



# WELCOME TO THE COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS NEWSLETTER

VOLUME 1 ISSUE 3 FALL/WINTER 2006



## FARM TO GROCER!

BY MICHAELLE REHMANN

Earlier this summer a number of grocers in Southeast Michigan were interviewed to gain a better understanding of opportunities for farmers to sell directly to grocers. Throughout the interviews, it became evident that grocers classify themselves into three different categories of which there are several subcategories. These are chain grocers, independent grocers and mom & pop shops.

Of these three categories, chain and independent grocers enjoy considerable buying power. Chain grocers have power because they can buy in large volumes. Independent grocers have overcome this obstacle by joining cooperatives to increase purchasing power. As a result, independent grocers with cooperative affiliation have as much or more purchasing power as chain grocers.

In spite of their ability to drive market prices, chain grocers have recently turned to buying local as a way to create a niche in a highly competitive market. Most recently Wal-Mart, Meijer and Whole Foods have announced a commitment to buying local. While their competitors are promising to buy local, grocers with cooperative affiliation have indicated this is something they have always done. Farmers interested in selling to independent grocers with cooperative affiliation are

encouraged to contact IGA or Spartan Stores.

Perhaps the area of greatest opportunity for medium sized farmers to sell their produce is with the independent grocers without cooperative affiliation and mom & pop shops. These grocers are often looking to connect to their community and believe that purchasing from local farmers is a way to do so. In addition, these stores often purchase a lower volume than their competitors and are able to fulfill their needs through local connections.

Overall opportunities for farmers to sell directly to grocers exist, however they require commitment on the part of the farmer and grocer to make the relationship work. Farmers must be aware of maintaining competitive pricing and must provide quality products in a timely fashion to the grocers. Grocers must make a commitment to working with several farmers to meet their needs, which will be a change from the current ordering practice. In the end, both sides must remember that pennies make dollars and pennies spent within our communities strengthen the local economy.

MICHAELLE REHMANN IS THE MSU EXTENSION URBAN COLLABORATORS INTERN FOR FSEP.

# FSEP

Volume 1 Issue 3 Autumn 2006

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## OUR MISSION

FSEP 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 and healthy local economies.

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# MAKING AN IMPACT

BY MICHAEL DIRAMIO

“Students at the University of Michigan are eating twice as many apples since dining services began offering local apples [in place of non-local apples].” - Matthew Hall, Chef, University of Michigan Dining Services

More and more people and institutions are fed up with an existing agrifood system that is not serving their needs. People are waking up to a runaway agrifood system, from farm to table, that has almost unintentionally undermined the foundations of our community. It has simultaneously created an uneven playing field and poor economic outlook for farmers, and reduced security and health of the food supply for consumers. We have a hard time knowing how our food is grown, where it comes from, and how to access healthy and local food and farm products. More and more people are contacting the Food System Economic Partnership (FSEP) to seek help finding local farm products because they are not readily available or people don't have sufficient access through existing distribution channels. And it's happening here at University of Michigan dining halls.

When FSEP was contacted late this summer by the U of M, we connected Chef Matthew Hall with a variety of local growers. The East Quad dining hall now regularly purchases a variety of apples and other items directly from nearby Lesser Farm of Chelsea, Michigan. But this is only the beginning. The U of M's East Quad dining hall serves approximately 1000 meals per day to students. The dining hall's managers have asked FSEP to help them achieve 50% local farm foods next year. They have also said that if East Quad's dining hall is successful, other dining halls on campus may follow suit. This is real change. Local farms are benefiting and gaining new and better outlets for their products. Students are eating it up, literally. And FSEP is helping make it happen.

The U of M project is one among several FSEP is currently helping to achieve. In the farm to

school program, FSEP is working with two K-12 schools to host a “local food day” event this fall. This event is a launch pad for these schools to begin regularly purchasing local farm foods to serve their students. In the business development program, FSEP is working on several projects including one with farmers to explore the feasibility of multiple biodiesel production facilities across the region. FSEP has also brought together a team of business leaders and resource providers to explore the creation of a new local food distribution business. In the research program, FSEP is funding a study of the regional supply chain from producers through end users. This project will help identify gaps and new agricultural market and product opportunities. In the membership program, FSEP is taking inventory to see where we need to grow our membership to improve our potential impact. In the education and outreach program, FSEP is finalizing a “Community Profile,” a magazine-like document that presents a snapshot of the agrifood system from various community member perspectives. FSEP is also working hard to prepare the lineup for our March 2007 regional networking conference.

FSEP’s leadership team begins almost every meeting with a locally grown and made meal. In this way, FSEP leadership team members are serving as a model for what we see our region needs, and what FSEP is already helping to make happen.

MICHAEL DIRAMIO IS DEPUTY DIRECTOR OF FOOD SYSTEM ECONOMIC PARTNERSHIP.



## CELEBRATING LOCAL FOODS

BY CLAIRE MAITRE

Two recent events were showcases for local foods, educating and celebrating what’s possible.

The 2006 Growing Connections Conference & Organic Harvest Festival took place on a cold and drizzly Saturday, Sept 30th, at Springfield Oaks 4-H Fairgrounds near Davisburg in Oakland County. Despite the daunting weather, about 700 primarily MetroDetroiters came to participate in educational workshops, enjoy delightful children’s events, and shop for goods from nearly 50 vendors, 40 of whom were selling locally produced products. Two large barns were dedicated to the exhibitors, 14 of whom were local farmers selling produce, honey, eggs and other livestock products.

For the past six years now, this annual

festival has been organized by Lisa Capraro, founder of the Healthy Traditions Network. HTN is a local consumer group that values a return to traditional, nutrient-dense foods grown on local farms that are dedicated to growing practices that enhance soil health, livestock health, and human health by using organic methods and pasture-raised livestock. Many of the HTN members volunteered considerable time and talents to making the festival a success. Members who attended greeted the farmers like the actual friends they've become over the years since many HTN members buy directly from these farmers year-round. (HTN is represented on the FSEP Leadership Team by Claire Maitre.)

The 2nd annual Great Lakes Bioneers Detroit Conference took place on the campus of Wayne State University on October 20-22, hosting 320 participants over the three days. This conference attracts people from all walks of life who are interested in sustainable social change, from green building to environmental justice to how we grow food to how we educate our children. The word Bioneers comes from combining two words: biological pioneers. The dominant philosophy of the Bioneers is that we can look to nature and biological systems for solutions to the most pressing cultural concerns of our time that will help humanity restore a healthy bond with the rest of the biological communities on earth as well as with one another. The Bioneers community, more than 10,000 strong across North America, celebrated simultaneous conferences and shared 15 plenary speakers beamed via satellite from the "headwaters" conference in San Rafael, CA.

Detroit was one of 18 satellite sites this year. Keeping with tradition, the local conference offered numerous breakout sessions of local interest as well as bus tours to local highlights where social change is underway. This year's food/farming related tours included the Eden Organic Pasta Company in Detroit, a Detroit Garden tour including Earthworks Urban Farm, and a very popular tour to Catherine Ferguson Academy, a Detroit public school for teen mothers where the young women learn part of their curriculum by farming an entire city block dedicated to fruit and vegetable production as well as housing several livestock in out buildings the

students helped to construct .

For many people attending the conference, the lunch offered on Saturday and Sunday is a real highlight, a delightful and delicious experience that brings together local chefs and goods from local farms and businesses. The goal each year is to provide lunch gleaned as much as possible from sustainable growing practices and from within the local food shed. This year's lunches were created with produce and products gathered from nine Michigan growers and six local businesses. Susan Schmidt and Chef Nick Seccia partnered with Ann Perrault of Avalon International Breads in Detroit and a small group of volunteers to create a lunch experience that moved the conference participants from theory to practice, deliciously illustrating the time-honored value of creating community around local food. The experience included a display that described each of the nine farms and linked them to a map of Michigan with red cord, providing a visual illustration of a local food network!

Both the Growing Connections Conference & Harvest Festival and the Great Lakes Bioneers Detroit Conference are local events that promote the core mission, values and vision of FSEP.

CLAIRE MAITRE IS CHAIR OF FSEP'S MEMBERSHIP COMMITTEE AND EDUCATION & OUTREACH COMMITTEE. CLAIRE CO-CREATED A WORKSHOP FOR THE GC FESTIVAL TITLED, "FOOD IS THE REVOLUTION" AND WAS A COORDINATING VOLUNTEER OF THE GLBD LUNCHES FOR THE PAST TWO YEARS.



# MAPPING THE PATH OF FOOD

BY PHIL TOCCO

How does the food you eat get to YOU? When many people think about it, they usually know where it starts and where they find it on the grocery store shelves, but there are MANY steps between the field and the fork that are a mystery to all.

As part of our overarching goal to develop a quantitative picture of our current food system reality, FSEP has hired the MSU Product Center to conduct a study tracing how several food products travel through the food system.

The study will look at each step in the path that food takes and look for opportunity within that path for new jobs or products that might fit our current market demands. A nother specific question we're looking to answer is if the individuals who make up the steps in the path to the consumer have ever considered buying locally and if they do buy locally, how much do they buy.

The results of this study should be available some time in June 2007. Look for executive summaries either at the FSEP website or a brief report of results in this newsletter. This work is funded by a matching grant from the Michigan Economic Development Corporation and local county partners.

PHIL TOCCO IS CHAIR OF FSEP'S RESEARCH COMMITTEE AND IS A MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY EXTENSION EDUCATOR AS WELL AS A MEMBER OF THE MSU PRODUCT CENTER AG INNOVATION NETWORK.



# VIEW YOUR FOOD SYSTEM

BY ANNE VAIL

This fall our team of graduate students at the University of Michigan have been compiling a community food profile for Southeastern Michigan. Reading similar to a magazine, this document is the first in a series of publications designed to highlight and explore various aspects of our local food system. We are working on behalf of the Food System Economic Partnership (FSEP) and the community food profile is modeled after the work of the C.S. Mott Group at Michigan State University.

FSEP plays many roles in working of fulfill its mission to "catalyze change in the food system of Southeastern Michigan." Some of these responsibilities include providing research, education and outreach with urban and rural partnerships, resulting in agricultural development opportunities, sustainable communities, and healthy local economies. This food profile serves as an important communication tool to enable these goals for change in the food system.

This document has a few primary goals:

-- The community food profile provides a snapshot of the local food system from the varied perspectives of food system actors in a five-county region of southeastern Michigan. These representatives include farmers, producers, processors, distributors and consumers as well as policy-makers, educators, entrepreneurs and community leaders. Through interviews, photographs and supporting research the profile gives the seemingly impersonal food system a face and a story. More precisely, it begins to build a library of the many faces and stories that comprise the local food system.

-- Beyond painting a picture, the profile strives to inform stakeholders including individuals and organizations, current and potential entrepreneurs, and policy-makers about the local food system in a creative and accessible way. The themes addressed in this edition were chosen based on conversations and responses to an open-ended survey about perceptions of local food communities.

# GOOD GOLLY MISS MOLLY

BY MOLLY ROBERTSHAW

-- Through this information, the profile aims to provoke increased awareness of and dialogue about the food system. Awareness and dialogue are the first steps in taking an active role in creating a food system that better represents our values as a food community.

-- Finally, to promote active change in the food system, this document showcases future opportunities for development of small businesses, organizations and networks to promote local economic growth through a stronger food system.

The topics and examples included in the profile only begin to represent the multifaceted, interconnected food system in our region and the many opportunities for change toward a system that better meets the needs of all stakeholders. As FSEP deepens its work, the community food profile will serve as a compass to help steer change in the food system and a weather-vane to gauge its progress.

The process of developing the community food profile took us all over the five county area, allowing us to engage with some wonderful movers and shakers in our food system. After researching the community members, businesses, and projects that would fulfill our chosen themes, we conducted personal interviews and documented our experience with photos to include in the community food profile. Finally, we highlight fun facts about our food system throughout the pages of the document and continually provide suggestions for how the reader can contribute to food system from many different avenues. November/December is the anticipated date of completion of the first community food profile. Look for it on the FSEP website and in your community!

ANNE VAIL IS A MEMBER OF FSEP'S UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN MASTERS STUDENT INTERN TEAM FROM THE SCHOOL OF NATURAL RESOURCES AND ENVIRONMENT.



Hi FSEP! My name is Molly Robertshaw and I am an MSW candidate at the University of Michigan studying Community Organizing and Social Systems. I'm originally from Cincinnati, Ohio where I earned my undergraduate degree in social work from Xavier University. Since graduation in 2003, I served for a year as an Americorps volunteer in Sitka, Alaska coordinating youth service learning and after-school programs. Following this experience, I moved home to Cincinnati where I worked as a rural case manager for the last couple of years for clients with HIV/AIDS. From this employment experience, I realized my desire to expand my career options beyond 'typical' social work and also my increasing interest in food system issues as well as my need to learn Spanish. So, the first half of 2006 found me farming and learning Spanish in Costa Rica and teaching children 'where their food comes from' complete with milking cows and goats at a farm in Cincinnati!

I came upon the FSEP website as I searched for a meaningful and challenging internship experience that melded both my personal interests and the requirements of the MSW program. Based on my background and the needs of FSEP, I'm thrilled to have found my niche with the Farm-to-School committee assisting with grant writing, helping to coordinate FtS's community partners, developing a farmer inventory, and working to figure out the distribution puzzle of getting local foods into the schools. I'm excited about these challenges because they tap my interest in building a more healthy society and working towards simplifying our complicated food system to benefit both the farmer and the children. In my spare time, I enjoy biking, running, hiking, Capoeira, traveling, learning Spanish, and getting my hands dirty in the garden. I very much look forward to learning with you and working together in the coming year!



## VIEW FROM THE BOARD

BY DAVID LUTCHKA

Harvest and calf weaning are going well. The gall of some people thinking that if we don't vote for them the world as we know it will end. Here is a reality check for those that think they are better than the rest of us. Take a bucket of water. Put your hand in it. Pull it out. You are as important or you will be missed as much as the hole in the water that is there.

The board is proceeding in a manner that is illustrated in my last story in this message. We are looking for a couple of new members as one resigned for health reasons and another for work-related lack of time. There is nothing unique about being a board member, just an open mind (mine is mostly blank), a lot of ideas, a willingness to speak up and time. We need to have a full board so that we have as many opinions and ideas to fully discuss items that come up. We need the same in the leadership team. As counties do a part of the funding, we are doing the county thing by rebidding or reviewing our contracts annually. We have had a second round of interviews for our independent contractor position (manager). A decision in the best interest of FSEP will be made shortly.

It is wonderful to see the Michigan Department of

Agriculture so interested in FSEP. We have come a long way in a short time but we need to have a couple of very visible projects completed to get more interest and give us more respect. I think we have couple on the bubble for this next year.

Last year about this time I was hunting in Colorado and saw a large mountain lion. While I was sitting there the following came to me. In order for that lion to survive, get food, he has to be faster than the slowest animal on that mountain. In order for other animals to not be lion food they have to run faster than the fastest lion on the mountain. Every morning every animal on the mountain has to hit the floor running to get food or keep from being food. This is the same thing FSEP is doing and what we must continue to do. Never look back, someone might catch you.

DAVID LUTCHKA IS AN FSEP BOARD MEMBER, A JACKSON COUNTY COMMISSIONER AND AN INDEPENDENT FARMER. HE HAS SPENT A LOT OF TIME LATELY GETTING IN HIS CORN HARVEST.



# I LOVE FIREWORKS

BY CLAIRE MAITRE

I love fireworks! You know, that occasional event formed a round chemical alchemy, explosions, fantastic colors in the night sky and instant community on the ground as folks gather to witness the spectacular. This is the analogy that occurs to me as I contemplate my experience of being a guest at the “Outstanding in the Field” dinner that took place at Lakeplain Prairie and Larkrest Farms on August 20th.

Maybe it’s because a week later I can still recall the explosions of fantastic flavors in my mouth as I made my way through the amazing buffet of delights that I captured on my plate. Chef Nick Seccia and his company of volunteer chefs were nothing less than creative artists and extraordinary alchemists who knew how to utilize each ingredient with complementary synergy and beautiful presentation to dazzle the senses.

Maybe it’s because I could recognize the silent explosion on that fertile ground that was a declaration of community and the healthy bonds between others that occur when we experience ourselves as belonging to something greater than ourselves. Isn’t this most recognizable when it’s an event that includes sharing a meal? When you add joyful melodies from live musicians and a perfect summer evening, it’s hard to imagine how it could have been better. There were moments for me that evening when I found my eyes misting with joy realized, noticing that what I long for on Earth, a sense of community and a way of living on this planet that sustains our natural resources for future generations, was there in that field with splendor and beauty.

I love to be so close to the fireworks that the biggest booms course right through my body and dwarf my heartbeat. It reminds me of what greatness is available when I allow the experience of being alive to extend beyond my own personal life into that ocean of life of which I am a part. Dinner in that field helped me feel like I am part of a movement that values a return to a



local, sustainable food system. And it’s a movement that can celebrate!

Before dinner began, Chef Nick stood before us to tell us a bit of the story behind each of the ingredients that went into the meal. Each dish was described, not only by name, but also from where it came. Dexter Cider Mill, Spring Port High School, Calder Dairy, Avalon Bakery, Maple Creek Farm...the litany of local whereabouts continued and became as important to our sensibilities as the flavors we began to anticipate. We were learning that there is something delicious about being at home in our foodshed.

Farmers Mary LaFrance and Maria Chrypinski along with Chef Nick and Susan Schmidt from The Henry Ford are part of a movement that signifies a changing tide in how we, as a people, choose to create culture where relationships are the fertile ground from which all else springs forth. Mary and Maria tune themselves intimately to the land and the whole biotic community that grows the food in their fields. Nick and Susan, along with the members of Slow Food Huron Valley are helping to cultivate relationships in our community based on human values and appreciation for what can happen when we think of ourselves as members of that community rather than as ‘consumers.’

Isn’t this also the spirit of what being a member of a CSA is all about? You get to belong to the dance of life in a different way than ever before in your life whether it’s by joining a work detail at the farm for a few hours, talking with other members about their concerns and joys, or sharing a meal or a recipe. If you missed the farm dinner this year, I encourage you to come next year. We’ll save a place at the table for you.