



FSEP exists to catalyze change in the food system of Southeastern Michigan.

Business Innovation Update

*Mike Score
Leadership Team Chair*

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Business Expansion and Development of New Ventures

Recently, several people have asked me what FSEP has accomplished in its efforts to improve this region's food system. In a sense, our funding partners and the general public extended a grace period to our organization to "get our act together", but clearly there is an expectation internally and externally that FSEP will go on to do great things.

The current work that my FSEP colleagues and I are doing includes expansion of existing businesses and development of new ventures. We are helping entrepreneurs develop written plans for ventures so

that they can identify and manage risks, and increase the likelihood that their investments will pay off. These efforts will result in successful, well planned businesses that will increase farm profitability and provide sustained improved consumer access to local farm goods.

FSEP is currently working with more than 40 entrepreneurs in Wayne, Washtenaw, Jackson, Lenawee, and Monroe Counties. Although much of the

“These efforts will result in successful, well planned businesses that will increase farm profitability and provide sustained, improved consumer access to local farm goods.”

work we do in this area is highly confidential, which makes communicating our work to the public more difficult, the following is an example of a business that has completed its business plan and is in the process of inviting the public to try its new products.

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Farm-to-School

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Phil Tocco

Anthony VanDerworp

Van Varner

Staff

Ruth Blackburn

Jennifer Fike

Intern

Jennifer Young

Jennifer's Food for Thought...

An Update on FSEP Activities and Projects

Since my arrival in February, I have been amazed by the dedication and spirit of the FSEP Leadership Team and Board, interns, and the many partners that are engaged in our work. The groundwork has been laid by the commitment and dedication of these volunteers who have worked so hard to make FSEP a success. I am energized to be a part of the FSEP team and do what I can to make a difference in our mission to catalyze change in the food system of Southeast Michigan.

An exciting development at FSEP is having Ruth Blackburn join us as the Project Coordinator for the Farm-to-School program. Ruth's background as a dietician and her experience with local food buying at U-M, lend much needed expertise to this program. We are grateful to the Community Foundation of Southeast Michigan which makes the Project Coordinator position a reality. Ruth will be focusing on increasing local food purchasing in the Ann Arbor Public Schools, Chelsea Schools, and the Henry Ford Academy in Dearborn.

Another important milestone has also been reached. FSEP received 501(c)(3) status in January which enables our organization to apply for grants and receive funding as a stand-alone nonprofit. This gives FSEP credibility with grantors, provides for financial stability, and allows donations to be made directly to FSEP. Other administrative highlights include the creation of a case statement and development plan for 2007.

The MSU Product Center has recently concluded research into the supply chain in three counties of the FSEP region (Jackson, Lenawee, and Monroe). The purpose of the research project is to analyze the scope and performance of the supply chain for locally grown food products in these counties. We are eagerly awaiting the results of this study, which will be posted to our website once it is released.

In other research news, a master's student research team from the University of Michigan's School of Natural Resources and Environment analyzed producer and consumer demand in the FSEP region to determine if demand exists for a localized food system. The report concluded that in fact, consumer demand does exist, and there are barriers and opportunities for strengthening the local food system. The student research team also developed a community food profile for Southeast Michigan, which was designed to create a greater awareness of our regional food system. Look for these reports on our website (www.fsepmichigan.org).

In April, FSEP coordinated a meeting to connect local growers/producers and the University of Michigan's East Quad dormitory to increase local purchasing. We are happy to report that more local farmers are now selling their products to U-M.

The success of FSEP's Business and Innovation Networking (BIN) program is continuing. Business planning services with food entrepreneurs and farmers is expanding at a rapid pace. There has been a great influx of new clients we are assisting in launching new agri-food businesses. Other clients we serve include farmers/producers wishing to transition from traditional methods of agriculture into niche markets to improve their competitiveness.

In March, FSEP hosted our second annual conference at Washtenaw Community College which was a great success (see article page 11). Attendance was much higher than the previous year and the networking opportunities and connections made were invaluable. The break-out sessions sparked much interest and enthusiasm by the participants. One area we will be focusing on for next year's conference is having local food served during lunch. In the near term, FSEP will be focusing on public education related to food system aspects of the federal Farm Bill. Implementation of an on-line farm directory is in process, a marketing plan is in development, and grants are being researched and written.

I'm ready to move FSEP to the next level of growth including improving our financial stability, increasing our media exposure, solidifying our partner relationships, doing more outreach, and increasing the leverage of our resources. By doing this, we can keep farms viable in the five county area that FSEP serves, and together, we can make this vision a reality.

Youth Farm Stand Project

Susan Schmidt

Board Chair

Much has been written about the concept of how “it takes a village” to raise a child. At The Henry Ford, we take that idea to a whole new level. Here, we think it takes a village to *educate* a child. That village, of course, is our own Greenfield Village which houses the main campus of our charter public high school, Henry Ford Academy. The Henry Ford Academy’s unique vision for public education in a public space provides its diverse student body with learning through innovative teaching both in the classroom and in the public spaces of The Henry Ford. This arrangement helps these young people learn to make decisions about educational and career paths. Within that context, we also have an opportunity to expand their horizons regarding food choices and one of our state’s biggest economic drivers - agriculture.

Part of my job as Director of Food Service for The Henry Ford naturally, is to plan and provide meals for the students. Frankly, it has been a struggle to come up with nutritious meals that they will actually eat.

As high schoolers, our students come to us with fairly ingrained eating habits, which usually collide with healthy, whole food

ideas. So, I decided to try a different tact; involving the students with food and where it comes from. Taking a cue from one of my biggest heroes, Alice Waters, I decided to start a student garden. Not only would the kids be able to grow things for their own meals, they could learn about ecology, horticulture and hopefully a bit about making better food choices. I enlisted several of my colleagues and their departmental resources and was able to have a raised garden bed put in outside of some of the classrooms. Season one was a great success so we put in a second bed. Our school became part of the FSEP farm to school demonstration project to model a charter school purchasing and

“Here, we think it takes a village to *educate* a child.”

it seemed like a great way to expand the educational elements of the student garden to include entrepreneurial skills and business planning.

Our students will operate their stand in a nearby community as a for-profit venture. They will grow some of the food they sell as well as buying some from a wholesaler for resale. This fall there will be a Henry Ford Academy farm stand at the Greenfield Village farmers market. These budding businesspeople will learn multiple things; not only about business, but about agribusiness. They will get a snapshot of how the food system works from the field to the marketplace. Additionally, the group will work with a local church to have a low or no cost farm stand in a community with limited access to fresh food. These food related projects will have multiple positive outcomes. Students can learn about the numerous food related business and career opportunities that exist in our state as well as intricacies of fresh food supply and demand. They will take

away solid real life business and financial experience and hopefully create life long healthy, fresh food choices. ■



Planting the school garden at the Henry Ford Academy.

servicing local foods in our lunchrooms. Then when the opportunity arose to participate in the MSU student farm stand project,

Business Innovation Update *continued from pg. 1*

A FSEP Success Story: Charlie and Veronica Davis, Owners of Vic's Chips

Veronica Davis and her husband, Charlie, have been making gourmet chocolate products as a hobby for several years. They purchase local ingredients and use their talents to coat various food items with chocolate and other luxury dessert ingredients. A special dimension to their work is that they are committed to making high-quality dessert items available to low income consumers in Southeast Michigan. Think of chocolates for consumers who cannot afford brands like Godiva, having access to delicious, fresh desserts. The MSU Product Center, working through FSEP, helped Veronica and Charlie develop a written business plan that identifies their competitors, carefully maps out an understanding of

their target customers, and fully accounts for the cost of producing their product in a business setting. This work helped them right-size their production, balancing economies of scale with available resources. FSEP also introduced Veronica and Charlie to a social justice investment group that has taken interest in their business idea, strengthened their business management skills, and provided small scale investment funds needed to move beyond hobby production. The three main products in this business are chocolate covered strawberries, caramel clusters, and toffee-covered potato chips. Look for Vic's Chips at the Black Expo in Detroit, or call Veronica and Charlie at (313) 273-7491.

“A special dimension to their work is that they are committed to making high-quality dessert items available to low-income consumers in Southeast Michigan.”

When business plans are implemented our clients generally want the world to know about their new products or services. As other business plans move to a level where we can discuss them publicly, we will feature these businesses in our upcoming newsletters. ■

Mike Score serves on the FSEP Board and is the Agricultural Innovation Counselor with MSU Extension in Washtenaw County.

GIS-based Farm Product Directory

Mike Score

Over the course of the last few months, FSEP has been working to provide the Southeastern Michigan area with an innovative online regional Farm Product Directory. This directory is designed to support farmers in getting their products to market, and to facilitate interested public and retail businesses in buying locally.

The purpose of the directory is to improve profitability by strengthening markets for local farm products. It will help to increase regional processing of local agricultural commodities, crops, and farm products.

Over 110 farmers have responded to an initial survey stating that they would like to participate in the directory. These farmers will be contacted to confirm the

accuracy of their contact and product information.

The ultimate goal is to develop an online GIS-map from which interested parties can run queries to find specific farm products throughout the region. The final product is intended to be useful to farmers and processors alike. The map will also help to determine gaps in the production of food items that are not currently being grown in the region.

Once the map is up and running for Washtenaw, FSEP will assess the feasibility of expanding the map to other counties. The plan is to have a Washtenaw County map up and running this summer, and to have a regional map available this winter for the growing season of 2008. ■

FSEP Welcomes...

Jennifer Fike
Project Manager

Jennifer began her tenure with FSEP in February and is excited to bring her nonprofit management and business experience along with her passion for great food to FSEP. Jennifer serves as the Treasurer for Washtenaw Literacy, and is the Finance Manager for the Huron River Watershed Council. She has also served on the board of the Southeast Michigan Land Conservancy. Jennifer has a BBA from the University of Michigan, lives in Ann Arbor and has been a member of Tante Farm CSA for five years. She believes that by working to change the regional food system, more dollars will remain in the regional economy, farmers will remain viable, children will eat healthier, land will be preserved, and the quality of life in Southeast Michigan will improve.

Ruth Blackburn
Farm-to-School Project Coordinator

Ruth has worked with a variety of food programs for many years including recent work at the University of Michigan creating menus and initiatives to bring local food products into the residence halls. She is thrilled to be able to use her leadership skills and knowledge of food and food systems in a collaborative setting with others who share her passion for fresh, delicious food. Ruth also brings experience as an educator having taught food safety, food service management and a variety of cooking and nutrition classes. Ruth is a graduate of Eastern Michigan University's Dietetics program and the University of Michigan Public Health Nutrition program where she focused on food and nutrition policy. She lives in Ann Arbor with her husband Dave and 12-year old son Sam.

Jennifer Young
Intern

Born and raised in Ann Arbor, Michigan, Jennifer has a Bachelor's in Biology from Eastern Michigan University, and is currently pursuing her Master's in Environmental Policy at the University of Michigan. Jennifer is delighted about the opportunity to intern with FSEP and to learn about the food systems of Southeast Michigan. She intends to contribute her commitment to making a difference and her love of writing. Jennifer's interest in FSEP stems from her desire to work with an organization that facilitates sustainable solutions that win victories for conservation, community health and economic vitality. Jennifer plans to utilize her experience working with FSEP as she embarks in a career in collaboration.

Food System Economic Partnership Food System Economic Partnership is a non-profit collaboration of urban and rural community and business leaders that exists to catalyze change in the food system of Southeastern Michigan. We provide research, education and outreach with urban and rural partnerships, resulting in agricultural development opportunities, sustainable communities, and healthy local economies. The geographic focus area of FSEP encompasses the five counties of Jackson, Monroe, Washtenaw, and Wayne Counties. FSEP is a non-profit organization under section 501(c)(3) of the federal tax code.

If you enjoy this newsletter, please consider supporting us. FSEP projects include Business Innovation and Networking, Farm-to-School, User-Based Research and Software Development, Education and Outreach, and Membership Building.

Yes! You can support agricultural development opportunities in Southeast Michigan!

Please enclose your check with this form, and make checks payable to:

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Farm-to-School

Taking Root in Southeastern Michigan

An interview with Jeremy Moghtader

The FSEP Farm-to-School Demonstration Project, inspired by the national Farm-to-School movement and the work of other local organizations, is taking root here in Southeastern Michigan. Jeremy Moghtader is the Chair of the FSEP Farm-to-School Committee. In addition to providing leadership at FSEP, Jeremy serves as president on the founding board of directors for The Agrarian Adventure a local farm to school and sustainable food and agriculture education non-profit ; he also serves on the leadership team of Slow Food Huron Valley, and is the farm manager and instructor with the MSU Student Organic Farm. He speaks here with FSEP about his experiences with getting local foods in Michigan schools.

How did you get interested in food systems?

My grandparents had a farm in Charlotte, Michigan. They raised sheep on their farm, and grew a number of different crops. If it hadn't been for my experience working on my grandparent's farm, I don't know that I would be involved in food systems. I was an economics major as an undergrad, and then studied agro-ecology in my Master's program. Food systems brought together my passions for ecology, economics, and social issues.

How did you get involved in the FSEP Farm-to-School (FtS) project?

The work we were, and still are, doing at The Agrarian Adventure to strengthening stu-



Students from Chelsea's public school enjoy fresh produce from FtS at the Chelsea Farm Day..

dent's connections between the food they eat, their personal health and the health of their community and the environment is in broader terms Farm to School work. I was also serving on the FSEP leadership team, so when we formed the FSEP FtS committee as a way to have a demonstration project for many of the changes FSEP is working to create in our local food system, I became the committee chair.

In your own words, what is Farm-to-School?

Farm-to-School is connecting students with local healthy foods, and connecting them with the source of their food. Teaching youth about the importance of agriculture in their community, and the connection with their environment.

What is the purpose of the FSEP FtS Demonstration project?

The purpose is to assist school districts across the region in establishing FtS programs. Facilitating the inclusion of local foods at local schools and increasing the consumption of these foods, while helping to educate kids about the benefits to their health, their community and their environment. The end goal is to have school districts and local communities take ownership of their Farm-to-School projects and continue to grow them as FSEP helps other schools and communities establish FtS programs.

Which school districts are included in the current scope of FSEP's pilot Farm-to-School project?

The Ann Arbor public schools, Chelsea public schools, and the Henry Ford Academy Charter High School in Dearborn. In addition to those school districts, we are partnering with The Agrarian Adventure and Project Healthy Schools, an initiative of the University of Michigan Hospital. We chose schools with different structures and a diversity of different characteristics so that we could gain a wider base of knowledge about what approaches seemed to work best in context of different types of schools and different models of school food service. Every district handles its food differently. Ann Arbor has an out-side food service contractor and does all its cooking out of Pioneer High School, while Chelsea is a self-op and has a kitchen in each of its schools. We will be applying the lessons learned from the implementation of the pilot program to helping other area school districts start FtS programs.

What are the challenges involved in getting local foods in schools?

“Establishing new food system connections will take work and creativity.”

The biggest challenge is the distribution of local foods; the physical act of getting locally produced food into the schools. In our current food system, things are done the way they are not necessarily because they provide the best outcomes, but because of a combination of historic, political, and economic factors that have shaped our food system and created certain connections and ways of doing things that have a lot of inertia behind them. Establishing new food system connections will take work and creativity. That's why schools need an organization such as FSEP that is working to break-up the barriers that food service providers face in sourcing and serving local foods and provide new opportunities of farmers and food businesses to serve the growing need and demand for local food.

How does one know if his/her food is locally produced?

Ask. You gotta ask. Most places do not say on their menu where their food comes from. Most businesses don't give you the information because they don't think that you want it.

Is it more expensive for schools to buy locally?

Not necessarily. There is so much cost imbedded in shipping. At least one distributor has confided in me that he was paying just as much for the shipping as he was for the tomatoes. It also depends on how much the district is receiving very low cost commodity foods through the USDA free and reduced lunch pro-

gram. The FSEP FtS program is primarily focused on fresh produce right now not only because of its health benefits, but also because fresh produce is not provided to schools in the commodity food program.

At the University of Michigan the switch to local apples has decreased the price of apples for the University and increased student consumption. The farmers also reap the benefits. From the sale of his apples, Dale Lesser, a local farmer from Dexter, was able to earn a higher percentage of the sale than if he had shipped out his apples. This is because when he sells locally, he receives the full price the University pays and doesn't incur costs of long distance transport and multiple middle-men. There are studies that clearly document how more dollars return to the farmer from programs such as FtS where their farm products are purchased in the region. That in turn boosts the local economy. A local farmer is more likely to re-spend the dollar that he earns in the local economy. This is called the "multiplier effect".

What is the most exciting new development with the FSEP FtS project?

The hiring of Ruth Blackburn as the FtS Project Coordinator. I'm very excited that this position has been filled and all of the groundwork has been done, so that we can start making real progress. I believe that we can now move quickly in facilitating the implementation of FtS programs in the region. I feel like we are on the verge of something huge; there are some pretty big pieces that have come together as a result of the combined efforts by organizations in our region devoted to issues of local agriculture, food, education and health that are quickly moving us forward.

What is your vision for the FtS project?

People wanting and having access to locally produced food.

Local foods being available and abundant, whether that's through school lunch, farmer's

markets, restaurants, or stores. The end goal is to have a food system that is transparent between the people who produce the food and the people that eat the food. People being connected to the land; the people who are the stewards of that land, and food that gets produced on that land. Eating food is something that we do everyday. How we eat and what we eat has a big impact on our land, economy, personal health, and the health of the environment. In the end I'd like to see a food system that increases the connections between food and agriculture, and that increases people's awareness of all of the connections and impacts that food and agriculture has on our community. My vision is to have a local food system that has a thriving food and farm economy and healthy, happy eaters. ■

“Eating food is something that we do everyday. How we eat and what we eat has a big impact on our land, economy, personal health, and the health of the environment.”

FSEP Conference 2007

Brenda Reau

The second annual FSEP Conference that took place in March sparked excitement about new developments in the regional food system. Over 200 people attended the Conference, which took place at Washtenaw Community College on March 29.

Food systems are hallmarked by a diverse range of stakeholders that come to the table over food related issues. The FSEP 2007 Conference brought together these diverse interests for the purpose of broadening community understanding about the local food system, and exploring opportunities for growth in production, processing, distribution, sales, and consumption of local foods. Fifteen different presentations were given by a number of individuals representing a plethora of different business and community organizations, including the C.S. Mott Group for Sustainable Food Systems, the Product Center for Agricultural and Natural Resources, Michigan State University, MSU Extension, the University of Michigan, the Henry Ford, Zingerman's Community of Business, Growing Hope, Healthy Traditions Network, and others.

The keynote presentation by Michael Potter, CEO of Eden Foods (based in Clinton, Michigan), underlined the importance of reinventing the food system. Potter discussed how his company has developed a network of family farms, suppliers, and business relationships dedicated to providing foods to meet consumer needs.

The conference was one of the many ways that FSEP is reaching out to educate and inform the public about the local food system. FSEP's education and outreach goals are to foster learning through education among all key stakeholders regarding

others involved in local food production and distribution.

Conference attendees were enthusiastic about the conference and the importance of FSEP's work. One attendee remarked:



Susan Coccia, from the C.S. Mott Group for Sustainable Systems and a Board Member with FSEP, presented about how the seven-county Youth Farm Stand project connects youth, farmers, and consumers in the community.

the impact of our current food system, and to help identify potential alternatives for change.

As a way to ascertain the impact of the conference on the community, FSEP surveyed conference attendees about their experience. There were several significant results from the survey. One of those was that 78% of respondents indicated "I have a much better understanding of local food system opportunities." Another was that 86% of respondents said that "I understand the mission of FSEP as an organization and the work it is trying to accomplish." Conference attendees also stated that they benefited from the conference by the opportunities for networking and the connections they made with

"This conference is a great example of how government sparks private sector entrepreneurship which should be pointed out to those who think government should shrink and lower taxes. Our taxes have helped FSEP happen. This should be made clear to all participants. I actually am willing to pay more taxes to promote FSEP and similar initiatives." ■

Brenda Reau serves on the FSEP Board and is the County Extension Director with MSU Extension in Monroe County.



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We are on the web!

www.fsepmichigan.org

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FSEP Partner Organizations:

Governments

Jackson County
Lenawee County
Monroe County
Washtenaw County
Wayne County

Food Businesses / Institutions

Consumers Unlimited
Del Bene Produce
McClellan Produce Sales & Distribution, Inc.
Orai Group
The Henry Ford
Zingerman's Community of Businesses

Farm Business Organizations

Greenstone Farm Credit Services
Michigan Coalition of Black Farmers
Michigan Farm Bureau
Organic Growers of Michigan

Community Organizations

Agrarian Adventure
Growing Hope
Michigan Food & Farming Systems
Michigan Organic Food & Farm Alliance
Slow Food Detroit
Slow Food Huron Valley

Resource Providers

MSU Mott Group for Sustainable Food Systems
MSU Extension
MSU Product Center for Agricultural and Natural Resources
Select Michigan Campaign
University of Michigan