

GOOD FOOD ACCESS FOR FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES:

MICHIGAN GOOD FOOD WORK GROUP REPORT SERIES

Report No. 2 of 5



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This report was developed with leadership from the C.S. Mott Group for Sustainable Food Systems at Michigan State University, the Food Bank Council of Michigan and the Michigan Food Policy Council. This report, along with the others in the series, provides the foundation for the goals and agenda priorities put forth in the Michigan Good Food Charter.

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FOOD SECURITY EXISTS WHEN ALL PEOPLE, AT ALL TIMES, HAVE PHYSICAL AND ECONOMIC ACCESS TO SUFFICIENT, SAFE, AND NUTRITIOUS FOOD TO MEET THEIR DIETARY NEEDS AND FOOD PREFERENCES FOR AN ACTIVE AND HEALTHY LIFE. (FAO)¹

VISION

Our vision is a food system that provides access to healthy, green, fair and affordable food for all Michigan residents. All strategies to increase access should:

- View food as a solution, not as a problem.
- Be sustainable and community-driven.
- Increase the economic viability of both the community and the state.

CURRENT STATE OF AFFAIRS

Michigan has a problem of inadequate access to good, healthy, affordable food. Does it affect every individual and family living in the state? No. Does it affect neighborhoods and communities across Michigan? Absolutely.

Access to good food - food that is healthy, green, fair and affordable - is an issue for individuals, families and communities in every county in Michigan. The Michigan Department of Agriculture (MDA), in conjunction with the U.S. Census Bureau, used census tracts to identify areas in Michigan with "limited access" to a grocery store – i.e., a population of low- and moderate-income residents, a below-average density of grocery stores, and travel limitations to stores due to store distance, lack of vehicle access and lack of public transportation infrastructure.² MDA found that every county in the state has at least one area (often more) that met this definition, and that 59 percent of all Michigan residents live in a limited access area. Approximately 54 percent of all census tracts in Michigan lack reasonable access to retail grocery stores that offer healthy and affordable fresh produce, along with meat, poultry, milk and dairy products.³

One might assume that this is because Michigan has fallen hard in the economic crisis. But anyone familiar with urban areas such as Detroit, Flint, Benton Harbor or Pontiac will tell you that the lack of grocery stores that provide fresh, affordable food within these cities has been around for decades. Detroit, for example, has 155 grocery stores and food markets that carry some level of meat and produce, and well over 1,000 convenience stores, including gas stations and party stores, that may carry some level of food. But in reality, in cities such as Detroit, it is often easier to buy a bottle of beer than it is to get an apple. Even if you can get an apple, it probably costs more than the bottle of beer. And the apple most likely traveled many miles to get to the store.

GOOD FOOD means food that is:

Healthy

It provides nourishment and enables people to thrive.

Green

It was produced in a manner that is environmentally sustainable.

Fair

No one along the production line was exploited during its creation.

Affordable

All people have access to it.

Adapted from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation

¹ Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. (1996) Rome Declaration on World Food Security and World Food Summit Plan of Action. World Food Summit November 13-17. Rome.

² U.S. Department of Agriculture. (2009) Access to Affordable and Nutritious Food: Measuring and Understanding Food Deserts and Their Consequences. Report to Congress. Retrieved from <http://www.ers.usda.gov/publications/ap/ap036/>.

³ Craig, R. G. (2009) Economic Impact of New or Expanded Retail Food Store Developments by Using PA 231 and Other Tools to Promote Healthy and Affordable Food Options in Michigan. Agriculture Development Division, Michigan Department of Agriculture. Retrieved 12/9/09 from http://www.michigan.gov/documents/mda/Economic_Impact_MiDeptAg_290186_7.pdf.



Researchers have documented that Detroit residents living in areas that have an imbalance of healthy food options are statistically more likely to suffer or die prematurely from diet-related diseases.⁴ But Detroit is not alone in this struggle. Areas outside Detroit - including Pontiac, Lansing, Grand Rapids and Flint, as well as rural counties - are also paying a high price for lack of access to quality food.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has suggested that, without serious intervention, diet- and lifestyle-related diseases will lead to a generation - today's children - that for the first time in history will have shorter life spans than their parents. Simply put, our diets are killing us. The issue has become so essential to the health and well-being of Americans that First Lady Michelle Obama has announced the Let's Move campaign to reduce childhood obesity. To support that effort, the federal government has included increased funding for healthy grocery stores in underserved areas.

The Challenges and Context of Food Access

POVERTY AND ACCESS

Communities with a lower socioeconomic status have been found to have fewer supermarkets per person, greater distances to travel to the nearest major food store and decreased availability of healthy foods than wealthier areas enjoy.⁵ In other words, if you are living at or around the poverty level, you are more likely to live in an underserved area than higher income households. You are less likely to have full-service grocery stores within walking distance. You are less likely to have reliable transportation. You are less likely to be fully employed and may lack or have insufficient health insurance coverage.

Access to full-service grocery stores is further complicated by the fact that, for many of Michigan's low-income residents, public transportation options to food stores are limited, and low-income individuals tend not to own cars. Further, areas that have high poverty rates also tend to have greater concentrations of fast-food restaurants than grocery stores, offering low-cost food but few options for fresh fruits and vegetables.

The thing often left unsaid is many of the people living in poverty are from communities of color. Many of those we interviewed in the process of developing this report stated that food access in Michigan is more than just a food justice issue - it is also a racial justice issue. In fact, one urban farmer and food justice activist said that food access is one of the last hurdles of the civil rights movement in this country.

The issue of food access crosses into another social justice issue: education. Food access is not just an issue for individuals and families but also an issue in Michigan schools. Some schools are beginning to improve the quality and nutritional value of the food they serve through farm-to-school programs. Yet limited school food budgets often make serving healthy food difficult, especially in high poverty communities where school districts suffer from a lack of funding across all program areas.



⁴ Gallagher, M. (2007) *Examining the Impact of Food Deserts on Public Health in Detroit*. Mari Gallagher Research & Consulting Group.

⁵ Albemarle State Policy Center (2008) *Balance: A Report on State Action to Promote Nutrition, Increase Physical Activity, and Prevent Obesity*. Issue 7. 2008 Fall Report. Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. Retrieved 1/29/10 from <http://www.rwjf.org/pr/product.jsp?id=30792>.



Why is school food so important? Children who are hungry or who suffer from childhood obesity may not have the same educational outcomes as children who eat good, fresh healthy food. For many children, the free or reduced price meal they receive at school is their primary meal of the day. An educator talked to us about what happens (or does not happen) for children in the summer when school is out and there is no food at home. “People don’t want to believe it, but our kids go hungry in the summer. School means everything, including eating a meal.”

School policies might even contradict efforts to provide healthy food. One of our work group contributors described a school garden where the children are helping to grow good, healthy food. But school policies and regulations state that the school cannot prepare and serve the food that is grown in the garden.

IF YOU BUILD IT...

Adding to the complexity of this issue, simply providing more fresh foods through farmers’ markets and grocers is not enough to fully address limitations to healthy food access and consumption. One of the obstacles to getting fresh food to people and getting them to eat it is that many do not or cannot cook. There are several reasons for this. In underserved areas, especially in rental properties and public housing, refrigerators and stoves often do not work. With the elimination of home economics programs in schools, youth are not always coming into adulthood with basic cooking skills.

And because many families are working more hours than in earlier times and have irregular schedules, it becomes habitual to eat packaged foods or fast foods. Unfortunately, a dollar meal at the fast-food restaurant across the street is cheaper and easier than trying to buy fresh food, bring it home and prepare a meal for the family.

One community resident that we interviewed in a low-access neighborhood in Benton Harbor said that putting a major grocery store in the middle of an area that did not have one before means little without some education and support. “In a market system, if you provide produce and fresh meats and dairy but the community doesn’t know how to prepare what you offer or culturally doesn’t eat what you offer, they won’t buy it. And if they don’t buy it, folks will stop offering it. Then you are back where you started.” A food activist and urban farmer in Detroit concurs. “You can’t just look at food and say, ‘If you build it, they will come.’”

Programs in urban and rural areas are starting to appear that teach residents not only how to grow and shop for food but also how to prepare it. A partnership between Grand Rapids’ Peace Gardens and the Grand Rapids Community College culinary program has students teaching residents how to prepare fresh, healthy meals. In Lansing, the Allen Neighborhood Center formerly held cooking demonstrations and now distributes fresh produce snacks at the weekly farmers’ market to foster demand for the foods sold there.

IMPACT OF MICHIGAN’S ECONOMY ON FOOD ACCESS

Tough economic times have hit Michigianians hard, and not just those who are poor and underserved. The current economy has forced Michigan and the rest of the country to redefine its notion of who is poor and who may be living in or on the edge of food insecurity. In addition to those who may have been living at or below the poverty level in the past, the ranks of the food insecure are swelling because of a crumbling middle class. As a result, many individuals and families are just a paycheck or two away from poverty, homelessness and hunger. Many are facing tough choices. Each week they choose between paying their utilities and buying food. They decide between paying rent and buying food. And they are often forced to choose between paying for their prescription medications and buying groceries.



To help out, thousands of pounds of food are distributed each month via an infrastructure that includes food bank and rescue programs as well as federal commodities programs. In the commodities programs, the sources of free food often originate from over-production and waste in the current food system. Food banks are repositories where surplus or salvageable but unmarketable food and other products are stored and distributed to intermediary organizations that work with clients who are hungry or have serious limitations in their access to food. Food banks are procuring food through product donations directly from local and regional food and grocery retailers and producers; product donations indirectly from producers, wholesalers and retailers acquired via the national parent organization, America's Second Harvest; purchase arrangements when products are not available through donations; and small amounts of miscellaneous non-perishable foods collected through local food drives.

Opportunities to Build On

LINKING TO FARMER OPPORTUNITIES

To meet the access needs of underserved communities, there is a movement around the state and across the country to link rural farmers with consumers. In Michigan, opportunities have been created to bring rural farmers into farmers' markets in Lansing, Flint and Grand Rapids, and throughout southeastern Michigan. This effort has resulted in access to fresh produce for underserved communities, provided new markets for rural farmers and brought Michigan residents closer to the goal of access to Michigan-grown food for everyone.

One executive director of a neighborhood center said that the effort to link farmers with the community has created a real win-win situation. Adding equipment to accept Bridge Cards (the debit card that Michigan uses to distribute food stamps) at farmers' markets has also been extremely helpful in the effort to both increase access and increase farmer revenues.

COMMUNITY INITIATIVES

Food access is an issue that will require strategic thinking and action. Many organizations have developed creative, innovative community programs to bring healthy food to Michigan residents. Many of these are discussed in the agenda priorities that follow; they are included here to demonstrate the range of innovation already under way in Michigan:

Farmers' markets in innovative locations: These include churches, hospitals, community centers and street corners. Many are open four to five months out of the year, and some accept bridge cards and WIC coupons.

Community gardens: Community gardens can be found in most counties across the state. Though they are a good start, most agree that few community gardens have the capacity to feed large groups of people through a whole growing year.

Engagement of faith-based groups: One group is providing free regional trainings to faith-based organizations in Lansing, Grand Rapids, Flint and Detroit on how to promote healthy eating.

Food co-ops: These provide a variety of foods and share profits and savings with their membership. In some cases, members also work in the store in exchange for a further discount on purchases.

Community-supported agriculture (CSA): CSA is a strategy by which consumers become partners with farmers, receiving a share of what is grown but also incurring some of the risks of production by purchasing a farm "share" up front.

Mobile food programs: The new Michigan Neighborhood Food Movers delivers fruits and vegetables to Detroit residents on a fixed route and schedule. The program was made possible in Detroit through a \$75,000 low-interest loan.

Community advocacy: Communities across the state are coming together to bring these issues and opportunities to the attention of decision makers. Several groups are formalizing as local food policy councils or similar entities.



For example, the Food System Economic Partnership (FSEP), formed in 2005, seeks to revitalize the food system across a five county region of southeast Michigan. In another example, a committed group of Detroit community, business, corporate, faith-based, foundation and non-profit leaders began working together in 2007 to create a comprehensive community plan to improve the health and well-being of Detroiters. The focus is on increasing access to healthier, more affordable food and to better environments for exercise and play. *A Call for Action: Detroit Food & Fitness Community Plan*, released in October 2009, focused on policy and systems changes to eliminate barriers to healthy eating and physical activity.

STATEWIDE INITIATIVES

Groups around the state have also started to work together to address the many healthy food access issues. Some of the statewide initiatives include:

- The Michigan Food Policy Council, which is focused on food-related revitalization projects and increasing access to fresh and healthy Michigan-grown food, especially for children, low-income families and inner-city residents.
- Healthy Kids, Healthy Michigan (HKHM), a coalition of organizations which aims to reduce childhood obesity through state policy initiatives.
- The Michigan Healthy Weight Partnership, facilitated by the Michigan Department of Community Health, aims to prevent and control obesity and other chronic diseases through healthful eating and physical activity.

In the realm of state policy, P.A. 231 was enacted in July of 2008 to provide tax abatements for up to 10 years for new grocery stores in underserved neighborhoods that provide fresh produce and meats. An area must have a population of low- and moderate-income residents, a below-average density of grocery stores and travel limitations to grocery stores. Many cities would be eligible. The goal is to bring retailers into the neighborhood to provide good food at affordable prices. The qualifications for retailers are tight, requiring that 75 percent of the store (based on square footage) has to be used for fresh fruits and vegetables and meats. As a result, liquor and party stores will not be allowed to simply offer a bare-bones produce selection to qualify.

To take advantage of the abatement, stores such as Meijer that have historically shied away from these underserved areas are considering testing smaller stores that primarily offer groceries. To date, however, the Department of Agriculture has yet to receive an application for tax abatement status. Some members of the business community, including owners of existing stores, stated that the current state of the Michigan economy is a significant deterrent to opening new stores. Others believe that the tax abatement is good but is not going to be enough to help small businesses cover the costs of opening new outlets.



Moving Forward

The recommendations presented in the following sections of this report reflect the input of our contributors, insights from successful programming and policy initiatives in Michigan and across the country, and input that came during the Michigan Good Food Summit held in Lansing in February 2010. Every sector - from policymakers and legislators to growers and producers, community residents and advocates, and the business, educational and faith communities – has a role to play.

Access is achievable, and it is important that we act now. The 59 percent of Michigan residents who do not have good access to healthy food cannot wait another decade. In another decade, Michigan children who are now in early elementary school will be graduating from high school; newborns will be nearing the end of middle school. For these children to grow up healthy, to thrive in school and in our communities, we need to bring the creative resources of our entire state to bear on this issue.

The possibilities resulting from the interconnection of community programs, policy-oriented activities and state-level strategies cannot be overstated. In the future, this may be looked upon as the moment in time when Michigan, through creativity, collaboration, and commitment, achieved a level of food access and security for all of its residents that is the model for the entire country.



GOOD FOOD ACCESS GOALS

Our goal is that by 2020, the portion of Michigan residents who have access to affordable, fresh, healthy food (based on the USDA definition of access) will double, to reach at least 80 percent of the population, and all residents will be able to access at least 20 percent of their food from Michigan sources.

Within this goal, we have identified five broad strategies, (see pages 10-11) or realms of action, and 19 agenda priorities (see pages 14-32). We have also identified geographic areas of the state where, based on poverty rates, inadequate access to good food is likely to be most critical (see following section).

Priority Areas

Every county in the state struggles with access to fresh, healthy food, but Michigan's low-income rural and urban communities face particular challenges. We recommend that the strategies in this report be focused first on those communities whose total or child poverty rates are double the state average or greater (see Table 1). We believe that this emphasis is needed if we are to protect our most vulnerable children and reach the goal of 80 percent access to good food by 2020.

Table 1: Selected Large Michigan Cities with High Poverty Rates (2008)⁶

City	Population	Percent individuals at or below poverty	Percent children under age 18 at or below poverty
Michigan	10,045,697	14.0	19.0
Detroit	808,398	33.1	46.2
Flint	105,068	34.4	49.7
Kalamazoo	70,561	32.3	35.7
Muskegon	41,085	33.5	38.1
Pontiac	59,841	28.4	40.1
Saginaw	51,218	36.2	46.9

In addition to the above cities, there are many rural areas in Michigan with high poverty rates. The ten counties listed in Table 2 have the highest poverty rates in Michigan for children under the age of 18 and should be given special emphasis in the strategies. Figure 1 also indicates counties of the state with high rates of child poverty.

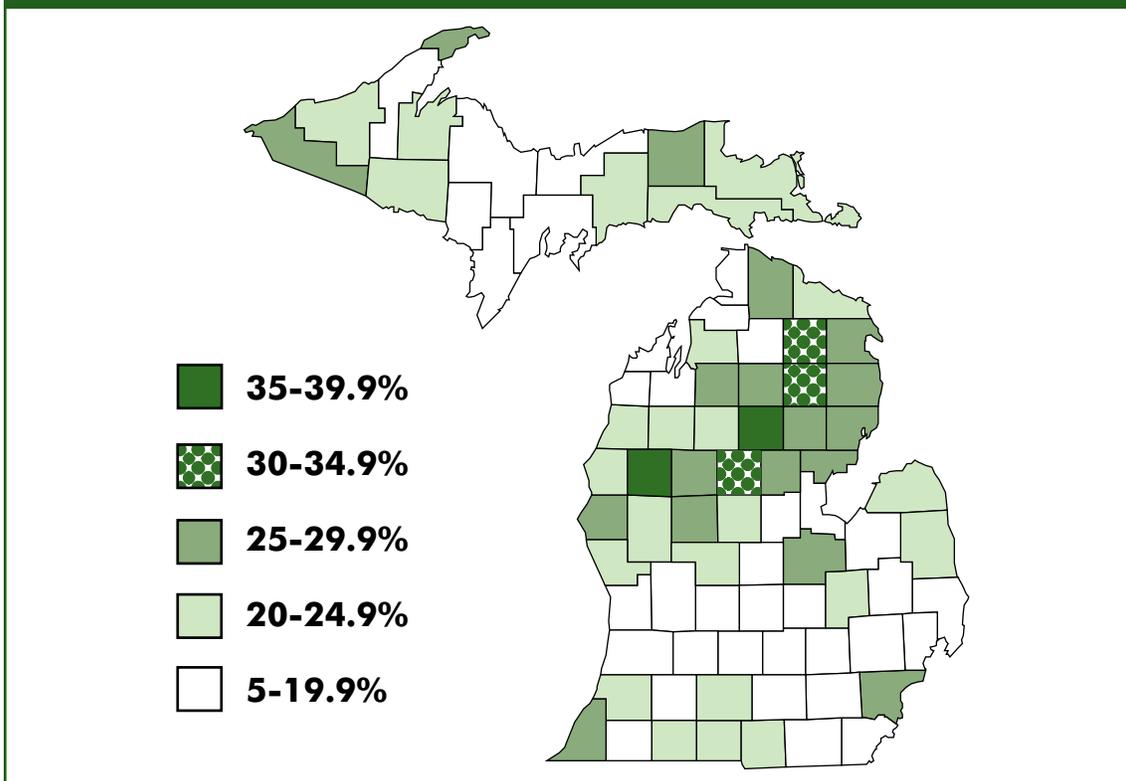
⁶ U.S. Census Bureau. (2008) 2006-2008 American Community Survey 3-Year Estimates, Data Profiles by City.



Table 2: Michigan Counties with Ten Highest Child Poverty Rates (2008)

County	Population Estimate ⁷	Percent children under 18 in poverty ⁸	Percent all ages in poverty ⁹
Michigan	10,045,697	14.0	19.0
Lake	11,017	36.0	20.1
Roscommon	24,682	35.1	18.4
Montmorency	10,185	32.6	17.7
Clare	30,349	31.9	19.1
Oscoda	8,884	30.6	17.7
Crawford	14,428	29.9	17.8
Iosco	26,104	29.9	17.6
Oceana	27,774	29.6	18.8
Gladwin	25,963	29.6	17.8
Wayne	1,949,024	29.3	20.5

Figure 1: Percent Children under 18 in Poverty in Michigan Counties (2008)¹⁰



⁷ U.S. Census Bureau. (2008) Population Estimates Program.

⁸ U.S. Census Bureau. (2008) Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates. Estimates for Michigan Counties, 2008.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

Strategy Types

COMMUNITY-BASED STRATEGIES

Expand and increase innovative methods to bring healthy foods to underserved areas as well as strategies to encourage their consumption.

Communities throughout Michigan are taking a hard look at their local food system and the impact it is having on the health and well-being of local residents. The frightening rise in the rates of obesity, diabetes and cardiovascular disease has spurred communities throughout Michigan to develop a variety of strategies that bring healthy food to their residents. These strategies are coming from the ground up, so they are uniquely poised to meet their communities' particular cultural and economic characteristics.

Many focus on bringing locally grown food to residents through farmers' markets, community gardens and community-supported agriculture programs (CSAs). In 2009, former Governor Granholm supported a mobile food initiative in Detroit - entrepreneurs drove trucks through the streets of the city and sold fresh fruits and vegetables to the residents. Emergency food providers, who serve some of the poorest residents in the state, are also seeking, through food rescue models, ways to bring fresh produce and healthier foods to residents who utilize soup kitchens and food pantries. Initiatives are also under way to create places for residents to learn about the cooking, storage and production of fresh foods.

The proposed community-based strategies in this report build on the innovative work already under way in Michigan to increase access to healthy food.

POLICY, PLANNING AND LAND USE STRATEGIES

Use policy and planning strategies to increase access to healthy food in underserved areas.

Groups in underserved communities throughout the state are developing innovative ideas for bringing healthy foods into their communities. The policy climate that surrounds their access efforts can make or break their success.

As noted earlier, farmers' markets, urban gardens and mobile food vendors are only a few of the strategies under way. With their eyes focused on the prize of healthy fresh fruits and vegetables, groups are startled to find that ordinances or policies dating back 50 years or more are standing in their way. Local zoning ordinances - which define what kinds of residential, commercial or agricultural uses can take place on the land and what kinds of structures can be placed on property - can prevent community gardeners from digging up even the first shovelful of dirt.

Local food policy councils are one way that communities in Michigan – Grand Rapids and Detroit, for example – are taking up the task of ensuring that needed policies are in place to support their communities' food system values and initiatives. Michigan is fortunate to have a state-level food policy council that gives food-related stakeholders a forum to identify policies that harness the potential of the food system to aid in communities' economic development, provide children and those in need greater access to fresh and nutritious foods, and support stewardship of our finite land and water resources.

Viewing other planning and land use decisions with an eye toward healthy food access can reveal further possibilities for bringing fresh fruits and vegetables into communities. Adopting a proactive approach to find ways that various government actions can increase access could go a long way toward opening up opportunities for healthy food access in underserved areas, including through increasing urban agriculture sites.

PUBLIC BENEFIT STRATEGIES

Maximize use of current public benefit programs for vulnerable populations, especially children and seniors, and link them with strategies for healthy food access.

Approximately 1.1 million people in Michigan experience food insecurity to some degree.¹¹ The USDA defines "food security" as access by all members of a household at all times to enough food for an active, healthy life.¹²

¹¹ Michigan Food Policy Council. (2006) Report of Recommendations. Retrieved from <http://www.michigan.gov/mfpc/0,1607,7-228--151980--00.html>.



Though multiple programs and policies at the federal, state and local levels affect access to healthy food, three areas were repeatedly mentioned by food advocates working on behalf of the poor and low-income residents in Michigan: the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP); the new vendor regulations related to the Women, Infants and Children (WIC) program; and U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) food programs that are currently underutilized.

The public benefit strategies offer specific ways to work within these three programs to increase access to healthy food for Michigan's low-income residents.

GROCERY STORE STRATEGIES

Provide training and financing to launch new grocery stores and improve existing stores to better serve people in urban and rural underserved areas.

Increased grocery store access and quality will enhance healthy and affordable food options. Linking farmers and the development of regional food system infrastructure to Michigan grocery stores, both small and large, will also help ensure that more people have the opportunity to choose Michigan-grown and Michigan-produced foods and that our retailers support Michigan farmers and agri-food businesses. Supermarket access has been shown to affect the amount of fruits and vegetables that residents consume, so this lack of access may be negatively affecting Michigan residents' health. The addition of just one local supermarket contributes to a 32 percent increase in fruit and vegetable consumption of nearby residents.¹³

One question that arises is whether grocery stores can be economically viable in low-income areas. *Re-Designing the Local Food System in Detroit*, a report by the Fair Food Network, notes that many Detroit neighborhoods could in fact support a full-service grocery store. In just one month – February 2009 – over \$8 million out of a total of \$33 million in food stamp benefits was redeemed in stores outside Detroit. Assuming that spending patterns are consistent throughout the year, over \$97 million in food stamp revenue is being spent outside Detroit. The report concludes that retail spending could support 600,000 to 1 million square feet of retail grocery space in Detroit. Similarly, the Food Trust of Philadelphia showed that each of Philadelphia's inner-city communities contains at least \$50 million in annual retail buying power per square mile,¹⁴ and many Michigan communities are likely to hold comparable potential.

The proposed grocery store strategies highlight work already under way in Michigan that holds promise for improving and increasing the quality and number of grocery stores in underserved communities, and that should be expanded throughout the state.

CULTURAL TRANSFORMATION STRATEGIES

Establish Michigan as “the place to be” for culturally based good food that is locally grown, processed, prepared and consumed.

The aforementioned four strategies are tied directly to healthy food access, but many of these initiatives are starting to change the culture of food in Michigan's communities. For example, in the course of just a few years, Detroit headlines have changed from “food deserts” to “urban agriculture.” This change is not just semantics. The cumulative work of hundreds of individuals and many organizations around the state over the past decade - one garden, one program, one initiative at a time - has started to become headline news and create new possibilities.

The proposed cultural transformation strategies build on some established social marketing ideas. They would help reinforce the behavioral changes needed to make many of the other strategies outlined here a success, in much the same way that social marketing has been used to discourage people from smoking in public areas or to encourage them to use seat belts and to follow speed limits. They offer a way for all Michigan residents to become interconnected with community programs, policy-oriented activities and state-level strategies.

¹² U.S. Department of Agriculture Food and Nutrition Service Web site. (n.d.) Food Security Resources: Food Security. Retrieved 4/12/10 from <http://www.fns.usda.gov/fsec/>.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ Marter, M. (2006) *Reversing a Supermarket Trend*. *The Philadelphia Inquirer*. October 13.

INDICATORS

The following indicators can help assess progress towards improving food access in Michigan and the extent to which different strategies are being utilized.

OVERALL INDICATORS

- Data from the Michigan Department of Agriculture identifying which census tracts have “limited access” to healthy food.
- Percentage of households that are food insecure/ food secure. This information is collected by the U.S. Department of Agriculture via a household food security survey. At present, the four ranges of food security/insecurity are high food security, marginal food security, low food security and very low food security.
- Percentage of population that is living at or below the poverty level. This is collected by the U.S. Census Bureau.
- Daily per capita servings of fruits and vegetables consumed. Data is collected through the Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS). BRFSS is the world’s largest on-going telephone health survey system, tracking health conditions and risk behaviors in the United States yearly since 1984. Michigan also collects data on youth through the Michigan Youth Behavioral Risk Survey (YRBS), which is conducted every two years and provides data representative of 9th through 12th graders in public and private schools.
- Obesity rate in adults and youth. This data is collected through the Michigan BRFSS and YRBS.





COMMUNITY-BASED STRATEGY INDICATORS

- Number of and total sales at farmers' markets.
- Number of community-supported agriculture programs.
- Number of innovative food delivery models established.
- Types of foods and volume of foods sold through innovative food delivery models.
- Number of community kitchens identified or established.
- Volume of food products donated to food banks.

POLICY AND LAND USE STRATEGY INDICATORS

- Number of food policy councils established in Michigan communities.
- The diversity of participants on food policy councils, including youth.
- Number of state and local government agencies that incorporate food access into planning strategies and decisions.
- Number of communities that undertake a review of their zoning laws and other ordinances related to land use.
- Number of communities that allow chickens, goats, bees, hoopouses and food production in certain zones.
- Number of low- to affordable-income housing projects renovated or constructed using state or federal funds that have some healthy food access mechanism, such as a store, farmers' market, mobile food vendor or CSA.

PUBLIC BENEFIT STRATEGY INDICATORS

- Number of SNAP application kiosks in non-profit organizations and community centers.
- Number of farmers' markets that accept Bridge Cards and WIC coupons.
- Number of fresh fruit and vegetable types stocked by stores that accept WIC coupons.
- Number of farmers' markets that provide incentives to SNAP participants (i.e. matching coupons) to purchase fresh produce.

GROCERY STORE STRATEGY INDICATORS

- Number of grocery stores created or improved under P.A. 231 or a Healthy Corner Store Initiative.
- Number of corner stores that are transformed into neighborhood markets.
- Number of residents employed by grocery and corner stores who live in the surrounding neighborhoods.
- Volume of fresh fruits and vegetables sold at grocery stores and corner stores.

CULTURAL TRANSFORMATION STRATEGY INDICATORS

- Number of individuals engaged as "innovation angels" (see agenda priority 18).
- Number of new businesses created via innovation angels.
- Number of cultural leaders engaged in promoting healthy food access.

AGENDA PRIORITIES

2012 AGENDA

2012 COMMUNITY-BASED STRATEGIES

1. Increase the number of farmers' markets by providing technical assistance and identifying sources for start-up funding.

Farmers' markets provide direct access to locally grown fresh produce as well as grains and other nutritious foods. In addition to benefiting farmers economically by providing a location for them to sell their produce, farmers' markets offer consumers direct access to healthy foods; the opportunity to learn about where and how food is grown, to get to know the grower (farmer) and to try different kinds of foods; and a chance to increase their knowledge of nutrition.

According to the Michigan Farmers' Market Association, there are more than 220 farmers' markets operating in Michigan.¹⁵ Detroit, the largest city in the state, has four markets, including the Detroit Eastern Market, for an average of 217,780 residents per market. Flint, with a population of 117,068, has one market. Studies of the economic viability of grocery stores suggest that every 10,000 residents can support a grocery store of approximately 15,000 to 20,000 square feet. Though no comparable data is available for farmers' markets, clearly there is room for expansion.

Offering incentives to purchase fruits and vegetables at farmers' markets via food stamps can play an integral role in the success of farmers' markets in low-income communities. Subsidizing the purchase of fruits and vegetables at farmers' markets has been shown to make a big difference in the eating habits of low-income residents.¹⁶ Families who receive purchasing assistance have been shown to increase their fruit and vegetable consumption by as much as three additional servings a day.¹⁷

Two farmers' markets in Detroit offer an example of the kinds of revenues that can be generated through farmers' markets. The Wayne State University (WSU) Farmers' Market launched its first season in 2009. The market drew diverse customers, including WSU students and employees and community members shopping for an equally diverse array of breads, fruits, vegetables, flowers, grains, honey, dessert toppings and prepared foods. As shown in Table 3 below, vendors at the WSU market averaged \$17,500 in total sales per vendor.

Total number of market days	25
Average number of vendors per market day	10
Average number of customers per market day	1,054
Estimated total sales	\$175,000
Estimated total Bridge Card sales	\$5,032
Estimated average total sales per market day	\$7,000
Estimated average Bridge Card sales per market day	\$201
Estimated average total sales per vendor (n=10)	\$17,500

¹⁵ See <http://www.mifma.org/home/>.

¹⁶ Albarmarle State Policy Center (2008). *A Report on State Action to Promote Nutrition, Increase Physical Activity, and Prevent Obesity. Balance. Issue 7. 2008 Fall Report.* Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. Retrieved 1/29/10 from <http://www.rwjf.org/pr/product.jsp?id=30792>.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*



Market planners were able to make fresh produce more accessible to community members by accepting Bridge Cards and Project Fresh coupons, and also by doubling Bridge Card benefits (on a pilot basis) with the Mo' Bucks program.¹⁸ This program is now called Double Up Food Bucks and is managed by the Fair Food Network. At participating farmers' markets, people using their Bridge Cards receive \$2 worth of bonus tokens for every \$2 spent, up to \$20 in tokens per visit. This program is active at several farmers' markets in Detroit and the hope is to expand across the state.

The Northwest Detroit Farmers' Market has been operating since 2005 and sells only Michigan-grown or Michigan-made products. In 2009, it was open a total of 20 Thursdays in the summer and early fall, from 4 to 8 p.m. Table 4 shows sales data.

Table 4: Northwest Detroit Farmers' Market, 2009	
Total number of market days	20
Average number of customers per market day	400
Estimated total sales	\$100,000
Estimated average total sales per market day	\$5,000

Implementation: We recommend that resources be provided to enhance the ability of Michigan State University (MSU) and the Michigan Farmers' Market Association (MIFMA) to work with area farmers, community associations and non-profit organizations to establish farmers' markets in low-income communities in Michigan. MSU and MIFMA could help identify sources of start-up funding to increase the number of farmers' markets.

Existing markets could provide consultation regarding start-up and marketing. A cost-benefit analysis would need to be done for each community to assess market potential and to identify possible locations for these markets. Community-based marketing strategies would need to be created to publicize the markets and encourage residents to visit and purchase foods. Outreach to farmers would be needed to be sure they understood the sales potential a new market might represent and to ensure adequate supply for the market. To ensure success, one entity within each community - a community group or non-profit organization, for example - would need to be willing to take the lead. Existing zoning laws might pose a challenge and would need to be reviewed and possibly revised.

2. Provide education and start-up funding to help people and communities grow and market fresh foods.

The idea of community gardens as a strategy to increase access to healthy foods has a long history in Michigan. More than 115 years ago, in 1894, Hazen Pingree, the mayor of Detroit, launched his Potato Patch plan to alleviate hunger among the city's poorest residents. Over the next few years, 430 vacant lots were farmed by residents and, within two years, were producing more than \$30,000 in 1896 dollars (over \$780,000 in today's dollars) worth of fresh fruits and vegetables.¹⁹

Today, the role of community gardens and farms in food access is again being considered. As noted in the 2005 Albion Statement, "Food, family farming, community and household gardens, CSAs and other local production systems must, once again, be valued as the lifeblood they are to our cultures, economies, and environments. To rebuild them as guarantors of our food security, we must act now to reestablish their long-term health and sustainability."²⁰

¹⁸ Farmers' Market Friends Say Goodbye for 2009! (2009) Wayne Seedling, 2(3), 3. Retrieved from <http://www.clas.wayne.edu/downloads/newsletters/Seedling120909KP.pdf>.

¹⁹ Holli, M. (1969) *Reform in Detroit - Hazen S. Pingree and Urban Politics*. NY: Oxford University, p. 72. Cited by City Farmer News 11/28/09. Retrieved from <http://www.cityfarmer.info/2009/11/28/mayor-hazen-pingree-and-the-potato-patch-plan-of-the-1890s/>.

²⁰ Dahlberg, K., Bingen, J., and Pothukuchi, K. (2005) *The Albion Statement. Healthy People, Places, and Communities: A 2025 Vision for Michigan's Food and Farming. The Citizens' Network for Michigan Food Democracy*. Retrieved 10/8/09 from http://www.mifooddemocracy.org/documents/Albion_Statement.pdf.



Forms of community gardens and urban farms vary. They range from gardens operated by neighbors to land that is shared and gardened by community residents to small or large-scale growing operations such as market gardens and CSAs, and methods of growing food on impervious surfaces or poor soil such as indoor production of mushrooms or hydroponic gardening.²¹ Some examples include:

- Blandford Nature Center's Mixed Greens program invites Grand Rapids residents to grow their own produce in community gardens while also teaching the children in the area about better eating habits and how to maintain an organic garden.
- Growing Hope, in Ypsilanti and Ann Arbor, is dedicated to improving lives and communities through gardening and healthy food access.
- The Greater Lansing Food Bank's Garden Project is dedicated to growing healthy food and cultivating connections. The Garden Project provides home and community gardening opportunities for people to grow, harvest, prepare and preserve their own vegetables and fruits. Volunteers harvest more than 200,000 pounds of fresh fruits and vegetables each season.

Gardens are proving to have a wide variety of benefits. Data from a study among urban gardeners in Flint found that adults with a household member who participated in a community garden consumed fruits and vegetables 1.4 more times per day than those who did not participate, and they were 3.5 times more likely to consume fruits and vegetables at least five times per day.²² Gardens furthermore allow participants to grow and eat foods that are culturally significant to them.

Gardens also provide value beyond the food they produce. Research shows that the organizational underpinnings of gardens give rise to a range of social processes, including social connections, reciprocity, mutual trust, collective decision making, civic engagement and community building, all important processes associated with improving individual health and strengthening neighborhoods.²³

Community gardens also have economic benefits. Urban gardens that are created on city-owned vacant land can reduce the local government's costs for cleaning and maintenance. Detroit, for example, spends \$800,000 per year cleaning vacant land.²⁴ New York City found that residential property values within 1,000 feet of a community garden increased after establishment of a garden.²⁵

Community gardens can also be a source of healthy food for poor and homeless residents. A community garden run by the corrections department in Oakland County produces roughly 14,000 pounds of food that is donated to area food banks, soup kitchens and senior citizens.²⁶ Gardens can also be a source of economic development for youth. Teens working at Earthworks, a program of Detroit's Capuchin Soup Kitchen, grow food that they then sell via their Youth Farm Stand program.²⁷

The potential for these gardens can be broader than just food. The mission of the Growing Home Community Garden (GHCG) in San Francisco, for example, is to provide a community garden where both homeless and housed San Franciscans work side-by-side to grow nutritious food, access green space and build community.

²¹ Colasanti, K. (2009) *Urban Agriculture for Michigan Planners*. Michigan Planner, October 2009.

²² Alaimo, K., Packnett, E., Miles, R., and Kruger, D. (2008) *Fruit and Vegetable Intake among Urban Community Gardeners*. *Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior*, 40(2), 94-101.

²³ Teig, E., Anykya, J., Bardwell, L., Buchenau, M., Marshall, J., and Litt, J. (2009) *Collective Efficacy in Denver, CO: Strengthening Neighborhoods and Health through Community Gardens*. *Health & Place*, 15(4), 1115-1122.

²⁴ National Vacant Properties Campaign. (2005) *Vacant Properties: The True Cost to Communities*. Retrieved from http://www.vacantproperties.org/latestreports/True%20Costs_Aug05.pdf.

²⁵ Been, V., and Voicu, I. (2006) *The Effect of Community Gardens on Neighboring Property Values*, New York University School of Law, New York University Law and Economics Working Papers Paper 46. Retrieved from <http://ssrn.com/abstract=889113>.

²⁶ Whitesall, A. (2007). *From Plot to Plate: SE Michigan's Urban Gardens*. *Metromode*, October 18, 2007. Retrieved 12/7/09 from www.metromodemedia.com/features/UrbanGardens0041.aspx.

²⁷ *Ibid.*



Creating neighborhood green spaces and providing edible foods in an urban environment are obvious goals. Skill-building, nutritional education and food preparation classes provide additional community value. What makes this program unique, however, is its focus on building community. The GHCG provides an inspirational venue to change community norms and prejudices, to improve community relations, and to celebrate and harvest together.

Implementation: We recommend that local universities and community gardening organizations within each of the targeted communities establish a partnership to provide gardening information and assistance to residents, organizations and institutions seeking to establish gardens. Existing successful gardening organizations, such as those mentioned above, could provide consultation on outreach, marketing, start-up costs, ongoing funding resources and other issues to ensure success. As noted above with the strategy of establishing farmers' markets, zoning laws might pose a challenge and would need to be reviewed and possibly revised. Start-up funding, perhaps from local foundations, would be needed to purchase tools, seeds, fencing and other supplies. Additional financial assistance would be needed for hoophouses and other items that help gardeners extend the traditional growing season in Michigan.



Photo by Kathryn Colasanti.

3. Invest in innovative food delivery models that have documented success in increasing healthy food access.

Though grocery stores in underserved areas are essential to eliminating food deserts, several innovative models for food delivery are under way in Michigan that are worth further study and evaluation. The Fresh Food Partnership in northern Michigan is one example. This initiative purchases fresh fruits and vegetables from local farmers and delivers this produce, with help from dedicated volunteers, to more than 30 pantries, shelters and meal programs in a five-county area. Another example is the Michigan Neighborhood Food Movers Project, which was launched as a collaborative effort between the state, several local Detroit partners and individuals seeking to become entrepreneurs in the fresh food movement. Trucks full of fresh produce travel around three Detroit neighborhoods like ice cream trucks, selling fruits and vegetables and sometimes setting up in high-traffic areas such as church parking lots.

Implementation: The level of interest and excitement around local healthy foods in Michigan is generating new models of food delivery around the state. The benefits of many of these models compared with their costs, however, as well as their effectiveness in reaching underserved communities, have not been fully assessed. Because of this, it is difficult to know which models provide the most benefit in meeting the healthy food needs of underserved communities.

As a result, we recommend a twofold approach. One is that local community organizations, foundations and local colleges/universities work together to identify innovative ways to bring healthy foods into local communities. This approach would include developing business plans, financing strategies, marketing, outreach and cost/benefit analyses. The Michigan Farmers' Market Association could assist with strategies related to expanding farmers' markets.

Concurrently, we recommend that local colleges/universities partner with these new initiatives to help assess the impact of these new food delivery models on local communities. In this way, we would begin to develop a needed database of community models and strategies that are effective in bringing healthy foods into underserved communities. Doctoral students could be engaged in the evaluation process, thereby minimizing the costs of this component. Start-up funding for trucks, stands and/or other needed supplies would be needed and could be provided through local economic development groups. Some models might require staff members to have food handling licenses, which are available from local health departments. Funding might also be required to help staff members obtain licenses.

2012 POLICY PLANNING AND LAND USE STRATEGIES

4. Establish local food policy councils made up of community residents, businesses, farmers, units of local government, and food, anti-hunger and food justice advocates.

Until recently, failings in our food system have been seen as isolated problems. Unlike other issues such as transportation, housing and economic development, which have their own city and/or state departments, food issues tend to be dealt with by a fragmented array of government and non-government agencies.²⁸ Food policy councils began as a way of addressing this fragmentation, providing a forum through which the food system can be addressed as a whole.

Food policy councils are groups of stakeholders from the many and diverse sectors of the food system, such as anti-hunger and food justice advocates, educators, non-profit organizations, concerned citizens, government officials, farmers, grocers, chefs, workers, food processors and food distributors. They serve as forums for discussion of food issues, fostering coordination between sectors in the food system, evaluating and influencing policy, and launching or supporting programs and services that address local needs.

The central aim is to identify and propose innovative solutions to improve local or state food systems, solutions that spur local economic development and make food systems more environmentally sustainable and socially just.²⁹

The Michigan Food Policy Council (MFPC), a statewide council, was created by Governor Granholm in 2005. Funded in partnership with the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, it brings diverse food-related stakeholders together to recommend programs and policies to the governor to improve Michigan's food future. Its mission is to cultivate a safe, healthy and available food supply for all of Michigan's residents while building on the state's agricultural diversity to enhance economic growth. The MFPC is unique in that it focuses on the food system as an economic development strategy while explicitly linking public health and community well-being to the state's agricultural production. The MFPC gives food-related stakeholders the forum to identify policies that harness the potential of the food system to aid in communities' economic development, provide children and those in need greater access to fresh and nutritious foods, and support stewardship of our finite land and water resources.

Grand Rapids and Detroit both have local food policy councils. The Greater Grand Rapids Food Systems Council (GRFSC) was founded in 2001. It brings together chefs, environmental and religious organizations, planners, farmers, community gardeners, conservationists, educators, health professionals, parents and others seeking to broaden the dialogue about the present food system and create alternatives.³⁰ The GRFSC developed a community-designed plan to address the food, nutrition and hunger issues of residents in three low-income neighborhoods of Grand Rapids and the city of Muskegon Heights. It has educational courses to connect consumers and farmers. It helped Grand Rapids develop a city gardens policy and urban agriculture planning documents – planning and zoning tools that can be used to support urban agriculture. It also does research and analysis of food systems in urban Grand Rapids, such as the economics of dollars spent on local food availability.

Detroit's food policy council was formed in 2009.³¹ Its vision is "a city with a healthy, vibrant, hunger-free populace that has easy access to fresh produce and other healthy food choices; a city in which the residents are educated about healthy food choices, and understand their relationship to the food system; a city in which urban agriculture, composting and other sustainable practices contribute to its economic vitality; and a city in which all of its residents, workers, guests and visitors are treated with respect, justice and dignity by those from whom they obtain food."³²

²⁸ Harper, A., Shattuck, A., Holt-Gimenez, E., Alkon, A., and Lambrick, F. (2009) *Development Report No. 21: Food Policy Councils: Lessons Learned*. Institute for Food and Development Policy. Retrieved from <http://www.foodfirst.org/en/foodpolicycouncils-lessons>.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *Greater Grand Rapids Food Systems Council*. Retrieved from <http://www.foodshed.net>.

³¹ *Detroit Food Policy Council*. Retrieved from <http://www.detroitfoodpolicycouncil.net>.

³² *Ibid.*



A review of the literature and key interviews completed by Food First and the Community Food Security Coalition in 2009³³ identified key potentials for the model of food policy councils.

- Address public health through improving food access, addressing hunger and food insecurity, and improving the quality of available food.
- Influence national and state-level policy debates.
- Connect multiple sectors that wouldn't otherwise work together.
- Bring local food policy into mainstream politics.

The work of local food policy councils in strengthening local food systems can also provide a boost to local economies. One study estimated that a single region in northwestern Wisconsin lost \$1.13 billion a year in potential wealth through the food economy. In assessing the food economy of the Chesapeake Bay region, researchers found that a 15 percent increase in local food purchases would bring in three times more dollars to farming communities than federal subsidies currently bring to the region. A WorldWatch Study estimated that if the greater Seattle area were to source just 20 percent of its food locally, it would inject an extra billion dollars per year into the city's economy. To many, these food dollars represent an opportunity to capture more wealth in the community.

Additionally, food policy councils can give voice to underserved communities that traditionally have had little access to power. The Detroit Food Policy Council, for example, created six at-large seats (29 percent) for consumers and the general public, indicating that "special effort should be made to ensure that grass-roots, low-income community members and others with an earnest stake in our community are represented on the DFPC." They also designated seats for the sectors of environmental justice, food industry workers and emergency food providers.³⁴

Implementation: We recommend that the Michigan Food Policy Council take the lead in helping local communities understand the role of food policy councils and, as needed, provide assistance in establishing them. In particular, the MFPC can help local communities determine whether a food policy council would be beneficial in helping address the lack of access to healthy food in their community; help local governments understand how food policy councils fit into the overall policy and legislative aspects of local government; share ideas on the composition, structure and other aspects of local food policy councils; and develop model language, such as bylaws, to help launch local food policy councils. Local food policy councils in Michigan (Grand Rapids and Detroit) could provide assistance.

One of the challenges in establishing food policy councils is recruiting a diverse group of participants who can ensure representation of all aspects of food access in the conversation. In addition to residents, community groups and local government, it is important also to include local business owners, financiers such as banks or economic development authorities, and major food providers such as schools and hospitals, as well as local farmers. Having all of these groups around the table helps ensure a broad, diverse dialog that can create meaningful changes that ensure access in underserved communities.

5. Update zoning and other ordinances to allow and facilitate urban agriculture and other initiatives that expand access to good food.

Many communities throughout Michigan have zoning and other ordinances that date back decades, some to the 1950s or earlier. These ordinances were developed during an era when these communities were booming and were not facing the kinds of economic devastation and challenges to accessing healthy food that they are today. The ordinances focused more on density and segregating residential from industrial use, not considering that a time might come when agriculture and farming could be desired within a city as a way of increasing access to healthy food, much less promising strategies for community and economic development. As a result, zoning and other ordinances need to be reviewed and updated to align with the new urban model of farming and food production that is developing across Michigan.

³³ Harper, A., Shattuck, A., Holt-Gimenez, E., Alkon, A., and Lambrick, F. (2009) Development Report No. 21: Food Policy Councils: Lessons Learned. Institute for Food and Development Policy. Retrieved from <http://www.foodfirst.org/en/foodpolicycouncils-lessons>

³⁴ Detroit Food Policy Council. Retrieved from <http://www.detroitfoodpolicycouncil.net>.

Some of the issues include:³⁵

- Use of vacant land for community gardens and urban farming. In addition to the use of the land, zoning laws dictate whether structures such as hoophouses would be allowed, whether water access would be maintained once a vacant house has been torn down, and whether the city will provide garbage pickup at vacant lands being used for gardens and farming.
- Allowing chickens, bees, goats and other livestock inside city limits. Composted manure from chickens and goats produces high-quality, cheap fertilizer and reduces the need for synthetic chemicals. Most cities, however, ban or set strict limits on livestock to reduce concerns such as smell, sanitation and aesthetics.

Information from the Genesee County Land Bank, the Ruth Mott Foundation and Michigan State University Extension, shown in Table 5, provides possible rationales for allowing livestock, hoop-houses, bees and food production within urban neighborhoods and explains how communities might regulate these to accommodate the culture and values of their community while helping to increase access to healthy food.

WHAT	WHY ALLOW	HOW TO REGULATE
Chickens and goats	Provide eggs, meat and dairy products. Inexpensive, high-quality manure compost replaces expensive synthetic fertilizers.	Limit numbers and require permits for each animal. Require pens. Require setbacks from property lines. Restrict roosters. Require notification and approval of neighbors. Neuter male goats. Dehorn goats.
Hoophouses	Extended growing season for extra production. Allow gardeners to prepare seedlings. Can grow cold-hardy varieties in winter without additional heat source.	Specified setbacks from property lines and street front. Specific height and size limits for each zoning district. Require fencing or shrubs as a buffer to adjacent properties.
Bees	Necessary to pollinate crops. Increase number of hives to bolster honeybee populations decreased by an unknown cause in recent years. Produce honey and other valuable products.	Limit number of hives. Require setbacks from property lines. Specify minimum lot sizes. Require a permit.
Food production	Creates income for gardeners. Offsets costs to produce fresh, safe food. Local production guarantees local availability. Reduces environmental impact of food production by reducing fuel and transportation costs.	Require fences or landscaping as buffers between houses and garden. Allow market gardens in certain zones such as multiple-family, commercial, industrial or urban garden districts.

³⁵ Shaw, L. (2009) *Flint to Consider Ordinance Changes to Enhance Urban Agriculture*. *Flint Journal*, July 7.

³⁶ (Adapted from) *Ibid*.



Implementation: We recommend that the Michigan Department of Agriculture encourage local governments to establish task forces to review ordinances restricting urban agriculture and to recommend changes that will increase opportunities for local residents and organizations to engage in farming and food production.

Perhaps the biggest challenge is getting this issue high enough on the priority agenda of local governments so that they commit time and resources to this task. The city of Flint, which has just completed a review of its ordinances, as well as Detroit, which is currently involved in this process, could provide examples of barriers they have encountered and changes they have made to help other local governments take similar steps.

6. Integrate good food access into state and local planning related to housing, transportation, employment and economic/community development.

Local and state departments of housing, transportation, employment and economic or community development can play a proactive role in increasing access to healthy food. With an eye toward improving healthy food access, planners, housing developers and others can assess how their various policies and activities could be changed to increase access to fresh fruits and vegetables.

For example, Michigan, under its Campaign to End Homelessness, has several strategies in place to help the more than 86,000 homeless persons in Michigan attain housing.³⁷ Various models exist for creating low- to moderate-income housing, ranging from individual homes or apartments (known as scattered site housing) to developments with multiple units. Depending on the location of this housing, low-income residents will end up facing the same obstacles as their neighbors in accessing fresh fruits and vegetables. Encouraging housing developers to establish some kind of year-round food outlet, such as a small grocery store or a fresh farm stand, in all low-income housing developments could significantly increase access for both the residents living in these buildings as well as those in the surrounding neighborhood.

Transportation planners, too, can also consider food access in their assessment and decision-making processes. Several communities around the country are experimenting with rearranging bus routes to provide direct transportation to and from grocery stores. For example, the Austin, Texas, Capital Metro, working with the Austin/Travis County Food Policy Council, started a “grocery bus” line with the specific intent of providing improved food access to residents of the primarily low-income Latino eastside. The bus route was designed to run at regular intervals seven days a week.³⁸ Similarly, the Knoxville Food Policy Council lobbied the municipal transit system to extend service to a shopping center and farmers’ market.

Implementation: We recommend that the governor direct state departments of transportation, housing, economic development and employment to begin to evaluate all of their policies and strategies for their effects on access to healthy food, and to ensure that all future activities contribute to increased healthy food access. Each of these departments, in turn, could encourage its local counterparts to take the same approach.

The challenge in this is that it requires adding a new, additional frame of reference to all policies and strategies. The Michigan Food Policy Council could help state agencies think about the impact of their policies on food access. Michigan’s universities and colleges would also be an excellent resource.



³⁷ Michigan State Housing Development Authority. (2009) *The State of Homelessness in Michigan: 2008 Annual Summary*. Retrieved from <http://www.thecampaigntoendhomelessness.org/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=THTBfwnf2vY%3D&tabid=81&mid=429>.

³⁸ Vallianatos, M., Shaffer, A., and Gottlieb, R. (2002) *Transportation and Food: The Importance of Access. A Policy Brief of the Center for Food and Justice, Urban and Environmental Policy Institute*. Retrieved from http://departments.ox.y.edu/uepi/cfj/publications/transportation_and_food.pdf.

2012 PUBLIC BENEFIT STRATEGIES

7. Support current efforts to expand the community-based online SNAP benefit application process by placing application kiosks in non-profit offices and community centers.

Michigan has seen a steady increase in residents in need of food assistance and other benefits. Since January 2000, Food Assistance Program (FAP) cases have increased by nearly 150 percent.

Starting in August 2009, applications for FAP were made available via the Internet. The online eligibility and application process now allows Michigan residents to verify eligibility for FAP benefits, submit a formal application for assistance, track and receive personalized information about their current FAP benefits, and report household or income changes to their local Michigan Department of Human Services (DHS) office.

Since that time, DHS has successfully secured funding to install Internet kiosks in each of its 124 field offices, promoting greater client engagement in the application process, increasing overall enrollment numbers and reducing the number of paper applications handled by DHS eligibility specialists.

The next steps to improving accessibility to federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Benefits (SNAP) in Michigan are installing Internet kiosks in well-trafficked non-profit and community-based organizations across the state, and training organization representatives in how to assist clients to complete the online application. Achieving these will entail identifying appropriate community-based and non-profit organizations, purchasing and installing the kiosks, developing and implementing a training program, and supporting organization outreach and promotion efforts.

The benefits to Michigan will be considerable. More people will be able to apply for FAP benefits online in places that they are accustomed to patronizing. This will increase the number of FAP-eligible households that receive FAP benefits, reduce the paperwork burden on DHS, and reduce the traffic and shorten the wait times associated with FAP program applications in DHS field offices.

Implementation: The Michigan Department of Human Services has developed this initiative and has been taking the lead on it. The major barrier to implementation is funding. Local foundations with a focus on human services and ending poverty could assist the DHS in securing needed funding, either by providing direct support to non-profit and community-based organizations identified as sites by DHS or by financing development of grant proposals to national foundations to support this initiative.

8. Increase the number of farmers' markets that have the technology to accept Bridge Cards.

The second strategy around increasing the use of SNAP dollars to purchase fresh produce is to increase the number of farmers' markets that accept the Bridge Card, Michigan's name for the Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) card for SNAP benefits. The EBT card is used to distribute food stamps to millions of households each month, taking the place of the traditional paper food stamp. Unfortunately, many farmers' markets in Michigan are located at sites that do not have the telephone line and power cord needed to operate the processing machine for the EBT card.

Implementation: The Michigan Farmers' Market Association (MIFMA) has been working to increase the number of farmers' markets that have the capacity to accept the Bridge Card. Local foundations with a focus on human services and ending poverty could assist MIFMA in securing needed funding, either by providing direct support to non-profit and community-based organizations identified as sites by MIFMA or by financing development of grant proposals to national foundations to support this initiative.

In addition, we recommend that the state consider negotiating its next SNAP technical support contract, which would follow the expiration of the current contract in 2013, to provide wireless EBT terminals at no charge to all farmers' markets.



9. Assist corner stores and markets to implement the new Women, Infants Children (WIC) requirements for participating stores to stock fresh fruits and vegetables.

As of August 19, 2009, Michigan’s approximately 2,000 WIC vendors are now required to have on stock at all times at least two varieties of fresh fruits and two varieties of fresh vegetables. This new regulation is a boon for healthy food access advocates because it places fresh fruits and vegetables in places where low-income women go to shop for formula, baby food and other grocery products for their children.

Large food outlets such as grocery stores already carry fresh produce, but this regulation poses some complications for small corner stores and markets that have not traditionally stocked fresh foods and that do not have the delivery system, display space and storage units needed to carry these items. In addition, there are few vendors who will distribute the smaller volumes needed by these smaller stores.

Two strategies that have been proposed are the establishment of collective purchasing programs to reduce the cost of fresh produce for small store owners and the creation of a network of distribution trucks that would deliver small amounts of fresh produce to small stores on a regular basis.

Implementation: We recommend that local community organizations, residents, WIC vendors (store owners or managers) and an industry group such as the Association of Food and Petroleum Dealers work together to assess the needs of local WIC vendors in stocking fresh fruits and vegetables. Once this assessment is completed and recommendations have been developed, we recommend that local foundations or local economic development associations support pilot programs with strong evaluations to assess the impact and identify additional barriers.



2015 AGENDA

2015 GROCERY STORE STRATEGIES

10. Increase the number and quality of rural and urban supermarkets and grocery stores.

The Detroit Fresh Food Access Initiative, an innovative program developed by the Detroit Economic Growth Corporation, was designed to increase the number and quality of supermarkets and grocery stores in underserved neighborhoods in Detroit. While evaluation of the initiatives’ impacts is still needed, this may be a promising strategy for other areas of the state. This strategy could also be linked with efforts to support Michigan farmers and Michigan food-based businesses, including those that are part of each community’s regional food system, helping ensure that more people have the opportunity to choose Michigan-grown and Michigan-produced foods.

The initiative is focused on stores that will make a demonstrable impact in customer experience, store operation or neighborhood quality. It consists of a mix of technical assistance from industry consultants and experts; a clearinghouse of information, resources and research for Detroit grocery stores; assistance with securing financing; coordination of community partnerships to help address the challenges and help grocers to pilot some innovative practices; and liaison between the grocery store community and city government agencies, community development financing agencies, technical assistance resources, commercial real estate developers and others. At present, the Detroit Economic Growth Corporation is in conversation with operators of 22 stores about participating in this initiative.

P.A. 231, passed by the Michigan Legislature in 2008, will help provide some of the needed financing for this recommendation. It calls for commercial property tax incentives to encourage new or expanded qualified retail food establishments in underserved areas. The Michigan Department of Agriculture estimates that the potential exists for a minimum of 20 new supermarkets to be built in these underserved areas in the next two to three years.³⁹

³⁹ Craig, R. G. (2009) *Economic Impact of New or Expanded Retail Food Store Developments by Using PA 231 and Other Tools to Promote Healthy and Affordable Food Options in Michigan*. Agriculture Development Division, Michigan Department of Agriculture. Retrieved 12/9/09 from http://www.michigan.gov/documents/mda/Economic_Impact_MiDeptAg_290186_7.pdf.



The impact of these supermarkets would be considerable. For a single supermarket, the total economic impact is estimated to be \$42.6 million, with a total of 151 new jobs. Multiply that by 20 new supermarkets, and the impact could be \$852 million in sales and an increase in employment of 3,020 jobs. This does not include the number of construction jobs needed to build these markets.⁴⁰

The development of grocery stores in Harlem offers evidence of the potential success, as well as the challenges, in developing grocery stores in poor communities. Two community organizations – the East Harlem Abyssinian Triangle (EHAT) and the Abyssinian Development Corporation (ADC) – worked for 10 years to bring a supermarket to the community. The neighborhood, consisting largely of Latinos and African Americans, is home to a plethora of fast-food restaurants, small bodegas with scant healthy food options and a few small local grocers. Public transportation exists, but residents who wanted to shop for moderately priced fruits and vegetables often had to travel up to one hour by bus to find a suitable grocery store, an option that was either difficult or impossible for seniors and women travelling with small children.

Although the majority of residents welcomed the new store, its development faced challenges along the way. Small local grocers protested it, worried that they would be driven out of business by the new supermarket. EHAT worked with the community to advocate for the development, and eventually the protests subsided. EHAT and ADC secured project financing by leveraging \$3 of private sector funds for every dollar of public funding. They also negotiated an agreement with the Pathmark Company to guarantee that at least 75 percent of the new jobs would go to local residents.

The store has been extremely successful. Data showed that the supermarket met or exceeded industry averages in almost every category. An in-store bank branch opened in the supermarket, providing residents with a safe, secure environment to do their banking. The store now has one of the largest produce departments in New York City. Since the first Pathmark grocery store opened its doors seven years ago, another opened in 2005 some 20 blocks away from the first store. The second store created about 200 jobs, and three quarters of its workers came from the community.

Bayview Hunters Point, a low-income community of color in southeastern San Francisco, launched the Good Neighbor Program, a partnership between Bayview's community-based organizations, businesses and city government to improve the quality of foods available there. The program developed criteria that define "good" store neighbors, including devoting at least 10 percent of inventory to fresh produce and an additional 10 to 20 percent of inventory to other healthy foods, accepting food stamps, limiting tobacco and alcohol promotion, and adhering to environmental and health standards. Stores that agree to comply with these criteria receive technical assistance and training, energy efficiency upgrades, marketing assistance, and grants to make initial purchases of healthy foods and to test how the items sell. The program also engages in outreach and promotion through activities such as nutrition education and food tasting, and encouraging community residents to patronize the stores. It is now being expanded to other stores.

Implementation: We recommend that a thorough evaluation of the Detroit Fresh Food Access Initiative be undertaken to assess whether it holds promise as a model that could be replicated in other underserved communities throughout Michigan. This evaluation could include an assessment of the:

- Costs required for each component of the strategy.
- Usefulness of the clearinghouse.
- Extent to which community groups and residents are engaged in the initiative.
- Extent to which store owners are able to implement innovative practices.
- Ability to attract financing for capital costs and other expenses tied to the initiative.
- Potential interest of grocery store chains in operating stores in low-income communities.
- Other barriers to implementation.

⁴⁰ Ibid.



11. Empower local residents throughout Michigan to operate grocery stores and to improve the economic base in both urban and rural communities.

The Detroit Grocer Project was launched by the Michigan Department of Human Services as a way to empower a number of new entrepreneurs to operate grocery stores in Detroit. It is a four-year project that anticipates engaging a total of 10 participants in the various aspects of the program.

The project builds on the strong tradition of independently owned supermarkets and recognizes that a number of economic and community development goals can be achieved through a strategy that invests in the talents and strengths of people who are already living, working and doing business in Detroit.

The project offers four key activities:

- **Training** in business principles and practices as well as specifics of the grocery store industry, including trends in Detroit, the food supply chain and nutrition.
- **Access to capital** through the development of financial models that will help these new entrepreneurs attract capital.
- **On-the-job training and networking:** Each entrepreneur will be mentored by an experienced grocer. Entrepreneurs will also be paired with successful area grocers and be trained in each supermarket department as well as in the management and financial operations of a store.
- **Community outreach and customer relations:** The project will help new entrepreneurs gather input on community preferences and service expectations so they can be successful. This portion of the program will be available to all grocery businesses operating in Detroit.

Like other food initiatives, the Detroit Grocer Project seeks to increase access to healthy food for residents in low-income communities within Detroit. A particular strength of this project is its focus on racial equity. Because it directly addresses historical racism, the Detroit Grocer Project can offer a model for communities throughout Michigan to build on their rich cultural traditions while improving both the health and economic viability of their communities.

Implementation: We recommend that the Michigan Department of Human Services undertake a thorough evaluation of this strategy to assess whether it holds promise as a model that could be replicated in other underserved communities throughout Michigan. This evaluation could include an assessment of the:

- Costs required for each component of the strategy.
- Extent to which community groups and residents are engaged in the initiative.
- Extent to which store owners are able to implement innovative practices.
- Ability to attract financing for capital costs and other expenses tied to the initiative.
- Other barriers to implementation.

12. Transform corner stores into neighborhood markets that offer a wide range of healthy foods.

Last year, the American Journal of Epidemiology reported that people with no supermarket near their homes were up to 46 percent less likely to have a healthy diet than those with more shopping options.⁴¹ Fifty-nine percent of Michigan residents do not have a grocery store nearby.⁴² Many rely on corner stores for their food needs.

Over the past several years, the idea of using these corner stores as part of a campaign to improve the diets of area residents has developed considerable momentum. Starting with Philadelphia, New York, Baltimore, Hartford, Conn. and Oakland, Calif., perhaps a hundred or more communities across the country have started corner store interventions or are planning them. The idea is simple: to increase low-income residents'

⁴¹ Granville, K. (2009) *Pushing Fresh Produce Instead of Cookies at the Corner Market*. The New York Times, October 30.

⁴² Craig, R. G. (2009) *Economic Impact of New or Expanded Retail Food Store Developments by Using PA 231 and Other Tools to Promote Healthy and Affordable Food Options in Michigan*. Agriculture Development Division, Michigan Department of Agriculture. Retrieved 12/9/09 from http://www.michigan.gov/documents/mda/Economic_Impact_MiDeptAg_290186_7.pdf.

access to healthy, affordable foods and fresh produce by increasing the availability of these foods in neighborhood corner stores. Strategies include providing the infrastructure (such as refrigeration units, display bins), capacity (such as delivery options) and financing so that corner stores can stock supplies of fresh produce and healthy foods for their customers. In some cases, urban farms or farms near city outskirts may be able to supply corner stores. These strategies, along with market research, promotion and education, can help get neighborhood residents to shop at these stores and purchase healthy foods. This idea has been given additional momentum recently by the new WIC regulation that requires all stores that accept WIC coupons to stock a minimum of two fresh fruits and two fresh vegetables.



In Detroit, SEED Wayne has been partnering with Earthworks Urban Farm to explore the feasibility of creating a healthy corner store pilot program in the eastside area around the Capuchin Soup Kitchen. SEED Wayne has two stores engaged in the project and, after visiting 47 more stores, has an additional five store operators that are interested in participating.⁴³ In addition to tracking sales, SEED Wayne is continuing to do outreach with neighborhood residents to learn more about effective social marketing techniques to increase knowledge of and demand for fresh produce.

In Lansing, the Food Systems Project of the Northwest Initiative partnered with a Quality Dairy convenience store in the neighborhood to increase the amount of produce sold in the store. The store now provides fresh, organic, locally grown fruits and vegetables from Heritage Acres Farms to customers. The store hosts nutrition education

events and fairs in the store and the parking lot. The project, which has support from Michigan State University Extension, has been able to serve more people than it otherwise would have been able to because the store now accepts WIC and Bridge Cards. It has been so successful that, in two years, the project has grown from one store serving the community to four. It has also received funding from the Michigan Nutrition Network and from the Food Stamp Nutrition Education Program.

The corner store initiative appears to require considerable outreach and upfront community development work to be successful. In Philadelphia, the Corner Store Campaign offers convenience stores social marketing materials and publicity to promote the new healthier options and a small sum of money for stores that participate in evaluative research. The campaign links the availability of healthier snack options in the stores with nutrition education in the neighboring schools. The campaign also includes the “Snack Smart Street Soldiers,” a group of adolescents who work as ambassadors of the program to share the ideas and culture of healthy eating with their classmates and friends at school. The “soldiers” have created marketing materials including a comic book about making healthy choices.

The work may well be worth it because these various strategies offer the potential to shift neighborhood residents’ diets toward healthier food options. The Hartford [Connecticut] Food System, for example, undertook strategies to strengthen corner stores and reported an overall eight percent switch of food inventories from junk food to regular groceries. Cleveland, Ohio, has also been implementing corner store strategies, with one market reporting a 20 percent increase in fruit sales as a result of the initiative.⁴⁴

⁴³ Farmers’ Market Friends Say Goodbye for 2009! (2009) Wayne Seedling, 2(3), 3. Retrieved from <http://www.clas.wayne.edu/downloads/newsletters/Seedling120909KP.pdf>.

⁴⁴ Granville, K. (2009) Pushing Fresh Produce Instead of Cookies at the Corner Market. *The New York Times*, October 30.



Implementation: We recommend that the MDCH undertake a study of the corner store initiatives in Lansing (Quality Dairy) and Detroit (SEED Wayne) to better understand the needs of store owners, the potential for store transformation into markets that sell a range of healthy foods and the challenges faced by these owners to undertake this transformation. The findings could then be shared with local health departments around the state, industry groups such as the Association of Food and Petroleum Dealers, community organizations and others concerned about access to healthy food.

We also recommend that local foundations or local economic development associations support pilot programs with corner store owners in low-income communities throughout Michigan to test out strategies and to determine whether there are any regional differences in needs, strategies or effectiveness. These pilot programs need to include strong evaluations to assess the impact and identify additional barriers.

A major barrier to this will be finding a way to ensure that stores can continue to be viable as their product line shifts away from more profitable items (liquor and cigarettes) toward items with a lower profit margin, such as fresh produce.

2015 COMMUNITY-BASED STRATEGIES

13. Establish and support community kitchens around the state that offer places for community groups, churches and others to teach residents about fresh food cooking, storage and production.

There is expanding interest in healthy foods, including processing and preparing these foods for sale, but federal and state regulations generally prohibit commercial food processing in home kitchens. They also tend to require small processors to purchase equipment that meets health codes. Because setting up this equipment can be very expensive, an increasing number of farmers and food entrepreneurs are pooling their resources and expertise to develop community kitchens.

Community kitchens offer specialty food processors, farmers and caterers a relatively inexpensive licensed space to undertake food processing activities. Kitchen clients are charged only for the time that they use the facility. They benefit from the technical knowledge of others using the kitchen, particularly those with extensive food processing, marketing and business experience.

According to researchers from the University of Wisconsin who interviewed 17 community kitchen organizers from around the country, these projects have been built to boost local job creation, diversify the local economy, and transfer ideas and technology from universities or companies. Private, public, for-profit and not-for-profit kitchens were included in the study. Some kitchens were just getting off the ground; others had many years of experience.⁴⁵

Non-profit groups are also engaged in providing community kitchens. These groups, however, often need long-term supporting partnerships, grants or aggressive marketing plans to stay in business according to the Center for Integrated Agricultural Systems. For example, the non-profit West CAP Crossroads Kitchen Incubator in Menomonie, Wisc. is located in a prominent downtown location and plans to house an established natural food cooperative, which will act as an anchor tenant and a retail outlet for kitchen clients.

Community kitchens operated by for-profit companies typically stay in business by charging higher fees than non-profit kitchens. "One advantage of for-profit kitchens is their incentive to become self-sufficient," notes Kaelyn Stiles, a researcher at the Center for Integrated Agricultural Systems at the University of Wisconsin.⁴⁶ A few for-profit companies with community kitchens have developed labels and product lines to supplement rental fee income.

Implementation: We recommend that Extension and non-profit organizations work together to identify and/or establish community kitchens around the state. Possible barriers are zoning, licensing and liability considerations. Local foundations interested in hunger and food access issues could provide start-up funding to launch these kitchens.

⁴⁵ Center for Integrated Agricultural Systems. (2001) *Community kitchens: key elements of success* (Research Brief #54). Retrieved November 10, 2010 from <http://www.cias.wisc.edu/economics/community-kitchens-key-elements-of-success/>.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

14. Ensure that Michigan's most impoverished residents have access to fresh, healthy food by continuing to support the Michigan Agricultural Surplus System (MASS), which procures unmarketable fresh produce for use in Michigan's food banks, and by educating businesses about the Good Samaritan Food Donation Act, which protects businesses donating food products from liability.

Around the state, food pantries, homeless shelters and other emergency food providers are creating relationships with community gardens, food rescue programs and others so that Michigan's most impoverished residents can have access to fresh, healthy food.

These emergency food pantries and food rescue programs fill a critical gap in the state's food system by providing food to soup kitchens, homeless shelters, food pantries and other programs that serve hungry, low-income Michigan residents in all of Michigan's 83 counties. In 2009, 1,760 emergency food agencies in Michigan served 1,173,700 individuals,⁴⁷ over 12 percent of the state's population. Three-fourths of pantry programs, 71 percent of kitchen programs and 52 percent of shelter programs saw an increase in clients compared with 2006.

Serving the entire state is essential because hunger is not just an urban problem - 40 percent of Michigan's hungry people live in rural or suburban areas.⁴⁸

The volume of food distributed is difficult to comprehend. In 2006, Michigan's food bank network, which consists of regional food banks along with their subsidiary distribution organizations and branch warehouses, distributed 65 million pounds of surplus vegetables, fruits and groceries. The food is made available to the soup kitchens and other agencies at a low cost (about 10 cents per pound for goods with an average retail of about \$2 per pound).

A critical part of the emergency food system is food rescue. From July 2008 through June 2009, Forgotten Harvest, a food rescue agency in southeastern Michigan, rescued nearly 12.5 million pounds of food. Each of its 21 refrigerated trucks picks up 60,000 pounds of meat, vegetables, fruit and dairy products each day and delivers it to agencies that feed the hungry.

One way that Michigan can increase access to fresh foods for poor or homeless individuals and families is to continue the Michigan Agricultural Surplus System (MASS). MASS is an innovative partnership between Michigan food banks, the agricultural community and food processors. It procures unmarketable yet nutritious agricultural surplus from Michigan farmers and then distributes this surplus to Michigan's statewide network of food banks, which then make it available to local pantries, soup kitchens and shelters.

The scope is considerable. In 2008, MASS salvaged close to 5 million pounds of fresh produce. MASS provides a safe, fast and convenient system for the state's food industry to donate products, plus reimbursement to growers, packers and processors for costs incurred in preparing donations.

A second strategy is to educate businesses about the Good Samaritan Food Donation Act, which encourages the donation of food and grocery products to non-profit organizations by protecting donors from liability. These donations are crucial for the hundreds of food banks and emergency food providers in Michigan. Many of these organizations have no staff, rely entirely on volunteers, and have few resources to purchase food for the homeless and hungry. (Data from the Hunger in America Report show that 74 percent of pantry programs and 42 percent of kitchens have no paid staff members.⁴⁹) Without these donations, many would have to close, leaving over a million Michigan residents without a place to get food.

Implementation: We recommend that the state continue to support the Michigan Agricultural Surplus System and educate businesses about the Good Samaritan Food Donation Act. Local college marketing or public relations programs could be enlisted to develop materials about both programs, which could then be distributed to local food businesses and large food providers throughout the state.

⁴⁷ Malbi, J., Cohen, R., Potter, F. and Zhao, Z. (2010) *Hunger in America 2010 National Report*. Mathematica Policy Research, Inc. Retrieved from <http://feedingamerica.org/faces-of-hunger/hunger-in-america-2010.aspx>.

⁴⁸ Food Bank Council of Michigan. Retrieved from <http://www.fbcmich.org>.

⁴⁹ Malbi, J., Cohen, R., Potter, F. and Zhao, Z. (2010) *Hunger in America 2010 National Report*. Mathematica Policy Research, Inc. Retrieved from <http://feedingamerica.org/faces-of-hunger/hunger-in-america-2010.aspx>.



2015 PUBLIC BENEFIT STRATEGIES

15. Strengthen the potential for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and Farmers' Market Nutrition Program (Project FRESH) benefits to support purchase of fresh fruits and vegetables by seeking philanthropic support for matching farmers' market coupons or other similar strategies.

In fiscal year 2009, Michigan residents spent a total of \$2.1 billion in food stamp benefits.⁵⁰ This is an estimated \$40.5 million each week and is nearly double the amount that was spent in FY 2005. One question under consideration is how SNAP might be used to increase the purchase of fresh fruits and vegetables.

The data from the pilot Mo' Bucks program, described earlier under the first agenda priority, offers a suggestion of the economic impact of SNAP on the purchase of Michigan produce. During the pilot, which took place at five Detroit locations in September and October 2009, SNAP customers spent an additional 41 percent on fresh produce. If evaluations show that programs like these are effective, they could be integrated into SNAP as enhanced benefits so that all Michigan SNAP recipients could have greater access to Michigan-grown produce.

Though the additional spending on produce represents a very small percentage of the total SNAP dollars that are spent in Michigan, the pilot does show that SNAP customers will spend more on fresh fruits and vegetables when provided a financial incentive such as a matching dollar program.⁵¹ It also suggests that farmers' markets might be able to increase revenues by being able to accept the Bridge Card.

Implementation: We recommend that the DHS and local foundations support pilot programs such as the Mo' Bucks program to more fully understand the impact of such programs on the purchase of fresh produce by SNAP recipients. Anticipating a favorable evaluation, we recommend that these programs be integrated into SNAP so that all Michigan SNAP recipients have access to this benefit. Additionally, strategies will need to be developed to provide incentives for the purchase of fresh produce year round, not only at seasonal farmers' markets.

16. Maximize the use of federally funded school breakfast, school lunch, after-school snack, summer lunch and other programs to increase access to good food for vulnerable children and senior citizens.

Each year, millions of dollars in unclaimed meals are left on the table in Michigan. These meals come to the state through school-based, summer nutrition and other federal programs, ensuring that school-age children and vulnerable senior citizens are fed year round.

The United Way for Southeastern Michigan estimates that a 10 percent increase in the utilization of three of these federal programs - school breakfast, school lunch and after-school snack programs - and a 60 percent increase in the summer lunch program would together provide more than 8.3 million meals to children in southeastern Michigan alone.

Access to these programs depends on family income level. As unemployment continues to rise and more and more families are struggling to put food on the table, the demand for these programs will increase.

Implementation: We recommend that the state undertake a campaign to increase awareness of these programs by schools and other organizations around Michigan, and to assist schools and organizations with the application process so that more children and seniors can get nutritious meals. Non-profit organizations can engage in outreach to get our most vulnerable citizens enrolled in these programs.



⁵⁰ U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service. Retrieved from <http://www.fns.usda.gov>.

⁵¹ Fogelman, R. (2009) Mo' Bucks Pilot Program Final Report. Eastern Market Corporation. Retrieved from http://www.detroiteasternmarket.com/media/files/105_mo_bucks_emc_pilot_report_final_for_public_view.pdf.

2015 CULTURAL TRANSFORMATION STRATEGIES

17. Create a Food and Farming Corps, similar to City Year or AmeriCorps, that utilizes college students and/or recent college graduates to help create a new culture around food and farming and to support community-based food system development.

A Food and Farming Corps would offer an opportunity for college students and recent college graduates to become involved at various places along the food system. Young adults participating in this kind of program, akin to City Year or AmeriCorps, could work in all aspects of the food system – e.g., helping rural and urban farmers, assisting at farmers' market stands, working in community grocery stores or markets, engaging youth in food-related activities or working in community kitchens. In addition to learning about the food system, corps members would gain practical, firsthand knowledge about farming and perhaps develop an interest in farming as a career.

The climate is right to launch such a corps. Interest in food and food systems is increasing throughout Michigan, and significant numbers of college students already volunteer. Volunteering by college students is growing at twice the rate of overall volunteering in the United States. In Michigan, 37.4 percent of college students volunteer, and the state ranks 12th in the country in college student volunteerism. Michigan's overall adult volunteer rate is 18th in the country.⁵²

Benefits to the organization receiving the volunteers are countless, such as free or low-cost assistance, plus the skills and knowledge that each volunteer brings to the organization. The impact on the volunteer is equally significant. A study of AmeriCorps volunteers - *Still Serving: Measuring the Eight-Year Impact of AmeriCorps on Alumni* - showed that AmeriCorps causes long-term positive impacts on the civic attitudes and behaviors of the program's alumni. AmeriCorps alums are significantly more civically engaged and more likely to pursue public service careers in the government and non-profit sector than their counterparts in the comparison group. They are also significantly more likely to be happy and satisfied with their lives.⁵³

Implementation: Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy (IATP)/Kellogg Foundation Food and Society Policy fellows Curt Ellis and Deb Eschmeyer are working on a pilot project that is an extension of the AmeriCorps Farm-to-School workers program. This new Farmcorps Initiative, scheduled to launch in 2011, will place young farmers and young people who are interested in land and community with non-profit organizations and schools to help support community garden and school garden projects. Through expansion of existing AmeriCorps-funded farm-to-school efforts and the creation of a national AmeriCorps program for school gardens, the corps will enhance schoolyards, improve access to fresh fruits and vegetables, and inspire young people to eat well.

Michigan has been identified as one of the potential sites. As a first step, we recommend that Michigan seek to become a partner in the planning and implementation so that our state gets a spot in this pilot. After an evaluation of its effectiveness, a similar corps could be created to include Michigan's farmers (AmeriCorps volunteers are not allowed to be placed with for-profit businesses). A local Michigan college or university could convene a collaboration to develop a pilot Food and Farming Corps.



Photo by Kathryn Colasanti.

⁵² Corporation for National and Community Service and Abt Associates Inc. (2008) *Still Serving: Measuring the Eight-Year Impact of AmeriCorps on Alumni*. Retrieved from http://www.nationalservice.gov/pdf/08_0513_longstudy_report.pdf.

⁵³ *Ibid.*



2020 AGENDA

2020 CULTURAL TRANSFORMATION STRATEGIES

18. Create a team of “innovation angels” – venture capitalists, businesses and community residents – to create and support sustainable businesses that increase access to healthy food.

The possibilities for businesses that increase access to healthy food are endless. Perhaps the biggest obstacle for establishing these businesses is funding. Imagine if a group of venture capitalists, successful entrepreneurs and other types of investors, along with community businesses, farmers and fledgling food entrepreneurs, came together to generate innovative ideas around growing food, improving access in communities, and creating new businesses and jobs. This team could then develop funding and capital for the most promising ideas and review their successes and challenges to better understand what works.

Implementation: We recommend that organizations such as the Michigan Chamber of Commerce, the Michigan Economic Development Corporation or the state’s university business schools convene such a group. The major barrier will be convincing investors that food is a worthy financial and community investment.

19. Identify and cultivate leaders, including community experts, to help shift Michigan to more forward-thinking choices and a love for gardening, cooking and good food, and offer community-based and culturally appropriate consumer education.

Pick up any brand-name sneaker, show it to a middle school-age youth, and most likely he or she will be able to tell you what sports team, player or rock star is associated with that shoe. Try to do the same with an aspect of access to healthy food, such as urban gardening, and not just middle schoolers but everyone else will draw a blank. Food is just food, isn’t it?

Not according to Will Allen, former basketball player. In 1993, Growing Power was an organization with teens who needed a place to work. Will Allen was a farmer with land. Will designed a program that offered teens an opportunity to work at his store and renovate the greenhouses to grow food for their community. What started as a simple partnership to change the landscape of the north side of Milwaukee has blossomed into a national and global commitment to sustainable food systems.⁵⁴

According to Debra Landwehr Engle in *Grace from the Garden: Changing the World One Garden at a Time*, “Will isn’t out to change the ways of multinational food producers or foreign governments. But he is spurring people to turn the weedy lot on the corner into a field of cucumbers and kale, and he’s probably inspiring a few others to turn off the TV and make dinner for the family.”⁵⁵

Imagine 10 Will Allens in Michigan, each one taking on some aspect of the food system – urban farming, mobile food vendors in rural areas, hoophouses, healthy cooking. The power of such role modeling cannot be overestimated.

This strategy also holds promise for helping to create or strengthen the growing culture of Michigan food – preparing and eating foods that are seasonal and regional, and celebrating Michigan’s rich and diverse range of fruits and vegetables.

⁵⁴ Growing Power Web site. “In The News.” Retrieved 4/15/10 from http://www.growingpower.org/in_the_news.htm.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*



Implementation: We recommend that organizations such as leadership academies or non-profits with funding and support from foundations help create a culturally, ethnically and racially diverse body of community experts who could advocate for good food. This group would contain individuals who each would have a particular area of interest or expertise in some aspect of the food system as a way to start a cultural shift in Michigan around healthy food.

Students from marketing, advertising or a similar department within a Michigan college or university could collaborate with local community organizations, farmers and others to take on the challenge of launching a first wave of cultural transformers. They could create a logo, designs and marketing strategies. A public relations firm could be approached to provide pro bono support to this effort. Doctoral candidates from the university could provide an evaluation of the impact.

CONCLUSION

This report represents some of the possibilities for strengthening good food access across Michigan. It represents the fundamental belief that all people, from children to senior citizens and everyone in between, deserve fresh, affordable, fair and healthy food. Our strategies are aggressive because there is so much work to do. If Michigan is going to eradicate its food deserts in both rural and urban areas in each of its 83 counties and improve the health and wellness of all of its residents, then we must take action now. There is no one-size-fits-all in this set of recommendations and implementation strategies. It is going to take policymakers, stakeholders, the business and non-profit communities, and urban and rural farmers to make it happen. Success will not come through these individuals and organizations working alone. Nor will it come overnight. It will take hard work, collaboration, creativity and commitment to achieve a food system centered on good food across the state.



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