

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
April 26, 2013

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### **Michigan Institutions Expand Local Food Purchasing**

EAST LANSING, Mich. – Many institutions are eager to put more local food on their menus and area farmers are interested in supplying it, recent surveys by the Michigan State University Center for Regional Food Systems demonstrate.

Since 2004, CRFS has conducted six surveys to understand the landscape of Farm to Institution efforts in Michigan. In such initiatives, institutions like schools, early childcare programs, and hospitals connect with area farmers, food producers and vendors who provide local food to the institutions. A recent analysis of data gathered in 2012 and prior Farm to Institution surveys reveals interest in the expansion of such purchasing by both producers and institutional buyers in Michigan.

“We have seen steady growth in local purchasing by food service directors across institutions since 2004,” said Dr. Michael Hamm, CRFS director. “This points to increasing potential for farmers to generate new business in these markets and for institutions to provide the fresher, local foods valued by their customers.”

Local food purchasing at K–12 schools has been the most extensively studied. Research to date shows:

- The number of schools and districts purchasing local food has been growing, and more than half of schools now purchase local food.
- About 90% of schools and districts are interested in purchasing local food in the future, whether currently doing so or not.
- Fresh and whole fruits and vegetables are of greatest interest, compared to meat, dairy, grain and bean items.
- Local foods are most commonly purchased through full-service distributors, rather than directly from farmers, farmer cooperatives or specialty distributors.

The three Farm to School surveys conducted since 2004 reveal supporting the local economy and/or helping Michigan farms and businesses as top motivators for purchasing local food. Schools are also driven by access to fresher food and access to higher quality food. The primary barriers reported by school food service providers are the limited seasonal availability of items, food safety concerns and budget constraints.

A survey of early childcare programs showed similar motivations and concerns. While only about one quarter of early childcare sites purchased local foods, over two-thirds of the programs were interested in connecting with a local farmer.

Many of Michigan's hospitals are also making efforts to purchase local food. As of December 2012, 114 of the state's nearly 150 hospitals had committed to locally source 20% of their food by 2020 through the Michigan Health & Hospital Association's Healthy Food Hospitals initiative.

CRFS also conducted a survey on the supply side, in partnership with the Michigan Field Office of the USDA's National Agriculture Statistics Service, examining vegetable farmers' interest and willingness to sell to institutional markets. This survey revealed that half of respondents were interested in selling to at least one type of institution (school, hospital or college/university), though only about six percent did at the time of the survey.

Analysis of the Michigan Farm to Institution data collected since 2004 indicates that local food purchasing is a practice that will continue to grow among K-12 schools, early childcare and education programs, and hospitals. While relatively few farmers appear to be selling directly to institutions currently, a large number are interested in exploring the opportunities to sell to these markets.

Summaries of the Farm to Institution surveys can be found on the CRFS website at [foodsystems.msu.edu/activities/farm-to-school](http://foodsystems.msu.edu/activities/farm-to-school).

The Michigan State University Center for Regional Food Systems unites the applied research, education and outreach expertise of faculty and staff members at MSU to advance understanding of and engagement with regional food systems. CRFS organizers envision a thriving economy, equity and sustainability for Michigan, the country and the planet through food systems rooted in local regions and centered on food that is healthy, green, fair and affordable.

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