

## VISION

We envision a thriving economy, equity and sustainability for all of Michigan and its people through a food system rooted in local communities and centered on good food.



## this issue

Artisan Food Processors See Food Safety Inspectors as Resources p.1

News & Notes p.3

Beef Producers Involved in Local Food Research p.4

## Artisan Food Processors See Food Safety Inspectors as Resources

By Jenifer Buckley, PhD Candidate and University Distinguished Fellow, Michigan State University



Conventional wisdom has it that regulations make things difficult for small- and medium-scale food businesses. Many start-up entrepreneurs feel that food safety regulations require unreasonable investments and that inspectors do not understand the realities of small business.

How, then, can we improve the regulatory process for small- and medium-scale food businesses? In particular, given growing interest in artisan foods, how can regulations better accommodate artisan food processors?

Jenifer Buckley's Michigan State University research has been tackling this issue through interviews with established artisan processors and Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (MDARD) Food and Dairy inspectors, and field observations of processing operations and inspections.

The results have been encouraging. Many of these artisan processors indicate that, in fact, inspectors play an important consultant role, one that involves spending a considerable amount of time discussing production and management issues in addition to regulatory compliance. Amid shrinking governmental

budgets and increasing demands on inspectors' time, this highlights a need to further develop other technical assistance resources for small processors in Michigan. Participants suggest, for example, networks to help processors locate used equipment, purchase supplies in bulk quantities, and develop stronger connections with each other and with regulators.

The research has focused on several overall questions: What experiences have inspectors and established artisan processors had with each other? What makes the regulatory process succeed for both parties? What training is needed? What regulations would artisans like to see changed?

Initial expectations were that artisans would emphasize the cost, impracticality or mere inconvenience of specific regulatory requirements. And indeed, artisans indicate that some requirements are burdensome and that regulators can be difficult to communicate or work with.

More often, however, processors describe their inspectors as resources. Inspectors have helped identify artisan production strategies

# 2020 GOALS

- Michigan institutions sourcing 20% of their food from Michigan
- Michigan farmers profitably supplying 20% of Michigan markets
- Generating new agri-food businesses
- 80% of Michigan residents having access to good food
- All Michigan schools meeting nutrition standards
- Michigan schools incorporating food and agriculture into preK-12 curricula

## Artisan Food Processors cont.

that meet regulatory requirements. As one cheesemaker put it, “Every wild hair [idea] I’ve brought to [my inspector], she’s said, ‘Okay, let me see.’” For their part, many MDARD inspectors enjoy the educational and advisory aspects of their jobs and are proud to see smaller businesses succeed.

Key to this dynamic is the establishment of an open and mutually respectful relationship—“seeing each other as human.” It takes time to cultivate this relationship, but participants indicate that a teamwork approach helps artisans and inspectors resolve disagreements about compliance. They are less likely to allow disagreements to escalate.

Asked what advice they have for other processors, artisans reply:

- Inform yourself about regulations and plan far ahead.
- Be persistent about what you want to do, but seek collaboration with inspectors when identifying solutions to difficulties.
- Don’t adopt an antagonistic attitude or think you “have nothing more to learn” about food safety or, for that matter, about your own operation.

### Funding:

- This material is based upon work supported by the National Science Foundation under award No. SES-1230878.
- This project and all associated reports and support materials are supported by the Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) program, which is funded by the U.S. Department of Agriculture – National Institute of Food and Agriculture (USDA-NIFA), under Project Number GNC10-134. Any opinions, findings, conclusions or recommendations expressed within do not necessarily reflect the view of the SARE program or the U.S. Department of Agriculture. USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.
- This work has been supported by funds from a grant to Michigan State University from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation to establish a pasture-based dairy program at the Kellogg Biological Station.

- Recognize and respect inspectors’ authority and expertise, regardless of what your views on regulations may be.
- Ask questions, and listen. “Listen, listen, listen.”
- Make judicious choices when challenging inspector decisions. “Go along with the little stuff. That way, when the inspector asks for the big stuff, it’s easier to make it into smaller steps.”
- “Make friends with your inspector.” Don’t see inspectors as enemies who are “out to get” you.

Suggestions for inspectors and other regulatory staff will be presented at an MDARD meeting this spring.

More information about the study is at <https://www.msu.edu/~jbuckley/research/>. Buckley will also present sessions at the Northern Michigan Small Farms Conference in Grayling on Saturday, January 26 (<http://smallfarmconference.com/>), and during MSU Agriculture and Natural Resources Week in East Lansing on Monday, March 4 ([http://anrweek.canr.msu.edu/anrweek/program\\_schedule](http://anrweek.canr.msu.edu/anrweek/program_schedule)). ■



Photo courtesy of <http://www.greatlakesgreatcheese.com>

## News & Notes

Keeping you up to speed on good food-related happenings in Michigan

### Help Grow the Farm Industry:

The USDA is in the process of completing the Census of Agriculture. Conducted every five years by USDA's National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS), the Census captures a complete count of all U.S. farms, ranches and those who operate them.

As the second most diverse agricultural state in the nation, the Census of Agriculture is a critical opportunity for Michigan producers to reinforce the importance of agriculture to our economy. For example, the data are a key input for the Michigan State University Product Center's \$91.4 billion estimate of the food and agriculture system's impact to Michigan's economy.

NASS mailed out Census forms in late December, and responses are due by February 4th, 2013. Producers also have the option to complete their forms online. For more information about the Census, visit [www.agcensus.usda.gov](http://www.agcensus.usda.gov) or call the NASS, Michigan Field Office at (800) 453-7501.

NASS encourages all farmers and ranchers to respond timely and accurately. Federal law requires NASS to keep all individual information confidential. NASS encourages Michigan farmers to do their part and make sure they are represented. ■

### Fundraising for Local Food:

Michigan Land Use Institute (MLUI) has been seeking support to implement one of the Michigan Good Food Charter agenda priorities—"10 cents a meal," whereby schools are given extra funds to purchase local, healthy food for school meals. (See [March 2012 newsletter](#).) In the meantime, they've partnered with the Traverse Bay Area Intermediate School District to start their own two-year fundraising campaign with support from the Northwest Michigan Food and Farming Network.

The campaign is striving to raise funds to support locally grown fruits and vegetables going into school lunches multiple times per week. The goal is to provide extra spending power in tight school budgets and help Michigan's economy while putting healthy food on children's plates. Each school involved has pledged to match the 10 cents provided from the campaign fund from their existing school lunch dollars.

Traverse City's annual Pigstock event in October raised \$2,625 to specifically provide local schools with extra funds to source local fruits and vegetables! ■

*The following is for informational purposes only and does not constitute an endorsement. The Michigan Good Food initiative does not benefit financially from the sale of these books nor the provision of this information.*

New World Publishing is offering coupon discounts for several of its books, including the new book: "Eat Local: Simple Steps" and "The New Farmers' Market."

Go to: <http://tableoftheearth.com/our-store>. Purchase book(s): "Add To Cart." Enter Coupon Code (below, without quotes) in the Shopping Cart. Click "Apply." The price will change to show a discount.

- Eat Local (60% Off) Coupon code: "EL60"
- Eat Local & New Farmers' Market (1 each) (50% Off) Coupon code: "ELNFM50"
- All 5 books (Eat Local, New Farmers Market, Micro Eco-Farming, Sell What You Sow!, The New Agritourism) (50% Off) Coupon code: "allmybooks50"

## UPCOMING FOOD SYSTEM CONFERENCES IN MICHIGAN

- Michigan Family Farms Conference — January 19 in Battle Creek. [www.miffs.org/mffe](http://www.miffs.org/mffe)
- Northern Michigan Small Farm Conference — January 26 in Grayling. [smallfarmconference.com](http://smallfarmconference.com)
- Food For Change Summit 2013 — January 26 in Flint. [foodforchangesummit.org](http://foodforchangesummit.org)
- All About Food: From Farm to Fork — February 14 in Clinton Township. [www.macomfood.org](http://www.macomfood.org)
- Everybody Eats 2.0: Cultivating Food Democracy — February 23 in Lansing, MI. [www.every-body-eats.com/](http://www.every-body-eats.com/)
- Michigan Organic Reporting Session — March 1 in East Lansing. [www.michiganorganic.msu.edu/michiganorganic/organic-reporting-session](http://www.michiganorganic.msu.edu/michiganorganic/organic-reporting-session)
- Farm Route to Prosperity Summit — March 12 in Traverse City. Contact: [Jim Sluyter](#)



Photo courtesy of [Guindon Farms of Cornell, Michigan](#).

## Beef Producers Involved in Local Food Research

By *Patty Cantrell, Regional Food Solutions*

Moving Michigan toward its Good Food Charter goal of Michigan farmers supplying 20 percent of food in Michigan markets by 2020 involves a lot of people and businesses in many different sectors. One area of emerging Michigan research is grass-fed beef production.

Even though grass-fed beef products fetch premium prices, farmers can still end up losing profits because of production and marketing challenges.

Enter Michigan State University’s Lake City Research Center, in Missaukee County, specializing in pastured beef research. With a new three-year grant from North Central Region-Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education, the research center is on a mission to help northwest Michigan identify and address issues that keep pastured beef from reaching its full regional potential.

Benzie County livestock producer Paul May shares an unexpected element crucial for pastured beef. “Worms are without a doubt the most important livestock out here; their castings have the perfect mineral profile,” he

said of how worms support pasture productivity and nutrition of his grass-fed beef system. “I’ve got to have them.”

Lake City Research Center Staff will soon be out in the fields with 20 participating northwest Michigan beef producers, helping them get their pastures into shape and cattle finished for market. To address challenges on the buyer side, they will also partner with meat processors, food distributors, and chefs in the region to work out snags in their systems. The project will generate real-life data by tracking 200 head of cattle from participating farms in Northwest markets as they move through the supply chain, said coordinator Jason Rowntree.

“Ultimately, we have to put pastured beef through the entire system – from production methodology all the way to culinary preparation – to see the areas that become bottlenecks in terms of logistics and costs,” Rowntree said.

For more information, check out the research center online at [agbioresearch.msu.edu/lakecity](http://agbioresearch.msu.edu/lakecity). ■

## Michigan Good Food Issue 16 January, 2013



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*Michigan Good Food is a policy initiative centered on the Michigan Good Food Charter, which was developed with input from hundreds of people across Michigan. The MSU Center for Regional Food Systems supports and disseminates communications around the charter.*



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