local and state funds over \$50,000 were brought into the areas along with innumerable local donations, especially to support the Family Gardening Project (for low income families). We succeeded in cross programming within MSUE to include Nutrition, Parenting, Child Care, Agriculture, Master Gardening and 4H. We partnered across local agencies for the Senior Project Fresh Project. We did cross county partnering with the Family Gardening, the Local Food Guide and the Walking Guides. From our SARE weekend workshop to today, we can look back and see the ripples from our pebble in the pond.

## **Sault Ste Marie Farmers Market**

### **Chippewa County Community Food Team**

In Chippewa County, dwindling numbers of direct markets for fresh produce and increased transportation costs for meat processing that ultimately reduced local livestock farmers' profit margin were impetus for the growth of a local team. Team members envisioned an increase overall health in community, an increase number of small businesses, and more informed land use decisions as viable outcomes. Team members pursued multiple approaches:

1. Reinstate state meat inspectors program
1. Establish local processing facility
2. Increase direct purchase of locally grown products



3. Provide education opportunities to farmers on issues from safety to food labeling
4. Provide assistance to farmers on how to direct market products to consumers
5. Strategic marketing methods to increase attendance at local farm markets

**Highlights:**

- From 2003 to 2005, the market had increased its number of farmer vendors from 2 to 32.
- According to all vendors, profit margins from 2004 to 2005 were higher. The local Farmers' Market had increased its sales of meat, poultry, and produce. Total 2005 market sales increased from \$500 in June to \$4,000 in September, measured in 2-hour-periods, over the course of one day in both months.
- Investment of Sault Ste Marie Downtown Development Authority approved a \$275,000 investment for the local farmer's market that only allows local produce.
- The Sault Ste Marie Downtown Business District changed its Shopping Night extended store hours to Wednesday nights due to volume of customers at Farmers' Market.

Chippewa County MSU Extension Director Jim Lucas has taken a leadership role in the community food team's local efforts. Here is his story:

The main focus of our work is with the Sault Ste Marie (SSM) Farmers' Market. Demand for local foods by local people is growing faster than what we can supply. The SSM Farmers' Market has become a social event on Wednesday evenings. We are what people do before they go to the concert in the park on Wednesday evenings. Around 300 people rush from work to the SSM Farmers' Market to purchase their favorite items from their favorite vendors. It has become a social affair where new vendors are welcome by the older ones with helpful hints on displays and pricing. We try to offer a full line of foods from meats, poultry, eggs, veggies, fruits, art, a ventriloquist, and live music weekly. We have learned to place our artist, maple syrup, honey, creams and lotions, and herbalists between our produce vendors to "slow down" traffic in the market and provide shopping opportunities for these folks. We try to keep our artisan bread, meats, poultry, fresh fish, and tree fruits at separate locations in the market so folks have a better shopping experience by strolling around and searching for their favorite goods. I have made some good friends and the community has access to good food. We have 39 registered vendors now with 20-30 vendors weekly.

Impact: Our Market is in a parking lot. The Downtown Development Authority (DDA) has purchased land and will develop a farmers' market for us, an investment of \$250,000. The DDA also moved evening shopping from Thursday to Wednesday while an extra 300 people are at the Wednesday Farmers' Market. Most of our customers are middle class professional folk that want healthy food for their families. All of our vendors live and grow their produce in the Eastern Upper Peninsula. Impact: A grower from WI comes on the weekend with his produce and sells in another location south of town. Another market has opened with vendors that bring produce from all over. They have set the market up south of town on weekends. People have choice, know what works, and the vendors at the SSM Farmers' Market want to demonstrate to local persons what they can be produced locally.

We have yet to break into the grocery store produce with local produce. This will be our 2007 goal with the assistance of the USDA-CSREES-funded hoop houses we will be receiving through our relationship with the CS Mott Group at MSU.

Our customers are still a minority of the folks in the community. Most people still want dirt cheap food. It is difficult to change this mentality. Most customers appreciate our tag line, "know the people that grow your food" but we still get complaints that we are more expensive than the supermarkets, our selection is minimal, and that we do not let "jobbers" or folks that buy boxed veggies from Eastern Market or other locations around the country sell at our market. We are proud that we have a market place for good food. We have several needs to expand upon, but that is a year or two off.

## **Van Buren County Emerging Farmers Initiative Van Buren Local Food Entrepreneur Initiative**

To stem the loss of farmland to development, the Van Buren County Community Team looked holistically at what was happening in their area to encourage and support emerging farmers. After developing a "Farmer 101" course directed at new farmers, MSU Extension in Van Buren County wanted to team up with others in the community to approach emerging farmers more holistically. A more comprehensive program for ag-entrepreneurs (entrepreneurial program with financial incentives that match personal savings as equity in business) was created after MSUE received federal funding for 35 matched savings accounts for agri-related business start-up or enhancement. This meant that there was the potential for 35 new food-related business start up or enhancements or put another way, \$100,000 invested in small farm and/or food entrepreneurship. To increase viability of multi-cultural and other new farmers, MSUE took a leadership role in creating the Van Buren Local Food Entrepreneur Initiative.



This initiative is unique in that the entrepreneur program focuses on the farm and food business sector. The entrepreneurs program occurs over the course of a year in which emerging farmers and food entrepreneurs build their enterprise viability while connecting with one another. The year is structured to enable agriculture entrepreneurs to shore up or create business plans, access debt and equity capital, cultivate markets, network with each other and share information such that they stimulate and invigorate local economies, and afford access to healthy food through direct markets. MSUE offers Agriculture Individual Development Accounts (IDAs), a matched savings program. The IDAs allow the participant to build equity within the business. Because savings occurs over the course of the year, the IDAs enable the participant to focus on launching or strengthening the business. IDAs are one tool that help lower-income emerging farmers and entrepreneurs stay focused on cash flow in the early stages of their business. To date, nine farmers have opened IDA accounts with a credit union partner.

## Highlights from the greater Van Buren County Agricultural Entrepreneur Individual Development Account Program

- CS Mott Group received funding through HHS AFI for 70 agriculture accounts in southwest Mi.
- IDAs are imbedded in "Emergent Farmer Program", a peer farmer program
- Local farmer who is also IDA holder coordinates program
- Nine emerging farmers have opened IDAs
- EITC
- Local credit union provides financial counseling and products

Julie Pioch, Van Buren County MSU Extension Director, shares her story...

Farmers save money, submit a business plan, participate in peer to peer meetings. All have taken educational classes to forward them in the ag businesses. Some have completed and some are working on writing business development plans. All have participated in monthly gatherings to network and guide each other in the business of agriculture.

Monthly meetings have been rewarding and inspiring for me as an organizer and educator. The peer to peer discussions have been useful to me in gleaning what future educational programs and opportunities might be needed for the entrepreneurs. Although I prepare an agenda to work through just in case, we have never used it. The group fills the time with relevant discussion about the host farm operation along with a tour. There is non-stop conversation and idea exchange about how to improve and focus the operation.

Business plan development is a perceived barrier to some members and old news to others. As a group we have been able to talk about what a business plan contains, how to interpret business "dreams and expectations" into a written document and what a business plan can be used for (loans, planning and focusing your operation and grants).

Lee Arboreal, co-owner of the Eaters Guild, grower and coordinator of the Van Buren Local Food Entrepreneur Initiative shares his insights...

Unique aspects are its peer-farmer support and matched savings accounts that build equity in the farm business. Nine emerging farmers opened asset building accounts, used tax refunds to pay property taxes, and barter skills in lieu of dipping into savings. Based on feedback from the group, the entrepreneurs are also finding value in the peer to peer networking opportunities. They attend as a requirement to the program but also because they are finding real value in their shared time. For example, as beginning farmers and excited entrepreneurs, members of this group have all sorts of ideas for their enterprises. At two meetings held on farms this summer, the group was able to assist in identifying the growers' strengths and weaknesses. After touring the farm and discussing all the ideas the peer group was able to help the farmers focus their plans. The peer group was able to offer suggestions for focusing on the strengths that would allow the farmers to establish a cash flow in the short term which could be built upon to help them realize their larger goals that were more likely ten years down the road. Each farmer has pride in their own operations and wants to share what they have accomplished with the group and they welcome the insight of their peers.

Conversations at the gatherings always dwell a great deal on input costs marketing and markets. Outcomes from sharing around these topics have been suggestions for expanding markets, and ways to share resources within the group. For example, sharing in the cost of a bulk load of chicken feed or sharing space at farmers markets or in greenhouses.

Seeing the group's identity and strengths emerge, as a grower, has let me see better the wisdom of baiting the new ag entrepreneurs to be together once a month. The knowledge and experience differential along with the diverse expertise has been a creative tension by which fun, sharing and commiseration is had. A challenge for me as an organizer and peer has been to encourage participation and attendance in an inviting way instead of a requiring one. Julie probably has felt this, not least with me, and is more masterful at executing kind deliberation.

Beyond the savings match the cohort is clearly assembling a network of material and experiential resources. The intimacy of exploring each others projects—messy, bizarre, half-finished or beautifully flawed--has opened up channels of generosity and exchange greater than the usual sort common to farmers. One tool we are imagining and working to make use of is a simple way to encourage more daily or routine communication between participants. A list-serve, e-mail solution has been posited but some gaps in access/usership has hindered making this open to all. The phone is always there for acute needs and has been the way I've stayed in touch with some of the participants.

Mark Thomas, CED Specialist with MSUE shares his observations...

In the early seventies as my military obligation was drawing to a close and the oppressive thought of forty more years in the basement of the bank reading and writing nonsense for business types overwhelmed, I discovered "The Greening of America" by Charles A. Reich among others. I couldn't wait to let my freak flag fly and get back to the land. I was sure that a depression was coming and I needed to "blow up my TV, throw away my papers and move to the country to set my mind free."

Well that aside, next thing I know I'm getting up at 4:40 every morning to milk cows for two buck an hour. Get back home at 7:30 am and crank that organic truck farm gig until dark. "Scratch the earth, plant the seed, protect until it turns into feed. Haul it to market, put on a price, and when the folks come, be sure to smile nice." (oh yeah, write bad rhymes also) So then a time passed and then it seems that everybody was having them dreams. "I'll let you be in my farmers' market if I can be in yours." So we worked and played together. Studied and traveled together. Started families and ran co-ops together. Then our backs gave out, or Raygun came into office, or we needed money for something (like health insurance), well, you get the idea. Its like Jack London said, "You can trade muscle for money for only so long. You are going to run out of muscle before you run out of the need for money." Brains will get you through times of no muscle better than muscle will get you through times of no brains - I said that.

So we finished off our degrees by degrees and shined our shoes and cut our hair. "You can shine your shoes and wear a suit. You can comb your hair and look quite cute. You can live a lie until you die, but one thing you can't hide is when you are crippled inside." - John Lennon (one of them songs he wrote).

So what I am telling you is that I felt healed inside by my visit with the IDA folks the other night. You see Susan, the passion still burns, the community spirit still exists, the hope is continual and consciousness is still evolving. What I was able to witness felt good. Gentle sharing of ideas without judgment. No overburdened investment in an idea to be defended for no good reason. A welcoming of constructive suggestions. A genuine offering of resources and experiences received with the same trueness. (not to mention the hot chocolate and cookies). Better people make better communities. Competition replaced by completion.

How did these kids (20- somethings) find the vision of a better world? How did my generation get so lucky as to feel that the pioneer work of the 70s and 80s wasn't wasted? Perhaps I was transported back in time to feel this hopefulness of a better environment. The missing element for these new pioneers was the sense of community. The IDA program/farming 101 helped to provide the opportunity, but they are making it a reality.

# USDA CSREES SARE GRANT 2005-2006 Consultant's Report - August 30, 2006

## 1. PROCESS

### Retreats as educational skill building opportunities

At both the March 2005 and April 2006 retreats local team members shared experiences, traded expertise and increased their advocacy skills. The March 2005 retreat, however, had the greatest focus on advocacy skills with a full two hour workshop "Welcome to Policy: Working with Public Officials." A 2-page summary of the workshop's key points is included as an attachment to this report.

### Shared local experience and support via site visits, hands-on opportunities for local public officials

Local site visits gave staff, consultants and team members the opportunity to look at the policy implications of their work in greater depth. Site visits are time-consuming to host and time-consuming to attend, but certainly valuable and motivating. Additionally, a number of site hosts invited local officials to participate. Those officials able to attend had first hand experiences with the work of local food policy teams and the policy issues inherent in that work. Sen. Van Woerkom (R-Norton Shores) attended the Muskegon Local Food Policy Team in Spring Lake, and a representative of Rep. Gary McDowell (D-Rudyard) attended the site visit in Chippewa County. In both instances, the exposure raised the legislators' awareness of local food policy concerns and increased their potential willingness to take action to address these concerns.

### Updates via listserv & conference calls

CARRS Staff created the [FOODSPEAKLIST@MSU.EDU](mailto:FOODSPEAKLIST@MSU.EDU), which included individuals throughout MSU Extension, as well as others not necessarily participating in SARE local food policy teams. I used the listserv to post general legislative updates, details about specific opportunities or legislation, and to recruit participants for hearings or panels. Staff and I received very little response to listserv alerts about opportunities to monitor hearings, provide testimony or comment on topics related to the work of the local teams. It was clear that individual contact was necessary to recruit local food policy team members for this kind of participation in public policy advocacy. The one exception was SB 777, a bill pre-empting local regulation of genetically modified seeds. In this instance the listserv dialog was extremely active, and as passed on through other networks, resulted in a fairly large volume of messages to key legislators.

Other feedback about the listserv:

- ✓ It's a useful medium to pass on legislative updates and news not typically found in the mainstream media (my sources include Gongwer Michigan Report and MIRS)
- ✓ too many or too lengthy personal statements on events or issues discouraged some from participating in the listserv;
- ✓ Alternatively, one person felt that "there's almost no back-and-forth...";
- ✓ Some guidelines were needed to ensure the listserv was not used for lobbying purposes, and limited to education and discussion of issues.

There were a number of conference calls early in the grant cycle, but almost none in 2006. I don't know how useful they were and the listserv seemed to partially take the place of conference calls. Our focus shifted more to contacting individual teams about opportunities relevant to their work and recruiting members for specific events (a hearing, a press conference, a panel presentation, etc.).

Assistance drafting strategic public policy plans

After one site visit, I drafted a detailed strategic public policy plan (attached). I don't know the extent to which it was used, but I sensed that this particular team – while motivated to move forward – had little time to devote to the plan, and needed more consultant or staff time and support to move forward.

## **Assistance developing message for testimony and other forms of public comment**

In a number of instances, team members wanted to participate in a hearing or a panel but were reluctant to do so without help crafting a concise message on the policy issues and knowing in advance what to expect (e.g., a Senate Hearing vs. a MFPC “listening session”). Given this support, I found team members willing to participate in events, and doing so effectively and with confidence.

## **Identification of opportunities to share public policy concerns with policy makers**

As mentioned above, local food policy team members created many opportunities to educate policy makers about their concerns. They also took advantage of hearings, listening sessions, and press conferences to advance their policy agenda. Team members should be particularly proud of their impact on the Michigan Food Policy Council's work and for prompting Senator Van Woerkom to call a special Senate Agriculture committee hearing exclusively dedicated to a panel presentation by local food policy members.

### Identification and sharing of individual team's expertise with other teams

CARRS staff really facilitated this process, but not without some difficulty in getting teams to articulate the exact public policy implications in their work. In the end, I think CARRS staff, while not getting exactly what they expected, created useful events, documents and tools that fit the needs of team members.

## **2. STEPS**

- A. Skill building: advocacy training with local food policy teams, March 3 & 4, 2005
- B. Local Site Visits
  - Kalamazoo Food Policy Team < name of event? >, June, 2005.
  - Muskegon Local Food Policy Team <name of event? – afternoon seminar> August, 2005.
  - Chippewa Co. Tours – Sault Ste. Marie Farmers Market & the Dutcher's farm and poultry processing operations, September 28 & 29, 2005.
  - Cheboygan Community Food Team Visit (I wasn't present), November 14, 2005.
- C. Strategic public policy advocacy planning: assisted the Chippewa Co. team develop detailed strategic public policy plan, October 2005.
- D. On-going email alerts via the listserv on issues of interest both at the state legislature and in other settings.
- E. Assistance developing concise public policy message. For example, CARRS staff and I helped the teams create a shared “Michigan Community Food Policy Teams' Policy Recommendations.”
- F. Identify opportunities to provide comment to public policy makers: committee testimony on state legislation, and before the Michigan Food Policy Council and its various task forces, as well other settings.
- G. Recruit and provide the necessary supports to team members so they could successfully provide comments in various settings (i.e., preparation of testimony, organization of panel presentations).
- H. Initiate opportunities to engage policy makers – for example, requested special hearing of the Senate Agriculture Committee on activities and policy recommendations of local food policy teams.
- I. Share efforts, explore in-depth profiles and policy implications of five teams, share tools and expertise, identify means of continued networking/sharing , Spring Retreat, April 10, 2006.

## **3. ILLUMINATE PITFALLS**

Some teams had difficulty translating their local initiatives and activities into public policy recommendations and advocacy actions. As their consultant I needed better explanations, better exercises to help local food policy activists articulate the policy implications of their work.

It was difficult engaging teams in public policy discussions at state level.

For example, last fall there was a well-publicized series of hearings held by the Senate Health Policy Committee on Obesity, and throughout the term of this grant a number of “listening sessions” and various task force meetings of the Michigan Food Policy Council. The local teams that I thought would be most interested in engaging on the issues did not respond. Because I work at the state level, I wasn’t able to provide team members with information on local opportunities for public policy discussions. This might have been more helpful to team members, especially those who faced significant transportation problems and/or who were especially new or intimidated by public policy advocacy

There was inconsistent engagement across local food policy teams. Some team members were already highly experienced in public policy advocacy and needed no prompting or assistance whatsoever. But the majority of team members needed more individual contact and attention, something that would have required more staff/consultant time to provide.

Teams needed assistance with evidence gathering (e.g., the history of Michigan’s regulation of meat and poultry processing); again, more staff/consultant time than available was needed to follow through on this with the local team members.

I learned to exercise caution when using the listserv to alert participants to current legislation and other public policy issues. On the other hand, some food policy team members without staff or consultant prompting, spoke out on the listserv with reminders about effective ways to communicate views to elected officials.

The connection or relationship between local food policy team members and their MSUE agents varied greatly. In some instances, the agent was an integral member of the food policy team. In other instances, it was difficult to observe any connection between the regional MSUE agent and the local food policy team. I lacked the understanding and experience with MSUE to address this issue.

Team members and MSUE Agents themselves who gave me feedback on this issue identified the following barriers to MSUE Agents participation in local food policy teams:

Lack of time  
Low priority  
Inexperience/lack of skills

## 4. ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND ONGOING OPPORTUNITIES

Completed shared public policy agenda: *“Michigan Community Food Policy Teams’ Policy Recommendations”*

Presented testimony and/or public policy recommendations at:

- ✓ November 4, 2005: Michigan Food Policy Council Task (MFPC) force on Enhancing Agricultural Viability.
- ✓ January 28, 2006: Michigan Food Policy Council “Listening Session” held at the Northern Michigan Small Farm Conference, Grayling, MI.
- ✓ February 22, 2006: Senate Health Policy Committee Hearing in Lansing. Presentation by Dr. Mike Hamm, and members of the Community and School Gardeners Association (membership overlaps with some local food policy teams) on expanding access to locally grown food & gardening as one tool to address the epidemic of Childhood Type II Diabetes.
- ✓ April ( ), 2006: Senate Agriculture Committee, Committee Chair convened a special committee hearing for a panel presentation by local food policy team members.

A representative of a local food policy team participated in press conference in the fall of 2005 on proposed cuts in Congress to the Food Assistance Program. The coalition included Food Bank Council of Michigan, Center for Civil Justice, and Marianne Udow, Director of the MI Department of Human Services.

Public comments (see above) made by local food policy members before various MFPC taskforces, have (in words of staff) *“facilitated development of task force recommendations to the full MFPC.”*

We expect many local food policy council policy concerns to be reflected in the final MFPC Report and Recommendations to the Governor (report to be released in Fall, 2006).

Local food policy members, via listserv alerts and communication, greatly expanded discussion of a bill pre-empting local control over genetically modified seeds, SB 777. Jeff Cobb, Chief of Staff to Sen. Van Woerkom, Chair of the Senate Agriculture committee indicated: *“We expected to have one hearing, but instead had four or five hearings...we were surprised by the amount of interest in this bill.”*

After various presentations of the Michigan Community Food Policy Teams' Policy Recommendations, a number of state legislators have indicated an interest in learning more about the economic impact of state-sponsored meat and poultry inspection program.

Chippewa County Food Policy Team member Cindy Dutcher was invited to participate in round table, facilitated by Michigan Food & Farming Systems (MIFFS) and the MSU Product Center, on re-establishing state inspection program for small to medium size chicken and poultry producers.

Executives from the Department of Agriculture, after visiting the Saginaw Farmers Market, asked the local food policy team member for more information on the development of the market and its guidelines, in order to incorporate this information in other economic development grants, such as the “Cities of Promise” program.

Chair of Senate Health Policy Committee, Sen. Bev Hammerstrom, solicited ideas for legislation addressing childhood obesity. Dr. Mike Hamm provided input on one concept that could increase local food purchasing capacity by schools. Concept may be incorporated in legislation this fall.

Michigan Community Food Issues Teams' Retreat  
April 10th, 2006 - 9 a.m.—4 p.m.  
Kettunen Center—Tustin, Michigan  
9 a.m.-4 p.m.

AGENDA

8:30 a.m.— Coffee and rolls

9:00 a.m.— 10:30 a.m.

**Sharing Our Efforts**

Cheboygan, Kent, Kalamazoo,  
Montmorency, and Ingham

10:30 a.m.-12 p.m.

**Detailed Stories: Local Efforts on  
Policy Issues**

Saginaw, Northwest MI, Van Buren,  
Washtenaw, and Muskegon

Lunch

View “What Will We Eat?”, a  
documentary produced by Chris  
Bedford

1:00– 2:00 p.m.

**Sharing Thoughts and Tools**

Ingham, Cheboygan, Saginaw, and  
Washtenaw

2:15-4 :00 p.m..

**Staying Connected**

RSVP: [cocciare@msu.edu](mailto:cocciare@msu.edu)

*All Travel Will Be Reimbursed*

**Sharing Our Efforts**

Five teams will take about ten minutes to present their past year's efforts. Specifically, each group will provide information on:

What issues did you tackle and what steps taken?

Social, financial, and other resources mobilized

Components of projects that are sustainable

Resources needed to continue

What changed in your community or is there any evidence that this is important to others in the community

**In-depth Profiles and Policy Implications**

Five teams will provide a more detailed account of their local efforts, focusing on policy issues that are integrated in all aspects of their work.

Discussion on the draft Policy Agenda submitted to the Food Policy Council will follow.

**Sharing Our Thoughts and Tools**

Time will be devoted to review the morning, asking questions and sharing information. Four teams will share specific tools and techniques used to inform their efforts: examples include survey tools, farm market assessments, and networking methods.

**Staying Connected**

Describe ways in which teams undertaking similar areas can continue to work with one another. Hear about several initiatives in which local teams may want to participate. Leave the retreat knowing how to continue connecting with one another to further community system efforts locally.



Dutcher Farm, Chippewa  
County, Michigan

Saginaw Farmers' Market  
Saginaw Michigan



# RETREAT AGENDA March 2005

## Thursday, March 3, 2005

**10:00-11:00 a.m. Registration, coffee, baseline survey**

**11:00 a.m.-12:00 p.m.**

- Community food systems, an overview (Mike Hamm)
- Objectives of the retreat and scope of project (Mike Hamm)
- Introductions
- Evaluation activities (Susan Smalley and David Conner)

**12:00-1:00 p.m. Lunch**

**1:00-2:45 p.m.**

Community food systems: framing the message (Mike Hamm)

- From food systems to community food systems (Marty Heller)

**3:00 - 5:00 p.m.**

Tools to help you create and implement your plan

Presenters: Julie Hale Smith, Michigan State Housing Dev. Authority; Dale Sherwin, USDA Rural Development; Laura Bower, Michigan Economic Dev. Corp.; Staff member, Michigan Public Health Department

### Travel Arrangements

Travel, lodging, and meals are covered through the SARE grant. Where ever possible, please try to car pool to Kettunen.

We are making all room reservations, so please let us know your team members as soon as possible.

For information, contact  
Susan Cocciarelli  
517-432-4525

## Thursday, March 3, 2005

**7 p.m.– 9 p.m.**

**7:30-8:30 a.m. Breakfast**

**9:00 a.m.–12:00 p.m.**

Community involvement and role of community as team (Frank Fear, MSU)

Publicizing your issues (Patti Cantrell, Mi. Land Use Institute)

Understand technical assistance provider roles and time frame for project benchmark achievement (Susan Cocciarelli and Barb Mutch)

Review Action Plan

**12:00–1:00 p.m. Lunch**



**Giving Tree Farm**