

Food Connections: Community Food Profiles Provide a Tool for Framing Community-based Food Systems

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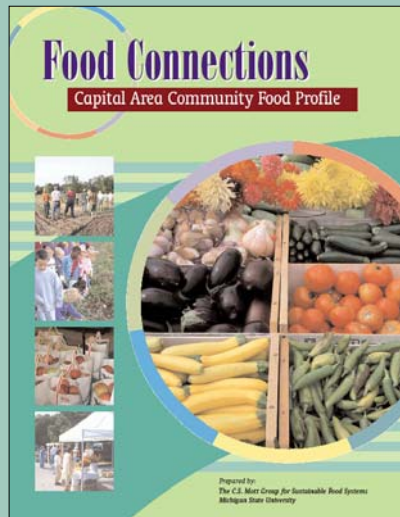
The way that food is produced, processed, distributed, marketed, purchased, prepared and eaten (i.e., the food system) influences and interconnects the economic, ecological and social well-being of communities and individuals. Community-based food system development offers a common platform to address issues as diverse as obesity, urban sprawl and economic development.

Purpose of a Community Food Profile

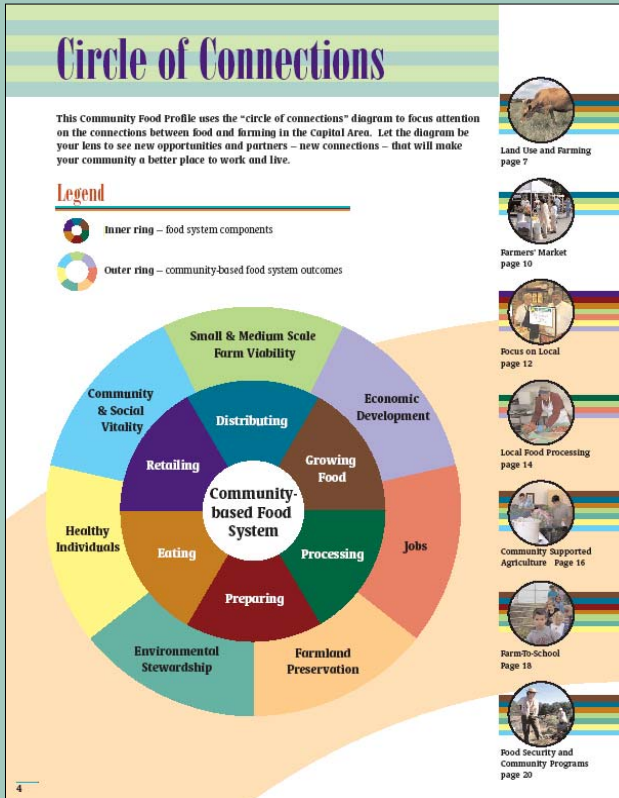
- Highlight examples of community-based food activities
- Communicate visually and verbally the connections within a community-based food system
- Build support for local food activities
- Provide an entry-point for engaging leaders and citizens
- Develop multi-sector partnerships that result in mutually beneficial programs and projects

Framing community-based food systems

How do we think about food and farming and their relationship to community? The Community Food Profile uses the diagram below to emphasize connections, both between components of the food system and potential outcomes.



Food Connections: Capital Area Community Food Profile is a 24-page booklet that provides a framework for communicating the opportunities of a community-based food system. Focused on Lansing tri-county area, it also serves as an example resource for other communities doing local food system work.



Land Use and Farming

Letting in the urban center of a largely agricultural region. In 2002, the tri-county area had about 3400 farms, representing 92 percent of the total land. But like many Michigan communities, the capital area is experiencing urban sprawl. From 1980 to 2006, land in the area was developed at twice the rate of population growth. Much of that development has been occurring in rural areas outside existing urban service areas. From 2001 to 2006, for every acre of new residential land, five acres of new rural residential land were developed. As the population grows in the tri-county area, such growth is expected to continue.

Across the region, efforts are under way to craft the rural expansion of suburban and rural residential land use. For example, the tri-county Regional Planning Commission is working with local governments to focus growth in urban centers, while preserving the farmland, forest, preserving the area's farmland, and go hand-in-hand with preserving the viability of local agriculture. Over the past 15 years, a general of tri-county rural farms have experienced an increased loss of farmland.

Increasing consumer demand for food that has been grown or raised in the region, and making those foods easily accessible for purchase, is one way to enhance the viability of local agriculture.

In the past 15 years, U.S. agriculture has been losing about 100,000 acres of farmland a year. In Michigan, the loss is about 10,000 acres a year. The loss of farmland is a significant concern for Michigan's future. The loss of farmland is a significant concern for Michigan's future. The loss of farmland is a significant concern for Michigan's future.

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County	1999	2000	2010	1999-2010 % Growth
Charlevoix	42,812	44,754	46,414	8.2%
Easton	98,952	105,054	142,123	44%
Ingham	292,763	279,236	238,695	20%
Tri-County	443,727	447,734	375,306	30%

Facts and figures combine with colorful photographs and thought-provoking questions to provide a context for a local food system. "What you can do" boxes offer suggestions for action at various levels.

Innovative Orchardist Seeks Market

When Jane Smith bought Apple Acres Orchard from her uncle 17 years ago, her things were clear: the personal health reasons, the local message she wanted to support, and the way she wanted to live a life of the farm. She would not be in a more distant place of the region.

Apple Acres is located on West State Road in Charlevoix, about 30 miles southwest of Lansing. Apple, cider, apple sauce, apple butter and other farm products are sold at the farm's monthly from September through the first of November, as well as through small vendors in the Lansing, Ann Arbor and Detroit areas.

Jane reflected on her learning curve for growing and marketing organic fruits in the days before the labor laws, information and resources for organic, on-handing were scarce. But customers also didn't expect organic to look perfect. As the demand for organic food has grown, so have the consumer attitudes to the organic farmer - and customer expectations.

"It's just really changed over the years. A lot of the organic food that we can grow in Michigan is very compatible, in terms of visual appeal, to conventional," Jane says.

But apples weren't the only thing consumers were looking for. Through her interactions with local markets in south-eastern Michigan, Jane saw that the majority of local three-range eggs were consumer with a demand that was "topping off the farm." So in 1996, she started selling free-range, organic, Certified Humane, and pasture-raised eggs. To expand market and think about the possibilities, she had to visit and produce and compete for the other person.

It's amazing that there's more understanding with the consumers and the farmers, just understanding everybody's needs. Just like in any relationship, you've really got to understand the other person. And I think a community-based food system just requires that by a couple of hundred or thousand, or whatever you call it, community, we have to be willing to be open, to expand market and think about the possibilities, and have trust, and patience and competing for the other person.

Contact Information
The Apple Acres Orchard and other Michigan farms can be found at www.itsmarket.org

The local food system comes to life through stories of the people and enterprises involved. These reveal the challenges as well as the opportunities of a community-based food system.

The Capital Area Community Food Profile offers an example. The Mott Group will assist interested communities across Michigan to develop Community Food Profiles for their local area. For information on developing a Community Food Profile, go to www.mottgroup.msu.edu or email us at: mottgroup@msu.edu.



Download the complete Capital Area Community Food Profile at: www.mottgroup.msu.edu