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A Framework For
Food & Farming
In Northwest Michigan



**FRAMEWORK
FOR OUR FUTURE**
A REGIONAL PROSPERITY PLAN

2014 REPORT

A *Framework for Food and Farming in Northwest Michigan* was prepared as part of the *Framework for Our Future: A Regional Prosperity Plan for Northwest Michigan*, a regional resource for local governments, community organizations working to meet local goals. The *Framework* was developed as part of Michigan's Regional Prosperity Initiative, as initiated by Governor Rick Snyder and signed into law as a part of the FY 2014 budget. The Regional Prosperity Initiative encourages local private, public, and non-profit partners to identify regionally aligned growth and investment strategies for the State of Michigan to support, not the other way around. It also provides the framework for streamlining state services and highlighting the regionally defined goals and strategies that will further Northwest Michigan's success.

The *Framework for Our Future* includes information and tools that can help stakeholders address issues such as housing, transportation, land use, energy, arts and culture, workforce and economic development, community health, food and farming systems, and natural resources. Data and information will help communities supplement their local deliberation,

planning, and decision-making processes, and will help to identify the steps a community can take to address a local issue, if desired.

The *Framework for Our Future* was developed by the Northwest Michigan Council of Governments (NWMCOG) with input and partnerships from a variety of community stakeholders and members of the public. An intensive community outreach process featured a wide variety of opportunities for participation from the public: events, surveys, focus groups, online forums, and public discussions were held region-wide throughout the process. Outreach activities and engagement opportunities included a series of community dialogues, interviews, and other events designed to obtain input from individuals with disabilities, minorities, youth, those in poverty, and others that have historically been underrepresented in planning processes. Public input was used to identify priority community issues and concerns, and to help develop goals, strategies, and actions.

The goals, strategies, and actions included in the *Framework* were built upon public input heard throughout the process, as well as on existing

and adopted goals from local plans and planning initiatives. Strategies are not intended as recommendations, nor do they supersede and local government decision-making. Moreover, the *Framework* is not intended for, nor shall it be used for, infringing upon or the taking of personal property rights enjoyed by the residents of Northwest Michigan. Rather, the information included in the *Framework* is instead intended to serve as a compilation of best practices to help guide local decision-makers who would like to address the issues identified in the *Framework*.



FRAMEWORK FOR OUR FUTURE

A REGIONAL PROSPERITY PLAN
FOR NORTHWEST LOWER MICHIGAN

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➔ Food & Farming: Introduction

Food and farming are cornerstones of Northwest Michigan's economy and quality of life. In addition to accounting for millions of dollars in exports of fruit, potatoes, dairy, and Christmas trees, the region's farms play an important role in tourism – one of the region's largest economic engines. And a growing interest in and demand for local food is creating new business opportunities as farmers and food producers innovate and diversify, creating new job opportunities and expanding markets.

Yet, despite the importance of agricultural businesses to the region's economy, a number of pressures combine to impact the financial viability of many farming operations:

- Rapid population increases have put agricultural land under significant pressure for development, raising the value of farmland – and the costs of doing business. As farms are subdivided into residential development, farmland is removed from production; and once it's taken out of production, land is rarely returned to farming.
- Most farms in Northwest Michigan are operated as small family farms that face additional economic pressure as the size and scale of farming operations continue to increase. To remain competitive in the face of financial pressures created statewide, national, and global food policy, many small farms are diversifying, looking for new markets, or adding value to their products through on-site processing. However, traditional lending parameters mean that these new ventures are often difficult to finance; and the region is lacking important food system infrastructure that these businesses need, such as smaller-scale packaging, wholesaling, or distributing.



Food and farming are a large component of the region's economy and a cherished aspect of its rural character.

- The area's agricultural economy is also experiencing shifts in its workforce. As significant numbers of farmers prepare to retire without passing farms on to heirs, new farmers face high start-up costs that create barriers to establishing themselves in agriculture. Without new farmers to replace retiring farmers, significant acreages of farmland, and valuable skill sets, are endangered.
 - Many farms in Northwest Michigan depend on a skilled migrant workforce. However, immigration-related issues are having impacts on farms and workers throughout the region. Farmers report difficulties in finding workers with the appropriate skills, which threatens their ability to grow labor-intensive crops.
- zoning to support and encourage agricultural innovation, combined with nontraditional lending opportunities that provide needed capital, can foster new business opportunities. Land use and financial policies designed to preserve active and productive farmland can reduce development pressure and related impacts. Workforce development and apprenticeship programs offer opportunities to build and support a new generation of farmers, while supports for local food systems can increase the availability and affordability of fresh, healthy food for residents. *A Framework for Food & Farming in Northwest Michigan* identifies these and other ways that local zoning, incentives, and community initiatives can support and encourage farming operations while also ensuring food access and security in Northwest Michigan.

Local priorities and policies have tremendous impacts on these issues, which affect the continued viability of the region's food and farming economy. For instance,

Food & Farming: Enhancing Economic Prosperity

Food and farming-related activity in Northwest Michigan is a cornerstone of our economic prosperity:

- Agriculture contributes millions of dollars annually to the economy, in sales and related activity.
- Many visitors travel to the region to take part in agricultural tourism activities, such as visiting wineries and farm markets.
- New food and farming market trends present important opportunities for job creation and business expansion.

➔ Agricultural Land & Production

Farmland defines, in significant measure, Northwest Michigan's landscape and sense of place. Farms, fields, woodlands, and orchards create the rural character that is beloved by residents and visitors alike, and drives, in part, the region's rapid population growth and tourism industry. In addition, the region's farms produce a diverse range of crops and products, ranking in the state's top 10 producers of sweet and tart cherries, Christmas trees, and milk.

Communities region-wide recognize the profound economic impact created by the region's farmland. Local master plans highlight the importance of farms and farmland to local economies, and the public consistently prioritizes the preservation of farms and open space. However, farmers and farmland experience significant pressures in the form of residential development demand and changing economic conditions that threaten the profitability and viability of many farms.

Current Land Use & Production

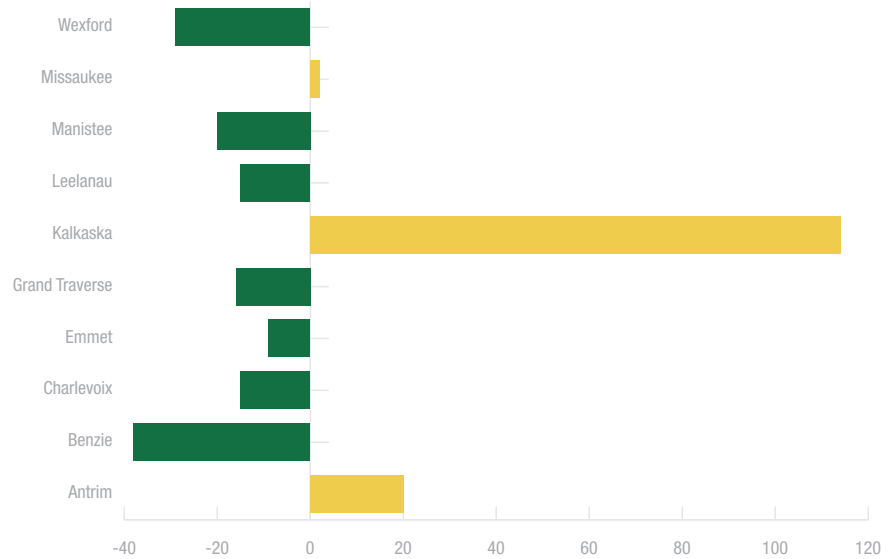
The US Agricultural Census reports that Northwest Michigan's agricultural land includes over 486,000 acres of cropland, pastureland, and woodlands and makes up about 16% of the region's land area.

Michigan's agricultural production is the second most diverse in the nation, following only California; and farms in Northwest Michigan make important contributions to this agricultural diversity:

LAND IN FARMS BY COUNTY, 2012

LOCATION	ACRES OF LAND IN FARMS, 2012	% OF LAND AREA IN FARMS, 2012
Antrim	64,167	21%
Benzie	20,646	10%
Charlevoix	37,540	14%
Emmet	39,805	13%
Grand Traverse	54,558	18%
Kalkaska	25,819	7%
Leelanau	59,481	27%
Manistee	44,298	13%
Missaukee	99,510	28%
Wexford	40,333	11%
Michigan	486,157	16%

% CHANGE IN LAND IN FARMS, 1974-2012



Source: 2012 US Agricultural Census

- About 114,000 acres of the region's farmland are comprised of woodlands, making up about 4% of the region's total land area and nearly a quarter of the region's farmland. Much of that wooded farmland is planted in Christmas trees, which act as an important export for the region. Missaukee County is ranked first in Michigan for acres in and sales of Christmas trees, and sixth nationwide for Christmas tree sales. Wexford and Manistee counties also rank in Michigan's top 10 in terms of Christmas tree acreage and sales.
- The climate and soils of parts of Northwest Michigan are ideally suited to fruit production, and farmland near Lake Michigan coastal areas produce significant percentages of the Michigan's sweet and tart cherries and plums and prunes. About 37,000 acres of land in Northwest Michigan are planted in orchards—accounting for a third of the state's total acreage in orchards—and several counties produce significant volumes of fruit. Antrim, Benzie, Leelanau, Grand Traverse, and Manistee counties rank in the state's top 10 tart cherry producers, while Leelanau, Grand Traverse, and Antrim counties are ranked in the top 3 tart cherry revenues nationwide.
- Vegetables, particularly potatoes, are another important regional export. Antrim and Kalkaska County produce significant volumes of potatoes, both ranking in the state's top ten.
- Over 1,600 farms in the region raise livestock, with beef cattle and laying chickens (making up the most commonly raised livestock. A majority of livestock production, which includes dairy cattle, occurs in Missaukee County, which ranks fourth in Michigan for the value of sales from milk.¹

Production Practices

Access to fertile soils, and proper soil monitoring and management, are central to food production. Healthy and high-quality soils are necessary for agricultural production, and they also provide a wide range of other ecological benefits such as improved water quality. Farmland plays an important role in groundwater recharge and in preventing stormwater runoff. Yet, runoff and nutrients associated with agricultural activity have been identified as one of the largest sources of water pollution in the Northwest Michigan region.

Organic production offers an approach to farming that mitigates some of these pollution concerns. Organic farming is defined by the US Department of Agriculture as an "ecological production management system that promotes and enhances biodiversity, biological cycles, and soil biological activity." It is based on minimal use of off-farm inputs and on management practices that restore, maintain and enhance ecological harmony. Organic farms rely on techniques

such as crop rotation, green manure, compost, and biological pest control, with limitations on certain farming methods like synthetic fertilizers and hormones or antibiotic use in livestock.

In addition to achieving important ecological benefits, organic farming also offers options for sales to other, nontraditional markets, with opportunities for increased profits or revenues. About 1% of farms in Northwest Michigan, are identified by the agricultural census as being US Department of Agriculture certified organic.² However, because the process for certification as an organic farm is rigorous and in some cases burdensome, some farms that practice these methods of farming in the region don't apply for organic certification status, but instead market their products as "natural."

Development Pressure & Farmland Fragmentation

Between 1970 – 2010, the region's population has more than doubled. Much of this population increase has been focused in rural areas, driven

by a desire for rural lifestyles and large development lots, and has increased development pressure on agricultural land, which is often attractive for residential development due to scenic views.

Residential development pressure leads to increased land values, resulting in financial pressures for working farms as taxable values increase, while also creating added incentives for selling farmland. As farms struggle to remain financially viable, the financial payoff associated with the sale of farmland for development can lead to the fragmentation of many productive farms, as large parcels are sold to be subdivided and developed. Between 1974-2012, the region lost over 48,000 acres, or 9%, of its total farmland, while the average farm declined in size by 54 acres, or 30%.⁴

In addition to fragmenting farmland, residential development pressure also acts to increase the value of land. Affordable access to farmland is critical for new and expanding farmers; yet, as the cost of farmland increases, so too does the cost associated with farming, particularly for those that are looking to begin or expand a farming operation by purchasing productive farmland.



Purchase of Development Rights

Purchase of Development Rights (PDR) programs are economic development tools designed to retain agricultural businesses. They are voluntary programs that compensate owners of farmland for their willingness to accept a permanent restriction that limits future development of the land for non-agricultural purposes. Landowners are compensated for the fair market value of their land, based on the difference between what it could be sold for on the open market with no restrictions and what it can be sold for as farmland. Independent, professional appraisers determine these values and an agreement is negotiated with the farmer. Once an easement is in place, the landowner may still sell the land on the open market as farmland. All private property rights remain intact. Some of these farmland preservation programs include components to ensure the long-term viability of the farm, through support with business planning and farm succession planning.

Acme Township and Peninsula Township, both in Grand Traverse County, have implemented successful purchase of development rights programs. A PDR program was adopted in Peninsula Township in 1994 when residents voted for a tax millage to support the program. The millage was supported and increased in 2002; the program will extend until 2023. To date, about 4,500 acres of productive farmland has been preserved, with funding from both the Township millage, state grants, and private funding initiatives coordinated by the Grand Traverse Regional Land Conservancy and the American Farmland Trust.

In 2004, Acme Township adopted a Farmland and Open Space Development Rights Ordinance, and voters approved a 10 year millage to fund it. To date, with help from the Grand Traverse Regional Land Conservancy, over 800 acres of farmland have been preserved in Acme Township.

In addition to township-run programs, partners like the Grand Traverse Regional Land Conservancy and the Leelanau Conservancy work with farmers on new approaches to farmland preservation, including PDR-based programs.

Opportunities: Agricultural Land & Production

For rural communities and local governments working to support their local farming economy, there are a number of tools available to help address needs related to agricultural land and production.

A number of zoning techniques can act to alleviate some development pressure while allowing important development or property subdivision options for farmers and property owners. Some communities have considered zoning approaches designed around this goal that includes large minimum lot sizes of 20-40 acres in order to minimize the potential for farmland

right to create additional development or density rights on a given parcel of land, in return for preserving portions of open space or farmland on another piece of property.

Some communities also operate purchase of development rights (PDR) programs, in which farmers are compensated financially for giving up options for development on active farmland. These programs are often funded by a millage, and have worked successfully in communities within the region to permanently protect important farmland while offering added revenue and increased profitability for farmers.

Where purchase of development rights programs are not available, temporary farmland protection agreements can offer additional options for farmers and property owners.

fragmentation. Sliding scale zoning is another option that can be used for that purpose, allowing property owners to split off some small parcels for residential development while preserving larger tracts of the original parcel.

Another technique designed to preserve large acreages of farmland is known as the transfer of development rights. This zoning method allows property owners to acquire the

Where purchase of development rights programs are not available, temporary farmland protection agreements can offer additional options for farmers and property owners. Conservation easements and other conservation agreements may be entered into with community organizations such as land conservancies. Programs may offer cash payments or other benefits on a temporary basis for each acre of land preserved over a given period of time.

➔ Farm Economy & the Regional Food System

Agriculture is a major economic driver in the region, contributing hundreds of millions of dollars in sales annually to the gross regional product, while also driving tourism and stimulating new innovation, entrepreneurialism, and employment.

In 2012, the region's agricultural industry exported over \$500 million dollars and accounted for 1% of the region's gross regional product.⁵ Regional agricultural sales were approximately equal to the value of sales in the finance/insurance and amounted to half of all accommodation/food service sales and about 42% of all retail sales. However, these

numbers don't account for the impacts of agriculture on other businesses. The US Department of Agriculture – Environmental Research Service estimates that in 2012, each dollar of agricultural exports stimulated another \$1.27 in business activity in 2012—resulting in an additional \$636 million in economic activity for a total economic output of \$1.1 billion dollars.

In addition, agriculture has profound impacts on tourism. Many of the region's thousands of visitors are attracted in part by the region's rural character, rolling hills of orchards and fields, and agriculturally-based attractions like wineries and farm

markets. The impact of agriculture on tourism continues to grow, as more farms offer agri-tourism opportunities throughout the region.

Retaining and enhancing this agricultural economy is paramount for many communities in the region. Over 60% of all locally-adopted master plans in the region included specific language relative to preserving farmland and/or enhancing the agricultural economy.⁶ Yet, many farms—particularly smaller, family-operated farms—struggle to remain economically viable in the face of global economic pressures, shifting national policies, financing needs, and

other challenges. Steadily increasing percentages of farms in the region report net losses: in 2012, two-thirds of farms in Northwest Michigan reported net losses, compared to 51% in 2002. Meanwhile, 62% of primary farm operators worked off the farm in 2012, implying that additional income was needed to support nearly two-thirds of the region's farms. Many farm operators are working to overcome these challenges through new business ventures, diversification, or value-added activities that can add revenue and support ongoing farming operations.

Smaller-Scale Farms, Diversification, & Entrepreneurial Agriculture

94% of farms in Northwest Michigan are operated as family farms, and about two out of every three farms in the region have annual sales below \$100,000.⁷ These smaller, family-run farms are likely to face additional economic pressures as the size and scale of farming operations continue to increase. In order to remain competitive, many

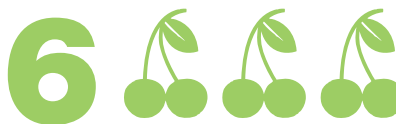
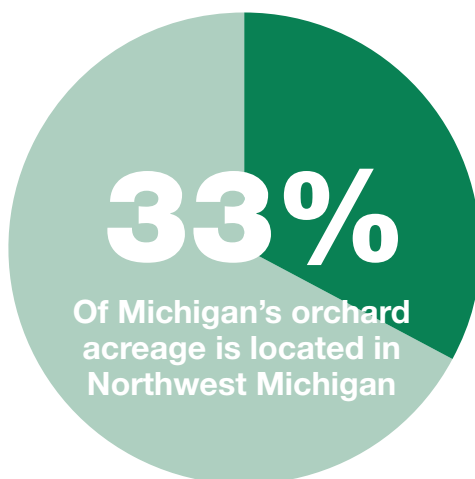
small farms in the region are working to enhance their profitability by diversifying, or by identifying and working with new markets. Examples abound of farms in the region that have successfully transitioned to serve local markets, process produce into value-added products, act as event or tourism destinations, or specialize in niche markets. The 2012 Agricultural Census indicated that a total of over 650 farms reported direct sales to consumers, had income from agritourism, sold value-added products, and/or used a Community-Supported Agriculture (CSA) model to sell farm products. Further, in 2013, Taste the Local Difference listed 500 farms that provide direct farm-to-consumer service in the 10-county region. Local markets like Community-Supported Agriculture (CSA) operations and direct-to-consumer sales provide opportunities for farmers to tap into a large and growing customer base while eliminating transportation and other distribution-related costs. Agri-tourism, meanwhile, provides opportunities to enhance or expand revenues beyond product sales. Orchards with cider mills, vineyards with wineries and tasting rooms, corn mazes, and farm markets

have all positioned themselves to both contribute to and take advantage of the region's tourist economy.

These new market avenues can increase a farm's profitability and incomes while attracting new farmers that see opportunities in emerging markets. Diversification and innovation may create opportunities to earn additional revenue on smaller acreages. While the size of farms has shrunk substantially in the region since 1974, the number of farms in the region has increased by 20%.⁸

Despite the opportunities available in new local food markets, these new, innovative farming operations often face difficulties in the form of policy barriers or infrastructure gaps. For example, agri-tourism activities like events, on-farm restaurants or tasting rooms, or processing may not be allowed by local zoning that is designed to accommodate only traditional agricultural activities in agricultural districts.

Northwest Michigan's agricultural harvest accounts for significant proportions of the state's total tart cherry and Christmas tree production.



NW Michigan counties ranking among the state's top 10 tart cherry producers by sales



NW Michigan counties ranking among the state's top 10 Christmas tree producers by sales & acreage

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Further, gaps in local and regional food system infrastructure mean that new agricultural outlets often struggle to meet distribution and processing needs in getting their products to local markets. As many farms seek to expand or enhance their businesses through diversification, new markets, or value-added products, it is imperative that the appropriate distribution, processing, or wholesaling infrastructure is in place to support these new ventures. But many local and regional food producers find that the necessary processing, distribution, and storage facilities are missing. Needs for food system infrastructure including processing facilities for meat, cold storage, and facilities for freezing and storing local produce are identified as food system gaps by stakeholders in the region.

In addition, farms can face challenges in marketing their locally-grown products to the community through established retail outlets. Supermarkets, which are the primary retail outlet used by most consumers for food purchases, come with a number of challenges—such as large volume requirements or seasonality issues—for producers looking to sell their products to local consumers. As a result, because the nation's food system operates largely at a global scale, much of the region's agricultural harvest is exported out of the region for processing. It is typically easier to find produce or other food products from other parts of the world than it is to purchase fruits or vegetables grown just a few miles away. Added infrastructure for processing, distribution, wholesaling, and related activities that is designed around local and regional needs can help increase the affordability and accessibility of locally-produced foods; but the data, feasibility studies, and policies needed to support the creation of this infrastructure is largely lacking.

Local Food Marketing & Market Channels

Locally-produced food is growing as a priority for many individuals and families throughout the country, the state, and the region. Recognition that

263

FARMS MARKETING
PRODUCTS DIRECTLY
TO RETAIL OUTLETS

274

FARMS PRODUCING AND
SELLING VALUE-ADDED
PRODUCTS

48

FARMS MARKETING
PRODUCTS THROUGH
CSAS

68

FARMS WITH
AGRI-TOURISM /
RECREATION

Source: 2012 US Agricultural Census

local food purchases help to support local and regional economies, while also providing health benefits, is contributing to increased demand for local food. Many small farms in the region are working to enhance their profitability by marketing and selling their products directly to consumers or local retail outlets in order to meet this demand. However, because of missing food system infrastructure, it can be difficult for farms to reach consumers, many of whom purchase food in large supermarkets that may or may not sell or advertise locally-grown products. Food and farming stakeholders have stressed the need to raise awareness of what, when, where, and how consumers can purchase local food products.

Additionally, producers, processors, distributors, and other stakeholders struggle with a lack of data that allows for measurement of local product sales trends. This data is critical in developing new initiatives and in obtaining financing for new business ventures, but, because of the diverse outlets and types of sales transactions, developing and tracking reliable measures is a challenge.

Financing

As many smaller-scale farms grow and expand, access to loans or other financial capital is often needed in order to support new business growth or markets. But the scale of these farm operations and the relatively short history of their local and regional market development don't provide the information and benchmarks that lenders need to finance their growing business ventures. Research conducted in Michigan as part of the Financing Farming in the US project identified a number of needs related to capital for farm-related businesses—as well as needs for lenders. In order to assess risk and investment decisions, lenders need established, reliable metrics and benchmarks; however, data relative to new and emerging agricultural enterprises is often not available. Without adequate data, some new or expanding farms are unable to obtain needed financing to support their operations.

Opportunities: Farm Economy

While many agricultural economic issues have roots in larger national and global trends, local governments and other community stakeholders can work to address local and regional food system needs through policies, incentives, and partnerships. Additionally, a number of local strategies can create needed supports for local and regional markets that enhance the profitability of small-scale farms.

Value-added agricultural activities that offer important avenues for farmers and processors may be encouraged or supported by local zoning that permits non-traditional agricultural activities to occur on farms or in agricultural districts. Zoning can also help to accommodate food system infrastructure needs and new innovation, by allowing for and encouraging the development of food hubs and food innovation districts. A growing number of food hubs nationwide are working to connect local food producers to local and regional retail outlets, while food innovation districts expand on the idea of food hubs, acting as a geographically-concentrated center of activity around entrepreneurial agriculture. Local planning and zoning can lay the groundwork

for food hubs or food innovation districts. Economic development tools such as downtown development authorities or revolving loan funds can also provide financial tools or incentives to help develop or support these needed food system infrastructure components.

Partnerships between producers and others can help farmers tap into local and regional markets, and can help raise awareness of opportunities to “buy local.” Local food initiatives such as the Taste the Local Difference, which provides directories and promotional assistance for local food, can help farmers promote their products to local market, while a consistent local or regional food brand could be effective in communicating where, how, and what local food products can be purchased by consumers. In order to meet the capital needs of smaller-scale farms, participation from a variety of stakeholders is needed, to both identify and address specific entrepreneurial needs. In addition, the use of community development financing institutions (CDFIs) offer non-traditional lending opportunities for food and farming entrepreneurs.

Food Innovation Districts

A food innovation district is a geographic concentration of food-oriented businesses, services, and community activities that local governments can support through planning and economic development initiatives in order to promote a positive business environment, spur regional food systems development, and increase access to local food. Food innovation districts are found in communities throughout Michigan, such as Eastern Market in Detroit and Lansing’s emerging food innovation district in Eastside Neighborhood.

Facilities in a food innovation district may include food processing or distribution infrastructure—such as warehouses, packaging plants, and distributors—along with retail outlets, community-oriented services and activities, and restaurants. When these uses are concentrated in a single location, food producers, distributors,

and other businesses are able to easily find customers, new market outlets, and other opportunities that create the synergy needed to grow businesses and enhance profitability.

Local governments can support these districts through planning and zoning approaches that allow and encourage their development, while economic incentives offered through downtown development authorities or revolving loan funds can provide financial resources and support.

Food Innovation Districts: An Economic Gardening Tool, developed by the Northwest Michigan Council of Governments and the MSU Center for Regional Food Systems, provides information, tools, and step-by-step worksheets for local governments, community organizations, and others working to put this idea into practice.

➔ Agricultural Workforce

The region's agricultural economy depends upon a highly skilled and knowledgeable workforce: farmers and farm laborers possess a unique set of skills needed to grow and harvest a wide variety of agricultural products. These proprietors and laborers make up about 1% of the region's total workforce, accounting for over 5,000 jobs with a total payroll of \$12.8 million.⁹

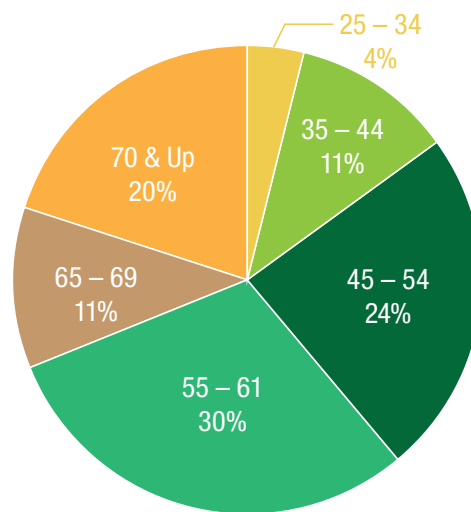
The region's agricultural workforce is experiencing profound changes in makeup: many farmers are reaching or are moving towards retirement age, leading to farm transition and succession issues nationwide. For those that are looking to begin farming outside of a traditional inheritance, meanwhile, a "skills gap," along with financial barriers, can often act as barriers to embarking on a new business venture. At the same time, the nation is struggling to address immigration issues, which have far-reaching impacts on the region's farms, farmers, and migrant and local farmworkers.

Farm Succession

The average principal farm operator in Northwest Michigan is 59 years old. Nearly one in three farmers in Northwest Michigan is over the age of 65, while only 15% of farmers are less than 45 years of age.¹⁰ The aging and impending retirement of many of these farmers will have significant repercussions throughout the region's agricultural industry.

The nation's agricultural heritage has historically revolved around a family farm that is passed on from generation to generation. Yet, according to a 2012 Michigan State University study, 472,000 acres of farmland are currently operated by owners that are planning to leave farming the next 10 years; and only 38% of those farmers that intend to retire in the coming years plan on passing their farm on as one unit to one heir. Additionally, of those aged 75 and

FARM PROPRIETERS BY AGE GROUP
2011



Source: 2011 US Agricultural Census

older who have not identified a successor to their farm, the majority indicated that they planned to sell their farm or leave it idle upon retirement—meaning that significant amounts of productive farmland are at risk of coming out of production.¹¹

For new farmers, high land values and start-up costs make it difficult to raise enough capital to purchase property and begin farming. Without farmers “in the wings” that are financially and otherwise prepared to help farms transition upon the large-scale retirement of farmers in the region, significant shifts in farming and its workforce can occur.

Job Creation, Innovation, & Training

New entrepreneurial agricultural activities present emerging opportunities for job creation. Regionally, employment in agriculture, forestry, fishing, and hunting increased by 7% between 2012 and 2014; and statewide reports indicate that adding opportunities for food production, processing, and other

agricultural-related activities could add significantly more jobs to the state's economy. However, many new and existing agricultural jobs require unique skill sets. Employment opportunities emerging from new agricultural business ventures may require skills or knowledge not available within the local workforce, while those looking for employment may not have the skills or knowledge even for existing farm labor jobs.

Migrant Workforce

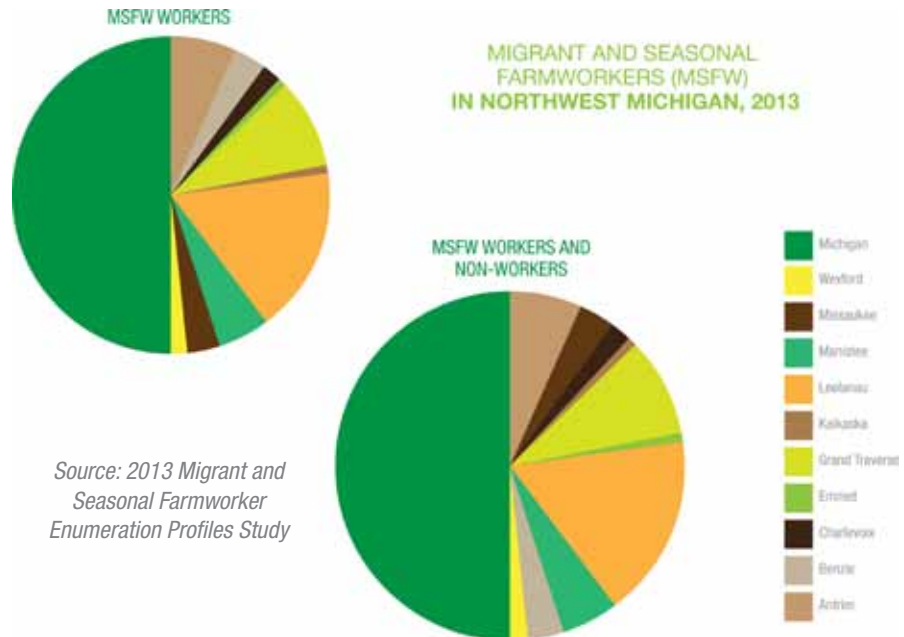
Many farms in Northwest Michigan, particularly fruit farms, depend on a skilled workforce made up primarily of guest and migrant workers. A 2013 State of Michigan study reported that there are about 4,700 migrant laborers engaged in activities related to field agriculture, nursery/greenhouse work, food processing, and reforestation in Northwest Michigan.¹³

While farm laborers have historically followed crops, developing trends indicate that seasonal farm laborers are increasingly likely to stay in one location all year. A 2013 report indicated that some former migrant

workers are beginning to settle in Michigan and travel to other states for agricultural work in order to settle down, improve educational opportunities, and avoid immigration-related travel difficulties. Reports also suggest that seasonal farm work serves as entry-level employment for immigrants and new workers, who eventually move into other employment.

Some of these trends are reflected in the growth of the region's Hispanic or Latino population, a group that has historically provided seasonal agricultural labor in Northwest Michigan. While the Hispanic population remains a small percentage of the region's total population (2%), it is increasing significantly faster than the population as a whole. Between 2000-2010, the number of those identifying themselves as Hispanic or Latino in Northwest Michigan increased by 45%, from 2,815 individuals in 2000 to 4,107 in 2010.¹⁴ The region's overall population, meanwhile, increased by only 6%.

Even as many farmworkers settle throughout Michigan, immigration-related concerns are having impacts on farms throughout the region. Both farmers and undocumented migrant workers face significant issues relative to workers' status. Immigration issues were cited as a concern in the 2013 Profiles Study, with farmworkers



indicating that they may be afraid to move around or apply for services in the fear of deportation for themselves or family members.

Immigration law and related concerns also pose significant obstacles to farmers in the region, with producers reporting a fear of workplace raids and a shortage of farm labor. Migrant workers perform difficult work that requires a unique set of skills; and because skilled labor is needed to harvest many fruit crops, it can be difficult to replace migrant workers with local labor. Farmers report that

the difficulties inherent in working with current guest worker programs create major barriers to finding and employing adequate skilled workers to harvest fruit crops. Some reports indicate that labor shortages and other issues associated with labor are threatening the ability of many fruit farmers to continue to grow labor-intensive crops such as apples and peaches.

Opportunities: Agricultural Workforce

Providing opportunities to prepare and support new farmers and farmworkers will be critical as the region's agricultural workforce changes. Community-led initiatives can help by connecting new would-be farmers with the expertise and capital needed to enter the business. Local governments can also play a role, by creating policies that support the use of farmland for agricultural purposes, thereby keeping land costs at a more manageable level. Agricultural zoning ordinances provide a number of opportunities to address development pressure on farmland, while the preservation of farmland or purchase of development rights can facilitate the transfer of land for purely agricultural purposes.

Coordinating with food and farming operations to offer training for existing and emerging agricultural positions

can help the local workforce develop the skills needed to take advantage of new job opportunities in entrepreneurial agriculture. In addition, apprenticeships to existing farms can help build skills and knowledge among individuals that would like to farm, creating opportunities to grow and expand the region's agricultural workforce as it loses many of its experienced farmers to retirement.

Many issues related to the region's migrant workforce are impacted by national policy. As the nation struggles to address immigration-related concerns, stakeholders and communities can work to build awareness of the needs and impacts of immigration reform on the local agricultural economy in order to ensure a broader understanding of workforce needs and obstacles.

➔ Food Access & Health

Despite the region's strong and diverse agricultural economy, many residents throughout the region struggle to access or afford healthy food. Limited access to healthy food can have major impacts on health, resulting in obesity, diabetes, and related health concerns.

In Northwest Michigan, food access issues are most likely to be centered around the affordability of healthy food. Many lower-income households with tight budgets have little choice but to purchase processed and pre-packaged foods. While more affordable, these foods typically come with higher calories, sodium, and sugar counts. In addition, community input indicates that many families, particularly those living in generational poverty, may lack the knowledge of how to prepare fresh foods.

Healthy Food Access

When individuals lack the financial or other means to prepare healthy foods, many must make food choices that contribute to obesity. Obesity was identified as a top health risk by a number of stakeholders, both in discussions held throughout the Framework process and in community health assessments conducted throughout the region. Approximately one-third of residents living in the region are obese (as defined by an individual body mass index, or BMI, greater than 30) and another one-third are overweight. Youth, minority populations, and people in poverty all

cited obesity as a high-priority health concern: overweight and obesity rates are even higher in minority populations and those living in poverty.

Obesity contributes to increased costs associated with chronic diseases, including diabetes. Data from the Center for Disease Control indicates that the prevalence of diabetes for all but two of the region's ten counties is higher than the prevalence of diabetes at the state level; and rates of diabetes nationally are higher for minority populations and those in poverty (see *A Framework for Community Health in Northwest Michigan* for more information on obesity and diabetes).

Food Insecurity

Above and beyond healthy food access issues, many individuals throughout the region simply lack the resources to afford enough food. Food insecurity is defined by the USDA as a lack of access, at times, to enough food for an

50,000 INDIVIDUALS IN NW MICHIGAN RECEIVING SNAP BENEFITS

20,875 CHILDREN IN NW MICHIGAN ELIGIBLE FOR FREE OR REDUCED LUNCH

27% FOOD-INSECURE PEOPLE IN NW MICHIGAN THAT ARE NOT ELIGIBLE FOR SNAP

16 MARKETS IN NW MICHIGAN ACCEPTING DOUBLE UP FOOD BUCKS

active, healthy life for all household members and limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate foods. Food insecure households are not necessarily food insecure all the time. Rather, food insecurity may reflect a household's need to make trade-offs between important basic needs, such as housing or medical bills, and purchasing nutritionally adequate foods.

In Northwest Michigan, over 40,000 individuals are considered food insecure.¹⁵ On average, about 27% of those individuals are not eligible for the Supplements Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) or other nutrition programs like the Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) program, which provides food assistance to income-eligible families and individuals (see chart). Recent changes to the SNAP Program as part of the 2014 Farm Bill have impacted the program, affecting eligibility and reducing the number of program recipients.

FOOD INSECURITY IN NORTHWEST MICHIGAN

LOCATION	FOOD INSECURITY RATE	# FOOD INSECURE PEOPLE	FOOD INSECURE PEOPLE INELIGIBLE FOR SNAP	AVERAGE COST OF A MEAL
Antrim	13%	3,160	21%	\$3.18
Benzie	14%	3,490	30%	\$3.04
Charlevoix	13%	3,420	32%	\$3.30
Emmet	14%	4,530	34%	\$2.99
Grand Traverse	12%	10,590	34%	\$2.81
Kalkaska	14%	2,330	18%	\$2.78
Leelanau	11%	2,300	36%	\$4.79
Manistee	14%	3,490	27%	\$3.04
Missaukee	14%	2,090	19%	\$2.74
Wexford	15%	5,010	23%	\$2.57
Northwest Michigan	13%	40,410	27%	\$3.12

Source: Map the Meal Gap, Feeding America, 2011. www.feedingamerica.org

Opportunities: Food Access & Health

Food access challenges can be directly impacted by local policy decisions: policy supporters for local food systems and related initiatives can increase the availability of fresh, affordable, and healthy food to residents.

For instance, food innovation districts offer opportunities for producers and food businesses to build and expand local markets, ultimately reducing costs of fresh, local food. These districts may also include activities or uses like nutrition and health classes, community gardens, or other healthy food-based community initiatives that can increase awareness and access to healthy food and lifestyles.

Public schools—although not under the authority of local governments—also have a vital role in ensuring that children have access to healthy food during the school day. School policies that establish nutrition standards in schools and daycare facilities can promote the health and well-being of children. A number of schools in the region participate in farm-to-school programs that provide healthy local food to school cafeterias while providing outlets for local farms.

Poverty & Food Access

Limited access to healthy, affordable food can result in consequences such as hunger, obesity, and related chronic conditions. A number of nutrition programs exist for those below the poverty line; however, many food insecure people in Northwest Michigan may not be eligible for these programs, leaving many individuals dependent, to some extent, on assistance from food pantries.

- The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), formerly known as "food stamps," is the nation's most important anti-hunger program. SNAP benefits can be used by low-income households to purchase food at grocery stores, convenience stores, and some farmers markets and co-op food programs. A temporary boost to the program through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act ended in November 2013, resulting in a reduction in benefits to nearly every household receiving SNAP benefits.
- The Double Up Food Bucks program allows shoppers using a SNAP Bridge Card purchase foods at participating markets to receive an equal amount in Double Up Food Bucks tokens which can be spent on Michigan-grown fruits and vegetables. The program increases the affordability and availability of fresh, healthy, locally-grown foods for low-income households. 16 markets in Northwest Michigan accept Double Up Food Bucks. No markets in Missaukee or Kalkaska counties currently accept Double Up Food bucks.
- A number of school nutrition programs provide healthy food to children through school-based programs. The National School Lunch Program provides free or low-cost lunch to children of income-eligible households and is supplemented by programs including the School Breakfast Program, the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program, Summer Food Service Program, and Child and Adult Care Food Program.
- Food pantries are run by nonprofit organizations such as church groups. They distribute food and other products directly to low-income individuals or households and households in need. Food pantries typically rely on grants and donations in order to purchase and food. They often receive food from food banks, which are storehouses for food and other products that are often distributed by food pantries, but may also provide other services. They may also provide related services, such as advocacy or education, for the community.

The 2014 Farm Bill

The Agricultural Act of 2014, otherwise known as the Farm Bill, is a 5-year farm bill that authorizes services and programs related to nutrition and agriculture, and reforms agricultural policy. Highlights of the bill include:

- A reduction of \$23 billion in total farm bill spending
- A number of reforms to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). Reforms include pilot programs for mandatory work programs, prohibition on advertisement or recruitment for SNAP, and prevention of potential SNAP fraud, abuses, or use by ineligible households
- Restores livestock disaster assistance
- Repeals or consolidates nearly 100 programs administered by the USDA.
- Repeals direct subsidy payments to farmers, focusing savings from that program on crop insurance and limiting producers to risk management tools that offer protection when they suffer significant losses.
- Reduces regulatory barriers for job creators while making investments in land stewardship, rural electric, water, and other infrastructure needs that grow job capacity.
- Limits on payments are reduced, eligibility rules are tightened, and means tests are streamlined to make farm programs more accountable.
- Provides historic reforms to dairy policy by repealing outdated dairy programs, offering instead a new, voluntary margin protection program without imposing government-mandated supply controls
- Reauthorizes and strengthens livestock disaster assistance
- Supports small businesses and beginning farms and ranchers with training and access to capital.
- Provides \$15 million to support rural business development and growth
- Provides \$150 million for waste and wastewater infrastructure
- Reserves 10% of certain programs for regional, long-term investments to promote economic development
- Continues authorization for \$200 million annually for international market development
- Endows \$200 million for a foundation for agricultural research, and doubles the funding for the Specialty Crop Research Initiative to \$80 million annually
- Consolidates conservation programs and links conservation practices to crop insurance premium subsidy for highly erodible lands and wetlands
- Encourages producers and partners to design conservation projects that focus on and address regional priorities.

The 2014 Farm Bill will have impacts on producers, consumers, and communities nationwide. Yet, many of the specifics related to the bill's provisions continue to emerge. Programs details and parameters will be determined by administering agencies, primarily the USDA.

➔ Local Implementation Checklist: Food & Farming

Planning and zoning are important implementation tool for communities that are working to meet food and farming needs. The Local Implementation checklist identifies some examples of how communities in Northwest Michigan and other parts of Michigan have addressed food and farming needs in their local policies. Communities may consider this language, and/or *Framework for Our Future Strategies* when updating their own policies.

Master Plan Goals and Objectives

Support for agriculture is a common theme in master plans throughout the region. Communities throughout the region include master plan goals and objectives to minimize development pressure on farmland, preserve the agricultural economy, increase investment in agricultural businesses, and strengthen the urban/rural connection to provide a regional food system and stable, local employment. Some sample language from masterplans in Northwest Michigan include:

Support the economic vitality, continued operation, and growth of agriculture in the community

- ☐ Formulate and adopt zoning policies that support agriculture and agricultural businesses
- ☐ Consider zoning changes that allow for value-added agriculture, such as farm stands, farmers markets, community-based agricultural businesses, and the like
- ☐ Consider zoning changes that permit agriculture-based tourism and community events

Enhance and support local or regional food system infrastructure development

- ☐ Identify marketing, storage, distribution, and other local or regional food system needs
- ☐ Consider zoning changes that allow for food innovation districts or activities in appropriate areas

Preserve agricultural land for farming

- ☐ Identify and map community farmland characteristics, including locations, type of agricultural enterprise, and crop type, in actively farmed or potential agricultural lands, to identify prime farmlands and/or priority lands for preservation
- ☐ Encourage continued agricultural production on prime soils and active farmland
- ☐ Protect economically viable and/or prime agricultural lands from encroachment and interference by incompatible uses by

clustering new residential development and/or planning for new development in and near existing communities

- ☐ Consider zoning changes that incorporate land division strategies allowing for future residential development while encouraging the continuation of farming and agriculture
- ☐ Identify, support, and encourage the use of agricultural preservation tools, including transfer of development rights zoning options or purchase of development rights programs or funds

Zoning Ordinance Elements

Zoning ordinances are local laws that regulate land and building in order to protect the health, safety, and welfare of all citizens. It helps define how properties are used, what new buildings look like, and how much development can occur in a community.

The degree to which local zoning ordinances encourage and support agriculture varies by community in order to address specific community conditions, needs, and concerns. Local zoning ordinances throughout the region have been adopted to support existing agricultural production, allow for new types of agricultural business, or support food access for all residents. Elements that may achieve these goals include provisions that allow for:

- ☐ Cluster or open space developments that preserve large acreages of farmland or open space
- ☐ Agricultural tourism, such as wineries, event space, or corn mazes
- ☐ Food processing in appropriate areas
- ☐ Food distribution, food hubs, and food innovation districts
- ☐ Small-scale urban agriculture, such as backyard chickens or bees
- ☐ Community gardens, market gardens, and other small-scale food production
- ☐ Farmers markets, roadside stands, and other direct-to-consumer retail activities
- ☐ Agricultural districts that encourage protection and active use of prime agricultural soils
- ☐ Transfer of development rights
- ☐ Form-based or mixed-use zoning to ensure easy residential access to food retail
- ☐ Small-scale food retail
- ☐ Limitations to fast food/drive through restaurants

➔ Framework Strategies

As a resource for communities in Northwest Michigan, the *Framework for Our Future* identifies a number of strategies and actions that communities can take locally to address their specific needs. Because each community identifies their own goals, through public input, local discussions, and need analyses, the strategies and actions identified in the *Framework* are not intended as recommendations for any communities to implement or adopt. Rather, they are provided as a resource list of potential actions that, if desired, can be taken locally and/or used as model language for local master plans, organizational strategic plans, and other policy documents, to address various community needs.

The strategies and actions in the *Framework* were developed from public input and local, regional, statewide, and national sources. Many are based on public input obtained during the *Framework for Our Future* process in events, focus groups, interviews, online discussions, and community dialogues, and were also drawn from or based on master plan language from existing adopted master plans within and outside the region. Others reflect state or national best practices designed to address specific issues.

Strategies are grouped around four major themes that reflect needs and potential actions for each community issue.

- **Education, Data & Outreach.** Often, taking action on a community need requires a solid understanding of the need, as well as public consensus on the appropriate course of action. Education, Data, & Outreach strategies address data gaps, outreach needs, and educational opportunities that can help to improve community understanding and awareness around a particular issue.
- **Planning & Policy.** Many community issues can be addressed in part by local policy, such as master plans and zoning ordinances. Planning & Policy strategies identify broad policy goals and specific changes to master plans or zoning ordinances that can impact a particular issue.
- **Funding & Incentives.** Communities can use funding and incentive tools to encourage private, public, and nonprofit initiatives and activities that meet local goals. Funding & Incentives strategies identify opportunities that can enhance organizational capacities, as well as incentives that may help communities work with the private sector and others to meet local goals.
- **Development & Implementation.** Goals for each community issue center around programs, development or initiatives that directly and

tangibly impact community needs. Development & Implementation goals include specific strategies designed for on-the-ground activities and bricks-and-mortar implementation.

Each strategy includes additional information intended to aid in implementation, including:

Why?

Each strategy is designed to address a certain issue. Information is provided to detail specific community needs that might be met through implementation of the strategy.

Actions

To implement each strategy, communities can consider taking action in a number of ways. This section identifies some specific actions that communities might consider to reach local goals.

Tools & Resources

A number of existing tools or resources are available to partners that are interested in taking action on a particular strategy. This section identifies, and provides links to, tools and resources such as:

- Research or background studies that can help communities identify specific community needs in order to develop appropriate policy or initiatives
- The *Framework for Our Future Action Guide*, which provides details and implementation guidance for planning and zoning actions identified in the *Framework*
- Guidebooks and workbooks that provide step-by-step information on actions and the implementation process
- Examples of where the action has been implemented regionally
- Local, regional, state, or national reference documents that can provide additional guidance

Links to all resources are available online at www.nwm.org/rpi.

Measures

Communities can track progress toward these goals and actions by benchmarking data identified in this section. While some measurement data will be locally generated and tracked, many indicators can be accessed on the regional data portal www.benchmarksnorthwest.org.

Food & Farming: Data, Education & Outreach

Improve awareness, knowledge & understanding of the region's food products and food system needs, programs, & initiatives

Strategy 1	Measure impact/improve understanding of progress and activities	
Why?	Up-to-date and relevant data on local food business and consumption is needed for community stakeholders, funders, lenders, and businesses themselves to be able to grow and support new food business ventures and initiatives. Reliable measures over time can help players benchmark progress and quantify needs in order to plan and implement new food systems initiatives and business.	
Actions	Identify and/or develop valid and accurate local food consumption data in order to track progress toward food system goals	Develop systems for collecting and sharing production and market data and other data relevant to regional food supply chain development
Tools & Resources	US Agricultural Census	Benchmarks Northwest
Measures	Number of indicators identified for measurement	
Strategy 2	Promote/ improve awareness of local food options	
Why?	Food and farming stakeholders have stressed the need to raise awareness of awareness of opportunities “buy local.” Consistent local or regional food brands or related initiatives could be effective in communicating where, how, and what local food products can be purchased by consumers.	
Actions	Consider the development or use of a local or regional “brand” to aid consumers in identifying and purchasing local foods	Include local food and agriculture in local and regional marketing efforts
	Provide and/or support free or low-cost food, nutrition, and cooking classes in convenient and high-traffic locations	
Tools & Resources	Taste the Local Difference	Grand Traverse Regional Foodshed Alliance
Measures	\$ in local food purchases	
Strategy 3	Identify/assess market channel gaps & infrastructure needs	
Why?	Added infrastructure for processing, distribution, wholesaling, and related activities that is designed around local and regional needs can help increase the affordability and accessibility of locally-produced foods; but the data, feasibility studies, and policies needed to support the creation of this infrastructure is largely lacking.	
Actions	Conduct market assessments/ feasibility studies for food system infrastructure elements as needed	Identify and support equipment and processing needs
	Increase producer access to market demand information	
Tools & Resources	Grand Traverse Regional Market Feasibility Report	

Strategy 4	Provide education, outreach, and communication with farmers and would-be farmers	
Why?	As the agricultural workforce experiences profound shifts in the coming years, coordinating with food and farming operations to offer training and apprenticeships can help the local workforce to develop the skills needed to take advantage of emerging job opportunities in entrepreneurial agriculture.	
Actions	Provide and/or support business development training and technical assistance for farmers, agricultural workforce, and would-be farmers	Provide and/or support job training for emerging agricultural industries and technologies
Tools & Resources	Northwest Michigan Ag Alliance	Northwest Michigan Works!
	Michigan State University Extension	
Measures	Number of job seekers in training or apprentice programs	
Strategy 5	Raise awareness among local units of government of innovation tools/strategies	
Why?	Local units of government have a variety of tools at their disposal for supporting and enhancing farm viability. Regular education can ensuring that communities are up-to-date and engaged on agricultural issues and emerging technique.	
Actions	Provide regular information to local units of government on food and farming system needs and opportunities	Work with state and regional partners to offer/provide/participate in regular workshops, webinars, packaged training, & presentations on housing needs and incentives
Tools & Resources	<i>Food Innovation Districts: An Economic Gardening Tool</i>	Michigan Farm Succession Guide
	<i>A Framework for Our Future Action Guide</i>	
Measures	Number of workshops provided	Number of participants in workshops

Food & Farming: Planning & Policy

Coordinate planning & zoning policies that support agricultural production, innovation, & financial viability

Strategy 1	Consider planning and zoning policies that encourage agricultural entrepreneurship and innovation	
Why?	Planning and zoning can help to accommodate food system infrastructure needs and new innovation, by allowing for and encouraging the development of food hubs and food innovation districts.	
Actions	Consider zoning changes to allow a variety of agricultural tourism opportunities in appropriate areas	Consider zoning changes to allow for food production and processing in appropriate areas
	Consider zoning changes to allow food distribution, food hubs, and food innovation districts in appropriate areas	
Tools & Resources	<i>Food Innovation Districts Guide: An Economic Gardening Tool</i>	Michigan Agricultural Tourism Local Zoning Guidebook & Model Ordinance
	<i>A Framework for Our Future Action Guide</i>	
Measures	Number of zoning districts permitting innovative agricultural practices	
Strategy 2	Consider zoning changes to allow and encourage non-traditional agricultural activities	
Why?	Value-added agricultural activities that offer important avenues for farmers and processors may be encouraged or supported by local zoning that permits non-traditional agricultural activities to occur on farms or in agricultural districts.	
Actions	Consider zoning changes to allow small-scale urban agriculture in cities and villages	Consider zoning changes to allow community gardens, market gardens, and other small-scale food production
	Consider zoning changes to allow farmers markets, roadside stands, and other direct-to-consumer retail activities in appropriate areas	
Tools & Resources	<i>A Framework for Our Future Action Guide</i>	
Measures	Number of zoning districts permitting urban and small-scale agriculture	

Strategy 3	Consider plans, programs, or ordinances to reduce farmland fragmentation	
Why?	Desire for rural lifestyles and homes creates an development pressure for farmland, resulting in the loss of productive farmlandand raise the costs of beginning, continuing, or expanding farming operations. Some local policies can alleviate development pressure while allowing options for property owners.	
Actions	Consider options to purchase or lease farmland development rights or easements	Consider zoning changes to encourage protection and active use of prime agricultural soils
	Consider zoning changes to allow for the transfer of development rights	
Tools & Resources	<i>A Framework for Our Future Action Guide</i>	
Measures	Acres of farmland/land in production	
Strategy 4	Consider plans, programs, or ordinances to ensure and improve healthy food access	
Why?	Food access challenges can be directly impacted by local policy decisions. Supports for local food systems can increase the availability of fresh, affordable, and healthy food to residents.	
Actions	Consider allowing form-based or mixed-use zoning approaches to ensure easy residential access to food retail	Consider zoning changes to allow for small-scale food retail opportunities
	Consider limits or restrictions to fast food/drive through establishments	
Tools & Resources	<i>A Framework for Our Future Action Guide</i>	
Measures	Number of mixed-use or form-based zoning codes	

Food & Farming: Financial Incentives

Support, enhance, and expand financial and programmatic capacities for housing development

Strategy 1	Ensure smaller-scale farm, food producer, and food processor access to capital	
Why?	As many smaller-scale farms grow and expand, access to loans or other financial capital is often needed in order to support new business growth or markets. Collaborative partnerships can help create opportunities to enhance access to loan or other capital.	
Actions	Work with state, regional, and other partners to access Community Development Financial Institution (CDFI) funds and other sources of capital	Individual Development Accounts
	Help producers attract equity capital so they can expand into value-added processing and/or new markets	Work with community foundations and others to increase funding from regional, state, and national foundations.
Tools & Resources	Northwest Michigan Farm and Food 20/20 Fund	
Measures	Dollars loaned to entrepreneurial farmers/food producers through CDFI	
Strategy 2	Consider the use of tax and other financing incentives for food system infrastructure, processing, and other needs	
Why?	Economic development tools such as downtown development authorities or revolving loan funds can also provide financial tools or incentives to help develop or support the food system infrastructure components needed for innovative agricultural activities.	
Actions	Consider the use of brownfield, downtown development authority, corridor improvement authority, and other avenues of tax increment financing to incentive food system infrastructure and improvements	

Food & Farming: Development & Implementation

Increase local food access, consumption, and business/entrepreneurial opportunities

Strategy 1	Enhance/expand, and improve access to local market channels and healthy foods	
Why?	Food access challenges can be directly impacted by local policy decisions. Supports for local food systems can increase the availability of fresh, affordable, and healthy food to residents.	
Actions	Improve and expand farm-to-school purchasing programs to include day cares, hospitals, senior housing, and other institutions	Maximize amount of local food served in schools by increasing the number of schools participating in farm-to-school programs
Tools & Resources	Michigan Farm to School	
Measures	Number of schools or institutions purchasing local foods	
Strategy 2	Enhance, expand, and improve access to farm labor	
Why?	As the agricultural workforce experiences profound shifts in the coming years, communities and partners can coordinate with food and farming operations to develop a local workforce with the skills needed to take advantage of emerging job opportunities in entrepreneurial agriculture, while also exploring opportunities to address immigration-related concerns.	
Actions	Provide, encourage, and/or support programs for youth agricultural entrepreneurship, agricultural skills, career opportunities, and apprenticeships	Provide, encourage, and/or support farmer training programs
	Improve systems for hiring migrant farmworkers/guest workers and the visa/H2a program (federal policy changes needed)	
Tools & Resources	Northwest Michigan Agricultural Alliance	
Measures	Number of job seekers in trainings and/or apprenticeships	

Strategy 3	Improve access to viable and affordable agricultural land and secure tenure for farmers	
Why?	Affordable access to farmland is critical in for new and expanding farmers. Offering farmland preservation or conservation programs can help to reduce start-up costs for new farmers while providing added revenue for existing farmers.	
Actions	Explore options for purchase of development rights or other conservation programs that provide long-term or permanent protection of farmland	
Tools & Resources	GTRLC Farmability Program	Acme Township PDR Program
	Peninsula Township PDR Program	
Measures	Acres of preserved land	
Strategy 4	Enhance, improve, and expand food system processing, production, and distribution capacities	
Why?	Processing, distribution, wholesaling, and other food system infrastructure components are needed for innovative agricultural activities.	
Actions	Encourage and support food system infrastructure enhancements	
Tools & Resources	<i>An Economic Gardening Tool</i>	
Measures	Number of food processing, distribution, and warehousing facilities	

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