

Community Food Systems:



A Resource Guide

Incorporating food systems planning into local government decision-making indicates an investment in public health and the local economy. It is essential for governments to evaluate existing policies and take the necessary measures to grow our local food system.

Navigating the policies that direct community food system infrastructure can be a challenge for local decision makers as they balance the public's demand for a local food identity and the guidance that regulates agricultural production—especially in urban and suburban areas. This resource outlines the components of a local food system, the policies at play, and why engaging in this movement can be beneficial for your community.

Consider the following types of questions. Do your local policies and regulations address the importance of local food supply? Has your municipality supported or identified locations for community gardens? Is a food processing facility a permitted use in multiple zoning districts? Can your residents grow vegetables and raise hens in their backyard? Is produce permitted to be sold in residential districts? Explore documents like your local Master Plan and zoning ordinances to find answers to these questions and much more.



Understanding Community Food Systems

A community food system is one in which “food production, processing, distribution and consumption are integrated to enhance the environmental, economic, social and nutritional health of a particular place.”

We have a tremendous opportunity to improve our quality of life by supporting the strengthening of our local food system. Please take the time to discuss this topic within your community and with your local decision makers.

Michigan Good Food Charter

The Michigan Good Food Initiative is a statewide effort to promote, implement and track progress toward the goals of the [Michigan Good Food Charter](#). The initiative is coordinated by staff at the [Michigan State University Center for Regional Food Systems](#) (CRFS) and guided by the [Michigan Good Food Steering Committee](#).

The Charter was developed in 2010 via the collaboration of hundreds of people across the state with leadership from the Michigan Food Policy Council, the [Food Bank Council of Michigan](#) and the CRFS.

Good Food = Healthy, Green, Fair, & Affordable

Would you like to be a part of achieving this vision? Go to: www.michiganfood.org

Benefits of a Local Food Economy

DEVELOPING A LOCAL FOOD IDENTITY

The **Sault Ste. Marie Farmers Market** began in the summer of 2003 with 2 vendors in a parking lot behind the health department. The primary purpose at that time was to give WIC clients receiving Project Fresh coupons an immediate opportunity to use those coupons. By 2005, the market had grown to 32 vendors and moved to a larger parking lot. Today the market has more than 40 registered vendors and occupies a prominent corner in downtown **Sault Ste. Marie** that the city purchased with the idea that the farmers market would be the anchor event for that location. It has become a community gathering place.

FOOD SECURITY

The **UP Food Exchange** hosts an **Online Marketplace** website where UP farmers can sell their products directly to local institutional food buyers. This site broadens where local farmers can market their products and gets more locally produced food into our grocery stores, restaurants, schools, and hospitals. The Online Marketplace strengthens the UP local food economy by increasing the access and availability of food produced by farms in our region. Increasingly interdependent webs of farms and institutions are bolstering our region's ability to meet our own food needs. This ability is a central part of what food security means in our remote northern climate.

POSITIVE ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

The Food System starts and ends with soil. The **Michigan State University Upper Peninsula Research and Extension Center in Chatham** has launched a long-term study to identify optimal cropping and livestock systems that have positive benefits to soil health. Integration of these systems supports a low-input model that is well-suited to the Upper Peninsula that grows forages very well. Promoting soil health is a cause both producers and consumers can support as everything we eat is rooted in the soil. Healthy soil = healthy food = healthy people = healthy communities!

Good farmland soil is not abundant in the UP, so it's important to protect most of what we do have from other uses. Farmland is vulnerable to development because it is easy to build on and is often taxed at higher rates than farming can support. Fortunately, there are a variety of ways to ensure the long-term existence of productive agricultural lands.

Protection of farmland through the sale or donation of a conservation easement to a land conservancy legally guarantees that the land can never be developed for other uses and that conservation-oriented farming practices are used. Agricultural conservation easements often include non-farmland acreage that is also protected from development in perpetuity. The conservation values of both the farmland and the non-farmland are defined in the easement and monitored annually by the land conservancy to ensure that they are protected.

CREATING JOBS

Harmony Health Foods (HHF), an independently-owned natural food store in **Sault Ste. Marie**, was able to make significant food storage and display improvements in their retail store as a result of partnering with the U.P. Food Exchange. Cooler improvements increased the amount of fresh produce they

were able to sell, which in turn increased their ability to carry more local produce. As a result of upgrading their freezers, HHF was able to increase the amount and variety of frozen meat products they carry – including bison, yak, and Scottish highland beef, all from local farms. The increase in sales led HHF to hire additional staff to run the store and keep up with increased sales.

BUILDING RESILIENCE

More and more farms in the UP are utilizing hoop houses to extend the growing season and provide fresh, local food for more of the year. The **NMU Hoop House** is a collaborative learning center for eaters of all ages who are curious about where food comes from and want to learn more about how it is grown. Through student-driven research and educational workshops for the community about sustainable agriculture, the project aims to expand the local food system, increase food security, and promote access to fresh food for everyone. All food raised in the NMU Hoop House is donated to the culinary programs at **Northern Michigan University** and charities in **Marquette**.

GROWING HEALTHY COMMUNITIES

Eastern U.P.

The **Sault Ste. Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians** is working to increase access to healthy, fresh, affordable foods and beverages through assisting communities with establishment of farmers markets and ongoing promotion and support of all farmers markets in the Sault Tribe service area. The **Community Transformation Grant** project has funded 17 school districts to improve their environments for healthy eating and provided funding to schools for water bottle filling stations to increase access to free water and reduce consumption of sugar sweetened beverages.

Central U.P.

The local **ACHIEVE (Action Communities for Health Innovation and EnVironmental ChangE)** team is comprised of a group of organizations and businesses working together to make the healthy choice the easy choice, while promoting healthy communities

in **Marquette County**. They do this through initiatives like the **Healthy Lifestyle Journal** which encourages people to eat 5 cups of veggies and fruits per day and through the Healthy Restaurant Initiative which encourages restaurants to offer healthier menu choices.

Western U.P.

Every Day Healthy, One Day Local is a new collaborative farm-to-table project at Jeffers High School in **Painesdale**. A partnership of the **Adams Township Schools, Western U.P. Health Department, Keweenaw Community Foundation**, and local farmers, the project aims to improve child health and wellness while strengthening local food systems. The school's food service staff is dedicated to cooking wholesome, fresh foods from scratch, using more locally sourced foods. Beginning fall 2014, one meal per week features local meats, vegetables, fruits, and more, with start-up funds from the community foundation and training from **Michigan Tech University** chef Eric Karvonen helping ease the transition. In addition, the health department, through funding from a **USDA SNAP-Education** grant, is providing nutrition education for grades K-6 using the **Cooking with Kids** curriculum at the district's neighboring South Range Elementary School.



Community Food Systems and the Right to Farm Act

Michigan's Right to Farm Act (RTFA), PA 93 of 1981, as amended (MCL 286.471 et seq.), was enacted to protect farmers from nuisance lawsuits initiated by non-farm neighbors. The rationale for doing so was based on the fact that such suits could threaten the economic viability of agriculture in a community, and collectively the state, and the opinion that a farm that existed prior to changes in surrounding land use should not be challenged as a nuisance if following generally accepted management practices.

The RTFA has been amended three times since first enacted, including an amendment in 1999 that expanded the RTFA to preempt local regulation of certain aspects of farm operations. In effect, today the RTFA limits a local government's ability to adopt zoning regulations that apply to commercial agriculture activities, so long as those activities conform to **Generally Accepted Agricultural and Management Practices** (GAAMPs). If an agriculture activity is commercial in nature and conforms to all applicable GAAMPs, local zoning cannot regulate aspects of the activity that are covered



in the RTFA or any of the GAAMPs. However, local government can still regulate aspects of commercial agriculture activities that are not covered in the RTFA or any of the published GAAMPs and require that agricultural buildings comply with zoning regulations such as setbacks, height limitations, etc. even if no building permit is required.

It is important to note that an April 2014 update to the Site Selection GAAMP returns zoning authority to local governments to regulate livestock facilities in 'primarily residential' areas. In effect, livestock facilities, regardless of size, must comply with local zoning in urban and higher-density suburban settings and may even be prohibited by local zoning. Still, local governments have the ability to

allow urban livestock and individuals and groups are encouraged to engage local officials in discussions about planning and zoning for urban livestock as part of a flourishing community food system.

TO LEARN MORE GO TO: <http://lu.msue.msu.edu/q&a/index.html#RTFA>

"If each U.P. resident purchased \$5 of food each week directly from farmers in the region, this would generate \$80 million of new farm revenue for local farms [annually]."

- Ken Meter

President, **Crossroads Resource Center**

Sample Approaches to Support Community Food Systems

County Planning

The **Local Food Supply: A Chapter of the Marquette County Comprehensive Plan** is an educational tool developed by Marquette County that addresses the importance of a strong local food system and discusses challenges and possible solutions. Goals and policies are listed and intended to guide communities in Marquette County in strengthening their local food system by supporting local farmers, providing opportunities for new farmers, and connecting producers and consumers.

Zoning

Clearwater Township (Kalkaska County) allows the keeping of livestock and poultry for personal, noncommercial use, provided that animals are maintained and housed so as not to be a public nuisance (13.02.F). Truck gardening and crop farming (13.02.G) are also allowed in single-family residential districts.

Whitewater Township (Grand Traverse County) allows farming of all types in residential zones for home use and enjoyment (7.10.F) with proper housing of livestock (37.20).

Backyard Poultry

Traverse City permits the keeping of up to four chickens so long as they are kept in an enclosure in the rear yard, and not closer than 25 feet from a dwelling on a neighboring parcel (610.01(d)(3)).

The **City of Kalamazoo** permits the keeping of rabbits and poultry within the city limits so long as they are kept free of offensive odors and in an enclosed yard not located closer than 30 feet from property lines (Article I, Sec. 7-5).

Urban Farms

In Flint, an organization called **Edible Flint** supports residents in growing and accessing healthy food and coordinates the packaging and delivery of vegetable seeds, transplants, compost, tilling and soil testing. Further, the **City of Flint** and the **Genesee County Land Bank** allow community and market gardens on private property as well as vacant lots.

Season Extension

The **Hoophouses for Health** program is designed to build capacity for season extension and local food production all while reaching out to consumers who may not otherwise have access to fresh produce.

Farmers participating in the program "pay off" their hoophouse, zero-interest loan by distributing fresh produce equal to the value of the hoophouse loan to vulnerable families. The **Michigan Farmers Market Association** in partnership with the Center for Regional Food Systems at Michigan State University and the **MSU Department of Horticulture** facilitates the program.



Community Food Systems Resources

WHO TO CONTACT

- **U.P. Food Exchange (UPFE) Food Hub Policy Committee**
www.upfoodexchange.com | 906-225-0671 x711 | info@upfoodexchange.com
- **Michigan State University Extension (MSUE)**
Brad Neumann, AICP Government & Public Policy Educator | 906-475-5731 | neuman36@anr.msu.edu
Michelle Walk, Community Food Systems Extension Educator | 906-635-6368 | walkmich@msu.edu
Ashley McFarland, Community Food Systems Extension Educator | 906-439-5176 | ashleymc@anr.msu.edu
http://msue.anr.msu.edu/topic/info/community_food_systems
- **Your Local Food Co-ops**
Marquette Food Co-op (Marquette) | 906-225-0671 | www.marquettefood.coop
Keweenaw Food Co-op (Hancock) | 906-482-2030 | www.keweenaw.coop
Northwind Natural Foods Co-op (Ironwood) | 906-932-3547 | www.northwindcoop.org
- **Regional Planning Agencies**
Central Upper Peninsula Planning & Development Commission | www.cuppad.org | 906-786-9234
Eastern Upper Peninsula Regional Planning & Development Commission | www.eup-planning.org | 906-635-1581
Western U.P. Planning & Development Region | www.wupldr.org | 906-482-7205
- **Elected Officials & Zoning**
Contact your local officials to learn about local laws and policies related to community food systems

LAND PRESERVATION FOR FOOD PRODUCTION

- **Little Traverse Conservancy**
www.landtrust.org | 231-347-0991 | Chippewa, Mackinac Counties
- **Keweenaw Land Trust**
www.keweenawlandtrust.org | 906-482-0820 | Western U.P.
- **Upper Peninsula Land Conservancy**
www.uplandconservancy.org | 906-225-8067 | All of the U.P. except Houghton & Keweenaw Counties

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE FOR FOOD PRODUCTION & PROCESSING

- **Michigan Conservation Districts**
www.macd.org
- **Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)**
www.nrcs.usda.gov
- **State of Michigan Health Departments**
www.michigan.gov/mdch/0,1607,7-132--96747--,00.html
- **MSU Product Center**
productcenter.msu.edu

WEBSITES

- **Michigan Good Food Charter**
www.michiganfood.org
- **Michigan Association of Planning Community and Regional Food Systems Planning Policy**
http://www.planningmi.org/downloads/map_food_systems_planning_policyboard_adopted_version622014.pdf
- **Marquette County Local Food Supply Plan**
http://www.co.marquette.mi.us/departments/planning/local_food_supply_plan.php
- **American Planning Association**
www.planning.org/resources/ontheradar/food/whyplanningissue.htm
- **Crossroads Resource Center**
www.crcworks.org
- **Food Policy Database**
www.morningagclips.com/food-policy-database-aids-communities
- **Municipal Zoning for Local Foods in Iowa**
www.leopold.iastate.edu/sites/default/files/pubs-and-papers/2015-09-municipal-zoning-local-foods-iowa.pdf

Take Action!

- 1**
Talk to local governmental officials/staff from your city, township and county about community foods. Remember to keep an open mind during the discussion and listen in order to establish yourself as a credible and reasonable person with the best interest of your community at heart.
- 2**
Attend regularly scheduled city, township and county meetings as well as planning commission meetings to learn about current issues and to get to know your local officials.
- 3**
Connect with the Food Hub in your region by serving on a committee, attending trainings, or acting as a local food advocate.
- 4**
Get to know your local farmers and what their needs and thoughts are regarding local food and agriculture. A good place to start is at your local farmers' market.
- 5**
Subscribe to weekly/monthly electronic newsletters and newsfeeds from the entities listed in the "Who to Contact" listing on the left.
- 6**
Grow and purchase local food to the best of your ability.

We want to highlight all the ways that local food is influencing U.P. communities. Please submit local food stories from your area to info@upfoodexchange.com

**U.P. FOOD
EXCHANGE**
growing local food systems

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