

See the Local Difference

Regional food systems become essential ingredient for Michigan's future

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Lee Arboreal's family and farm are growing.

Comfortably profitable now in their fifth growing season, Lee and wife Laurie are adding blueberries, blackberries, cows, turkeys, and goats to their 40-acre place, just outside of Bangor in southwest Michigan's famous fruit region. That's a major milestone for a young farm family that started out with crops like lettuce and carrots, which produce quick cash in just one year.

The Arboreals reached this milestone not by trying to compete with lettuce from California or strawberries from Chile. They did it by selling to Michigan's burgeoning market for food that is grown for its flavor rather than for its ability to survive cross-country shipping.

The two currently have 250 subscribers to a season's worth of food through their Community Supported Agriculture operation. They sell at three farmers markets. And they drop off thousands of dollars worth of produce every week at another farm's nearby loading dock for pickup by trucks serving Whole Foods Markets in Michigan.

And their little toddler Iris, just out of diapers when they started farming in 2004. She's now kicking around in cowboy boots at age seven, taking horse riding lessons from a neighbor, and soaking up the abundant life of a farm kid, surrounded by mother hens, baby goats, and verdant gardens.

The most powerful part of this new farm family's success, however, is the fact that Lee, Laurie, and Iris are far from being alone in some pastoral dream. Growing all

around them is a broad base of customers who are bypassing mainline markets and instead buying from a small but growing crop of neighborly operations like theirs.

Indeed, across Michigan and the nation, more farmers, food businesses, and families are going out of their way to grow, sell, and buy food that has more taste and nutrition when it reaches the plate—and fewer environmental and social costs along the way.

In the process, these farms, food businesses, and families—and others, from doctors to school cooks—are literally reinventing our systems for producing, processing, and marketing food.

Innovations come from even the least agricultural areas: Urban gardeners in Detroit, for example, are meeting that city's terrible lack of quality grocery stores head-on by growing and selling fresh local produce.

Innovations also are coming from small, medium, and large farms that are growing for and selling to local markets; more of those farms are also getting more involved in larger wholesale opportunities as well. Those opportunities are coming as both Michigan-based and larger, global food distributors like Sysco Corporation adjust their purchasing practices. Faced with a broader range of tastes and concerns in the market, Sysco is looking to put more food that is produced locally and sustainably—that is, in harmony with nature and communities—onto restaurant menus and school and hospital trays.

Local food pioneers Lee Arboreal and his wife, Laurie, are part of a growing movement that is reshaping Michigan's economy, region by region.



This special report, See the Local Difference, provides a tour of the emerging good food system in Michigan: How it is taking shape, what it contributes, and how local and state leaders can pitch in to both accelerate and make the most of it.

Part I of See the Local Difference covers the economic opportunities that flow from supporting and advancing local and regional food systems.

Part II provides a map of the programs and policies on the pathway leading to good food and a more durable prosperity for Michigan.

Hidden inside this budding, dynamic movement is a precious gem for Michigan. Like a subtle spice that makes a dish great, the new community and business connections forming around tasty, healthy, trustworthy food are becoming an essential ingredient for the state's future success.

Indeed, the beauty and necessity of growing, eating, and sharing good food is rising up the list of strategies Michigan leaders are working on in their bid to build competitive places.

There's something powerful, for example, about the new, three-acre "D-Town" urban farm on the western edge of Detroit's Rouge Park. It's one of many community-based food initiatives that Peter Anastor, manager of community and urban development at the Michigan Economic Development Corporation, says the agency is starting to appreciate.

"Our organization is just recognizing that food and farming is a piece of urban revitalization that ranges from the vibrancy of urban gardens and farmers markets to the basic services aspect of having grocery stores in the city," Mr. Anastor said. "If you want people to live there, you have to have some place for them to do their grocery shopping."

D-Town is not about attracting the next software company to the community, according to Malik Yakini, head of the Detroit Black Community Food Security Network. Instead, he recently told *The Michigan Citizen*, D-Town is about increasing access to quality, local food and building educational and economic opportunity.

"This is also healing work," he said. "In addition to healing ourselves, we're also healing the ecosystem."

The same thing is true of the many school districts across Michigan that are now beginning to serve local farm foods: It's about healthier kids, not making their towns more competitive.

But the cumulative effect of these and other regional food initiatives is to build that sense of place—rural to urban—that Michigan must strengthen. These efforts do that by making new local commerce and community connections and by transforming diets, neighborhoods, and markets.

Detroit's venerable Eastern Market has a plan to help rebuild southeast Michigan's local food economy. This year, a \$14M renovation was completed on Shed 2, the oldest, built in 1891.

Everybody Wins

The opportunities presented here are not aimed at promoting one particular approach to farming, but at building new, more regional food systems that can benefit all of Michigan.

According to experts like Dr. Soji Adelaja, director of Michigan State University's Land Policy Institute, the new good-food system—growing like grass through cracks in our industrial and suburban pavement—is a strategic economic asset for the state. Michigan becomes stronger on the national and world stage as its individual communities and regions embrace this emerging economic opportunity as part of their overall strategy to build healthy, happening places.

Dr. Adelaja, one of Michigan's economic revitalization gurus, says that building more cohesive and vibrant regions—made of downtown cultural centers that are well connected to suburbs surrounded by rural areas that provide food, recreation, and nature—is fundamental to assuring Michigan's future success.

"Michigan's historical lock on prosperity—its industrial infrastructure of capital, auto plants, skilled labor, and so forth—counts for less in the new, global economy," says Dr. Adelaja. "The rules of success have changed."

In this new era, success is much more about becoming a place where young people want to live, because their presence in turn makes it a place where companies looking for the best young employees will want to go. That means offering a great quality of life for everyone, and regional food systems can and should be an important part of that.

The time is right for Michigan to act on the economic development potential of building more regional food systems. Demand is strong. Supply is growing. New market infrastructure, such as distribution, is emerging. And support is coming from many directions.

Local, sustainably raised food can produce new jobs, build public health, and attract more family and business investment to Michigan as the state's regions become more attractive places to live and work.





Leslie and Ty, of Avalon International Breads, vend at Detroit's Eastern Market, where consumers think more about the people, practices, and places behind their food.

How Did We Get Here?

The first step, however, is to examine how we came to ship so much food produced in Michigan to places so far from home—and what it could mean if we again produced more for ourselves and our Midwest neighbors.

After all, even though Michigan is second only to California in its great diversity of crops, finding fresh Michigan strawberries in season at your nearest grocery store is a chore. That's because big grocery retailers, which have consolidated into a few national and international concerns, buy only large volumes of fruit tough enough to be moved cross-country.

It wasn't always like that, says Lee LeVanway, manager of the wholesale, farmer-owned Benton Harbor Fruit Market. Recently he compared the volume of Michigan and northern Indiana strawberries that moved through that market in 1952 with the amount that moved through it in 2008.

"More than 350,000 16-quart crates of strawberries were delivered to the market on one day in 1952—350 semi-loads," Mr. LeVanway said. "This year, we've had less than 3,000 crates. We've lost 99 percent of our production not because we don't grow good strawberries but because the chain stores won't buy them."

The Growing Demand for Local Food...

Families, schools, restaurants and other buyers are looking for more tastes, relationships, and assurances than our mainline food system currently delivers. Some leading indicators:

- *Farmers markets in Michigan have tripled from just 65 in 2000 to nearly 200 in 2008.*
- *Nationally, farmers markets have increased 150 percent since 1994, to 4,385.*
- *More than 30 northwest Michigan schools buy local food products.*
- *An MSU statewide survey found that seventy-three percent of school food service directors would like to do so, too.*
- *Nine thousand schools in 39 states have farm-to-school programs.*
- *Researchers estimate local fresh sales in the U.S. at \$5 billion in 2007 and project sales will reach \$7 billion by 2011.*

...Means Kids Eat Better

Besides boosting the local economy, the more than 30 northwest Lower Michigan schools regularly using a dozen different local farm products—from apples and winter squash to eggs, meat, and honey—are also helping kids eat healthier. In Benzie County last year, for example, students ate five times as many apples after their school switched to juicy, local varieties raised for flavor rather than for long-distance shipping.

Jenifer Murray, personal health administrator for the Benzie-Leelanau District Health Department, is excited by the farm-to-school programs she sees growing in the region. Every day she faces statistics on skyrocketing childhood obesity rates, which point to serious health problems, including diabetes and heart disease.

"Nutrition is key to chronic disease prevention," Ms. Murray said. "And we know that good nutrition is related to good learning. To make changes in a school system that affects so many kids—this is big."

Read more about the Michigan Land Use Institute's Farm to School program at www.localdifference.org.

Since 1952, the total number of Michigan farms dropped by two-thirds, from 151,000 to nearly 53,000. Most that survived adjusted to the food industry's drive for large quantities of low-cost food by getting bigger so they could fit into a mass-production system. The best bet for Michigan's fruit and vegetable producers was to grow crops for processing companies that freeze, dry, can, and make juice from produce.

That's a big reason why most of the \$1.9 billion of higher-value fresh fruits and vegetables we eat in Michigan comes from other states and countries. Michigan produces premier fruits and vegetables, but our climate's tender peaches and juicy apples, for example, are less able to stand up to thousands of miles of travel like fruit from drier climates like Washington and California. Michigan produce, therefore, mostly shows up in potato chips and apple juice, not in fresh market aisles. Fully 74 percent of

Michigan's fruits and 44 percent of its vegetables go into processed products.

That's not a bad thing: Food processing has kept many thousands of acres of farmland in business and helped keep Michigan agriculture a driving economic force in the state, neck and neck with tourism as the state's second-largest industries. In total, the state's farm and food sector has an annual economic impact of nearly \$64 billion¹.

But industrial agriculture forces are still pushing Michigan farmers, most at retirement age, off their land. Meanwhile, Michigan and other Midwest consumers are looking for tasty, tree-ripened peaches and beef and pork raised on nearby farms, but are having a difficult time finding such products.



¹ Study Shows Michigan Agriculture and Food Economy Growing, ANR Communications, Michigan State University, January 21, 2008: http://www.anrcats.msu.edu/press/010108/012108_economicimpact.htm

As the Supply of Local Food Expands...

Demand for local food is spurring a broad and diverse range of new, renewed, and expanded growing operations that are finding and building new markets. Those operations range from community gardens and smaller, subscription-based Community Supported Agriculture farms to all sizes of operations serving the growing number of farmers markets and wholesale distributors interested in local foods.

- Michigan now has 69 CSA operations (more at www.csami.org).
- Nationally, CSAs have grown since 1990 from at least 60 to more than 1,700 operations.
- Though using less than one percent of Michigan farm land, certified organic products increased 166 percent from 1997 to 2005.
- A 2006 MLUI-MSU study found that concerted efforts to grow and market more local food in Michigan could produce 1,900 jobs and \$164 million in new net farm income.

...It's Energizing Neighborhoods and Young People

Detroit's Garden Resource Collaborative is a citywide network of some 320 backyard gardens, 160 community gardens, and 40 school gardens all working together to energize neighborhoods and support opportunities for young people to build life skills. The Collaborative provides seeds, tools, and training and unites people from all corners of the city with workshops and events.

They even have a collaborative business venture: Every week Network gardeners young and old are at farmers markets in the city selling food they've grown themselves under their common "Grown in Detroit" label. They made more than \$11,000 in 2008, after grossing just \$800 three years ago at their start.

"More and more we're also breaking into the retail market," said Ashley Atkinson, director of urban agriculture with The Greening of Detroit, one of four organizations facilitating the Network. "You can go into restaurants here now and see 'Grown in Detroit' produce."

Learn more at www.detroitagriculture.org.

The Rise of New Markets

This increasing quest by consumers for tasty, healthy food produced by people they could actually go visit is opening doors for local farms and food businesses and their communities.

But moving through those doors is quite another thing. It requires helping interested farms start up or transition to new business models. It requires more storage, packing, distribution, and other services needed to move food around at a regional scale.

Rick Schnieders, chief executive officer of Sysco, is trying to figure out how to move his company through that door. Driving his efforts, he says, is the fact that the market is moving toward foods that provide “romance, memory, and trust” versus foods that are “fast, convenient, and cheap.”

Denis Jennisch, regional produce manager in Sysco’s Grand Rapids office, is trying to make that happen in his region by purchasing more products from nearby farms, which offer more “romance, memory, and trust” than anonymous, distant suppliers. Mr. Jennisch even received some money from headquarters to help farms find cooling and other equipment they might need to scale up for Sysco.

“The Grand Rapids and Kansas City offices are the two regions working on it and learning from each other,” he said. “Eventually the program will go to all of Sysco.”

Meanwhile, other distribution companies and all sizes of farms are trying to duplicate the success of Michigan’s asparagus farmers, who led the way in expanding produce sales into local, fresh markets.

Their story is very encouraging: In 2002, those growers, centered in west Michigan’s Oceana County, were swamped by a flood of imported Peruvian asparagus that severely depressed the prices they were getting from processors. So a small group of growers pushed back: Observing that health-conscious consumers were

eating more fresh, and less canned, asparagus, they began redirecting their asparagus to fresh markets.

It wasn’t easy. Switching from processed to fresh markets means new plant varieties, cooling equipment, and market relationships. But in three years, the pioneering growers increased the amount of Michigan asparagus going to higher-paying, fresh produce markets from 5 percent to 25 percent. They earned 20 percent more, and even the canners and other bulk processors had to pay more because they were competing with fresh markets.

Thinking Bigger

What if more Michigan farms diversified into fresh and local markets to satisfy new and growing appetites for healthy, tasty, trustworthy food?

A 2006 study by the Michigan Land Use Institute and Michigan State University researchers investigated that scenario. The study found that if Michigan farms tripled the relatively low volumes of fruits and vegetables going to higher-value fresh markets in Michigan, the state’s net farm income could increase by 16 percent, or \$164 million annually. As farms spent that new income at local restaurants, stores, doctor’s offices, and the like, they would stimulate nearly 1,900 new jobs.

Two studies by Iowa State University’s Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture also confirm the significant economic benefits flowing from more local spending on local foods. The benefits arise from stopping the exodus of local food dollars to other states and countries, and from the cumulative effect of re-circulating those dollars in the community—from food-buyer to store to farmer and store clerk, and back again to grocery checkout lane.

It all starts with investment in Michigan’s food and farm entrepreneurs, says David Armstrong, senior vice president of Greenstone

Farm Credit Services, Michigan’s largest agricultural lender.

“I was probably a little skeptical a few years ago,” Mr. Armstrong said. “But now there’s very clearly demand in the marketplace by people who want locally grown food. I think it can be a rallying opportunity for entrepreneurs who want to take some business risk and come up with a plan to serve that emerging need.”

Similarly, Chris Peterson, director of MSU’s Product Center for Agriculture and Natural Resources, believes local and regional food is a valuable strategy for Michigan agriculture.

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DAVID ARMSTRONG
Greenstone Farm Credit Services

“Regional food systems have been a very important focus of the Product Center’s work for several years now,” he said. “We’re working on several projects where we’re looking at how we could make connections between local producers and local consumers of food.”

Healthy Choices, Healthier Economy

In addition to jobs, efforts to build more regional food systems can help Michigan meet two other big needs: Stronger regional economies and lower economic and social costs from dietary diseases.

Strong farms support regional economies not only with local spending but with local amenities, like wineries, pumpkin patches, and the simple pleasures and environmental protections that come from open fields and forests.

For Michigan to have local food and farm amenities in the future, however, it must view farmland around its cities and towns differently and invest accordingly.

Over the last 50 years, our economic planning has not valued open land on the urban edge for food, clean water, and family outings but for siting the next shopping mall or suburb—a trend confirmed by a 2002 American Farmland Trust study. Michigan ranks ninth in the nation for the most threatened farmland. Over the next 35 years, our metropolitan counties stand to lose 25 percent of our urban-influenced land.

Yet fully 86 percent of the country's fruit and vegetable production occurs on so-called "urban influenced" land. Sixty-three percent of dairy, 39 percent of meat, and 35 percent of grain production happen there, too. Regional food-system building is a key step toward keeping this land on the job of nurturing our bodies, hearts, and minds.

It's also key to addressing Michigan's high rate of diet-related diseases.

A recent study for the Michigan Economic Development Corporation compared Michigan's health insurance costs to other states. It found that diet-related health problems here contributed significantly to higher health insurance costs, which makes it even more difficult for Michigan to keep and attract employers ¹.

The solution, according to well-established dietary guidelines, is for everyone to eat more fruits and vegetables, particularly fresh produce. And that means business opportunity

for existing and new farms, if Michigan invests in them.

"To provide a healthy food supply in terms of fruits and vegetables, we need a lot more farmers on the landscape," said Mike Hamm, director of MSU's C.S. Mott Group for Sustainable Food Systems. The U.S. Department of Agriculture estimates the country needs 13 million more acres of such production to provide enough fresh produce for Americans to eat according to dietary guidelines.

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The potential to build strong local economies by putting more of Michigan's food dollars toward healthy options from farms nearby is clear to Mr. LeVanway, the Benton Harbor Fruit Market manager.

"Here in Berrien County, we're number one in the state for agriculture, but we spend \$375 million each year for food that does not come from

here," he said. "If we spent more locally we would see an economic stimulus in our rural areas that would bring us back to the 1950s, when our communities were vibrant."

Farms at that time sold locally and exported their excess, he said. More local money stayed in the local economy, circulating and multiplying as it moved from one person's paycheck to another.

Oran Hesterman, an Ann Arbor-based national leader in the movement for healthy, green, fair, affordable food, also says that producing and selling local food can build more robust regions, which strengthens Michigan's economic and social foundation.

"It's really around creating opportunities for local ownership of sustainable food sources so that, as those entrepreneurs are successful, value that accrues to those enterprises also accrues to the community," Mr. Hesterman said.

That's exactly what Lee and Laurie Arboreal are doing for the state's economic future. So are the 13 other beginning farmers who, like the Arboreals, participated in a small but powerful savings-match program two years ago. The community investment helped each farm entrepreneur's startup effort; for example, Lee says it helped him make a down payment on a new tractor.

"The \$3,000 came at a key time," Lee said of the program which offered a 2-1 match of his savings. "I didn't come from agriculture and have land or equipment from my parents."

Neither did most of the others in the program. But they're farming now and staying in touch, often buying supplies together to get bulk discounts.

These new, local farmers are in Michigan to stay, contributing to a new economic future in which our state's regions function, from urban core to rural edge, as key economic drivers for the state's success in the 21st century.

¹ Bologna J, Hughes-Cromwick P, Roehrig C. Health Care Costs and Premiums: Michigan Compared with Selected Benchmark States. Ann Arbor, MI: Altarum; 2004.

Charting our Good Food Course

Four steps to strengthening Michigan with more local food and farming

Michigan families and businesses are calling for healthy, tasty, trustworthy food.

They are not waiting for Lansing, but moving forward, building new pathways between family farms and local buyers and reinventing systems, such as regional distribution, to bring more good food to more people.

There is power in this dynamic movement, which Michigan can harness by investing in it—power to bring dollars home to local economies, to grow green jobs, and to save money by keeping people and natural resources healthy.

Part II of *See the Local Difference* suggests four steps that local and state leaders can take to make sure Michigan benefits fully from the growing demand for local food. They are:

Planning for Food

Local governments make room for local food

Growing Entrepreneurs

Communities foster innovative farm and food businesses

Improving the Business Environment

Smarter regulations help supply meet demand

Investing in Infrastructure

Local food economy calls for new equipment and services

Lee LeVanway, manager of wholesale and retail sales at Benton Harbor Fruit Market, is a proponent of moving more Michigan food to Michigan markets.

Planning for Food

Local governments make room for local food

Most communities have some kind of plan for transportation, housing, sewer and water, emergency response, and more. But for food?

Essential as it may be, making sure your region has good ways to secure healthy, plentiful food for all has not been in local governments' job descriptions—until now.

Slowly but surely public concern over access to safe, high quality, healthy, affordable food is connecting with concern about the future of our farms and farmland. That combination is putting food—who gets it and where it comes from—on local leaders' plates.

The result: New information, tools, and policies that communities can use to put local people, places, and food back together again and then generate new prosperity.

A milestone came in 2007, when the American Planning Association issued comprehensive guidelines for regional food planning. APA's guidelines validated the idea that community planners should think about and assemble strategies for increasing residents' access to healthy food and for aiding farmers' ability to access and serve those residents.

One of the first steps in planning for community and regional food systems is taking an inventory of an area's food and farm needs, opportunities, and participants.

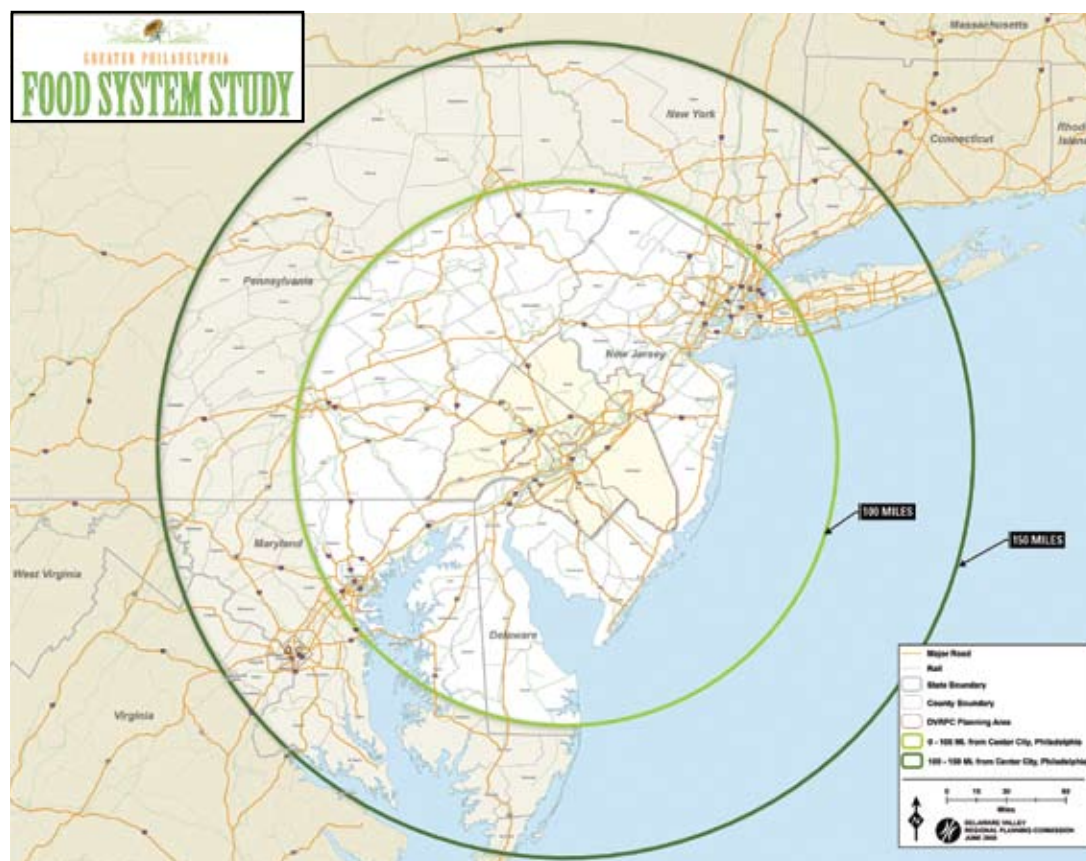
Dozens of grassroots groups across the country have performed such "community food assessments" by gathering data, drawing maps, and talking with farmers, food companies, churches, food banks, health professionals, and others to understand the rural-to-urban food landscape.

One of the largest such assessments is the just-published study of the 100-mile "foodshed" around San Francisco, performed by American Farmland Trust and local partners. "Foodshed," like the more common term "watershed," defines a supplying area and everything that affects it. San Francisco leaders are using the study to develop more local food markets, particularly for disadvantaged urban areas.

Another major effort is the Greater Philadelphia Food System Study, which takes a 100-mile-wide look at food supply, demand, and systems covering 70 counties in five

states. The region's metropolitan planning organization (MPO), the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission, is conducting the study.

The involvement of an MPO in foodshed assessment is a good sign, according to Robert Heuer, co-author of an upcoming national report for the Farm Credit Council on business opportunities in regional food systems. MPOs



The Greater Philadelphia Food System Study reflects increased government interest in measuring a region's ability to provide more of its own food—and a stronger regional economy.

manage federal transportation dollars, which largely determine how and where a region grows. "It's important," Mr. Heuer said, "to engage MPOs about how to build the infrastructure capacity needed to make localized food systems a vital complement to the global food system."

Kami Pothukuchi, a Wayne State University-based leader of the planning profession's new food systems focus, reinforces the idea that governments must act as a region through entities like MPOs to build regional food systems.

The guiding question, she said, is: "How can regions work as a system to meet as much of their needs as possible from their own natural resources?"

Visionary Farming

Over the past year, more than 3,000 people participated in Grand Vision workshops in six counties in northwest Lower Michigan. They spelled out their own ideas about where growth should and should not go and the kind of transportation options they wanted.



Then, more than 10,000 people weighed in on the four growth scenarios that The Grand Vision consultants derived from the workshops. Their “votes” will shape a growth strategy that suits most people and that local leaders will be willing to pursue.

A scientific survey conducted by the project confirmed what the workshops revealed: Most people in the region strongly favor a small-town, rural quality of life. That means there is strong support in the region for shaping growth so that it builds opportunities for local food and farming.

Inventories of northwest Lower Michigan’s local food and farm opportunities will soon help area residents decide how to implement The Grand Vision. The citizen-based project will roll out a “Final Vision” and begin implementation efforts in the late fall of 2009. See www.thegrandvision.org.

Urban Grocery

Malik Yakini remembers when produce trucks delivered fresh fruits and vegetables direct to Detroit neighborhoods.

“When I was a kid they drove up and down the streets every weekend with fresh produce,” recalled Mr. Yakini, who heads up the Detroit Black Community Food Security Network.

Something similar could happen again: Mr. Yakini and hundreds of other Detroit residents are exploring ways to bring better food choices to the city. Their efforts have drawn greater local and state attention since a 2007 study discovered just how much the city’s lack of quality, full-service grocery stores endangers lives.

The study, commissioned by Chicago-based LaSalle Bank Corporation, found that more than half of the city’s residents live in areas where fresh fruits and vegetables and other healthy foods are essentially unavailable. The study found that people in those areas are more likely to suffer or die prematurely from diet-related diseases.

City and state economic development leaders add that it’s difficult to attract new residents to Detroit if the city does not offer such basics.

Now the city’s economic development arm, the Detroit Economic Growth Corporation, is working on ways to increase fresh-food and quality-grocery choices in the city, including a potential multi-million dollar fund to stimulate investment.

“The attraction of new grocery stores and the improvement and expansion of existing stores is an important part of our retail strategy,” said Olga Savic Stella, vice president for business development at that agency. “Quality grocery stores anchor quality shopping districts.”

A model they’re looking at is the Pennsylvania Fresh Food Financing Initiative, which in the last few years has loaned or granted \$42 million to finance 58 projects, half in urban neighborhoods and half in small towns across the state.

Because the stores are independent and locally owned, the initiative’s leaders believe the businesses are more likely to work with local food suppliers, especially area farmers. While there are no studies yet to confirm that theory, if independent retailers are flexible enough to set up in tight downtown areas, they may also be open to buying from local farmers.



Detroit neighborhoods are getting young and old involved in growing and selling healthy food.

Mr. Yakini and some of his friends involved in the Detroit Black Community Food Security Network will be around if they do. The network’s three-acre “D-Town” urban farm on the western edge of Rouge Park is already selling food at farmers markets and to restaurants.

Maybe produce trucks are next.

Local Food: Lay of the Land

Several Michigan regions have taken stock of their food and farm assets and potential, including southeast Michigan’s five-county Food System Economic Partnership and northwest Lower Michigan’s Taste the Local Difference team of business development partners. There’s more on their studies at, respectively, www.fsep.org and www.localdifference.org.

A do-it-yourself guide to community food assessment is available through the C.S. Mott Group for Sustainable Food Systems at Michigan State University, www.mottgroup.msu.edu.

For a look at Community Food Assessments across the nation, see www.foodsecurity.org.

Find the American Planning Association’s Policy Guide on Community and Regional Food Planning at www.planning.org.

See the San Francisco foodshed report at www.farmland.org and the Greater Philadelphia Food System Study at www.dvrpc.org.

Growing Entrepreneurs

Communities foster innovative farm and food businesses

Wayne Kyle, owner of Blueberry Heritage Farms in Holland, is one of those third-generation farmers who know how to keep a good thing going: He's willing to learn, adapt, and invest.

Five years ago, for example, Mr. Kyle started converting some of his 200 acres of blueberries to organic. He saw both his sales and his production grow.



As Wayne Kyle shifts his farm in Holland from traditional to organic blueberries, its yield—and his profits—are growing.

"I'm seeing a big difference in the organic fields versus my traditional fields," he said. "The overall health of the soil, and the quality and productivity of the bushes is better."

Mr. Kyle is also one of those medium-scale farmers—he grows about 1 million pounds of blueberries each year—who sees a lot of good in re-localizing agriculture, both for his business, which is gaining direct sales to regional supermarkets, and for his community.

"The local food concept is a doable concept, and it's gaining steam," he said. "A small family farm can survive in that arena."

Clearly, Mr. Kyle understands the power of local food. The question for Michigan is whether it is willing to learn, adapt, and invest in the kind of thing Mr. Kyle is succeeding at: Going local as a way to diversify and strengthen our

agricultural economy and, by extension, the whole state's economy.

If so, then Michigan must focus on the needs and potential of three key groups:

- Established farm operators interested in trying new markets.
- Beginning farmers, who are full of creativity and commitment but rarely have land, equipment, or a background in farming.
- Young people interested in being the next generation of local food eaters and growers.

Here are some proven ways to help out these groups:

Business assistance and networks

"Farming 101" classes now taking place across the state provide a great start for ever more people from diverse backgrounds—suburban, second-career, immigrant—who want to try their hand at growing and marketing food.

Such courses are particularly effective when they offer some kind of ongoing support, such as farm business networks that allow peers to ask questions, share ideas, and even collaborate.

Several states have programs to help farms diversify, such as shifting from growing large-scale commodities to selling local foods. They include incentives, such as one-on-one grant-writing assistance and 50 percent cost sharing to get a plan going. Massachusetts is the leader: It offers grants of up to \$100,000 in exchange for five- and 10-year covenants on a farm's land.

Michigan once had grants available through its Julian-Stille Value-Added Agricultural Development Fund. The Michigan Food Policy Council issued recommendations in 2006 that called for reviving the fund and other strategies for addressing Michigan's healthy food and agricultural business needs. More at www.michigan.gov/mfpc.



"There is a niche in society now for people to produce healthy local food, and I know that's where I am supposed to fit in," says Ben Gluck, an undergraduate student of horticulture at Michigan State University. He spends much of his time at the university's Student Organic Farm, which features a nationally prominent one-year certificate program that prepares people for the real local-food world. It starts in January with the farm's year-round production of food in unheated, passive solar greenhouses. It continues through every step of an organic farming business—from crop planning and soil fertility building to harvesting and marketing.



Northwest Michigan's Get Farming! program offers business training, mentors, farmland connections, and more for aspiring and transitioning farmers.

Farmland connections

The average age of Michigan farmers is 54. Most of their children have left farming and won't be back. Getting farmers on that land means working creatively and aggressively to connect aspiring farmers from very different backgrounds with existing farms or other arable land.

The first step is surprising: Drop the idea that farming means owning a chunk of land. In the emerging urban-to-rural, regional food system, the farmland is often small areas of vacant, city-owned land.

Philadelphia's Somerton Tank Farms, for example, generated more than \$68,000 in gross sales in its fourth year of growing high-value vegetables on a half-acre plot next to two city water towers, according to the Farm Credit Council's forthcoming report on regional food systems, *Growing Opportunity*. The farm practiced Small Plot Intensive, or SPIN, farming, which is catching on as a low-cost way to "get farming." More at www.spinfarming.com.

Another example: A recent *Washington Post* article describes a Sacramento couple who appealed to neighbors for lawn space for market gardening. The couple received 40 offers, selected three larger plots close together, and now produces weekly boxes of vegetables for 30 customers, plus five free boxes for low-income families.

Regular farmland, of course, remains a core need. One option is linking land seekers with owners for lease-to-purchase and apprenticeship arrangements.

A number of groups around the country are working on this farm transition issue. Many offer farm business training and peer group network building. National leaders include California Farm Link and the Minnesota-based Land Stewardship

Project. Approaches include "speed dating" sessions between aspiring and retiring farmers and working donated conservation easements into a sale, which lowers the retiring farm's tax liability while reducing the purchase price for the new farmer. More at www.farmtransition.org.

Several groups in Michigan have laid the groundwork for such matching programs, including *Get Farming!* workshops as well as online listings of farmland owners and seekers through northwest Michigan's *Taste the Local Difference* project.

Youth Entrepreneurship

Increasing the awareness and skills of young people who are interested in farming is crucial. Youth entrepreneurship in food and farming ranges from Detroit kids selling produce from their gardens at farmers markets to teenagers at Glen Lake High School in northwest Michigan's Leelanau County preparing and selling healthy snacks made from local farm ingredients.

One of the most comprehensive in Michigan is the agri-science program at Springport High School, near Jackson. Out of 320 students, 260 participate in the program—working in the greenhouse, operating a farm stand, running a small, subscription-based Community Supported Agriculture business, and marketing pasture-raised chicken and beef.

Springport High's program provides real summer jobs for students who become part of the cooperative that manages the business end of operations.

Director Pat Henne says the program is about two futures—the kids' and rural Springport's.

"We are less than an hour's drive from Jackson, Lansing, Battle Creek, Kalamazoo, and Ann Arbor," Mr. Henne said. "Our big-scale vision is that we would like for our community to be looked at as a source of food."



Students in Springport High School's agriscience program earn an income and education selling local foods.

Emily Bingham

Farming's New Faces

Immigrant and women farmers are among those bringing new energy to Michigan agriculture, the state's second-largest industry.

You can see it in the sharp contrast between the big losses of farmland in Michigan— 300,000 acres between 1997 and 2002—and the big gains in the number of new, nontraditional farmers. During that period, for example, the number of Hispanic farmland owners grew by 163 percent, while the number of women owners grew by 20 percent.



Right: Nora Lindsey is completing the Organic Farming Certificate Program at Michigan State University and plans to make farming her full-time profession. Below: Until he was 15, Herberto Olviedo's family (above left) traveled as migrant laborers between Texas and Michigan. Now, at 25, Mr. Olviedo has saved enough money to buy a small farm and start building a beef cattle herd. He's taking farm business classes and using the region's Taste the Local Difference network to connect with other local farms. His perseverance keeps him moving forward. "That's the key really, to work hard to get what you really want," he said.



Wired For Success

New and growing demand for fresh, local, Michigan foods means that the state's fruit and vegetable growers need to make some changes if they want to get into that market.

Most have traditionally sold into canned, frozen, and dried foods markets, but fresh markets are different. For example, selling fresh means being able to cool produce as quickly as possible to maintain its taste as it heads to the supermarket. Packing produce to fit how restaurants and schools use it, such as in boxes containing a certain number and size of apples, suddenly becomes important.

That's why WIRED West Michigan, a regional workforce development initiative, is using some of its \$15 million, three-year U.S. Department of Labor grant to train farmers in the ways and needs of supermarkets and other larger buyers.

"It's about learning how to work in the realm of delivering to food service companies and larger retailers," said David Bisbee, assistant project manager with WIRED West Michigan, a project of the West Michigan Strategic Alliance.

The project involves some classroom training, along with field trips to see how other farms are successfully using hydro-cooling equipment and passive solar greenhouses, for example, to get buyers what they want, when they want it.

WIRED West Michigan has teamed up with The Starting Block, a food business incubator in Hart, and with the statewide Michigan Food and Farming Systems, to make the training happen.

The team is also simply putting Michigan growers together in the same room with buyers at "Meet the Buyer" receptions. Two have been held at the annual Great Lakes Fruit, Vegetable, and Farm Market Expo in Grand Rapids.

"When a farmer and a buyer from (the wholesale company) Spartan have looked each other in the eye, met in person, the whole process is dramatically easier," Mr. Bisbee said.

Selling Wholesale: A new resource is now available for farms entering the wholesale market arena. *Wholesale Success: A Farmer's Guide to Selling, Post-Harvest Handling, and Packing Produce* is available for \$80 (\$50 in quantity) at www.FamilyFarmed.org.

Individual Development Accounts

Soon after Katie Brandt graduated from the University of Michigan, in 2001, she landed her dream job—working as a hired farmhand. Even though she earned a minimal wage, Ms. Brandt learned so much she realized that she was indeed born to be a farmer.

Too often that's where the story stops for so many young people who want to farm. But Ms. Brandt is now working for herself on her own farm in Zeeland. She overcame one of the biggest obstacles that new farmers face—financing the new operation—thanks in part to an innovative combination of local leadership and a federal business development program traditionally applied to inner city needs.

Known as an Individual Development Account, the program uses funds from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to match money that an entrepreneur saves toward needed business investments.

Van Buren County Extension is Michigan's only farm-related example of this program. Agricultural IDAs are growing nationwide as a low-cost way to make a big difference for beginning farmers who have limited resources. In addition to the cash, participants are finding that the network of peers that emerges for the young farmers is invaluable.

In partnership with the C.S. Mott Group for Sustainable Food Systems at Michigan State University, Van Buren County Extension in 2004-2008 offered IDA opportunities to local farmers. Fourteen have since completed required business training, saved \$1,000 each in the year-long process, and received an additional \$2,000 in local and federal matches.

Ms. Katie Brandt will put hers into equipment. Lee Arboreal, another participant, made the down payment on a new tractor. Josh Speers, who is just 16, bought his first hay rake; he plans to follow in the footsteps of his mentor, Tom Wright, who makes a farm living supplying feed for suburban horse lovers.

Josh, along with Van Buren's other IDA holders, says getting to know the other startup farmers was one of the biggest benefits: "I learned a lot. There were people doing blueberries, chickens, fruits and vegetables, organic. Now we all know each other."

Michigan could use many more local IDA programs and the business support networks they build, said Susan Cocciarelli of the C.S. Mott Group at MSU.

Her long-term goal? She would like to see Michigan build an endowment fund for IDAs so the program could be more widespread and bootstrap more local food and farm businesses. In the near term, there's a chance Michigan could be one of 15 states chosen in 2010 for a Farm Bill pilot program aimed at building agricultural IDA programs across the nation.

Contact Ms. Cocciarelli at 517-432-4525 or cocciare@msu.edu.

Josh Speers, left, works with alfalfa producer Tom Wright and used an IDA to purchase his own hay rake.



Patty Cantrell

Improving the Business Environment

Smarter regulations help supply meet demand

In early 2008, schools all across the country were throwing away hamburger patties, burrito filling, and other beef products after a federal recall of millions of pounds of beef from a California meat processing plant.

At the Grand Traverse Area Catholic Schools in Traverse City, however, students ate sloppy joes just like normal. That's because their beef came directly from a fourth-generation farm just 35 miles away.

"We didn't have to worry about the recall at all," dining services administrator Michael Bauer told the *Traverse City Record-Eagle* that week. "We're trying to use that whole mentality of locally grown products. It hasn't been stored in a warehouse in California."

But, surprisingly, Benzie County beef farmer Randy Rice, who supplies the Catholic schools, does have to worry about the recall. Each time the big companies have a problem, federal regulations get stricter, and smaller companies have to bear the same compliance cost even though their operations, serving a smaller territory, do not pose as much risk to as many people.

That means more stress, for example, on the already tiny number of meat processors in Michigan that are still in business and able to serve Mr. Rice's growing operation. It also means more stress on Mr. Rice himself, and his cattle.

"I have to drive an hour farther to get my beef slaughtered now that the closest plant, 30 minutes away, stopped doing it," he said. Even though the closer plant, in Manistee, is still in business, it is no longer slaughtering animals from local producers because of the additional paperwork and procedures that came out of an earlier nationwide recall.

Meat processing is just one example of a big, thorny thicket of regulatory issues involved in the expansion of local food markets. It's a hot topic on the road to regional food systems because regulations are a key part of how encouraging or discouraging the business environment is to entrepreneurs.

Of course, smaller, local producers expect to be held to the highest food safety, environmental, and labor standards. Yet the rules that apply are generally written for large-scale factories, not small-scale farmsteads. This "scale neutrality" in regulations can create many unnecessary cost barriers.

Zoning for Success

Another major barrier to local farming and food production in Michigan is the welter of different township, village, and county zoning regulations.

Most zoning ordinances define farms as crop producers only: For example, farmers may produce milk from cows on their land, but they may not make cheese with it. As more farms take on cottage-scale processing, like artisan cheese making, they run into zoning regulations that either

prohibit such activities or make it costly to get approval.

Fortunately, some communities are thinking ahead.

For example, 14 years ago residents of Peninsula Township, just outside of Traverse City, were the first in the state to tax themselves to save farmland by purchasing farmland development rights. But even before that historic initiative, the area's residents and leaders knew that such a program, known as purchase of development rights, was not by itself enough to support the local farming culture that protects the township's breathtaking landscape.

"We recognized we need to preserve an industry," said Gordon Hayward, Peninsula Township planner.



Small processing operations like Lake City's L&J Meat Market are harder to find as industrial-scale regulations squeeze them out.

So, in August 2002, the township board took another major step forward. It adopted Farm Processing Amendment 139, making it the first township in Michigan to move a set of processing and retail activities from "special uses" on farms to "uses by right."

The township long had allowed processing, such as canning or freezing cherries, in agricultural zones. The amendment went further; it defined retail sales and processing as part of the farm operation itself. This eliminated the long and often contentious process farmers faced when they applied for special use zoning permits to develop new businesses.

It also reflected a growing recognition among community leaders that a new brand of entrepreneurial agriculture not only can fit well with the rural landscape, but also is vital for providing the new sources of income farm families need to keep working their land.

A New Plan for Green Space

If you were to look around your community through the eyes of someone like Andy Bowman or Cynthia Price, you would see some interesting activities popping up in city parks and even suburban neighborhoods.

Through the eyes of these Grand Rapids-area visionaries, you would see city parks where fruit trees and vegetables mingle among the tulips and the swing sets. You might see fruit from those trees picked for a neighborhood school's snack selection.

And you would even see subdivisions' green spaces suddenly busy with people tending market gardens and small chicken coops.

Viewed through one's own eyes, however, it all disappears. One big reason: Local zoning ordinances governing what you can do in your backyard, or even on your farm, either prohibit or ignore such local food opportunities.

That is why Mr. Bowman, Ms. Price, and many other people in Michigan and around the country work to clear away old zoning approaches and make way for a new, local-food day in urban, suburban, and rural areas.

Mr. Bowman works for the Grand Valley Metropolitan Council, the regional body that brings together local leaders from Grand Rapids and its surrounding townships and villages to address how the region works as a whole. Ms. Price is a founding leader of the Greater Grand Rapids Food Systems Council, people who come from agriculture, health care, business development, and elsewhere to make good food available and affordable to all.

The two have launched an effort to show metro Grand Rapids how land use rules can allow for more local food production, processing, and retailing.

Their guide, *New Approaches for Growing in Our Communities*, shows how agriculture can fit into our daily lives and local government thinking—from city streets to rural communities.

"It has to do primarily with how you establish agricultural uses on green spaces and open lands or vacant lots within the city," Mr. Bowman said. "In many cases, it involves the city not only agreeing to but also sponsoring the concept."

For example, a neighborhood association might want to buy some vacant lots and turn them into a community garden growing food for families and businesses, he said. At present, there is nary a mention in the city or township's regulations about that kind of land use, let alone a way for the group to approach the local zoning board and explain how it would manage the garden responsibly.

That is why Mr. Bowman and Ms. Price produced the guide: They want to clarify how such things can happen and how local governments and residents can work out the details.

And it looks like Grand Rapids is ready for it, Mr. Bowman said. The city is opening doors for new local food activity in town with its Green Grand Rapids initiative and a new citywide zoning ordinance that allows for a greater mix of uses in every zoning district.

Look for their urban agriculture zoning guide at www.foodshed.net.

One important step is to make space for food and gardening in land use regulations.



Investing in Infrastructure

Local food economy calls for new equipment and services

When most people hear the word “infrastructure,” they think of roads and bridges or water systems and communications towers. Infrastructure is all those pieces that make a system work efficiently and effectively as a whole; the power grid, for example, carries energy from many different sources to the many different places it’s needed.

In food, infrastructure is important, too. Barns, refrigeration, warehouses, loading docks, retail locations, distribution companies—all are part of the food system’s infrastructure.

As our food system became global in scale over the last 50 years, however, the reach of its infrastructure began to exceed the grasp of smaller-scale farms and their great diversity of products.

Now, as more schools look for fresh local foods, for instance, we find a very large gap in market infrastructure. Even though apples might be hanging on trees at a farm across the road from a school, the current industrial food infrastructure cannot deliver them those few hundred yards. Schools might buy the apples directly from the farm, but they can’t get them through the mainline food distributors they use daily.

Building a “regional food system” is all about filling that gap. It’s about reinventing and building food system infrastructure that allows for smaller farms and their wider array of products, from heritage-breed poultry to tree ripened, locally raised fruit.

The biggest needs are equipment and facilities that fit small and mid-scale producers, and building the capacity of smaller farms to meet bigger orders.

The Starting Block business incubator in the west Michigan community of Hart offers one way of solving such problems. It gives food entrepreneurs access to commercial equipment without making them buy it all themselves. At The Starting Block, entrepreneurs rent office space, store ingredients, and products; use a wide range of available equipment; and get expert help developing their products. There’s more at www.startingblock.biz.

A major redevelopment plan for Detroit’s Eastern Market offers another example. It shows how building a hub for local food retailing and processing can benefit both the local food economy and surrounding neighborhoods.

The plan aims to make the Eastern Market and nearby areas more successful by providing new local food retailing, processing, and distribution options. As a hub for a complete local food system, the market will even include an urban agriculture center with a model market garden and classes in urban food production. There’s more at www.detroiteasternmarket.com.

Distribution is always a challenge. Farmers interested in going wholesale need to get up to speed quickly in order to serve local markets; distributors themselves must re-think systems that have shut out smaller farms for years.

Companies large and small, from Sysco to Michigan-based distributors like the new Cherry Capital Foods in Traverse City, or Heeren Brothers Produce, are looking for more local farmers to help them meet demand for local and

specialty products. Even the natural food chain Whole Foods Market is redoubling efforts to buy from local farms after customers complained the company didn’t do enough.

“We’re putting a lot more energy into outreach and seeking farmers and other food producers through channels we may not have really focused on before,” said Adam Mitchel, a Midwest division produce coordinator.

Joe Colyn, a Michigan-based consultant for companies that are trying to diversify their supply chains and include more food from more local farms, says there is a growing appreciation among mainline buyers for the benefits that consumers find in local foods, from freshness to community connection.

“There’s also some awareness that our growers can provide unique flavors in fruits and vegetables, deliver them fresh and in good shape, and really satisfy consumers with stuff they used to eat, like great-tasting produce and fresh Michigan peaches,” Mr. Colyn said.

Willie Brown and his family produce and package their frozen corn-bread dressing, Southern Stuffing, at The Starting Block food business incubator in Hart.

*Current food
systems can’t deliver
an orchard’s apples
to a school right
across the street.*



Hooping It Up

It's a recurring question: How can Michigan farmers satisfy local markets when their growing season is so short?

Researchers at Michigan State University have found an effective, affordable answer: a new, badly needed piece of infrastructure that is perfect for helping smaller farms get more products to more markets.

It's called a passive solar greenhouse, or "hoophouse." Made of double-layered plastic stretched over a metal framework, hoophouses allow farmers to grow as many as 30 different cold-tolerant crops, from spinach to pak choi, through the dead of winter. Hoophouses also can provide restaurants, farmers markets, and other venues with ripe tomatoes and other high-demand vegetables as early as June—a real feat in Michigan.

"For Michigan farmers, it's really important to get in early and to be able to stay in late," said Adam Mitchel, a produce coordinator with the Midwest division of Whole Foods Market.

He's referring to the fact that everybody from California to Georgia has tomatoes to sell in August. Targeting times when their local foods are especially precious, like vine-ripened tomatoes in June, is just one of the ways Michigan farms can make hoophouses pay.

Passive solar hoophouses cost a lot less to build and operate than other types of greenhouses, which generally require a heat source, like propane or wood. That means farmers can get started making money for much less upfront investment. A standard 30 by 96-ft. hoophouse can cost \$8,000 to \$15,000, depending on its bells and whistles. With 60 percent of its area used for crops, it can bring in as much as \$26,000 in gross sales in one year, said Jeremy Moghtader, a manager of MSU's Student Organic Farm.

The farm has several hoophouses; students and faculty use them not only to gather valuable information for farmers but also to grow food for sale. The Student Organic Farm is truly hands-on, with a year-round Community Supported



Inexpensive hoophouses help growers extend their growing seasons, particularly in places like northern Michigan.

Agriculture operation giving students the chance to learn every aspect of organic growing and business management, including hoophouse growing.

MSU's Division of Housing and Food Services has partnered with the Student Organic Farm and MSU's C.S. Mott Group for Sustainable Food Systems to construct the farm's largest hoophouse yet. With it, the Student Organic Farm will sell greens year-round to campus dorms.

The goal is to produce fresh food for campus, and demonstrate how more farms could do it, too.

"We want to help pave the way for other farms to sell to bigger buyers, like institutional food services," said Moghtader.

It takes some planning and preparation to use hoophouses. Farmers must think about solar gain from all angles when deciding where to put them. They also have to plan their planting to allow for slower growth during the coldest, darkest times.

But the modest build-out cost is proving to be worth it for farms that are expanding markets for fresh and local foods. Communities that help local farms take advantage of this and other season-extending technologies will benefit both from the farms' business success...and from their year-round food.

Adam Montri of Michigan Food and Farming Systems shows growers how to install and use hoophouses.



Local and In Orbit

New markets call for new approaches.

One challenge facing the new good food sector is making the purchase of local, sustainably grown food more affordable and convenient without squeezing farmers out of business. Many entrepreneurs are trying to find a way around the big-box, mass-market model that has produced tons of cheap food but shuts out many smaller farms.

One of them is Local Orbit. This online market place—part eBay, part Amazon, part Craigslist—is still in its pilot stages. But it could revolutionize how farmers sell, and how consumers shop for, local food.

That's because it has something for everyone, says co-developer Erika Block: "Local Orbit makes it easier for farmers, other food producers, and independent retailers to do what they need to do (compete in a big-box, global food world) while at the same time providing the convenience, information, and all-in-one service that the typical consumer wants."

Here's how it works:

Retailers: A local independent retailer, like a family-owned grocery store, signs up to be the place where the farms and

food businesses drop off their local food orders. The retailer then gains a group of potentially regular customers who may buy other things at the store, such as non-local pineapples and peanuts.

Sellers: Farms and food businesses promote their wares at the local online Local Orbit site; every site is regionally based and managed. They also use a bunch of Local Orbit's back-office, online services, such as built-in databases that help them manage inventory, gather helpful market statistics, and export data for accounting purposes.

Buyers: Consumers place orders weekly through the site, which provides information about each participating farm's products. The site has many of the features online shoppers expect, like a shopping cart, payment and order processing, product reviews, and buying preferences. "If a customer has said they prefer only Michigan tomatoes, then the Michigan tomato will come up first, ahead of the Indiana tomato," Ms. Block said.

Local Orbit starts its pilot run in the spring of 2009. To learn more, visit www.localorb.it.



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ACROSS MICHIGAN LOCAL FOOD GETS COOKING

Local food activity is sprouting up everywhere across the state as a broad range of community interests – from health care professionals to economic development agencies – get involved.

Below is a list of key contacts in different regions of Michigan that can help you get connected. These contacts represent just some of what's going on all around the state. Start with them to find your way to people, partners, and projects that make sense for you.

Gary Howe

Northern Michigan

Chippewa County Extension

Farmers market development, hoophouse demonstrations, and other projects in the eastern U.P. Contact Chippewa County Extension Director Jim Lucas at lucasj@msu.edu.

Northern Lakes Economic Alliance

Farm business counseling, classes, and collaboration. Contact Wendy Wieland at wieland5@msu.edu.

Sunrise Food Coalition

Contact volunteer organizer Brian Botkin, brian.botkin@micrtc.ang.af.mil.

Taste the Local Difference

A 10-county network organized by the Traverse City-based Michigan Land Use Institute. See the project's searchable database of more than 300 farms, restaurants, grocers and others offering local foods at www.localdifference.org.

Mid Michigan

Allen Neighborhood Center

Neighborhood farmers markets, youth entrepreneurship, hoophouse demonstrations, and other projects. Contact Joan Nelson at joann@allenneighborhoodcenter.org.

Flint Farmers Market

Check out this hub for finding local food and others to work with: www.flintfarmersmarket.com.

The Garden Project

Provides gardening equipment and other support for community gardens. Contact Anne Rauscher at gardenproject@ingham.org.

MSU Student Organic Farm

Organic farming certificate program, community supported agriculture farm, and hoophouse research and demonstration. More at www.msuorganicfarm.org/home.php/.

Saginaw Farmers Market

Find your way to local food and community connections through the Saginaw Farmers Market at www.prideinsaginaw.org/events/farmers_market/.

Sweetwater Local Foods Market

A farmers market with a mission and a growing network of producers, consumers, and supporters. More at www.sweetwaterlocalfoodsmarket.org.

Southwest Michigan

Fair Food Matters

A network of local food promoters and projects in the Kalamazoo area. More at www.fairfoodmatters.org.

Greater Grand Rapids Food Systems Council

This multifaceted group produces a guide to local foods, events, research and more. Start at www.foodshed.net.

Mixed Greens at the Blandford Nature Center

Creating edible schoolyards and demonstration farming: www.blanfordnaturecenter.org.

Van Buren County Extension

Beginning farmer program including peer-to-peer support and matched savings accounts. Contact Julie Pioch at piochj@msu.edu.

Southeast Michigan

Detroit Black Community Food Security Network

Urban agriculture, small-scale farming for job development and food security in Detroit. Contact Malik Yakini at myakini@aol.com.

Detroit Garden Resource Program Collaborative

A network of more than 500 backyard and community gardens in Detroit (www.detroit-agriculture.org) supported collaboratively by four organizations: Detroit Agriculture Network, www.geocities.com/detroitag; The Greening of Detroit, www.greeningofdetroit.com; Capuchin Soup Kitchen's Earthworks Garden, www.cskdetroit.org; and Michigan State University Extension-Wayne County, www.msue.msu.edu.

Eastern Market Corporation

An historic 43-acre market in Detroit serving as wholesale hub seven days a week and as a retail farmers market. Contact Dan Carmody at dcarmody@detroiteasternmarket.com.

Food System Economic Partnership

A five-county collaborative connecting a range of business, government, and community groups around food and farming. More at www.fsepmichigan.org.

SEED Wayne

Dedicated to building sustainable food systems on the campus of Wayne State University and in Detroit communities. More at www.clas.wayne.edu/seedwayne.

Farm to School

Food System Economic Partnership

www.fsepmichigan.org/programs_projects/schools

Healthy School Meals

www.healthyschoolmeals.org

Michigan Farm to School

www.mifarmtoschool.msu.edu/

Taste the Local Difference

www.localdifference.org/farmtoschool

Statewide

Community Supported Agriculture in Michigan

www.csafarms.org

C.S. Mott Group for Sustainable Food Systems at MSU

www.mottgroup.msu.edu

Michigan Farmers Market Association

A central resource for consumers, growers, and managers of Michigan Farmers Markets. www.farmersmarkets.msu.edu.

Michigan Food and Farming Systems

www.miffs.org

Michigan Food Policy Council

www.michigan.gov/mfpc

Michigan Organic Food and Farm Alliance

www.moffa.org

MSU Product Center

www.productcenter.msu.edu

Funding

One important source of funding is the new 2008 federal Farm Bill, which includes \$14 billion targeted to help grow local food and sustainable agriculture in the United States. Learn all about the programs and funding in the *Grassroots Guide to the 2008 Farm Bill* by the Sustainable Agriculture Coalition. Find it at www.sustainableagriculturecoalition.org.

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