

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. To grow our local food system, it's vital that government officials evaluate existing policies and make updates that support the community's evolving needs

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 agricultural production regulations.. This resource outlines the components of a local food system, gives examples of work in the Upper Peninsula, and demonstrates how participating in this movement can be beneficial for your community.

We have a tremendous opportunity to improve our quality of life by working to strengthen our local food system. Across the state, individuals and organizations are coming together under the goals of the Michigan Good Food Charter to provide and

promote good food – food that is healthy, sustainable, fair, and affordable. By focusing on these values, we can build a healthier, more prosperous and more equitable future.

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 to get started.



BENEFITS OF A LOCAL FOOD ECONOMY

DEVELOPING A LOCAL FOOD IDENTITY

The Marquette Food Co-op & Upper Peninsula Food Exchange 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. Additionally, they offer Farm to School Fundraising. Through this program, schools can raise money by selling high quality items from small, local producers. This offers students a more meaningful fundraiser with interesting products, supports school wellness programs, can be connected to school gardens and food curriculum, and keeps money in the local economy. In 2023, \$5,540 was purchased from local vendors for the program and \$16,000 was raised for area schools. Contact Eli at 906-225-0671, ext. 726 or localfood@upfoodexchange.com

POSITIVE ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

The Marquette County Conservation District has staff with specialized skills to address conservation concerns. Our goal is always to benefit both the community and the environment through our work. Some of our programs include: Forestry Management; Produce & Agricultural Safety; Invasive Species Management; Pollinator Planning; Stream Monitoring; Environmental Education; Wildlife & Fisheries Habitat; and Wetland Mitigation. Visit marquettecd.com to learn more. The Produce Safety program works specifically with fresh produce growers to protect consumers against the risk of foodborne illnesses. The UP Produce Safety Technician can be reached directly at landen.mqtcondist@gmail.com

CREATING JOBS

The Downtown Marquette Farmers Market began in 1999 with only two determined vendors. The market expanded under the leadership of the Marquette Downtown Development Authority, growing to 18 farmers, and accepting three forms of food assistance by 2009. In the 25 years since its inception, the Downtown Marquette Farmers Market has grown to be the largest farmers market in the U.P. and is one of the best ways for farmers to connect directly with customers. During the 2025 season (May through October), there were 40 participating farmers. More than 2,500 customers shop at the market each week, providing financial support for area farmers and food producers. The economic impact of the market is felt throughout town, with spending by market customers in downtown Marquette businesses estimated at about \$2 million annually. Contact Brian Shier, (906) 228-9475 ext.105 or farmersmarket@downtownmarquette.org

LOCAL FOOD ACCESS

1 in 7 individuals in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan are considered food insecure. That's 14% of the population! In 2021, a group was convened to address this issue and improve the health and wellness of residents throughout the region. The group became the Food as Medicine Collaboration and is led by the Upper Peninsula Commission for Area Progress (UPCAP). Consisting of over 25 partner organizations and agencies, the group works to increase access to nutritious food, with a priority on access to locally grown, raised, or gathered foods. Through this collaboration a prescription for health program was initiated. Individuals over 18 at risk for or already diagnosed with a chronic health condition, and who have an economic barrier to accessing healthy food, can be "prescribed" fruits and vegetables by their doctor.

UPCAP sends participating individuals vouchers to be spent on produce at area farmers markets. They also offer additional programming to participants that will help them purchase other local items such as meat, eggs, maple syrup, honey, and wild rice. You can learn more about the programming, including which clinics, hospitals, and farmers markets are participating at <https://upcap.org/program/food-as-medicine/>

GROWING HEALTHY COMMUNITIES

Eastern U.P.

Wiisindaa Mnomijim "Let's Eat Good Food" Coalition is a community-wide collaboration of tribal families, community members, and area agencies to create a sustainable food system within the Brimley and Bay Mills Community. Wiisindaa Mnomijim works to create a more sustainable, thriving, and sovereign localized food system. The goal of Wiisindaa Mnomijim is to produce and provide access to nutritious traditional and local foods that improve the quality of life, economy, and environment through cultural and traditional practices, education, and policies. Key partners include Bay Mills Community College, Waishkey Bay Farm, Bay Mills Health Center, and Michigan State University Extension. Coalition meetings are held on the second Thursday of each month starting with a potluck dinner at 5:30 p.m., followed by the business meeting. Contact Kat Jaques at 906-322-1864 or kjaques@bmcc.edu

Western U.P.

The Western U.P. Food Systems Collaborative is a grassroots coalition of food growers and procurers, public health and civic partners, scientists, educators, land and water stewards, students, and all community members. We are committed to making food sovereignty, equity, and justice a reality for all peoples throughout the region known as Michigan's western Upper Peninsula, but also known as the Anishinaabe homelands and ceded-territory established by the Treaty of 1842; thus, we are not constrained by boundaries, but by the willingness of those committed to food and food systems in the surrounding regions including local state, Indigenous, and neighboring states' homelands and waters. Contact Rachael Pressley at 906-482-7205 ext. 116 or rpressley@wupdr.org

Central U.P.

Partridge Creek Farm (PCF) was founded as a non-profit organization in 2013 to better connect the Ishpeming community with their food and one another. They envision the whole community growing and eating nutritious, local, and equitably produced food year-round. To support this vision, this multi-faceted organization offers farm to school programming in the Ishpeming School District, community education, and space at five community garden sites. In 2023, 2,000 pounds of food was grown for the Ishpeming community and 208 produce CSAs were distributed. PCF is currently building the infrastructure for a 3.5 acre multi-generational farm. The farm is located on the site of the old Bell Hospital in downtown Ishpeming. Food from the farm will be used in the school cafeteria and distributed to the community. To learn more and get involved, visit partridgecreekfarm.org





“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

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. In primarily residential areas, however, local governments have greater zoning authority over agricultural practices, and may even prohibit agricultural activity. Many communities recognize that citizens in urban areas can and should be part of a flourishing community food system and have adopted language that allows some agricultural activity.

In February 2019, the City of Marquette adopted an entirely new zoning ordinance. The new ordinance allows for the limited keeping of chickens, rabbits, and bees, plus creates allowances for season extension structures. In low and medium density residential districts, a maximum of 6 hens and 6 rabbits per single-family or two-family dwelling unit may be kept. Animals must be confined to the lot and enclosed animal housing must meet the same setback requirements for accessory buildings and are prohibited in the front yard. For bees, a maximum of 10 hives is permitted on a residential lot. Hives can be as close as 10 feet from a property line if a 6 foot high flyway barrier surrounds the hive (Section 54.639). Marquette’s new zoning ordinance also expressly allows temporary hoop houses up to 8 feet high and plant covers for early start-up plants as close as 3 feet from property lines. Gardens and season extension structures are allowed in rear, side, and front yards, subject to the 3 foot setback (Section 54.619). Chocolay Township, just outside of Marquette, has

also made changes to zoning to support limited agricultural activity in a residential zone. In 2017, Chocolay replaced its Animal Control Ordinance (Ordinance # 45) with a new version (Ordinance #62). The new ordinance includes language that permits up to six chickens that are enclosed in the backyard at least 20 feet from a neighboring dwelling.

AGRICULTURE RESEARCH & EDUCATION

The Michigan State University Upper Peninsula Research and Extension Center (UPREC) in Chatham conducts research to identify best management practices for crop and livestock production that reduce input use, enhance soil health, and generate added value for producers. Integration of crop and livestock systems supports a low-input model that is well-suited to the U.P.’s climate and economy. Promoting soil health is a cause both producers and consumers can support, as good soil provides a critical foundation for success in farming and environmental stewardship. UPREC also works to create locavores early on, offering agricultural education to area school children, including school garden support. Contact James DeDecker at 906-439-5176 or dedecke5@msu.edu

FARMLAND CONSERVATION

Farmland provides multiple ecosystem services in the form of food, wildlife habitat, open space, etc. Farmland is also vulnerable to development because it’s 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. See back page for local contacts regarding land conservation.

COMMUNITY FOOD SYSTEMS RESOURCES

WHO TO CONTACT

U.P. Food Exchange (UPFE) & Marquette Food Co-op

Sarah Monte | www.upfoodexchange.com | 906-225-0671 x723 | info@upfoodexchange.com

Western U.P. Food Systems Collaborative

Rachael Pressley | www.wupfoodsystems.com | (906)482-7205 x116 | rpressley@wupcdr.org

Michigan State University Extension (MSUE)

Brad Neumann, Government & Community Vitality Educator | 906-475-5731 | neuman36@msu.edu
Abbey Palmer, Extension Educator | 906-439-5058 | palmerab@msu.edu

Taste the Local Difference

Alexandria Palzewicz, U.P. Local Food Coordinator | www.localdifference.org | 906.250.4507 | alex@localdifference.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.wupcdr.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

Fresh Systems, LLC

Phil Britton | 781-514-9855 | phil@freshsystemsllc.com

MSU Product Center

Parker Jones, Innovation Counselor | 614-893-6191 | Jonesp28@anr.msu.edu

WEBSITES

Michigan Good Food Charter

www.michiganfood.org

Michigan Association of Planning Community and Regional Food Systems Planning Policy

<https://www.planningmi.org/map-policies>

Marquette County Local Food Supply Plan

http://www.co.marquette.mi.us/departments/planning/local_food_supply_plan.php

Crossroads Resource Center

www.crcworks.org

Growing Food Connections

<https://growingfoodconnections.org/tools-resources/policy-database/>

Municipal Zoning for Local Foods in Iowa

<https://blogs.extension.iastate.edu/planningBLUZ/files/2012/01/ZONING-FOR-LOCAL-FOODS-GUIDEBOOK.pdf>

Zoning & Right to Farm Resources

https://www.canr.msu.edu/planning/zoning_ordinance_resources/agricultural-right-to-farm

TAKE ACTION!

1

Talk to local governmental officials/staff from your city, township and county about issues that are important to you. Remember to listen more than you talk. You need 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 get to know your elected officials.

3

Connect with the Food Hub in your region by serving on a committee, attending trainings, or acting as a local.

4

Subscribe to weekly/monthly electronic newsletters and newsfeeds from the entities listed in the “Who to Contact” listing on the left.

5

Grow and purchase local food to the best of your ability.

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

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