



**MICHIGAN
GOOD FOOD
CHARTER
2022**

GRATITUDES

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Contributors

The 2022 Michigan Good Food Charter was developed through a multi-year collaborative process involving representatives from over 150 Michigan agriculture, food, health, education, and governmental organizations.

We are deeply grateful to the many individuals who contributed their time, insight, and expertise to the development of the 2022 Michigan Good Food Charter.

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The Michigan Good Food initiative is a statewide effort to promote, implement, and track progress toward the Michigan Good Food Charter goals. The initiative is coordinated by the MSU Center for Regional Food Systems (CRFS) and guided by a coalition of partners. This publication builds directly upon the text and essential arguments of the original Michigan Good Food Charter, published in 2010 and authored through a similarly collaborative process.

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Land Acknowledgment

The Michigan Good Food Charter was designed to unite Michigan voices in support of a more equitable, sustainable, healthy, and fair food system. While this initiative is driven by partners based in different locations throughout the state, the project is coordinated by staff at Michigan State University.

As such, it is imperative to state that we collectively acknowledge that Michigan State University occupies the ancestral, traditional, and contemporary Lands of the Anishinaabeg – Three Fires Confederacy of Ojibwe, Odawa, and Potawatomi peoples.

In particular, the University resides on Land ceded in the 1819 Treaty of Saginaw. We recognize, support, and advocate for the sovereignty of Michigan's twelve federally-recognized Indian nations, for historic Indigenous communities in Michigan, for Indigenous individuals and communities who live here now, and for those who were forcibly removed from their Homelands.

By offering this Land Acknowledgment, we affirm Indigenous sovereignty and will work to hold Michigan State University more accountable to the needs of American Indian and Indigenous peoples.

Learn more about this [Land Acknowledgment](#) from the MSU American Indian and Indigenous Studies program.



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About Michigan Good Food

The Michigan Good Food initiative is a statewide effort to promote, implement, and track progress toward the Michigan Good Food Charter goals. The initiative is coordinated by the MSU Center for Regional Food Systems (CRFS) and guided by a coalition of partners. Learn more at michiganfood.org.

About MSU Center for Regional Food Systems

The Michigan State University Center for Regional Food Systems advances regionally-rooted food systems through applied research, education, and outreach. We do this by uniting the knowledge and experience of diverse stakeholders with that of MSU faculty and staff. Our work fosters a thriving economy, equity, and sustainability for Michigan, the nation, and the planet by advancing systems that produce food that is healthy, green, fair, and affordable. Learn more at foodsystems.msu.edu.

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WHAT IS THE MICHIGAN GOOD FOOD CHARTER?

A Shared Vision

Initially published in 2010, the original Michigan Good Food Charter helped build momentum for food systems efforts across the state. The original Charter envisioned food systems that promote equity, health, sustainability, and thriving economies through local and regional food and agriculture. The 2010 Michigan Good Food Charter defined “good food” as healthy, green, fair, and affordable. Its implementation generated food policy action and the growth of regional and statewide networks supporting food systems efforts.

Over a decade later, the 2022 Michigan Good Food Charter serves a similar purpose. The Charter is a guide for creating and sustaining good food systems rooted in Michigan communities.

A Tool for Collective Action

No single organization or community can make the necessary systemic changes alone.

Whether you are acting as an individual or as part of an organization, everyone can take action. The 2022 Michigan Good Food Charter builds on many years of network development to implement ideas supporting the original Charter goals. The updated action recommendations represent the goals, priorities, and strategies of a dynamic coalition of partners, including representatives from over 150 Michigan agriculture, food, health, education, business, and governmental organizations.

We have updated our vision, goals, strategies, and description of a “good food system” to reflect feedback and recommendations gathered from a multi-year collaborative effort with partners, organizations, and individuals across Michigan.

The 2022 Charter outlines a shared vision for a good food system in Michigan with six goals, six strategies, and 22 action recommendations. The Charter calls for systemic change by supporting food systems that ensure food is accessible to everyone, promote healthy communities, use fair and sustainable production methods, and support a diverse and equitable society.

We hope our vision and framework for action can be used to foster justice.

An ongoing, community-driven conversation to define what justice means requires a commitment to authentic partnership, trust-building, and equitably-distributed support from funders and investors. We need to continue to develop relationships, broaden authentic engagement, and build coalitions for action around our shared goals. The 2022 Charter offers an opportunity to engage in dialogue and coordinated policy action to advance our shared vision.



HOW CAN WE USE THE CHARTER?

The Michigan Good Food Charter is a tool for communication, advocacy, and evaluation.

We can use it to:



Explore ideas that advance good food systems in Michigan



Identify common ground within and across sectors



Build action coalitions around food systems policy change



Inform policymakers of statewide and local priorities



Organize shared measurement for greater impacts

CHARTER ACTION SUMMARY

A Vision for Michigan's Food Systems

Michigan has a thriving food economy distinguished by equity, health, and sustainability.

To achieve this vision, we need systemic change. Michigan food systems should ensure food is accessible to everyone, promote healthy communities, use fair and sustainable production methods, and support a diverse and equitable society.

A Good Food System Is...

Accessible

Everyone can access and afford healthy, culturally relevant food where they live, work, learn, and play.

Equitable

The food system promotes just and fair inclusion in a society where all people can participate, prosper, and have the power to make decisions.¹

Fair

No one is exploited in the food production process, and people working in food systems have access to living wages, benefits, safe work environments, and pathways for career advancement.

Healthy

The food system supports opportunities for everyone to be as healthy as possible, physically, mentally, socially, and spiritually.

Diverse

The food system encourages diversity - of scale, products, means of access, production strategies, markets, ownership models, and foodways - as a strength that fosters community and system resilience as we face an unknown future.

Sustainable

The food system protects air, water, and soil now and for future generations.



In order to achieve our vision, our strategies must address both the root causes and ongoing impacts of racism and other systemic inequities.

OUR GOALS

The results we want to see in our communities.

In order to address the complex challenges of the food system, we have identified six interconnected goals describing the results we want to see in our communities. These goals build on our vision and description of a good food system. Any strategy or action could help achieve a number of these results.



Food Access to Food Sovereignty

Everyone has the resources to access and afford healthy, culturally relevant food where they live, work, learn, and play and the ability to shape the food systems that impact them.



Farm and Food Business Viability

The food system supports a dynamic mix of local, regional, national, and global food sources that offer opportunities for small-scale and marginalized Michigan farm and food businesses to thrive.



Health Equity

The food system supports opportunities for everyone to be as healthy as possible, physically, mentally, socially, and spiritually.



Fair Wages and Economic Opportunity

People who plant, harvest, process, pack, transport, prepare, serve, and sell food have access to living wages, benefits, safe work environments, and pathways for career advancement and leadership.²



Sustainable Ecosystems

The food system protects air, water, and soil now and for future generations.



Climate Change Mitigation and Resilience

Communities are resilient in the face of climate change and the food system actively mitigates its impact on the climate.

UNDERSTANDING FOOD SYSTEMS

Food systems connect the food on our plates, the people who produce that food, and the ecosystems and resources that make agriculture possible. The ways we produce and access food, and all the health and environmental impacts our decisions generate, are shaped by culture, policy, and economics.

Food systems operate at global, national, regional, and local scales. We can look at food systems as having several interconnected components: ecosystems, supply chains, human influences, and economic, cultural, health, and environmental outcomes.

Food systems are part of ecosystems.

Ecosystems are communities of living beings interacting with their physical environment. We depend on air, water, land, and soil to produce food.

Our food systems decisions influence the health of the ecosystems we rely on and must prioritize the wellbeing of both people and the environment.

Food passes through many hands to reach us.

Most of our food moves through a process to get from the field to our plates. There is also a process for food recovery, disposal, and composting.

It takes many people to plant, harvest, process, pack, transport, prepare, serve, and sell food, and each step in the chain adds value.³

The price of food does not always reflect the true cost of production - both the labor and environmental impacts.





People shape food systems.

Policymakers, government agencies, funding and investment partners, local/regional community-based initiatives, and food, farm, health, and education networks all have a role in shaping food systems - for better or for worse.

Unfortunately, many current food system policies, practices, and economic structures reinforce inequities that stand in the way of us reaching our vision.

The people who shape our food systems must acknowledge and address these structural problems and work together across sectors to create practices and policies that make our food systems healthy, sustainable, equitable, and economically sound.

Our decisions have many outcomes.

Our decisions influence how food and agriculture systems function and can lead to a number of positive or detrimental impacts ranging from the individual or community level to national or global.

Our decisions may influence:

- » Health and wellness outcomes
- » Land, ecosystems, and energy impacts
- » Climate change, and its effects on food production
- » Social, economic, and cultural practices
- » Education, research, and innovation opportunities
- » Infrastructure and technology resources



WHAT NEEDS TO CHANGE?

Challenges Big and Small

The 2010 Michigan Good Food Charter envisioned a food system that supports a thriving economy, equity, and sustainability for all residents. Thanks to advocacy, entrepreneurship, network support, training, and technical assistance over the past decade, there has been enormous growth in support for local and regional food systems in Michigan.

More schools and early care and education settings now offer fresh, locally-sourced products in meals and snacks. Small farms and food businesses have more opportunities to sell their products directly to consumers and in retail markets. The number of Michigan farmers markets has grown, and more farmers markets can accept food assistance benefits and nutrition incentive programs.

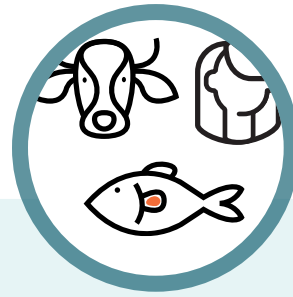
New federal and state programs have helped small- and mid-sized farms access food safety certifications, crop insurance benefits, specialized training, and financing. Resources dedicated to local and regional food systems have increased access to healthy, locally-sourced foods for many Michigan residents and spurred the growth of local and regional farm and food businesses.

In spite of this progress, and facing a pivotal time in the wake of a global pandemic, we still face challenges. Local and regional food infrastructure has not kept pace with rapidly growing markets for local food. Small- and mid-sized farms struggle to compete in commodity markets that incentivize selling at the lowest prices. Many policies and practices place higher burdens on BIPOC-owned/operated and small scale food producers. Zoning regulations limit food production in cities, and rural farmland is unaffordable in many places. Young and beginning farmers face challenges accessing capital to acquire equipment and land.



Meanwhile, an aging farming population combined with land consolidation has steadily reduced the number of family farms and put control of land in fewer and fewer hands. The food and agriculture industry struggles with labor shortages while workers often cannot earn a living wage,⁴ and some face unsafe working conditions. Schools and early care and education settings face restrictive budgets impacting their ability to serve locally sourced, culturally relevant foods.

Finally, many common agricultural practices contribute to climate change by producing harmful greenhouse gas emissions. These same practices also cause damaging environmental impacts such as reduced biodiversity, loss of pollinator species, and poor water and air quality. While agriculture contributes to climate change, it is also threatened by its effects, as extreme weather events like droughts and flooding become more prevalent and impact food production. Moreover, BIPOC communities and low wealth populations are disproportionately affected by the impacts of climate change.⁵



Root Causes and Ongoing Impacts

There are many reasons these challenges continue to hold us back. A common thread is the deeply-rooted systemic inequities, especially racism, woven throughout our history, society, and policies. We must acknowledge these root causes and their ongoing impacts as we work to address them.

Systemic inequities are so embedded in our culture that they can be hard to recognize. The United States of America is rooted in a rich agricultural heritage. However, that wealth was gained through exploitative practices like the economic institution of slavery and the theft of Indigenous land.

Racist farm and food policies have upheld division and inequity for generations. Persistent wealth and health disparities connected to food systems are a result of long-term, purposeful exclusion like

segregation and municipal redlining, repeated denial of government loans, and inequitable allocation of grants and resources to Black, Indigenous, and other farmers/producers of color.⁶

Because of this foundation, Indigenous and Black communities have not been able to build sovereign agrarian economies like wealthy white landowners. This has diminished economic power and limited opportunities for land tenure for marginalized communities. Furthermore, decision-making power remains disproportionately out of reach by those who are most impacted.

Dismantling unjust systems and achieving equity must be collaborative, intentional, and actionable to effect systemic change. We need a consistent commitment to addressing deeper, structural change by those who hold the most power.



The concept of land ownership originates from the European idea that land is a commodity that can be bought and sold by individuals.

In the United States, the history of land theft from Indigenous peoples and Black farmers has shaped our policy approach to land ownership, and conflicts with many Indigenous and Black cultural understandings of reciprocal relationships with land.

This means for some, land tenure or land stewardship is a more appropriate term.

WHAT CAN WE DO?

While systemic inequities are difficult to overcome, the Michigan Good Food Charter can help us address complex food systems challenges through strategic, coordinated policy action.

The Charter can serve as a guide and catalyst for food systems stakeholders to:

- » identify gaps in existing policies and initiatives;
- » determine where policy, resources, and funding can have the most impact and spur transformative change; and
- » leverage collective power to foster self-determination in communities most impacted by food systems challenges.

Collaboration Infrastructure

Everyone has a stake in seeing our shared vision become a reality. The term “collaboration infrastructure” is our attempt to make visible the importance of our networks and relationships, demonstrating that *how we work together is as important as what we work together on.*

The Michigan Good Food Charter initiative fosters a culture of collaboration through cross-sector partnerships and interconnected networks composed of farm, food, health, environment, policy, finance, business, and education partners. These partnerships, forged around shared values for good food systems, can facilitate balanced decision-making and advance political, economic, and environmental structural change.

| Root Causes | Ongoing Systemic Issues in the Food System | How the Charter Connects |
|---|--|--|
| <p><i>The origins of systemic issues are grounded in racism and white supremacy.</i></p> <p>Land theft</p> <p>Extractive economic systems</p> <p>Exploitative policies</p> <p>Unbalanced decision making</p> | <p><i>Systemic issues affect everyone and disproportionately impact marginalized communities.</i></p> <p>Wealth disparities related to land tenure and wealth building for marginalized individuals and communities</p> <p>Health and environmental issues affecting opportunities and quality of life</p> <p>Decision making disparities built into our society and institutions, leading to reduced individual and community self-determination</p> | <p><i>We must acknowledge and address ongoing systemic issues.</i></p> <p>The Michigan Good Food Charter integrates racial, economic, and environmental equity as critical elements for achieving our vision.</p> <p>We have woven ideas to support antiracism, community food sovereignty, and other forms of equity throughout the Charter recommendations.</p> |

A FRAMEWORK FOR GOOD FOOD ACTION

The Michigan Good Food Charter is organized using the framework below.

VISION

Our shared purpose.

Michigan has a thriving food economy distinguished by equity, health, and sustainability.

SIX GOALS

The results we want to see in our communities.

- » Food Access to Food Sovereignty
- » Farm and Food Business Viability
- » Health Equity
- » Fair Wages and Economic Opportunity
- » Sustainable Ecosystems
- » Climate Change Mitigation and Resilience

SIX STRATEGIES

Strategies describe how we can work toward the vision and results. Any given strategy or action could help us reach our vision and goals.

1. Cultivate thriving local/regional farm and food businesses.
2. Prioritize local and regional food systems within a global economy.
3. Use the power of collaboration to dismantle racism and systemic inequity in food systems.
4. Establish fair compensation, safe working environments, and opportunities for career advancement in food systems.
5. Foster climate resilience through equitable land stewardship.
6. Support people to have real choices that lead to good food and health.

22 ACTIONS

Steps we can take to engage in the strategies and achieve our goals.

Each action contains specific ideas that capture what is already happening in Michigan as well as new possibilities to inspire action.

STRATEGIES INDEX

The Charter recommendations are organized by strategies and actions. Strategies describe how we can work toward the vision and goals of the Michigan Good Food Charter.

Strategies, found in the middle column, are sorted into six topic areas. Each strategy includes actions to help accomplish the goals of the Charter. Please note that numbers do not represent rank order.

| Topic | Strategies | Actions |
|------------------------------------|--|--|
| Farm and Food Business Development | <p>Cultivate thriving local/regional farm and food businesses.</p> <p>Targeted investment, policies, and technical assistance can ensure the long-term financial viability of Michigan farm and food businesses while fostering financial empowerment for those producers who have been marginalized.</p> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Establish a statewide farm and food business viability program or network. 2. Generate equitable access to capital and maximize investment opportunities for farm and food businesses and BIPOC-led food systems initiatives. |
| | <p>Prioritize local and regional food systems within a global economy.</p> <p>We can strengthen Michigan communities by growing the market for locally and regionally produced food, increasing transparency and communication in the food supply chain, encouraging values-based food purchasing strategies, and investing in local/regional food value chain infrastructure.</p> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. Develop systems, tools, and resources for marketing locally, regionally, and sustainably produced food. 4. Invest in regional food distribution, processing, and manufacturing infrastructure to address the priorities of small- and mid-scale local/regional farm and food businesses. 5. Equip farmers markets with tools, resources, and policy support to create thriving marketplaces for local farm and food products. 6. Ensure food producers and communities are prepared for environmental, economic, and public health crises. 7. Create leadership development pathways for a diverse body of community experts to advocate and guide good food systems initiatives, networks, and policy. |
| Local/Regional Food Value Chains | <p>Use the power of collaboration to dismantle racism and systemic inequity in food systems.</p> <p>How we work together is as important as what we work on. Because no organization or community member can make the necessary systemic changes alone, collaboration and partnership are crucial. To successfully dismantle systemic inequities in the food system, we must increase the diversity and representation of people participating in food systems decision making at all levels.</p> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 8. Increase the collective power of local food councils and other community-driven advocacy coalitions to influence policy. 9. Invest in the continued development of cross-sector networks that support the development of good food systems. 10. Conduct research, education, evaluation, and advocacy efforts using equitable and antiracist principles/practices. |

| Topic | Strategies | Actions |
|--------------------------------|---|--|
| Employment Equity | <p>Establish fair compensation, safe working environments, and opportunities for career advancement in food systems.</p> <p>Food business owners, workers, and public and private agencies must work together to develop quality food systems jobs, design equitable career pathways, and ensure that food systems jobs protect the health of workers, communities, and the environment.</p> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 11. Equip farm and food business owners with adequate support to offer fair, comprehensive compensation and benefits. 12. Design equitable pathways to food systems employment, business ownership, and long-term careers. 13. Ensure that food systems jobs protect the health of workers, communities, and the environment. 14. Create opportunities for food systems workers to access resources to address stress, conflict management, and mental health care concerns. |
| Land and Ecosystem Stewardship | <p>Foster climate resilience through equitable land stewardship.</p> <p>We can invest in farmers and food producers as ecosystem stewards to protect rural and urban farmland, fisheries, and watersheds; reduce food waste; and keep plastic out of landfills. Additionally, land use policies and financial investment can improve access to land for current and future generations while advancing community food sovereignty.</p> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 15. Leverage land use planning strategies to improve access to farmland and support community food sovereignty for current and future generations. 16. Invest in farmers as ecosystem stewards by supporting and incentivizing food and agriculture practices that protect the integrity of our soil, water, and air. 17. Support the development of a food value chain that prioritizes Michigan- and sustainably-produced foods. 18. Invest in and support food recovery and food waste reduction practices throughout the value chain and among consumers. 19. Minimize single-use plastic and prioritize reusable, recyclable, and compostable packaging and serving alternatives. |
| Nutrition, Health, and Food | <p>Support people to have real choices that lead to good food and health.</p> <p>We must expand food access, foster the vitality of local/regional farm and food businesses, and address deeply rooted, systemic issues that lead to inequitable health outcomes. We can foster dignity and choice in food systems by prioritizing approaches that connect food, health, and community food sovereignty.</p> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 20. Eliminate barriers to food and nutrition security and ensure the nutritional needs of Michigan’s children are met. 21. Establish healthy and culturally relevant food environments in community-led, public, food service, and food retail settings. 22. Design food and nutrition education to incorporate culturally relevant foodways, cultivate understanding of the connections between food and health, and foster food systems literacy. |

FARM AND FOOD BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

Cultivate thriving local/regional farm and food businesses.

Targeted investment, policies, and technical assistance can ensure the long-term financial viability of Michigan farm and food businesses while fostering financial empowerment for those producers who have been marginalized.

1. Establish a statewide farm and food business viability program or network.

Building on existing models in Michigan and other states, a statewide farm and food business viability program or network could be established to provide comprehensive support for the creation of successful farm and food businesses. Public and private funders and technical assistance providers could collaborate with small- to mid-scale, beginning, BIPOC-led/owned, and other marginalized farm and food business owners to identify resources and support needs.

This program or network would provide easy-to-access training, technical assistance, and operations support for farm and food businesses, including but not limited to:

- » A directory of business support and services
- » Finance-readiness tools and training
- » Long- and short-term business planning
- » Risk management tools and analysis
- » Financial management and record-keeping
- » Human resources, mental health support, and stress management coaching
- » Retirement and ownership succession planning (business and land transfer)
- » Food safety planning and procedure support
- » Transitions to and development of cooperative and worker-owned businesses
- » Connections to new market channels that include institutional sales and grocery, retail, and restaurant procurement

2. Generate equitable access to capital and maximize investment opportunities for farm and food businesses and BIPOC-led food systems initiatives.

Address systemic inequities within lending institutions

Advocate for staff at public, private, and government lending institutions to regularly participate in mandatory antiracism and/or diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) training. Financing institutions should seek to eliminate well-documented⁷ systemic inequities experienced by BIPOC, LGBTQIA+, veteran, disabled, and women farm and food business owners and workers.

Business Development

Direct local, state, and federal agencies and private lending institutions to alleviate barriers BIPOC, small-scale, beginning, and other marginalized farm and food business owners face through farm financing programs.

- » Ensure funding allows for the purchase of land and adequately addresses rapidly rising land prices.
- » Promote land transfer incentive programs⁸ that preserve farmland and facilitate the transition of land to new and beginning farmers.
- » Provide small business planning and startup funding to help food business entrepreneurs produce and market foods within their own communities.
- » Develop BIPOC-led and -focused training and technical assistance opportunities that are culturally relevant and available in multiple languages and formats.
- » Create advertising campaigns to raise awareness of private, state, and federal funding opportunities among marginalized groups.
- » Development finance agencies can promote local and regional food systems to an “asset class” to increase their value and generate new opportunities for farm and food businesses.⁹
- » Restructure or eliminate matching fund requirements to make grant programs more accessible to farmers, food business owners, and organizations regardless of their financial and technical capacity.

Targeted Financing

Provide student debt relief and other loan-forgiveness programs for people producing food, including amending the Federal Public Service Student Loan Forgiveness program to include farmers.^{10,11}

Champion “creative capital” strategies to offer a wider variety of grant and loan products or special funds that target marginalized farm and food business owners. Examples include:

- » bridge loans¹² and special funds that help business owners access or leverage other financing sources;
- » blended capital, which is a mix of grants and loans offered at the same time to build capacity and increase capital assets;
- » microloans and revolving loan funds to support appropriate scale and pace of business development; and
- » incentive loans and tax incentives¹³ to help beginning farmers access land for sale or rent.

LOCAL/REGIONAL FOOD VALUE CHAINS

Prioritize local and regional food systems within a global economy.

We can strengthen Michigan communities by growing the market for locally and regionally produced food, increasing transparency and communication in the food supply chain, encouraging values-based food purchasing strategies, and investing in local/regional food value chain infrastructure.

3. Develop systems, tools, and resources for marketing locally, regionally, and sustainably produced food.

Farm to Institution

Support Michigan institutions to purchase 25 percent of food products from Michigan growers, producers, and processors by 2025. Adopted by the [Michigan Farm to Institution Network \(MFIN\)](#) in 2022, this goal builds directly upon two goals from the original 2010 Charter. As Michigan farm to institution efforts continue to mature and expand, funding and other support is needed for further training, technical assistance, research, and advocacy efforts.

Cottage Food Business

Evaluate the Michigan Cottage Food Law for enhancements that would further support entrepreneurs. Gather data to better understand the economic impact of this legislation and build on existing education and outreach to ensure would-be cottage food producers are well-informed of opportunities and limitations of establishing a cottage food business.¹⁴

Statewide Marketing Tools

Leverage state marketing efforts to create a statewide Michigan-grown/raised/produced label to make it easier for retailers, wholesalers, and consumers to identify and purchase local and regional products. Such a label would require strong promotion and communication to ensure consumers are aware of it and able to identify its use.¹⁵

- » Make the label available to farmers and food producers at no cost.
- » Take steps to enhance the visibility of BIPOC and other marginalized producers through self-identification and community-led or third-party verifications.
- » Advance the use of online marketplaces, directories, and information hubs for farmers and buyers to connect around the procurement of Michigan-grown and produced products.

Supply Chain Transparency

Support farm and food businesses to attain marketable, voluntary third-party certifications/verifications to help them gain access to new markets and ensure the integrity of the food supply chain.¹⁶ This allows smaller enterprises to gain a competitive advantage, and helps purchasers diversify their supply chain.

- » Government agencies, food purchasers, and business support initiatives can cover or share certification costs and advocate to streamline processes to obtain certifications, which are often complicated and costly.
- » Increase awareness and understanding of food safety assurance program options and sustainability label claims. This information supports values-based food procurement goals and encourages institutional purchasers to make scale- and program-appropriate choices.

Examples of Marketable Third-Party Certifications and Verifications for Farm and Food Businesses

| Agriculture and Food Production Certifications, Verifications, and Label Claims | Business Type Verifications/Certifications |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) » Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points (HACCP) and USDA Inspection for food processing and manufacturing » Michigan Agriculture Environmental Assurance Program (MAEAP) and the Michigan Produce Safety Risk Assessment Program (PSRA) » Sustainability label claims such as those listed in the Food Print Food Label Guide | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Certified B Corp Business, and Michigan B Local Business » Disability-Owned Business Enterprise (DOBE) » Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, or Transgender Business Enterprise (LGBTBE) » Minority Business Enterprise (MBE) » Service-Disabled Veteran-Owned (SDVO) » Veterans Business Enterprise (VBE) » Women Business Enterprise (WBE) |



MAEAP verification sign at a farm in West Michigan. Photo: Ethan Painter

4. Invest in regional food distribution, processing, and manufacturing infrastructure to address the priorities of small- and mid-scale local/ regional farm and food businesses.

Regional Infrastructure Investment

Continue to invest in regional food supply chain infrastructure through the Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (MDARD) [Value Added and Regional Food Systems Grants](#) and [Food and Agriculture Investment Fund Grants](#), the [Michigan State Planning and Development Regions](#), and other state and philanthropic initiatives. Particular focus should be on rural food distribution challenges.

Conduct a statewide needs assessment and develop a plan to improve small- to mid-scale food producers' access to distribution, storage, processing equipment, co-packers, and meat processing infrastructure.

Charge state-funded business support entities, such as the [Michigan Technical Education Centers](#) and [Michigan Translational Research And Commercialization \(MTRAC\) Innovation Hubs](#), with identifying and supporting the technological development needs of farmers and other agri-food enterprises.

Wholesale Market Access

Create access to wholesale markets for diverse small- and mid-scale farms and food businesses. Grow the food procurement capacity of food hubs, regional food distributors, food processors, and incubator and community kitchens alongside institutional and retail buyers.

Prioritize solutions that address the top barriers these stakeholders face, including:

- » coordinating logistics challenges/limitations on regional and local scales;
- » funding assistance for farmers to meet food safety requirements;
- » managing the aggregation of products and appropriate scaling of operations in the context of a given region;
- » promoting the best value over the lowest cost when working to meet buyer pricing requirements and product volume needs;
- » reducing the administrative burdens of becoming a vendor; and
- » creating matchmaking opportunities and providing training and technical assistance to small-scale and BIPOC food suppliers to improve wholesale readiness and relationships with purchasers.



What is a Food Value Chain?

The USDA Agriculture Marketing Service describes food value chains as a business strategy to “transform the traditional competitive seller/buyer relationships to a collaborative approach.” Value chains are trusting alliances among supply chain partners that recognize that creating maximum value for their products depends on interdependence, collaboration, and mutual support.

5. Equip farmers markets with tools, resources, and policy support to create thriving marketplaces for local farm and food products.

Economic Impact of Markets

Utilize data to understand the economic, workforce, and food access contributions of farmers markets in Michigan, and to identify what types of support (e.g. policy, training, funding) is needed by markets, vendors, and shoppers.

Identify strategies for farmers markets to support the diversity and strength of local food economies. For example, farmers markets can:

- » Encourage a variety of farming methods and types of foods offered, integrating culturally relevant foods, cottage food, and value-added products alongside fresh produce.
- » Take steps to connect small- and mid-sized vendors with additional opportunities (e.g., building relationships with local chefs, food retail outlets, regional distribution programs, or institutional buyers).

Staff Support, Funding, Training and Technical Assistance

Enhance the ability of the [Michigan Farmers Market Association](#) (MIFMA), [Michigan State University Extension](#), and other partners to provide training and technical assistance to markets, including resources to help farmers markets obtain startup and operating funds.

Continue to professionalize the role of farmers market managers through the [MIFMA Market Manager Certificate Program](#) and engage in advocacy at the local level to improve compensation and support for market managers and staff.

6. Ensure food producers and communities are prepared for environmental, economic, and public health crises.

Ensure climate action plans and disaster-preparedness and response strategies address the potential food systems challenges created by flooding, drought, extreme heat, and public health crises. Preparation and response strategies should:

- » Support and strengthen local/regional food procurement, which will allow businesses to more easily pivot during global/national supply chain challenges and improve the overall resilience of the food system.
- » Evaluate how state and local entities responded to the COVID-19 pandemic to prevent food/nutrition insecurity¹⁷ and supply chain collapse.¹⁸ Incorporate successful response strategies into policy, practice, and future crisis planning.
- » Distribute emergency economic relief funds efficiently to individuals and families needing food assistance as well as to farm and food businesses requiring economic assistance.



COLLABORATION INFRASTRUCTURE

Use the power of collaboration to dismantle racism and systemic inequity in food systems.

How we work together is as important as what we work on. Because no organization or community member can make the necessary systemic changes alone, collaboration and partnership are crucial. To successfully dismantle systemic inequities in the food system, we must increase the diversity and representation of people participating in food systems decision making at all levels.

7. Create leadership development pathways for a diverse body of community experts to advocate and guide good food systems initiatives, networks, and policy.

Ongoing Training and Assessment

In order to foster supportive environments for collaboration, predominantly white-led food systems organizations should engage in ongoing antiracism training and conduct internal assessments to better understand how to dismantle racism within their work and partnerships. We must build continued accountability into these learning processes.

Indigenous Leadership

Acknowledge and appropriately engage the work and history of Indigenous leaders and communities as the first peoples of this land in our food systems efforts. Non-tribal organizations and communities can identify and amplify the work of Indigenous communities in their regions, both on and off [Tribal lands](#). When called upon, collaborate with Tribal leaders to protect treaty rights, Tribal land, and other food sovereignty policies.



State and local food systems leaders gather at a Michigan Food Council Network Meeting held in Muskegon, MI

Photo: Ethan Painter

Local Leadership

Funders, researchers, and state agencies should develop authentic relationships with local leaders to support the implementation of farm, food, and health initiatives.

This includes working with BIPOC-led community organizations and leaders to ensure that resources, opportunities, and outreach materials are shared throughout broader community spaces, and, where needed, are readily available in multiple languages.

Youth-Driven Leadership

Encourage youth and young adult representation in food systems leadership and education. Strategies include:

- » Organizational boards, state agency committees, and food councils can designate seats for youth representation in their membership models. Training could be provided so that youth are engaged as emerging leaders and are able to voice concerns, share ideas, and have opportunities to develop policy knowledge.
- » Education institutions and organizations can provide youth with academic credit and/or scholarships to design and participate in community development, agriculture, and food systems projects.
- » Food and health organizations, including food councils, can partner with educators to develop place-based education initiatives that foster engagement, individual and community agency, and leadership among youth and young adults.¹⁹

8. Increase the collective power of local food councils and other community-driven advocacy coalitions to influence policy.

Continue to establish and grow the capacity of local food councils to coordinate advocacy efforts at local, state, Tribal, and federal levels. Food and health funders can continue to invest in local councils and the [Michigan Local Food Council Network](#) to cultivate councils' efforts to:

- » engage in diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI), anti-racism, and healing justice practices;
- » conduct locally-informed community organizing and advocacy campaigning;
- » improve fund development and strategic communications skills; and
- » design and evaluate policy recommendations for integration into advocacy actions councils conduct.

9. Invest in the continued development of cross-sector networks that support the development of good food systems.

Invest in the long-term, continued growth of existing network models that foster collaboration, shared measurement, and movement-building for local/regional food systems. These networks:

- » Help connect food systems stakeholders.
- » Provide guidance, funding, and technical assistance to institutions and other businesses to support development of community-based, sustainable food systems that embrace diversity, accessibility, and equity.
- » Support feasible models for institutions to procure locally/regionally grown food that is sustainably produced and distributed.
- » Create spaces and processes to share community-generated resources to promote learning among and within food and health networks.
- » Provide coordination, professional development, mentorship, technical assistance, shared resources, and outreach for local/regional food throughout the value chain, including for home and community gardeners



Local Food Councils

Individuals can get involved in their local councils or, where a council does not yet exist, assess whether your region could benefit from having a local food (policy) council.

The Michigan Local Food Council Network has resources to support new and existing councils.



[Directory of Michigan Local Food Councils, Food and Health Networks/Associations](#)

10. Conduct research, education, evaluation, and advocacy efforts using equitable and antiracist principles/practices.

Community-driven Research

Invest in and use community-based research methods and metrics in information gathering efforts, especially those that rely on BIPOC community engagement and participation.

- » Protect communities' data sovereignty, following guidelines such as the [CARE Indigenous Data Sovereignty Principles](#), which directs research designers to consider the collective benefit of the data, give authority to communities to control that data, engage respectfully with communities, and use ethics to inform the use of data.
- » If there is a need to build new research or programming tools, leverage funding to build them in a way that honors or cultivates the leadership and capacity of community-based initiatives.

Food Policy Advocacy

When considering policy action, local food councils, networks, and other advocates should conduct racial equity impact assessments, using tools such as the [Racial Equity Impact Assessment Toolkit](#) published by Race Forward.

Local food councils and other advocates can educate planners and policymakers on racial disparities in health outcomes related to the food system and advocate for changes that improve food environments.

Measuring Social Determinants of Health

Effectively and equitably track the impact of social determinants of health²⁰ within the food system. Using an equity lens:

- » Allocate funding to add the six-question food insecurity module²¹ to the Michigan Behavioral Risk Factor Survey (BRFS) consistently over the next ten years and oversample to be able to analyze results by race and ethnicity.
- » Coordinate among health care and community organizations to develop a universally accepted screening or survey tool to gather and disseminate food insecurity information. This will create efficiencies in intake and eligibility approval, and minimize application burnout for individuals seeking health care and food assistance services.
- » Provide targeted support and funding to regional organizations and local food councils to partner with higher education institutions and health departments to build food systems data and evaluation processes, modeling after successful efforts such as the [Detroit Food Policy Council's Food Metrics Reports](#) and the [Kent County Essential Needs Task Force Food Security Assessment](#), among others. Mapping efforts should be co-designed and informed by the lived experiences of impacted people.

Learn more about principles for collaboration:
[Jemez Principles for Democratic Organizing](#)
[Principles of Environmental Justice](#)

EMPLOYMENT EQUITY

Establish fair compensation, safe working environments, and opportunities for career advancement in food systems.

Food business owners, workers, and public and private agencies must work together to develop quality food systems jobs, design equitable career pathways, and ensure that food systems jobs protect the health of workers, communities, and the environment.

11. Equip farm and food business owners with adequate support to offer fair, comprehensive compensation and benefits.

Comprehensive Compensation

Advocate for policies that incentivize and support Michigan employers to offer earned paid medical leave, family/parental/caregiver leave, and health insurance beyond what is already required by law; and provide wages and retirement benefits that allow workers to afford to thrive.

Explore strategies for farm and food business owners and their employees to coordinate with planners, municipalities, state and local agencies, and other businesses to address issues such as affordable and quality child care, housing, parking, and transportation.

Advocate for fair wages for people working in food and agriculture jobs while incarcerated.²²

Support for Inclusive Hiring

Provide resources to help farm and food businesses incorporate diversity and inclusion practices in their hiring process and ongoing operations.

Offer training for beginning farmers and new business owners to build equitable employment practices into their business planning.

These changes will improve workforce retention, livable wages, and create safer working conditions.

12. Design equitable pathways to food systems employment, business ownership, and long-term careers.

Career Exploration

Advocate for incarcerated and formerly incarcerated people to have opportunities to build employable skills and experience in food systems careers. Organizers can work with agriculture industry leaders to identify seasonal and full-year employment and training needs. For example, the MSU Institute of Agricultural Technology (IAT) and MSU Extension's Master Gardener Program could partner with Michigan Department of Corrections (MDOC) to bring certificate training programs into MDOC facilities, growing the number of people who can fill these skilled positions.²³

Ensure youth, young adults, and adults shifting careers have pathways to food systems employment along with career exploration, business ownership, and leadership development. Strategies include:

- » Create quality, job-based experiential learning opportunities and pathways to farm ownership/land stewardship careers for migrant and seasonal workers and their children.
- » Leverage summer employment, fellowships, and other paid positions for young adults to build skills suitable to food systems job sectors such as culinary or food service; garden, farm, or food hubs; and nonprofits or small businesses.
- » Develop a local food distribution training and certification program for new and existing food hub managers.
- » Integrate local/regional sourcing into culinary and food service training program curricula.
- » Michigan colleges and universities could partner with food systems and workforce development organizations to create a food justice fellowship program with a policy training track and career connections. Such a program could offer transfer credits or deduction on tuition for hours, which could be earned through employment through eligible Michigan food systems jobs.

Skilled Workforce and Quality Jobs

Continue to strengthen the [Michigan Agriculture and Food System Workforce Advancement Initiative \(MAFSWAI\)](#), a statewide partnership established in 2020 composed of food and agriculture workers and employers, state agencies, researchers, educators, and nonprofits to build support for comprehensive workforce and employment development. This partnership will:

- » increase access to education, training and career pathway opportunities for migrant and seasonal farmworkers;
- » share learnings and promising practices in increasing education, training and career pathway access, to grow these opportunities for all Michigan communities BIPOC and other marginalized communities;
- » continue advocating for state and private funding, collaboration, and support for workforce and job development programs;
- » identify the characteristics of quality food systems jobs and support employers to develop jobs and workplaces that embody these characteristics; and
- » identify opportunities for more people to access education and training to become qualified for food systems jobs and help meet [Michigan's Sixty by '30 goals](#).

13. Ensure that food systems jobs protect the health of workers, communities, and the environment.

Incentivize employers to adopt policies and practices that limit food systems workers' exposure to work-related hazards²⁴ like toxic chemicals and exposure to harsh weather without protection.²⁵

Encourage businesses, institutions, and government entities to join over 400 other members in signing on to the [Fair Food Pledge](#),²⁶ a project coordinated by [Migrant Legal Aid](#). This program helps retailers, consumers, and other food businesses avoid exploitative practices in the supply chain, protects farmers from unfair competition, and encourages faster resolution of labor disputes.

Guide and incentivize employers to provide disabled employees and staff with support such as reliable transportation, flexible/remote work opportunities, and alternative compensation when income limits prevent people from earning more. Advocate for policies that support disabled peoples' means to earn a living wage and access aid.

14. Create opportunities for food systems workers to access resources to address stress, conflict management, and mental health care concerns.

Continue to provide education, services, and outreach to farmers to address farm stress and mental health concerns. Build on the model provided through the MSU Extension [Managing Farm Stress](#) program to offer consistent support to both farmers and food systems workers.

Support and promote the use of the [Michigan Agricultural Mediation Program](#),²⁷ which offers free mediation services to Michigan farmers to resolve their disputes outside of court.



Agricultural workers prepare sweet corn for market during the summer harvest at a family farm in Western Michigan.

LAND AND ECOSYSTEM STEWARDSHIP

Foster climate resilience through equitable land stewardship.

We can invest in farmers and food producers as ecosystem stewards to protect rural and urban farmland, fisheries, and watersheds; reduce food waste; and keep plastic out of landfills. Additionally, land use policies and financial investment can improve access to land for current and future generations while advancing community food sovereignty.



We have intentionally presented land and ecosystem stewardship recommendations together.

Stewardship means caring for something responsibly. Caring for the land is inherently part of protecting ecosystems, which also include plants, animals, water, and people.

Farmers and food producers manage the land on which our food is grown and thus have a direct impact on ecosystems.

15. Leverage land use planning strategies to improve access to farmland and support community food sovereignty for current and future generations.

Zoning and Land Use Policies

Ensure new and existing land use and zoning policies meet the needs of small-scale farmers (including urban food growers), food processors, and other food businesses. Local policies should allow individuals and community groups to grow and sell culturally relevant, traditional foods and livestock, enhancing their ability to become food self-sufficient and preserve cultural foodways.

Evaluate Michigan's food and agriculture laws and regulations for provisions that create unnecessary costs and regulatory burdens on low-risk businesses. Regulations should be applied in a way that acknowledges the diversity of producers, farm scale, and production practices.

Food systems should be added to the [Michigan Planning Enabling Act](#) to ensure planners and policymakers take local/regional food systems into account in master plans for cities, counties, or municipalities. Specific attention can be paid to how plans can incentivize healthy and local food in business districts, how residents are able to access food, and how well food production is supported. Additionally, planners can ensure that food and agriculture are included in state and local economic development plans.

Municipalities and counties can work toward sustainable food system and other goals by joining the [Michigan Green Communities network](#) and taking part in the [Michigan Green Communities Challenge](#).

Farmland Preservation and Farm Succession

Farmland preservation and land use policies should sustain the health of Michigan's traditional and contemporary fisheries, and adequately address agriculture's impact on the health of Michigan's watersheds. Planners and governments should engage drain commissioners, conservation districts, Indigenous leaders, and environmental justice advocates during policy making processes.

Engage in coordinated strategies to support the succession of farmland to the next generation of food producers. Strategies could include:

- » The establishment of a statewide, funded land-link program that builds on existing regional land-link and farmland preservation programs. This program could be supported through both state, and federal funds alongside private philanthropy and coordinated regionally with the help of existing land-link (such as [MiFarmLink](#)), farmland preservation, and farmer advocacy organizations.
- » Promotion of existing incentive programs to increase access to farmland for beginning farmers, such as existing [USDA Farm Service Agency loan programs](#), which have targeted funds to support new and beginning farmers and ranchers.²⁸
- » Review and revise state and local land use policies to preserve farmland. Farmland preservation plans should blend farmland protection with farm viability programs in areas with the highest vulnerability to development.

16. Invest in farmers as ecosystem stewards by supporting and incentivizing food and agriculture practices that protect the integrity of our soil, water, and air.

Policy Support

Advocate for policy changes to disincentivize farming practices that pose greater risks to the health and well-being of rural communities and farmworkers. This includes environmental hazards such as water pollution, odors, and toxic emissions, which greatly affect the health of farmworkers and nearby residents.

Advocate for policies that enhance pollinator habitats in urban and rural landscapes. Municipalities, counties, and institutions should adopt practices that minimize or eliminate pesticide use, especially those known to be connected to both pollinator and human health problems.^{29, 30}

Implement additional, market-based incentive strategies. For example, farmers and institutions can partner to identify marketable cover crops, such as oats, to ensure farmers are able to offset some costs associated with these practices.

Agricultural Practices

Invest in outreach, education, and transition planning to encourage farmers to adopt climate-smart agriculture practices. The Michigan Healthy Climate Plan³¹ suggests promoting climate-smart strategies like cover crops, conservation tillage, and the use of biochar³² and compost, all of which can improve soil health, store carbon, improve water quality, reduce food waste, and reduce reliance on synthetic fertilizer. Additionally, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) suggests agriculture emissions can be reduced through livestock, manure and land and crop management methods.³³

Prioritize animal welfare practices and support farmers to meet Michigan Care of Farm Animals Generally Accepted Agricultural Management Practices (GAAMPs).³⁴



17. Support the development of a food value chain that prioritizes Michigan- and sustainably-produced foods.³⁵

The [Michigan Healthy Climate Plan](#) recognizes increasing access to locally sourced agriculture and reducing food waste as climate-smart strategies.

Farm to institution efforts can help institutions offer more food that is environmentally sustainable and support food value chains that prioritize environmentally sustainable food production practices.

- » Food purchasers can review guidance to align and effectively communicate purchasing goals for sourcing local/regional and sustainably-grown food products.³⁶
- » Farmers can work with organizational partners to effectively communicate with buyers about their food production practices.
- » Consumers can ask for locally- and sustainably-produced foods where they shop and eat out.
- » Agricultural training programs can increase outreach and education efforts to support farmers in using or transitioning to sustainable agricultural practices.

Grass-fed cattle graze in open fields at Wernette Beef Farm in Central Michigan.

18. Invest in and support food recovery and food waste reduction practices throughout the value chain and among consumers.

Food Recovery

Encourage businesses and institutions to make use of the federal Bill Emerson Good Samaritan Food Donation Act and its counterpart, [Public Act 136: State of Michigan Good Samaritan Act](#), which protect businesses donating food products from liability and provides additional food donation liability protection for food donors who donate food in good faith and practice safe handling.

Reduce food loss on farms by supporting gleaning efforts and liability protection so farmers can donate more fruits and vegetables.

- » Continuing to provide funding through the [State of Michigan for the Michigan Agricultural Surplus System \(MASS\)](#), which allows the Food Bank Council of Michigan to procure fresh produce for use in Michigan's food banks from Michigan farms.
- » Provide state tax credits beyond the current limited federal tax deductions for farmers and transporters of donated food to increase the amount of food that is donated rather than unharvested or landfilled.

Waste Reduction

Educate consumers about food waste, including how to interpret date labels on food products and implement strategies to reduce at-home food waste. Provide education for business owners and food service workers to reduce overall waste, increase food donations, and encourage on-site collection for composting.

According to [NextCycle Michigan](#), "The entire state has inadequate food scrap/organics collection for residential, commercial/institutional sectors, and insufficient processing or robust end markets for compost or anaerobic digestion outputs."³⁷ Support is needed in the form of funding and business development to establish landfill diversion initiatives. Municipalities, County governments and public or private funders can invest in creative reuse, recycling, and composting systems infrastructure to meet the demand for these services opportunities while expanding new business and job opportunities.³⁸

19. Minimize single-use plastic and prioritize reusable, recyclable, and compostable packaging and serving alternatives.

Invest in opportunities to test and innovate food production, packaging, and distribution practices that reduce waste.

Review food production and food service practices to minimize or eliminate single-use plastic and produce less plastic waste. Incentivize larger organizations to make these changes in order to make these practices more affordable for smaller businesses and consumers. Institutions and businesses can:

- » Adopt environmentally preferred purchasing (EPP)³⁹ practices that provide healthier, less wasteful alternatives, empower local communities, and minimize adverse human and environmental impacts.
- » Integrate reusable and compostable solutions into food service and consumer packaged goods businesses to decrease waste and create new business opportunities.⁴⁰

NUTRITION, HEALTH, AND FOOD

Support people to have real choices that lead to good food and health.

We must expand food access, foster the vitality of local/regional farm and food businesses, and address deeply rooted, systemic issues that lead to inequitable health outcomes. We can foster dignity and choice in food systems by prioritizing approaches that connect food, health, and community food sovereignty.

20. Eliminate barriers to food and nutrition security and ensure the nutritional needs of Michigan's children are met.

Basic Needs

Advocate for resolutions declaring food, adequate housing, water and sanitation⁴¹ as human rights. Resolutions adopted at the local, state, tribal, or federal levels could encourage policy changes that improve access to resources meeting basic human needs and help achieve targets in the [Michigan Statewide Housing Plan](#).

First Foods

Recognize first foods as a critical part of the food system and integrate first foods access and early nutrition into food/nutrition security initiatives, policies, and actions.⁴²

- » Encourage businesses and other places of work to adopt breastfeeding/chestfeeding friendly policies and adapt to meet the needs of individuals who breastfeed/chestfeed.
- » Allocate equitable support to Black and Indigenous families to address additional barriers they face to initiate and continue breastfeeding/chestfeeding through community-based leadership and policy changes.⁴³
- » Ensure families with young children have access to culturally relevant foods, lactation and nutrition information, and resources to support positive health outcomes, including materials and support available in multiple languages.
- » Food policy councils can include a seat in their membership models for first foods or maternal and child health to ensure these issues are integrated into food systems advocacy.

[The Michigan Breastfeeding Network](#) and the Detroit-based [Black Mothers' Breastfeeding Association](#) each have policy priorities that address racial inequities.

Our Youngest Eaters



“First foods” are what children eat during the critical phase in child development between birth and 36 months.

Following the lead of the [Michigan Breastfeeding Network](#) and the [La Leche League](#), we are using the terms breastfeeding and chestfeeding to refer to some of the ways families nourish our youngest eaters.

Barriers to breast/chestfeeding include many cultural and social factors. Families should never feel shamed for the choices they make to breastfeed/chestfeed or use infant formula to nourish their children.

Young Eaters

Ensure children in early care and K-12 settings have access to nutritious meals and snacks throughout the year.

- » Continue to support state funding for [10 Cents a Meal for Michigan’s Kids and Farms](#). Expansion of the program could include increasing the number of children, sites, or geographies served; developing a support structure at the local level to help the programs succeed; and allowing state funding to cover other expenses like staff support and/or equipment to support the programs locally.
- » Continue to improve school food environments by following guidance outlined in the CDC Smart Snacks rules, and enhancing healthy food and beverage choices in compliance with school water access policies.⁴⁴
- » Assess COVID-19 pandemic policy changes, waivers, and expansions to school meals and food service for possible integration into permanent practice and policy. This includes advocating for appropriate investment and support for K-12, early care and education sites, summer food service program sites, and after-school programs to offer at least two meals and a snack at no charge (also known as universal meals), recognizing food as a critical part of the educational experience.^{45,46}

Nutrition Security Assistance

Make Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) enrollment, recertification, and usage more accessible:

- » Increase food assistance enrollment outreach initiatives for eligible post-secondary education students on and off campus to help address student food insecurity.
- » Reduce the burden to re-certify by decreasing the frequency of eligibility requirement assessments for food assistance benefits.
- » Advocate for greater flexibility and support to access food assistance benefits for disabled people, who often face higher burdens for eligibility and enrollment, as well as individuals and families who fall outside of the standard poverty line but who struggle with affording basic necessities, also known as ALICE (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed).⁴⁷

Nutrition Incentive Programs

Continue to invest in nutrition incentive programs (such as [Double Up Food Bucks](#) and [produce prescription \(PPR\) programs](#)) at the local level and through statewide support. Programs like these are designed to help residents purchase more fruits and vegetables to improve health outcomes and increase food access.⁴⁸

- » Equip farmers, farmers markets, and other community-based food retail outlets with the resources they need to accept food assistance and nutrition incentive programs. This includes wireless devices, online storefront technology, and other innovations. This may also involve replacing farmers market token systems with incentives loaded onto a shopper's Bridge Card or allowing other electronic forms of payment.
- » Expand access to healthy, culturally relevant food and redemption of benefit/incentive programs within community-led food models such as garden programs, farm stands, mobile markets, and food delivery programs.
- » Assess nutrition incentive programs for adaptations that would reach and serve more communities and participants. For example, currently, Tribal members who participate in the Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR) are not always able to participate in nutrition incentive programs that rely on SNAP eligibility for participation.
- » Expand and improve land-based initiatives to support goals for year-round local food production, especially in urban and rural areas with lower access to fresh food. For example, we could re-initiate the [Hoophouses for Health program](#)⁴⁹ – or a similar investment in both on-farm assets and local food access – with long-term investment such as a revolving loan fund.



Which food is healthy food?



The foods and culinary traditions nutrition professionals consider “healthy” must be defined in the context of culture of the individual and actively address the ethnic and racial biases that exclude the culturally relevant food traditions of many community members. Often, messages about which foods and diets are healthiest, only reflect European traditions and do not adequately represent the cultural experience and knowledge of BIPOC communities.^{50,51}

Photos above, left to right: Members of the Greater Lansing Food Bank Garden Project by Dilli Chapagai Hasta harvesting mustard greens; Fresh dumpling making; JaBu with her harvest

21. Establish healthy and culturally relevant food environments in community-led, public, food service, and food retail settings.

Food Service and Food Retail Spaces

Food service and food retail outlets can work with stakeholders to define healthy and culturally relevant foods; assess food and beverage offerings to ensure healthier choices are available; and implement menu labeling, adopting nutrition standards for children's meals, and promoting healthier meals and food items. This aligns with recommendations from the [Michigan Food Security Council Final Report](#) and the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services [Social Determinants of Health Strategy](#).

Public Spaces

State and local governments can use investment and planning strategies to support the improvement of the quality, variety, and number of healthier foods and beverages in existing food retail outlets; assist in the creation of new food retail outlets in underserved communities to increase access to healthier foods and beverages; and promote and market healthier foods and beverages to consumers.

Transportation, Distribution, and Choice

Prioritize strategies that empower real choices in marginalized communities.

- » Invest in innovative "last mile" food delivery models that have documented success in increasing healthy local/regional food access. Examples include mobile markets and produce and meal delivery.
- » Increase access to nutritious and culturally relevant foods for highly vulnerable populations, such as incarcerated individuals and emergency food service patrons.
- » Community organizations, public and private investors, and colleges and universities could help scale up effective strategies by providing business plans, impact assessments, financing strategies, and marketing and outreach tools. These innovations can help alleviate challenges many communities (both urban and rural) face around lack of reliable transportation and consistent public transit.

Community-Led Spaces

Invest in the development of cooperatively-owned or community-driven food retail outlets such as neighborhood buying clubs, co-op grocery stores, community investment funds, and other innovative business models. Build on existing nutrition incentive programs to encourage small grocery and corner stores to stock and procure culturally relevant foods grown by nearby urban growers.

Invest in community-led gardening initiatives that establish partnerships and honor and grow local knowledge. Provide support to residents, organizations, and institutions seeking to establish gardens. Funding and other forms of support could come from local colleges and universities, local governments, or foundations to set up tools, land, seed banks, mini-grant funds, and supply distributions.

22. Design food and nutrition education to incorporate culturally relevant foodways, cultivate understanding of the connections between food and health, and foster food systems literacy.

Food Educator Training

There are many types of food educators working with both adults and youth. Food and nutrition educators in any setting should receive ongoing training and technical assistance that addresses food systems issues, cultural relevancy, inclusive practices and antiracism.

Local and regional education programs, Tribal education initiatives, Michigan State University Extension, the Michigan Fitness Foundation and other food and nutrition education efforts should support the roles of educators, administrators, and staff to foster healthy school food environments.

Nutrition Education

Nutrition education for young eaters and their families in school, early care, and community-based settings can prioritize learning experiences that:

- » situate schools and early care and education sites as centers for student, family, and community outreach and education;
- » coordinate with other physical activity and built-environment initiatives;
- » involve active learning and inclusive teaching strategies;
- » include food systems equity as a part of the curriculum, alongside health, safety, and household food and culinary skills;
- » emphasize the value of a good food system: healthy, fair, accessible, diverse, sustainable, and equitable; and
- » empower families to celebrate cultural identities through food choices offered within educational institutions.

Food and Agriculture Education

Incorporate food and agriculture education into the pre-K through 12th grade curriculum and other learning opportunities for all Michigan students. Utilize these learning opportunities to help districts and teachers meet rigorous curriculum standards while increasing food systems literacy and awareness.

Community-based food systems education efforts can integrate opportunities for dialogue to address the challenges in the food system that impact the true cost of food production, human and environmental health, affordability of food, and farm and food business viability; raise awareness among consumers about the value of local food for human and environmental health; and provide opportunities to learn about a broad range of sustainable agricultural practices.

Food as Medicine

Integrate the practice of “food as medicine” into conventional health care, including improving nutrition education for medical students, health professionals, and researchers so they are able to understand and account for social, environmental, and cultural influences on people’s health. This can be accomplished by adopting an “environmental nutrition” approach, which considers nutritional value alongside “social, political, economic, and environmental factors related to the food system as a whole.”⁵²



Waterford School District Students release beneficial ladybugs in the Henry Ford Bloomfield Hospital Greenhouse.

ENDNOTES AND REFERENCES

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