

## PRIMA CIVITAS

### **A legislative compromise underlines federal commitment necessary to move healthy food access policy forward...**

At the end of January 2016, Republicans and Democrats are urging Congress to approve a five year plan for \$30 billion annually that provides school nutrition and related programming changes to the Healthy Hunger-Free Kids Act. This bipartisan effort is viewed as a strong step forward in healthy food access that decreases “operational challenges” to help schools plan healthy meals that are appealing to students while keeping nutritional standards raised. At the same time, the bill’s restriction in funding for those schools not offering whole grains at least 80% of the time meets with strong criticism as much food goes to waste because American youth do not always want to eat “healthy”. Nationally this has gained traction on both sides of the aisle, but policy and cooperation can become fragmented at the state and local levels. Here the path muddies and healthy food policy becomes a private or grant funded challenge rising up and dying down according to municipal champions.

In the last few decades focus on food origination and input concerns have become more main stream spurring regional food system infrastructure development and governance. In the mitten state, the Michigan Food Policy Council was developed in 2005 under the Granholm administration to recommend programs and policies that enhanced economic growth supporting the state’s diverse agriculture industry while cultivating a safe, healthy and available food supply for all Michigan residents. However, in December ‘14, Governor Snyder abolished the Policy Council and consolidated activities under the Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development moving forward as the Interdepartmental Collaboration Committee (ICC) Subcommittee on Food Policy, a statewide action team to support further food policy discussions. With changing administrations and agendas, community members across the state are beginning to organize and pursue food sovereignty through their own methods.

“Food policy and/or food policy councils can be a schizophrenic endeavor” says Randy Bell, Community Food Systems Extension Educator and Co-Chair of the Food Systems Workgroup (a [coalition](#) affiliated with the Power of We Consortium), because they can work to support policy change or programmatic efforts and it’s rare that it’s easy to separate them from one another.

Despite changing administrations and funding, Michigan continues to be a national trailblazer for local healthy food access policy. Stemming from the Food Policy Council’s work and in partnership with Michigan State University Center for Regional Food Systems (MSU CRFS) and the Food Bank Council of Michigan the [Michigan Good Food Charter](#) was crafted in 2010 as a road map for local food system development rooted in communities. In summary, this group along with 350 (and growing) organizations signed the Charter pledging to do their part in meeting the 2020 goals of: 20% of Michigan farmers supplying 20% of Michigan’s intutional food purchases - ultimately providing 80% of the Michigan population with healthy, green, fair and affordable food access.

With the MI Food Policy Council’s consolidation, necessary infrastructure to facilitate healthy food security is mainly spurred by grant opportunities through generous philanthropic effort and academic partnership. However, this is changing as socially motivated private entities and business stakeholders are coming together with state government, researchers and grass roots organizers to develop their own goals and guidance. MSU CRFS helps facilitate these efforts through the Michigan Local Food Council Network that convenes those functioning municipal level food councils and individuals working on food policy issues through peer-to-peer learning. A local food council is defined by the Network as a group convening around a defined geographic area to assess and recommend practices or policies that affect one or more aspects of the food systems, from growing to disposal and everything in between.

Network Coordinator, Liz Gensler, Academic Specialist at MSU, says “the role the network plays is bringing people in various communities together to figure out where their similarities are and how they can share best practices and strategy.” Co-facilitator of the MI Local Food Council Network and Principal of ENP Associates, a planning and GIS services firm located in Ann Arbor, MI, Megan Masson-Mincok says food policy plays an important role in helping build food business from very small scale start-up’s to flourishing nationally.

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“Currently, there is some support for small entrepreneurs, but many communities lack policy to help these businesses become medium-sized companies in an affordable manner” say Masson-Minock. For example, a small business owner under the Cottage Food Law may sell at the farm market and realize they’re able to make their hobby a full-time job, however, their production base must have support to scale up. Through her planning work, Masson-Minock asks the question of developers and local leaders: What do municipalities have in place for those stage two businesses? Other hot topics often include: city support for small scale food processors to hold daytime hours of operation; zoning challenges; the right to raise livestock in urban areas, and; hoop house construction in residential areas.

As such growth and ordinance challenges face many small business owners, funding is in place through the [Michigan Good Food Fund](#) for capital and technical assistance provided in partnership between the W.K. Kellogg Foundation and Capital Impact Partners since 2015. Similarly, a political effort to support local food business growth was also created at the end of 2015 by the American Heart Association (AHA), with the introduction of HB5180. The Healthy Food Assistance Act would provide 6.5 million dollars in financial incentives to certain MI agri-businesses and retailers facilitating access to fresh and nutritional foods with county-based programming assistance for small food retailers. These efforts represent two very different ways of coming to similar outcomes – through philanthropic/private partnership and policy development.

“We’re not re-inventing the wheel here, our goal ultimately is to seek this appropriation with the intent that it will align with the efforts of the MI Good Food Fund” says Dave Hodgkins, Government Relations Director of the AHA. While the AHA’s intention is to seek further resources for the prevention of cardiovascular disease and stroke, harnessing healthy food access momentum and grassroots policy efforts strengthens the overall local food movement. For more information on current food policy development and national examples of public/private partnership leading to increased local food access check out [Cultivating Collective Action: The Ecology of a Statewide Food Network](#). CEDAM membership interested in getting involved can also: keep updated on Good Food Charter [progress](#); join a regional food [council](#) and learn about their policy [work](#), or; follow [HB5180](#) and other MI food [legislation](#). For further information please contact CEDAM Senior Policy Specialist, Jessica AcMoody, at [acmoody@cedam.info](mailto:acmoody@cedam.info).