

NORTHWEST MICHIGAN FOOD AND FARMING NETWORK

Goal, objectives, and priority strategies from the Feb. 24, 2009, Farm Route to Prosperity summit

GOAL: Increase the resilience and double the value of the six-county region's food and agricultural system in 10 years (Antrim, Benzie, Grand Traverse, Kalkaska, Leelanau, Wexford counties).

OBJECTIVES

1. Double the market value of food and agriculture sales.
2. Increase to 10 percent (from current est. 2 percent) the market share of regional food expenditures going to regional food and agriculture businesses.
3. Ensure that all residents have access to an ample high-quality, healthy, and culturally diverse diet.
4. Increase the profitability and diversity of the regional food and agriculture system's participants, products, markets, services, and facilities.
5. Secure the availability and affordability of sufficient regional farmland and associated water and energy resources to build and maintain a long-term, sustainable business environment for local agriculture and food production.

PRIORITY STRATEGIES

by *Farm Route to Prosperity* working group

Health and Youth

- Ensure that families involved in the federal Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) assistance program are able to find and purchase local produce.
- Identify, link, and promote community gardening efforts in the region.
- Identify, link, and promote food/farm youth entrepreneurship programs.
- Use available community information media to link people and promote programs.

Farmland

- Develop a comprehensive inventory of farmland in the region.
- Produce a planning and zoning toolbox, based on empirical research, to help local governments encourage farm business development and farmland preservation.

Education/Training (Governance)

- Provide a series of food and farm business certifications as part of a menu of learning options in the community (i.e. through Northwestern Michigan College), including information for local governments on removing barriers to success, such as restrictive zoning.

Infrastructure

- Establish an industry roundtable of regional food producers, buyers, distributors, and processors to identify and address gaps in market infrastructure, such as a lack of smaller scale pre-processing facilities (coring, seeding etc.) or the ability of individual farms to supply larger orders, such as through cooperative regional branding.

Buyers/Food Service

- Increase and enhance efforts to build the demand and supply of regional foods, such as working in conjunction with the Michigan Food Policy Council.
- Recruit and work with more regional food buyers, such as grocers, not yet engaged.

Producers/Sellers

- Develop an education initiative for producers about market opportunities and distribution options.
- Develop a capital injection initiative to bring needed equity financing to regional food and farm operations.
- Work to maximize the reach and effectiveness of existing programs, such as the Northwest Michigan Horticultural Research Center.

Financing/Funding

- Establish a high-visibility Web location for comprehensive information about financing opportunities and support services for local food and farm businesses.
- Conduct a meat processing facility feasibility study.

PLANNING PARTNERS

Black Star Farms

Grand Traverse Band of Ottawa and Chippewa Indians

Grand Traverse Regional Land Conservancy

iOmni LLC

James Bardenhagen Farm

Leelanau Conservancy

Michigan Land Use Institute

Michigan Small Business and Technology Development Center

Michigan State University Extension

Neahtawanta Center

Northwest Michigan Council of Governments

Northwest Michigan Horticultural Research Center

SEEDS

Traverse Bay Economic Development Corporation

USDA-Rural Development

For more information, contact:
Patty Cantrell, Michigan Land Use Institute
231-941-6584 x 24, patty@mlui.org