



Community Connections NEWSLETTER

VOLUME 1 ISSUE 2 SUMMER 2006



MAKING CHANGE HAPPEN

BY SUSAN SCHMIDT

The process and pace of change that occurs during the formative stages of any organization can vary based on many factors, not the least of which is the complexity of the organization itself. For FSEP and its membership, this pace has seemed dizzyingly fast, while at others times, maddeningly slow. With so much need for positive change in the economic development of the food system, project ideas and possibilities for inventive collaboration flow as a quick current. The processes and “connecting to dots” don’t always follow as fast as we’d like, but since our last bulletin, there is much progress to report.

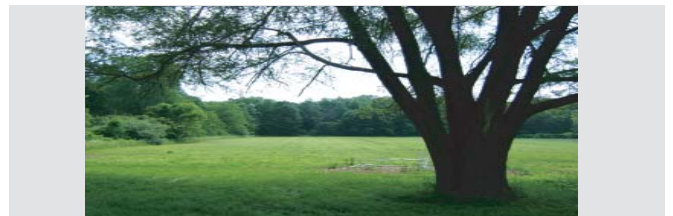
FSEP has completed the submission of our 501(c)(3) application to put us well on our way to being an official non-profit. We have formally adopted by-laws and now have a Board of Directors, of which I am honored to be chair. Our board will serve as a support for the FSEP leadership team and our organization’s mission, providing oversight for our financial resources and will ensure sound practices of governance.

On the ground, the Leadership Team drives the organization forward through focused sub-committee work groups. Each FSEP member performs committee work according to the various interests and expertise that they bring to the table. Success stories for our regional agricultural economy are being realized through this work, For example, the Research and Software Committee

focus groups with local chefs are resulting in purchasing agreements between farmers and restaurants. Target school districts are in the process of being chosen for the Farm to School committee project which will result in local produce items being served at these institutions. There are many other ongoing initiatives daily turning ideas into action – in other words, connecting those dots and actualizing real product moving through the local economy.

For those of us intimately connected to the FSEP, these developments are akin to proudly watching the seeds we’ve sown bloom and flourish. With the nurture of our leadership and board, our project will continue to propagate the growth of a healthy organization in a healthy agricultural economy.

SUSAN SCHMIDT IS CHAIR OF THE FSEP BOARD AND DIRECTOR OF FOOD SERVICES AND CATERING FOR THE HENRY FORD AT GREENFIELD VILLAGE IN DEARBORN, MICHIGAN.



F S E P

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LEADERSHIP TEAM -

FOR A LIST OF LEADERSHIP
TEAM MEMBERS, PLEASE VISIT:
FSEPMICHIGAN.ORG/TEAM



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 OPPORTUNITIES AND HEALTHY LOCAL ECONOMIES.

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FSEP UPDATE!

BY MICHAEL DIRAMIO

“Get on with it!” This phrase is my new daily mantra. FSEP is now in full action mode. Fresh off a successful conference in March, we have begun several new, exciting projects to assess opportunities and demonstrate community and economic impact in our region.

FSEP Projects Map

FSEP has compiled and created a GIS-based map of on-going projects supported by FSEP and our growing network of community leaders. The organization is currently supporting over 50 projects/businesses! The sorts of projects receiving support include: university dining services local food procurement, local meat processing, K-12 farm-to-school projects, youth entrepreneurship programs, grain processing, and many more! To view the FSEP-supported project map, go to fsepmichigan.org/programs_projects.

Market Research & Development

FSEP is well underway on several research initiatives, all investigating the potential for local agriculture/food sector development. Some activities and highlights include:

- At the first of three chef/restaurant manager focus group meetings, project coordinator Phil Tocco reported that chefs not only expressed keen interest in using local farm products, they also made several purchase agreements with farmers in attendance on the spot! Go to fsepmichigan.org/reports to view a full report on this FSEP restaurant market study.



Education and Outreach for Change

FSEP is at its most fundamental level an educational initiative because we realize that with education comes knowledge; and with knowledge is power. The organization continues to push the envelope of what people think is possible, and what people realize is needed to make a difference. The statewide conference that FSEP is collaboratively planning with the Michigan Land Use Institute, MSU, and other local leaders across the state is a testament to our region's capacity for positive change. FSEP is building this capacity for change within our membership, the people with whom our members work, and the community as a whole. In all of our activities, we are instilling a focus on knowledge, empowerment, and providing a boost for the region's entrepreneurs seeking to make better lives for themselves and helping to make their community a better place to live.

Farm-to-School Initiative

Kids getting healthy fresh local food delivered straight from their neighborhood farmers. Sounds like a no brainer, right? The FSEP Farm-to-School team has been working to make their vision a reality. The team has met with prospective schools and is planning a pilot project for this coming school year.

Making the Organizational Grade

On the organization management front, FSEP has made significant advancements over the past few months, including:

- Instituted formal Board and Bylaws
- Submitted paperwork to obtain 501c3 status with the IRS – currently pending.
- Launched and equipped task forces composed of community leaders around five primary FSEP program areas: market research and development, business innovation and networking, education and outreach, farm-to-school demonstration project, and membership building.

The FSEP organization has made significant strides in the past few months. Our capacity to achieve our mission has grown tremendously, and we are already demonstrating community impact. Yet there is much more to come. I am proud to be part of such a committed team of community and business leaders. I grow more excited each day as we begin to actualize the potential of our mission, and enhance this region we all call home.

MICHAEL DIRAMIO IS THE DEPUTY DIRECTOR OF FOOD SYSTEM ECONOMIC PARTNERSHIP.



FSEP CONFERENCE A SUCCESS!

BY BRENDA REAU

The FSEP Conference held on March 15 proved to be an exciting event attended by 150 people representing all aspects of the food system. The conference was held at the Sysco Foods Conference Center in Canton which was an excellent facility. Sysco graciously hosted the conference and provided the food.

The keynote presentation by Dr. Mike Hamm from Michigan State University on Food System Opportunities in Southeastern Michigan was very inspiring. Participants also found the variety of concurrent sessions to be valuable.

An evaluation documented the effectiveness of the conference in achieving its goals. Ninety-nine percent of the survey respondents reported that they better understood the local food system and opportunities for development. Eighty percent said that they now understood the mission of FSEP and the work it is trying to accomplish.

Plans are beginning to take shape for the 2007 FSEP Conference. Anyone having suggestions for the conference should contact Brenda Reau at reau@msu.edu

BRENDA REAU SERVES ON THE FSEP BOARD AND IS THE MONROE COUNTY MSU EXTENSION DIRECTOR.

NEW REPORT: GRAIN PRODUCT STUDY

Preliminary results from a study of local grain producers shows promise for new value-added grain processing ventures. Stay tuned to future announcements for a detailed report.

JUMP STARTING THE FARM-TO-SCHOOL PROJECT

BY JEREMY MOGHTADER

In local food systems, getting more people to eat more locally grown and prepared food is the name of the game. This type of local food system development has many community benefits in areas of economics, rural and urban community vitality, public health and the environment. It re-forges strong mutually beneficial linkages between our communities around the source of our sustenance...food, and highlights our interdependence as well as our collective and individual opportunities for growth.

In this world, connecting local children with local food, in an educational context via school lunches, teaches them about food and all its connections to personal and community health. Helping our youth understand the power and importance of these connections and develop healthy habits around food is absolutely essential to any local food system.

Inspired by these connections, FSEP has chosen to make one of its top priorities helping establish strong farm to school programs in our region. Over the next few years FSEP will be working collaboratively to bring together school officials, food service directors, contracted food service vendors, distributors, processors, and producers to establish creative and beneficial relationships that result in locally produced and processed food being eaten by students in our schools. In order to accomplish some of the broader farm to school goals and help ensure lasting change, FSEP is reaching out to and partnering with other groups and organizations who have been working on farm to school related activities such as child nutrition and food systems education in order to build collaboratively from their expertise, relationships, and knowledge.



Because of its diverse food systems network from these collaborations, FSEP is uniquely positioned to facilitate the logistics involved in procuring locally produced foods for use in school lunches and hopes to initiate lasting relationships between food growers, possessors, distributors, and schools, that will allow districts all over SE Michigan to serve locally grown food to their students. These types of relationships would be the same ones that would help expand the availability of local food in our groceries, restaurants and institutions, furthering larger FSEP goals.

Currently, we are in the process of searching for and evaluating school districts in our 5-county region to serve as sites and partners for our farm to school pilot project. Evaluations of these pilot programs will serve as basis for facilitating further expansion of farm to school in our region. Please look for upcoming updates and opportunities as this exciting project unfolds.

JEREMY MOGHTADER IS THE CHAIR OF THE FARM-TO-SCHOOL COMMITTEE AND A REPRESENTATIVE OF SLOW FOOD HURON VALLEY.



FARMERS' MARKETS: THE MISSING INGREDIENT

BY SUSAN SMALLEY

MSU has just completed our annual effort to touch base with all the farmers' markets we can find in Michigan. Kate Dennison, an MSU student working this summer in our office, has confirmed 149 farmers' markets across the state that are operating or plan to operate during the 2006 season. How many of these markets are in FSEP counties? Here's our count: Jackson – one; Lenawee – three; Monroe – two; Washtenaw – seven; Wayne – seven. You will find a list of farmers' markets in Michigan at www.farmersmarkets.msu.edu. Right now the list is still from 2005, but we'll be updating it very soon to reflect Kate's work.

We also know of several groups who are trying to start new farmers' markets in the FSEP region including Northwest Detroit's Grandmont Rosedale neighborhood, Lincoln Park, Highland Park, and Temperance.



Most of these existing and developing markets are searching for more farmers! Consumer interest in locally-grown food is at an all-time high and farmers' markets are the most visible places to find both the food and the farmers who grow it. This is an opportunity for current and future farmers to consider.

Selling at a farmers' market does require a regular – usually weekly – time commitment and a willingness to talk about your products with the customers. But costs to have space at the market and equip your market stall are reasonable. And the opportunity to get customer feedback about your farm products can help you target what you grow and sell to what the market wants. Selling at a farmers' market can be profitable on its own and it can lead you to other markets. For example, restaurant chefs often shop local farmers' markets to find unique local products to add to their menus. They may then develop ongoing working relationships with farmers they meet.

Some new markets will be in communities and neighborhoods where good, fresh food isn't readily available. Organizers are working to connect farmer vendors to Project FRESH and to get Food Stamp/Electronic Benefit Transfer certification for their markets. These programs let limited resource customers shop at farmers' markets and help to increase sales for participating farmers.

Michigan Food and Farming Systems (MIFFS) received grant funding from the Project for Public Spaces to support development of a Michigan Farmers' Market Association over the next year and a half. And MSU's Dr. Jim Bingen has received a grant from the Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) program to help him investigate the management and marketing practices of highly successful farmers' market vendors. Both MIFFS and MSU are also seeking additional resources to support Michigan farmers' markets and their farmers.

So visit some farmers' markets near you to see what is there and what people are buying. Then consider trying out a farmers' market as one part of your overall marketing plan. You might be the missing ingredient for a nearby market, and the market might be the missing ingredient for your marketing plan.

SUSAN SMALLEY IS A REPRESENTATIVE OF MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY EXTENSION AND THE C.S. MOTT GROUP FOR SUSTAINABLE FOOD SYSTEMS.

FSEP: A PROMOTER OF PUBLIC HEALTH

BY ELLEN CLEMENT

The Washtenaw County Public Health Department is a new FSEP member. Our interest in the work of this group is grounded in healthy eating, which, along with active living and reducing tobacco use, is one of our three community priorities. In Washtenaw County the rate at which people are becoming overweight is increasing, and only 14.3% of adults are eating the recommended 5 servings of fruits and vegetables per day. Eating well and maintaining healthy weights can help individuals remain healthier longer by reducing the likelihood of heart problems, diabetes and high blood pressure.

Washtenaw County Public Health's mission is "to assure, in partnership with the community, the conditions necessary for people to live healthy lives through prevention and protection programs." Two key elements of the mission explain the basis for our participation in FSEP—**partnership** and **assuring the conditions**.

Public Health departments often carry out their mission by using their influence with partners. We often describe our role as a catalyst in bringing about change. Two examples of how we use partnerships will make this clearer:

- Health Educators are working with schools to do assessments that can make the school a healthier place to work and learn. Coordinated School Health Teams then work with Public Health staff to identify improvements tailored to each school. As a result of coordinated school health teams, local schools have made nutrition changes such as healthy vending machines and healthier cafeteria choices. Local food products are a great resource for improving cafeteria offerings.
- Public Health works with local groups like Growing Hope that help connect people with resources to grow their own food and at the same time educate them about food systems and accessing locally grown food.

The debate on nutrition and physical activity is shifting away from a primary focus on personal responsibility and individual choice to one that examines policies and the role of the environment in shaping eating and activity behaviors. There has been a dramatic increase in the number of restaurants and decrease in the number of grocery stores in Washtenaw County. Cooking more meals at home and eating meals as a family helps individuals avoid the higher calories and larger servings that are frequently consumed with restaurant foods. For many people it is more difficult to purchase healthy foods than go to a fast food restaurant so **assuring the condition** of neighborhoods means increasing the availability of fresh fruits and vegetables and other healthy foods. Environmental changes that transform the food offerings of small stores, expand farmer's markets and make food and food access explicit parts of planning policies improve the conditions for all community residents.



SOURCE: USDA

Public Health is very enthusiastic about our partnership with FSEP and look forward to projects including "Farms to Schools" that are looking at ways to link local farm products to school cafeterias. A great resource for those interested in learning more about the connection between public health goals and FSEP is the report "Cultivating Common Ground: Linking Health and Sustainable Agriculture. It is available at the following website: http://www.preventioninstitute.org/pdf/Cultivating_Common_Ground_112204.pdf

ELLEN CLEMENT IS PUBLIC HEALTH OFFICER OF WASHTENAW COUNTY, MICHIGAN.



FSEP JOINS PLANNING TEAM FOR STATEWIDE FOOD SYSTEM POLICY CONFERENCE

BY MIKE SCORE

The primary focus of FSEP is the five-county region in southeast Michigan (Wayne, Washtenaw, Jackson, Lenawee, and Monroe). We have made good progress in developing a scope of work for research on the regional food system. Results of this work will be used to stimulate expansion of existing businesses, launching of new ventures, and facilitation of new joint ventures. Our work is being done with the intention of making local farm businesses more profitable and improving consumer access to local farm products. We have also succeeded in developing effective educational and outreach programs that help leaders understand the potential for improving the way food moves from farm to table. Our Farm to School team is progressing in effort to increase funding for work that will move more local food into regional school system cafeterias.

A major challenge for FSEP is completing this complex work in a way that all major stakeholders can understand. When we report results we have to use wording that is meaningful to urban and rural constituents from backgrounds of consumers, elected officials, business leaders, lenders, and service providers.

As if this level of complexity were not enough, FSEP leadership also needs to understand the political forces and public policies at the level of state government that determine what can be done in our local communities, and the pace at which work can move forward. That is why FSEP is working collaboratively with the Michigan Land Use Institute and the Grand Rapids Food Policy Council to plan a statewide conference in February, 2007. The conference will focus on state policies and their effects on food system development. The conference will bring traditionally opposed groups together to explain differing policy positions of organizations and to identify common interests that create opportunities for more progressive legislation in Michigan. Watch future FSEP newsletters for announcement of a specific date and location.

MIKE SCORE IS THE DIRECTOR OF THE FOOD SYSTEM ECONOMIC PARTNERSHIP IN CONJUNCTION WITH HIS POSITION AS AN EDUCATOR AT THE MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY EXTENSION SERVICE.



NEW REPORT: RESTAURANT MARKET STUDY

FSEP recently completed a study of restaurants in the five-county region to assess issues and opportunities for building linkages between farms and chefs. Go to fsepmichigan.org/reports to learn more and read the report!

ANNOUNCEMENTS AND UPCOMING EVENTS

Outstanding in the Field – Slow Food Event

August 20, 2006 at Larkrest Farms and Lakeplain Prairie Organic Farm in Brownstone Township, Wayne County.

- Farm-to-Field dinner to help fundraiser trip to send delegates to Terra Madre.
- Go to <http://slowfoodhuronvalley.com/events.php> for more information.

Healthy Traditions Network – Harvest Festival

September 30th, 2006, 9:30AM – 6:00PM, Springfield Oaks, Davisburg (4H County Fairgrounds)

- Summer picnic accompanied by variety of lectures.
- Go to <http://www.htnetwork.org/growingconnections.html> for more information.

Great Lakes Bioneers Conference: Sustainable Solutions for Social and Environmental Justice

October 20-22nd, 2006 at Wayne State University in Detroit, MI.

- FSEP Membership Chair Claire Maitre is on the planning committee.
- Go to <http://www.sustainabledetroit.org/bioneers> for more information.

Community Based Entrepreneurship Conference: Growing Local Economies

October 26, 2006, 8:30AM – 4:00PM, at Holiday Inn West in Lansing, MI

- Keynote speaker: Dr. Tom Lyons, Fifth Third Bank Professor Community Development and expert on state and local economic development
- Panel discussion and practice models for community-based businesses and successful networking
- Contact Dave Ivan at ivan@msu.edu or (989) 224-5296 for more information.

Choices Conference – C.S. Mott Group for Sustainable Food Systems

March 2007, Lansing, MI

- Interactive discussions on latest food and nutrition topics.
- Go to http://www.mottgroup.msu.edu/choices_front.asp for more information.

