

## AGENDA PRIORITIES

12. Implement a reimbursement program to provide an additional 10 cents per school meal, as a supplement to existing school meal funds, in order to purchase locally grown fruits and vegetables.

### GROW JOBS AND KIDS WITH MICHIGAN FOOD IN SCHOOLS

Turkey-apple-spinach wraps anyone? Sounds like lunch on the town, but in fact turkey-apple-spinach wraps were one of two menu choices recently at Platte River Elementary School in northwest Michigan's Benzie County.

The sweetness of the locally produced Honeycrisp apples in the wraps was one trick to getting the spinach into the kids, said Daniel Marbury. He's one of two national FoodCorps members working for a year with the region's schools to spice up menus, connect with local farm vendors, and provide nutrition education support. "One of the fourth-graders told me he normally wouldn't eat spinach but liked it in these wraps," Marbury said.



*Photo courtesy of FoodCorps*

**Let's Have More of This.** Gary Derrigan, food service director for Traverse City Area Public Schools, sees great opportunity to improve student health and academic performance with menu items that kids really like and that are good for them, too. But schools are strapped for resources to buy sometimes higher-priced local foods, for skills and equipment needed to handle whole, farm-fresh foods, and for the time to adjust menus and promote new choices, he said.

That's why he and other school food service operations in Michigan are interested in programs like one just passed in 2011 by the Oregon State Legislature. Oregon will provide 15 cents per meal to schools specifically for purchasing local foods and promoting healthy foods to kids. This step came after a pilot project in two Oregon school districts proved that giving schools some financial leeway could produce powerful results.

**Michigan Next?** The original Oregon pilot provided 7 cents per lunch to the two districts, or an investment of \$160,750. This money leveraged additional local purchasing by the schools for a total of \$461,992. An input-output economic analysis showed that the participating districts' local food purchases stimulated a significant amount of additional economic activity.

Traverse City's Derrigan says such an effort in Michigan, to keep lunch money local, could not only boost the state's economy but also bolster schools' work to encourage healthy dietary choices. "It would present us with a lot more opportunities than we currently have," Derrigan said. "It would help us expose kids to new foods, create that learning experience, and change some nutritional habits."

#### **Need**

Michigan's unemployment rate still hovers above 9 percent. Getting the state back in job gear and moving forward in business will require new thinking and new approaches. The Michigan Good Food Charter spells out one idea: Help schools improve school food choices and the

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state's economy at the same time by helping schools buy Michigan. The Charter proposes a public-private effort to provide a state allocation of 10 cents per school lunch to schools for buying locally grown fruits and vegetables. This supplement would significantly extend the budget of 20-30 cents per lunch meal that schools typically have for fruits and vegetables.

In 2011, Michigan schools served 141.4 million lunches. A 10-cent allocation would put \$14 million per year into circulation, generating new jobs and potentially inspiring new business investments, such as facilities to wash and chop produce, to better meet schools' needs. It would also increase the amount of nutritious food schools can buy for a student body that Michigan badly needs to grow strong, healthy, and successful.

## Opportunity

The amount of additional private and public investment that such a state allocation could leverage is what really counts in economic development. In the case of local and regional food markets, farmers, food businesses, local governments, business development agencies, and more are lining up to seize new opportunities as demand from schools, hospitals, restaurants, and more grows. The proposed state allocation has the potential to further incentivize them and advance many projects that are underway or in development, such as several "regional food hubs" for aggregating, distributing, and providing needed minimal processing (chopping, packing, etc.) of food from smaller farms.

Michigan schools are also prepared to make the most of such an allocation. There are nearly 60 programs registered on the Michigan Farm to School website.<sup>2</sup> And from 2004 to 2009, the number of schools sourcing local foods increased threefold, from 11 percent to 41 percent, according to Michigan State University surveys.<sup>3</sup> In his September 14, 2011 health and wellness address, Governor Rick Snyder highlighted this on-the-ground traction and the value of the state's farm-to-school networks for making the healthy food connection with local agriculture.

## Action

Michigan can get started now. Here are action steps toward the goal of a 10-cent state allocation to schools for buying Michigan fruits and vegetables:

- *Consider a pilot program, including evaluation of economic impacts.*
- *Assemble funding from the following sources or some combination: philanthropic dollars, local match, and special project funds that state agencies may have or seek, such as from USDA programs (e.g. Federal State Marketing Improvement Program or Specialty Crop Block Grants).*
- *Organize local and state stakeholders for advisory and advocacy support as the proposal progresses.*

## 1-2-3 Go!

Start talking about it, especially with local and state policy makers. The economic potential is clear. So is the opportunity to increase access to healthy, local food through farm-to-school programs, with more than 9,800 schools involved in all 50 states. Put the two together and you have a story to tell and many reasons to call for 10-cents for local food in Michigan schools!

<sup>1</sup>Kane, D. et al. (2011) The Impact of Seven Cents. EcoTrust.

<sup>2</sup>See <http://www.mifarmtoschool.msu.edu/>

<sup>3</sup>Colasanti, K., Matts, C. & Hamm, M. W. (in press). Results from the 2009 Michigan Farm-to-School Survey: Participation Grows from 2004. Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior.