Chapter 6: Conclusions, Recommendations and Next Steps

This project integrated multiple research methods to gather valuable information about the food system in southeastern Michigan. The goals of the project were to gather data and information about the current food system, identify barriers and opportunities for a more localized food system and to develop research-based resources to inform the future work of food system organizations in their efforts to re-localize the regional food system. The research, conducted over the course of the year, consisted of a broad literature review, a multi-sector survey, the creation of the "Southeastern Michigan Community Food Profile" and engagement in Participatory Action Research working with FSEP on several projects.

In conducting this research, we established more broad-based evidence for the conclusion of Davis *et al.* that southeastern Michigan is indeed well poised for the development of an intentionally localized food system. The region boasts a strong agricultural base that includes many farmers who currently sell or desire to sell their products locally, as well as a substantial urban population eager to consume more local foods. While formidable communication and infrastructural barriers exist within the current food system structure, cross-sector demand and the presence of active local food system advocates increase viable opportunities for bridging communication gaps and developing necessary infrastructure through networking, supporting new agricultural entrepreneurship, and developing systems for local food distribution.

The southeastern Michigan food system today

Land Use

Between 1990 and 2000, the percentage of land developed in southeastern Michigan increased by 17 percent. In 2000, 37 percent of the land in the region is developed (Southeast Michigan Council of Governments 2003). The five-county Study Area of accommodates a population of 2.8 million, most of which live in urbanized areas. There are about 5,500 farms in the region. Over the last 15 years, the composition of farms has changed slightly with an increase in large (1,000 or more acres) and small (fewer than 180 acres) farms, but a decrease in medium-sized farms (180-999 acres) according to the US Department of Agriculture. (U.S. Department of Agriculture National Agricultural Statistics Service 2002). The region lost about 50,000 acres of farmland between 1987 and 2002, mainly to urban development. This trend continues but is tempered by growing support for preservation of working lands in the region. Although 20 percent of farmers interviewed reported intentions to sell their land to developers when they retire, two-thirds of farmers would like to keep their land in agricultural use. Joining a handful of other communities across the state, voters in Ann Arbor and Washtenaw County have approved taxes to support farmland preservation programs.

Food Businesses

There are several thousand food-related businesses in the five-county region of southeastern Michigan. The Study Area boasts notable numbers of producers, processors, distributors, retailers and consumers.[20] The following are brief descriptions of each sector we included in our study.

Producers, including produce growers, grain farmers and meat producers, are the foundation of the food system. The primary agricultural goods produced in the southeastern Michigan are grain, meat and produce. Yet, consistent with the rest of the state, a wide variety of products originate in the region including eggs, dairy, honey, hay and straw, flowers, nuts and wine. Producers in southeastern Michigan sell their products through a variety of means, including sales to distributors, processors, retailers or directly to consumers. Still others sell to other markets including brokers, wholesalers, other farmers, grain elevators, and livestock exchanges.

Food processors turn raw agricultural goods into "value-added" products that are more readily usable by a broader array of consumers. Basic processing like washing and cutting vegetables can make local foods an option for hospitals, school districts and some restaurants. More extensive processing like roasting, mixing and canning are ways of extending the seasons of locally-grown produce making them available year round. Yet, processors comprise the smallest proportion of food-related businesses in the region, resulting in a limited array of options and outlets for local producers.

Local food **distributors**, who link food supply with demand, serve local, state and national clients including grocery stores, restaurants, schools and hospitals. While food distributors are located throughout the region, there is a concentration in the Eastern Market area of Detroit, a historical and thriving center of food system activity. Nearly all local distributors serve clients in multiple areas within and beyond the region. In order to be profitable, most food distributors also diversify their supply networks, often working with growers across state and, sometimes, national borders to provide products demanded year round.

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[20] List provided to FSEP by the C.S. Mott Group for Sustainable Agriculture and Michigan State University.

Whereas most consumers rarely think about food production, processing and distribution, **food retailers** are likely the most commonly recognized aspect of the food system. There are 645 grocery stores and approximately 23 multi-purpose stores in the five-county region. Many other food retail outlets exist in the area, as well. There are an estimated 23 farmers' markets in the region - a number which has increased in recent years to meet a growing demand that is reflected nationwide; the number of farmers' markets across the country grew from 1,200 in 1980 to 2,800 in 2000 and 4,385 in 2006 (U.S. Department of Agriculture 2006). Several food cooperatives and dozens of farm stands and U-pick farms speckle the community.

Food consumption and purchasing habits

Area consumers shop most regularly at grocery stores. Over 55 percent of shoppers purchase from grocery stores at least weekly. Close to one third of shoppers also reported making purchases at "multi-purpose stores" including Target, K-mart and Meijer or convenience stores on a weekly basis. People who shop at multi-purpose stores tend to frequent convenience stores as well.

Though less often, most consumers purchase foods directly from producers at least once during the growing season indicating that most consumers are aware of opportunities to buy local foods. Over the course of year, 80 percent of consumers surveyed visit farmers' markets, 62 percent buy food at farm stands, 37 percent participate in community supported agriculture (CSA), and 27 percent buy food at a food cooperative. Interestingly, 43 percent grow some of their own food at their homes or in community gardens. Institutions are also central food purchasers in the region. Institutional food buyers include school districts, colleges and universities, hospitals, museums and government facilities. Because of their high volume purchases, institutions wield significant influence within the food system.

The demand for a localized food system in southeastern Michigan

Participant stakeholders from each of the five major food system sectors surveyed or interviewed by the research team articulated some level of demand for a more localized food system. Producers and consumers voiced strong interests in increasing the proportion of products grown and consumed locally in southeastern Michigan. Food system intermediaries, including processors, distributors and retailers, indicated a mild interest in localizing the food system and showed that their level of interest depends largely on their perceived demand from producers and consumers.

Consumer demand

Our survey found that consumer demand is shared by individuals representing all socioeconomic groups. Over 45 percent of consumers reported thinking frequently about how and where their food was produced and only 7 percent stated that they "never" think about their food's origins. Eighty-five percent stated that it is either very or somewhat important to have local foods available in their community. The increase in farmers' markets in the region reflects and also helps to foster growing consumer demand for local food products. Notably, consumers in Jackson, Lenawee and Washtenaw counties perceive greater access to local foods currently than those in Monroe and Wayne counties.

Nearly half of all consumers surveyed were willing to pay a premium for local foods and would pay prices at or above the grocery store prices to which they are accustomed for particular food items. By a substantial margin, consumers are most interested in local produce, but also expressed notable interest in local dairy, meat and grain products. When purchasing food, consumers tend to make choices based on taste, quality, price and nutritional value. People who regularly buy local foods tend to value taste and quality, while rare local food buyers prioritize price. Outside of grocery stores, a large proportion of food is purchased at restaurants for consumption both in and outside of the home. When surveyed, over half of shoppers would select dishes prepared with local foods at restaurants when available.

Producer demand

Overall, the producer survey points to a strong desire among farmers within the five-county region to increase their participation in the local food system. While the majority of farmers surveyed sell at least some of their product within the state, a substantial portion of food grown in the area is sold in distant markets. Over half of the region's producers surveyed currently sell some of their products directly to consumers and close to 75 percent of the respondents indicated a strong interest in increasing the direct sale of their products. Those more interested in local food sales tended to operate small- or medium-sized farms, and part-time farmers showed consistently higher interest in increasing their local sales. Few farmers identified a "lack of consumer demand" as a barrier to participation in the local food system suggesting that many farmers acknowledge consumer demand for more locally-grown and produced food.

Grain producers in the region are particularly interested in more options for marketing their products and desire alternatives to the dominant grain elevators and general commodity markets. Many producers also noted heritage and agricultural tourism as opportunities for sustaining the local food system and creating jobs in the region. Heritage and *agritourism* are gaining state and national recognition, and some opportunities – such as support from Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Services – exist to support farmers in these endeavors. Not surprisingly, producers who desire to keep their land in farming into the future noted a stronger interest in strengthening the local food system.

Processor demand

Although our sample of local processors was small, there was a notable interest in processing local food products, which suggests the need for a subsequent, broader-reaching survey. However, this demand also appears to be dependent on the type of processing facility. Half (4 of 8) currently process some local foods and half stated that they have received requests for local foods, including requests for dairy, produce, meat, snack foods and poultry. Respondents were able to satisfy only some of this demand. Five of eight respondents said that they were very interested in processing local foods in the future.

Distributor demand

Overall, the survey suggests a moderate interest among locally-based food distributors in increasing the proportion of local foods they distribute. Over half of the distributors surveyed have experienced articulated demand from their customers for local foods and those who received requests worked to meet the demand. About half of the distributors surveyed indicated that they were able to meet most of the demand for local. Yet, 40 percent were not able to meet the demand. Eighty percent of distributors surveyed carry at least some local foods currently and almost all reported that the proportion of local foods distributed has remained constant or increased in the last five years. Though they noted insufficient demand from retailers and consumers as somewhat of a barrier to increasing the proportion of local food carried, distributors felt the strongest demand was for local produce and were, thus, most interested in distributing local produce in the future.

Retailer demand

Eighty-five percent of all stores surveyed currently carry some local goods. Further, the retailer survey reveals a strong interest to carry more local goods among grocery stores of all sizes. With

40% of all retailers indicating a very high or high interest in increasing the amount of local foods in their inventory, the retailer arm of the food system shows promise as the central means by which to make more local foods available to consumers. Notably, the number of requests received per month was positively correlated with the retailers' level of interest in increasing the number of local goods carried. This suggests that retailers respond to requests for local foods from customers and work to meet the demand.

Turning barriers into opportunities: the food system of tomorrow

Although our research points to an articulated demand for a more localized food system within southeastern Michigan, system participants in each sector identified key barriers to increasing the proportion of locally-grown foods that stay in the region. Meeting the demand for a more localized food system in the region will require creative, collaborative action to turn the barriers into opportunities. Working together, organizations like FSEP, other food system-focused groups, new and existing entrepreneurs and local governments have the capacity to make many of the necessary changes.

At either end of the complex food system, producers and consumers in the region were most interested in a localizing their food sales and purchasing. In order to strengthen the local food system, it is critical to address the barriers identified by these key stakeholders.

Consumers' barriers and opportunities

The barriers articulated by consumers to purchasing local foods center around, in order of strength, **availability**, **convenience** and **information**. Based on our analysis, consumers in southeastern Michigan will be likely to purchase more local foods should they be available and advertised at common, convenient points of purchase. While local foods are already available at other retail outlets like farmers' markets, food cooperatives and farm stands, we feel that the greatest potential for increasing the consumption of local foods lies within grocery stores and supermarkets.

Currently, American households spend an average of $5,375 per year on food, which results in roughly $325 billion spent on foods eaten at home and $239 billion for foods eaten outside of the home (Hamm 2004). Thus, if consumers were to begin spending even a small percentage of their weekly food budget toward local foods, the local food system and local economy would likely experience significant stimulation (Hamm 2004). As concerns about the rising incidence of obesity of other related diseases such as diabetes grow, locally produced foods can also offer fresh, healthy and nutritious alternatives to foods preserved with waxes or other chemical substances or processed with less healthful additives (Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture 2004).

Producers' barriers and opportunities

Where there is a clear demand among producers to increase their participation in the local food system, there are notable challenges to participation that must be addressed by local food system advocates like FSEP. Among the producers surveyed, the key barriers to selling more products locally included the lack of local **processing facilities**, the **time** it takes to sell locally and the lack of **distribution system** for local products. These three barriers are interrelated and aptly reflect the interdependence of the food system where producers are limited to the available services and priorities of processors and distributors. Within the existing infrastructure, there are few options for food processing – making locally-grown raw agricultural products more useful to local consumers – and for locally-focused distribution of both raw and processed products. These primary barriers also indicate a lack of infrastructure necessary for the direct sale and marketing of their products. Most notably, however, the farmers' feedback relates directly to all of the other components of the food system: distribution, processing, retail and consumption.

Similar concerns regarding the existing local food system infrastructure were voiced by farmers within the five-county region during the spring and summer of 2006 when the Local Food Master's Project Team, in conjunction with the Food System Economic Partnership, administered a survey to grain producers within the southeastern Michigan region (see Chapter 5: FSEP Grain Producer Survey). In a question about alternative market barriers, grain farmers rated "lack of near-by facilities for delivering harvested grains" as the second highest barrier out of 15 options. Further, a statistical analysis of the data collected from this survey exhibited a shift in "actual" verses "desired" marketing methods for the use of grain elevators, direct to processor sales, and direct to consumer sales. This suggests there is a strong desire among grain farmers to shift their method of sales to a more local, direct method, such as selling directly to a processor or consumer in the region.

Information and communication about the local food system and opportunities that exist was also a key barrier for producers. The survey found that many farmers are not familiar with local outlets through which to market and sell their products. This finding is likely the result of both a current lack of outlets as well as insufficient information and communication about local direct marketing opportunities that do exist. For instance, there are 23 farmers' markets in the five-county region and the number is growing. Each county has at least one market, and Lenawee, Monroe, Washtenaw and Wayne counties each have more than three markets. Based on these numbers, it is likely that most farmers are within a reasonable proximity to a market where they might be able to sell directly to consumers.

Farmers' voluntary written comments point to a handful of other issues that local food system organizers should consider. One is how to sufficiently and efficiently market local foods. Some farmers noted the importance of addressing national and local policies that may inhibit the ability to develop the food system. Most farmers in our survey felt that current markets and farming policies do not allow for sustained farming viability. Some of the farmers cited the need for market infrastructures and opportunities that promote locally grown products and sustainable agriculture. They also cited the need to see a "critical mass" of consumer demand to provide sufficient financial incentive for shifting to a more locally-oriented business strategy.

A number of interesting barriers were identified by the intermediate sectors of the food system revealing a strong need for improved communication among sectors.

Processors' barriers and opportunities

For processors, barriers to increasing the proportion of local foods they process include **price**, **communicating** with local producers, and **insufficient demand from distributors**. Processors acknowledge the demand from consumers and retailers, and do not see this as an important barrier to the processing of local foods. Further, if this consumer demand maintains momentum, an expected entrepreneurial gap would likely emerge to fulfill this demand. For both processors and distributors, a critical mass of demand from consumers as well as supply from local producers must often be in place in order to create change in an existing business or to spur the creation of a new business.

Given the few processing facilities in the five county region, food processing is an area that shows great promise for the development of new businesses. This will also open up the possibility of developing on-farm processing that will give farmers more opportunities for value-added processing and business strategies that, at times, come with significant financial benefits. An important factor in the development of local food processing is the need to make stronger connections with local producers and local distributors. This may be the role of a broker or possibility a paid position through MSU Extension or FSEP to facilitate these relationships. There is a slightly higher demand for local produce and diary, though there was significant demand for each category of food, depending upon the specialization of the processing company.

Distributors' barriers and opportunities

Among distributors, **communicating** with local producers, the amount of **time** it takes to accommodate local foods and the perceived **lack of consumer and retailer demand** for local products were the top reasons against distributing more local foods. No particular barriers stood out from the rest or produced a strong response from our respondents, however, about half of them verified several of the barriers commonly cited in the literature. Not all distributors felt that there was a huge demand from customers generally, or retail customers in particular, for local food. However, distributors will typically work to meet the demands of their customers. If demands among major and institutional buyers like grocery stores, schools and hospitals increase, there will likely be an increase in the interest and effort on the part of distributors to work with local producers.

Local produce was the clearest opportunity for development in the local food distribution system. Infrastructure to more efficiently connect producers and growers with local distributors is needed. Building a better system for connecting local producers and distributors may help mitigate the barriers of time and trouble locating producers. Locally-grown and produced varieties of produce, dairy and grain products that appeal to immigrant populations, including Indian and Middle Eastern, may also be an avenue to explore.

Retailers' barriers and opportunities

Retailers reported **insufficient supply/seasonality**, **price**, and **connecting with producers** as the largest barriers to increasing local foods in their inventory. We can address the barrier of overall supply in two ways: The first requires aggregating information about local producers in the region to determine the volume of foods we have to supply to local retailers. When we pool this information we may find that there is more supply, through more connections, than we are currently aware. The second way to address this issue is to encourage more individuals to choose local agricultural entrepreneurial endeavors. In fact, reviving agriculture as a viable career choice is a long-term goal of many local food systems.

Seasonality is a highly-rated barrier because it is difficult, if not impossible, to stock most local produce year round. Customers who expect to obtain virtually any product when they walk through the door of a market largely influence retailers' high rating of seasonality as a challenge. However, we must be sure to stress to retailers and consumers that eating local foods often implies eating items when they are in season in Michigan. That is, most local fruits and vegetables will only be available to local food retailers at certain times during the year. When those foods are not available, retailers can either: 1) put less energy and focus into selling those foods, or 2) they can import those foods during the off-season. What *is* important is the need for retailers to commit to buying from local producers when the products are available.

It is also important to stress the more consistent availability of meat, dairy, and most grain products (stored), which are less dependent upon growing seasons. In fact, a prudent marketing approach to local foods may be an initial focus on marketing produce during the spring and summer months and highlighting local meat and dairy during the winter season.

Because local food infrastructure including processing and distribution systems are not currently in place, some local goods are more expensive than conventional goods, making price an important barrier to retailers. However, local does not always mean more expensive and, in fact, some goods or outlets such as farmers' markets are actually cheaper than traditionally distance-sourced products. As we strengthen our local food system infrastructure and the demand for local goods goes up, we may even see decreases in some local food prices over time.

Southeastern Michigan can address the barrier of connecting retailers with producers through working together as a region and a food system to facilitate the sharing of information on local producers and time saving techniques. Organizations like FSEP are working to build a database of local producers that is easily and freely accessible to local retailers. Actors in a food system may also find it advantageous to serve as a broker or liaison between local producers and consumers. A drawback of this option, however, is the potential loss of community connections, which are forged by continued direct contact between the consumers and producers as they speak to each other directly.

Our finding that local retailers who are interested in carrying local foods did *not* find consumer demand to be a barrier is encouraging. This reveals the strong base of consumer demand that is necessary to drive the system as a whole, in addition to retailers' willingness to change practices in response to this demand. Likewise, the finding that retailers who carry more local foods did not find connecting with producers to be a major challenge assuages the barrier of connecting with producers perceived by those retailers that have not yet worked to forge those relationships.

Recommendations to strengthen the local food system

One of the primary goals of this study was to elucidate key barriers to strengthening the local food system in order to inform efforts to overcome them. These regional findings are consistent with conclusions of studies and reports conducted in other areas of the state and we can look to these and other reports to identify some potential strategies for addressing and eliminating these challenges. As such, we have listed several recommendations below that we feel will result in significant improvements to the existing food system in southeastern Michigan as well as new opportunities to create healthy and self-sustaining communities within the region.

Improve communication among sectors/food system actors

One key finding of our research was that there is a notable disconnect between consumer and producer demand for local food and the perceived lack of demand among food system intermediaries including processors, distributors and retailers. In our opinion, this is likely the crux of the food system challenges currently experienced within southeastern Michigan. Producers have demonstrated an interest in producing more local foods and consumers have indicated that they would purchase these items if they were more available and convenient to purchase. Yet, supermarket purchasers do not recognize that demand exists for local products.

There are many challenges for intermediaries within the food system, as noted previously within this discussion; however, we recognize a clearly defined role for food system advocates in working to educate these key stakeholders of the importance linkages they may provide within the existing local food system. Many grocery stores within southeastern Michigan are owned by large corporations that may or may not be located within the region. Thus, it will be essential to increase communications with these stakeholders and begin to bring these players to the table. Corporate purchasing policies will not be changed easily, but local food advocates must be willing to seek out the appropriate audiences and make the case for increasing local food availability within the region.

To achieve this, producers must also be willing to come to the table to address production and supply challenges that have historically been obstacles for partnerships with large retail outlets. Our team believes that a great opportunity exists for local producers and entrepreneurs within the region, but technical assistance and education will also be necessary to achieve this outcome. The Michigan State University Extension can play a critical role in this regard.

Support development of local food processing facilities

Many producers surveyed and interviewed noted the lack of processing facilities as a key barrier to a local food system. In fact, producers rated "lack of local processing facilities" as the most significant barrier to their future participation in the local food system (mean=3.45, n=38). Meat producers lamented the paucity of small-scale processors in the area and noted the relatively high per head cost of small-scale livestock processing due in part to the lack of competition. In the multi-sector survey, processors indicated that the key barriers to processing more local foods were price, lack of interaction or correspondence with local producers and insufficient demand from distributors. In general, the research team recommends both the facilitation of communication between producers and processors, as well as the development of local food processing facilities in southeastern Michigan. These facilities may include both on-farm processing, and autonomous food-related businesses.

Local products can also include mildly processed food products such as jams and sauces, made from local agricultural products. The benefits from processing local foods are two-fold: 1) products have a longer shelf life and are easy to serve during the off-season, thus allowing for a season extension for many varieties of local produce, and 2) in some cases, processing local foods is a valued-added opportunity to farmers or local processors, allowing them to reap a greater financial return from their products while providing the ability to tap into additional markets (Harmon 2004).

Develop local food distribution systems

Like local processing facilities, without local distribution networks the regional food system will experience a break in the local foods chain-of-custody. This critical distribution link poses the need for creative solutions and innovative delivery methods. The following are a few possible solutions: 1) opportunities may open up for local entrepreneurs to begin *new* ventures in the local food distribution business; 2) in some cases, minor adjustments to *existing* distribution channels could prove an effective way of hiring local distributors to move and broker local products; 3) with a critical mass of demand for a distributor in a given area, farmers and processors may strategize to collectively hire a local distributor to meet their common needs concerning transport and brokering; 4) while many national distributors' current practices are not conducive to local distribution and transportation, some businesses' pick-up and drop-off points may be fairly close to local producers' routes and, therefore, would not take much extra time and resources for a larger distributor to take on.

Promote local foods through advertising and education

Food system advocates must continue to play a role in helping to educate consumers of the benefits of purchasing local foods and the power of their pocketbooks. If consumers begin to ask for more local food items at their supermarkets, purchasers will begin to realize the potential of local food sales. This will not happen overnight; however, our research shows that large chains may be more amenable to working to overcome the challenges of offering local foods if they can recognize a net gain in return.

The fact that we found a correlation between the number of requests received for local products and retailer interest in carrying more local food, reinforces the importance of the vocalization of consumer interests in creating change in our food system. The more consumers ask for local goods, the more retailers will engage with our community to create forums to sell local goods. Therefore, it is imperative that consumers ask for local goods as often as possible.

Additional in-store advertising is also likely to increase the purchases of local food items. Branding programs like *Select Michigan* have been successful in Grand Rapids and a few locations in Detroit in advertising locally-grown products in grocery stores (Michigan Department of Agriculture 2006). Our research strongly supports the expansion of the *Select Michigan* program throughout southeastern Michigan to meet consumer demand for local produce, in particular.

We would urge that local food advocates focus efforts on increasing local produce in grocery and markets, since people tend to identify local food with farm produce before meat, dairy, and grain. Simultaneously, local food advocates and retailers can work together to raise awareness about the many other local products available beyond produce.

Areas for Future Research

This research has identified a number of opportunities to strengthen the existing food system within southeastern Michigan. However, our survey and other research are but one more step on the on-going path of research that will guide and propel the local food movement in southeastern Michigan and throughout the country. Our work was limited by time and resources, but as we conducted our research and analyzed our findings, we noted several areas of further research that we hope others will soon conduct. Some areas in need of further investigation include:

- Expand upon processor survey research. As local food processing presents important opportunities for the localized food system, we need to learn more from processors in order to more precisely identify opportunities and strategies.
- Study ethnic and socioeconomic differences in consumer habits and demand for local foods. Members of different ethnic and social groups may have particular interests and needs with respect to local foods. More information is needed to assess and meet the needs of all groups.
- Identify opportunities to differentiate marketing. Since different populations may demand local foods in different ways and for different reasons, various marketing and education strategies may be needed to effectively connect supply and demand.
- Identify local, state and national policy connections and influences on local food systems. Our research was intentionally focused on analyzing trends, interests and barriers within the region. We did not have time to investigate the myriad ways that existing policies may enable or constrain food system localization and the ways future policies may be used to support or limit the development of the local food economy. Such information will be necessary to inform future food system change priorities and strategies.
- Conduct focus groups within each food system sector. Often, surveys are followed by focus groups to gather more in-depth information from stakeholders and shed light on interesting or puzzling survey findings. Future research teams could convene several focus groups and use our survey findings as a starting point for dialogue.
- Use geospatial analysis to identify specific needs, challenges and opportunities for various segments of the population. Geographic Information Systems (GIS) present powerful tools for analyzing spatial information and trends. GIS may be used to identify clusters or networks of food system activity that may be expanded upon; identify

"holes" with respect to various food-related services; identify opportunities for Agricultural Tourism, or agtourism, in the region; or analyze the feasibility of food distribution systems. These are just a few potential uses of GIS software and we encourage partnering with county GIS experts to consider further the many ways GIS can be used to achieve food system change goals.

- Investigate how stronger local food systems can address food security and food access issues. In recent years, new farmers' markets have opened up in a few Detroit communities that have limited access to fresh healthy foods. In partnership with the Farmers' Market Nutrition Program that allows individuals to use food stamps to buy fresh, local produce, many families have been able to meet their food needs with local produce. Research and creativity will likely reveal additional opportunities to build "Farm to City" connections, supporting local farmers and filling gaps left by the dominant food system.
- Develop local distribution solutions. More research of successful models and creative collaborations among food system stakeholders are needed to fill-in one of the key "missing links" in the effort to localized the food system, distribution. FSEP is currently working on a potential local food distribution business that would be run by several partners or as a cooperative.

We hope that FSEP, its partners and others stakeholders in the food system will undertake these and other research endeavors in the coming years. Solid research combined with informed and persistent action and advocacy are key ingredients in the recipe for local food system change. We hope our contributions to the growing body of knowledge about local food systems will prove useful as the movement charges ahead.