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THE FARMERS MARKETER

FOOD & GROCERY: 20 reasons to feel hopeful about Michigan and our food system in 2012

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Winter carrots from Seeley Farm

Photo | Kim Bayer

Maybe it was the news about Michigan snagging a spot on the [Top 10 list of states with the most](#)

winter farmers' markets that pushed it over the edge, but I'm noticing an energy around food issues that I haven't seen before. There are so many things happening in this part of SE Michigan that didn't exist even three or four years ago when I decided to break up with my regular grocery store and shop for food from people I know.

[Wednesdays are 1/2 off Wine Night at Quarter Bistro [Print Coupon](#)]

It's sort of *de rigeur* to end the year with a catalog of the best foodie experiences you had, but this is a guide to hopeful signs for the new year - some trends to watch, support and engage with. And I'd argue that these are signposts pointing out the possibility of a food system that is as "healthy, green, fair, and affordable" as the [Michigan Good Food Charter](#) (!!!) outlines.

Yep, now more than ever I love that I live here because

1) I can learn where my food comes from

On my refrigerator I have a sticker that reminds me every time I open the door "No Farmers-No Food." In a twist on that message of doom, the hopeful [Real Time Farms](#) (RTF) slogan counters "Know Farms-Know Food."

In a [recent blog post](#) RTF lists the milestones of 2011. Their nationwide site is one of the best resources for farmers markets, and now includes: "3200 Farms, 1600 Food Artisans, 65 eateries with farm linked menus, over 32,000 photos posted of farms, markets and food artisans, and over 11,000 farm linked menu items added by eateries." And co-founders Karl and Cara Rosaen just took the weekend off!

2) We have ways to buy food outside the industrial paradigm, at local grocery stores, many farmers' markets, CSAs and

[Lunasa](#) online market "provides one-stop shopping for local products. With an online store-front and a convenient southeast Michigan pickup location, Lunasa makes shopping local easy. By becoming a member of Lunasa, you can be sure that the items you purchase are produced in Michigan by people who live in Michigan."

3) We now have local groceries that highlight their food from Michigan - and it's easy to find and buy Michigan-grown staples

From: [People's Food Co-op](#), the [Produce Station](#), [Arbor Farms Market](#) and [By The Pound](#)

4) The number of choices for Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) Farms continues to grow and diversify

A CSA is where you pay in advance for a "subscription" to the farm. This is usually a weekly box of produce that you pick up from the farmers' market or at the farm. Trends for CSAs in our area include:

- Going to four season production ([Brines Farm](#), [Capella Farm](#), [Sunseed Farm](#), [Livingstones Farm](#), [Seeley Farm](#))
- Becoming more specialized (like a garlic CSA! at [Dick's Pretty Good Garlic](#))
- Offering more options (like 1/2 shares, every other week pickup, flexible spending plans)

Just a few examples of new CSA farms in our area:

[Hand Sown Farm](#) will be offering a community farm share card for 2012.

[The Family Farm](#) a "3 acre intensive biodynamic urban farm that specializes in heirloom produce, poultry and eggs" offers pickup points at Jolly Pumpkin (in Ann Arbor) and at both the Tuesday and Saturday Ypsi markets.

[Bridgewater Barns Family Farm](#) has a CSA share and drops off at the Tuesday Ypsilanti farmers

market.

[Living Stones Farm CSA](#) now has a hoophouse to extend their growing season from March through November.

5) Things are getting even more "local" with Neighborhood Supported Agriculture (NSA)

These "micro-CSAs," or very small "Neighborhood Supported Agriculture" farms that are supplying produce to people within a 1 mile radius include:

[Madaras Garden Studio](#) and [Skinny Farm of Scio](#). Skinny Farm says "Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) is a support and supply agreement whereby consumers in a community support the people growing food for them by committing to and paying ahead for a "share" in the harvest of the farm. The grower's commitment is to plant, cultivate, harvest, wash, and distribute a bountiful selection of vegetables, fruit, flowers and herbs for all or part of the growing season. At Skinny Farm we take it a step further...um, closer,,,,, by adopting a what we call a Neighborhood Supported Agriculture (NSA) model. We like this concept because it brings neighbors together instead of keeping them separate."

6) New farms continue to fill in gaps and diversify the food system ecosystem, with a significant increase in four season growing

Several new farms have started thanks to the partnership between Ann Arbor Township, [FSEP](#) and [SELMA Cafe](#), which created a new farm incubator called the [Tilian Farm Development Center](#).

As a result, we can now buy year-round produce from [Seeley Farm](#); get a produce CSA share from [Green Things Farm](#); and find meat CSA shares from [Bending Sickle Community Farm](#). The Tilian Center will "incubate" two more farms this year, and start up a new Tilian CSA too!

In addition to the new, neighborhood, CSA, and four-season farms, some other new specialized farms in our area include:

[The Farm at St. Joe](#) an on-site farm supplying healthy food to St. Joe hospital and Ypsilanti farmers' markets!

[Dyer Family Organic Farm - Dick's Pretty Good Garlic](#) (rumored to be starting a garlic CSA)

[Knox Hops](#) growing nine different kinds of hops.

7) It's now getting pretty easy to find restaurants serving (at least some) local food

Including: [The Ravens Club](#), Mani Osteria, Frita Batido, Jolly Pumpkin, EAT, Mark's Carts, [Grange Kitchen and Bar](#), [Silvio's Organic Pizza](#), Zingerman's Roadhouse and Deli.

8) Healthy food for kids is coming to our schools

For the past four years, the [Food System Economic Partnership](#) (FSEP) has had a Farm-to-School initiative that works on both the supply and demand aspects of the challenge of getting healthy food into school lunch programs. FSEP has developed a toolkit to help schools set up Farm-to-school programs. And FSEP helps farmers learn what's required to be able to sell to schools. Now moving beyond just schools, FSEP is helping institutional buyers connect to farms, for example at University of Michigan Housing, the Michigan Department of Corrections, and area soup kitchens and shelters.

9) We now have annual local food events like

Like the 4th annual [Local Food Summit](#) which is coming up in March, and the 5th annual [HomeGrown Festival](#) coming up in September.

10) A new [Washtenaw Food Hub](#) is in the works

Food Hubs are important, [according to Agriculture Deputy Secretary Kathleen Merrigan](#) because

"We have a historic opportunity to help win the future by laying a new foundation for economic growth, creating jobs and building and revitalizing critical infrastructure here in Michigan and in rural communities across America through supporting and establishing local and regional food systems as an economic development strategy to keep wealth in local communities," said Merrigan. "This new data clearly demonstrates that small and midsize farmers can work with a variety of players to overcome the infrastructure challenges they face, while creating effective economic opportunities for their communities at the same time."

11) The Michigan Cottage Food Bill has provided an opportunity for new entrepreneurs

Including: [Al Meida Fine Algerian Pastries](#)

[Miette Bakery](#), [Sweet Heather Anne](#), [The Folktory](#), and more

12) We are growing regionally adapted and open-pollinated seeds

The [Great Lakes Heirloom Seed Trial](#) gave 60 gardeners and 5 farms the opportunity to participate in the environmental and food security benefits of growing food from seeds adapted to our climate and resistant to our pests.

13) UM President Mary Sue Coleman announced a goal of 20% Local Food

As part of [broad sustainability goals](#) backed up with \$14 million dollars, ""From the residence halls to the unions and hospitals, the university is introducing new purchasing guidelines," U-M said in a statement. The goal means that the university will more than double its purchases from local and sustainable sources, said Drew Horning, deputy director of the Graham Environmental Sustainability Institute, the group that spearheaded the research for the university's initiative."

14) Edible Avalon grows its community gardening program

The Edible Avalon community gardening program at Avalon's supportive housing sites started as a single garden in 2008, and now has 14 garden properties. They say that over 3200 pounds of fresh organic produce was grown by tenants in 2011.

In addition, Edible Avalon offers: Cooking classes and food preservation workshops; youth programming centered on our local foodshed and sustainable gardening; and nutrition and health-related programming reaches over 450 Avalon tenants.

15) Double Up Food Bucks are helping people on food stamps buy healthy food at farmers' markets and that helps farmers

How it works: "When a person eligible for SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) uses his or her SNAP Bridge Card to shop for food at a farmers' market, the amount of money that he or she spends is matched with Double Up Food Bucks bonus tokens. The tokens can then be exchanged for Michigan-grown fruits and vegetables."

16) The Ann Arbor Greenbelt expands, both in area and in focus

Adding to the area in which it pursues preservation, the Greenbelt and local land conservancies like Legacy Land Conservancy and the SE Michigan Land Conservancy, now also include preservation of farmland among their top priorities.

In a [Concentrate magazine interview](#) Ecology Center Director Mike Garfield says "I think today that one of the great opportunities that these land preservation programs have is to promote local food agriculture and farm-to-table agriculture in Washtenaw County...we've got the funds in place to make sure that when the market changes we'll be able to keep our rural lands rural, and we'll have farms that can grow local foods for Ann Arbor and Ypsilanti and Chelsea and other communities inside Washtenaw County." Garfield says.

What's coming next? Dollars to donuts that we'll be seeing some of this in the near future:

17) Slow Money "investing as if food, farms and fertility matter." This national non-profit has a goal to get 1 million people investing 1% of their assets within 100 miles of where they live.

18)A Washtenaw Food Policy Council that will help to coordinate local priorities and bring good food to a larger group of the mainstream public.

19) Aggregated CSAs - more options for CSA members that could include eggs, fruit, cheese, meat, and dry goods along with the produce in your share. Can't wait for this!

20) You know that Great Lakes Heirloom Seed Trial? Well, I understand that there are 2 heirloom seed companies starting up that will start growing their first seeds in 2012.

If you think in terms of a year, plant a seed; if in terms of ten years, plant trees; if in terms of 100 years, teach the people. -- Confucius

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Tags: farmers markets, local food, local food news, Kim Bayer
