

Localizing the Mackinac Island Food System  
Opportunities and Barriers to Increase Locally Produced Food Options on Mackinac Island  
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## Executive Summary

### *Introduction*

Mackinac Island is a premier tourist destination located between the Upper and Lower Peninsula of Michigan. The small island attracts nearly a million annual tourists a year, making the demand for food on the island extraordinarily large. Because there is no bridge to the island, the majority of food is shipped to the island on ferries. The shipment process is a logistical challenge that only a few large national food distributors have mastered. Long distance food shipments from these distributors emit greenhouse gasses that contribute to anthropogenic climate change and environmental degradation, and the nutritional quality of the perishable food items suffer in the long commute. Because there is a premium placed on food prices on the island, seasonal workers and year-round residents have limited options for fresh, nutritious food at an affordable cost.

To combat these issues, the social enterprise Mackinac Food Forest (MFF) has a four-year goal to make 25% of the food on Mackinac Island locally produced within 100 miles of the island. Increasing the prevalence of food from the nearby Eastern Upper Peninsula and Northern Lower Peninsula may help promote healthy eating habits and enable access to nutritious, high-quality, environmentally friendly and affordable food options on the island. Tourists make up the majority of food purchases on the island so their desire to eat local produce will be a catalyst for shifting business purchasing decisions on the island. Mackinac Island food businesses, which are the backbone of the Mackinac Island economy, need to be in support of MFF's goal in order for the transition to locally grown food to take hold. In order for Mackinac Island to reach MFF's local food purchasing goal, it is important to understand the current demand, opportunities, and barriers around local food purchasing on the island.

### *Methods*

In May a survey conducted of 51 people walking Main St. Mackinac Island about the importance of local food while vacationing and the amount they would be willing to spend for local food options. A interviewed were five Mackinac Island food purchasers (representing 11 island businesses) about their food sourcing decision processes.

### *Main Street Tourist Survey Results*

- Of the 51 people surveyed, **63% (32)** said that it was important that the food they ate on vacation was grown or raised in the place they visit.
- **76% (39)** said they would pay at least \$1 more for locally grown food items.
- **41% (21)** said they would be willing to pay at least\$3 more for locally grown food items.
- Respondents between the age of 25-34 were significantly more likely to say that local food was important when they vacation (71%) than respondents 55 and older (47%).
- Some tourists commented that there is a lack of healthy and vegetarian food options on the island.

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### *Food Purchaser Interview Results*

- All of the food purchasers had a positive attitude towards MFF and increasing the prevalence of local food on the Island.
- They described increased **freshness**, customer **demand**, supporting the **local economy**, and helping the **environment** as reasons for sourcing local food products.
- The food purchasers described considerable barriers to increasing their food purchasing from local farms, including:
  - **Supply chain and shipping difficulties**
  - **Limited demand for local food**
  - **Substandard quality and packaging**
  - **Lack of consistent products**
  - **Limited selection**
  - **Limited volume**
  - **High Cost**
- The food purchasers listed **8** large distributors that source to the island, and **11** local farms that source food to the island.
- The food purchasers described **15** different kinds of fruit or vegetable varieties that they source from local farms, and **9** meat, dairy, or specialty items that they source locally

### *Recommendations*

Mackinac Food Forest should make the reasons for purchasing food from local farms more salient for the island food purchasers and tourists alike. Strategies to accomplish this include:

- Create a **Mackinac Island local cookbook** that highlights recipes from local farmers. Restaurants on the island can submit their favorite local recipe and the cookbooks can be sold in Mackinac Island bookstores and advertised in storefronts.
- Provide a grant to organize a **farm stand** on Mackinac Island featuring a rotation of northern Michigan farmers. The leftover produce that is not sold during the farmer's stay could be sold to the local grocer at a discount price, and then sold in the grocery store.

The next step in the *Localizing the Mackinac Island Food System* project is to conduct **interviews with local farmers**. MFF can then act as a broker between the local farms and the food businesses on Mackinac Island. Talking to farmers that already sell to Mackinac Island can help illuminate the practices that make their farm successful in business with Mackinac Island. Those practices could be shared with other farms to replicate the success of the 'local farm to Mackinac Island' relationship.

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**Introduction**

Mackinac Island possesses a myriad of unique food challenges and opportunities. The 3.7 square mile tourist destination is famous for its food; Mackinac Island is the fudge capital of the world. The 14 fudge shops and 50 restaurants and hotel based dining options attract nearly 1 million annual visitors during the warm summer months (*Mackinacisland.org*). The density of restaurants and the volume of food served on the small island is extraordinary. Keeping up with the demand for food takes a highly coordinated effort for many of the 500 year-round residents (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010) and the influx of summer seasonal workers. With no bridge to Mackinac Island from the mainland and a ban on automobiles, all food must be shipped to the island on a ferry or delivered by airplane and then brought to the food businesses by a horse-drawn dray.

Most of this food comes from large national distributors that source their food products from around the country. The time it takes for items to get from farm to plate on the island can be significant. The long-distance shipments generate significant greenhouse gas emissions and the extended travel time of perishable items can diminish the food's nutritional quality (Klavinsky, 2013). Additionally, shipping food to the island is expensive, and the price premium is reflected in the island restaurant and grocery options.

Many seasonal workers have limited options for eating healthy meals at an inexpensive price. Many of the seasonal workers live in dormitory-style housing without kitchens and earn small wages throughout the summer. Year-round residents have even more limited food options in the winter when the lake freezes and the ferries stop making shipments.

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There is a dual challenge of increasing the prevalence of fresh, high-quality food options and keeping the food prices reasonable. Yet, there is an effort in the community to localize the food system in an attempt to transform the Mackinac Island brand to be locally and environmentally responsible.

The social enterprise Mackinac Food Forest (MFF) has a four-year goal to make 25% of the food on Mackinac Island locally grown or produced within 100 miles of the island. While localization alone will not solve Mackinac Island's distinctive food-related issues, increasing the prevalence of food from the Eastern Upper Peninsula and Northern Lower Peninsula may help promote healthy eating habits and enable equal access to nutritious, high-quality, environmentally friendly and affordable food on the island.

Experts from Michigan State University Extension suggests locally grown food has more nutrients, is more flavorful, and has less food safety risks than eating food from further away (Klavinsky, 2013). Furthermore, locally grown food is often grown using practices that protect the soil and water quality around farmland, and can bolster the local economy by keeping more money circulating in the community (Brain, 2012). Places that support local systems of agricultural production as part of their economic development plan can enhance their level of community socio-economic wellbeing (Lyson, 2002).

There is a variety of locally grown food options in the region to please the diverse palate of the tourists, seasonal workers, and residents of Mackinac Island. Michigan produces the second largest variety of farm products in the United States. (Cantrell et al., 2006). There are organizations such as Taste the Local Difference (*localdifference.org*), Cherry Capital Foods (*cherrycapitalfoods.com*), and Cultivate Michigan (*cultivatemichigan.org*) that are working to increase the prevalence of local food options in the Northern Michigan region by connecting

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farmers and their products to food businesses and institutions. Even though Northern Lower Peninsula and the Eastern UP have more forest land than farmland, there are farms growing high quality produce, meat, and specialty food products in the region that are eager to sell to local businesses.

The businesses on Mackinac Island play an enormous role in shaping the trends on the island. Therefore, Mackinac Island restaurants, hotels, and other food businesses need to utilize the diversity of Northern Michigan grown food products for the increase of locally grown food on the island to take hold. And to justify selling local options in their businesses, there needs to be a demand for the local offerings.

In a worldwide consumer survey, over 60% of the respondents had a preference for local fruit, vegetable, and meat brands than global brands (Nielsen, 2016). In another survey of United States consumers, 59% of people said they eat locally grown foods twice a week or more, and 23.8% said they eat locally grown foods at least once a day (National Grocers Association, 2014). In a study of southwest U.S. restaurant patrons, 20% of respondents said local sourcing was their primary factor in deciding where to eat (Lillywhite & Simonsen, 2014).

A majority of the food business profits on Mackinac Island come from tourists, so catering to their needs is essential for the island businesses. Spending on local food makes up an average one-third of total travel expenditure for vacationers (Sengal et al., 2015). Although people who act in pro-environmental ways at home may not always take on the same behaviors while traveling (Barr et al, 2010), local and regional food can add value to a tourist destination because people tend to travel to experience the authentic products of a place (Sengal et al., 2015). A study by Sengal et al. found that tourists staying at boutique hotels said local food was important to their overall trip satisfaction. Boutique hotel guests were significantly more likely

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than 4 or 5-star hotel guests to say that local food was important (2015). Many of the hotels on Mackinac Island fit the definition of ‘Boutique Hotels’ (Anhar, 2001), so a customer base of visitors eager to eat locally sourced food on the island may exist.

While using local products may be uncharted territory for some Mackinac Island businesses, there is a precedent in the Northern Michigan region for restaurants to source food products from local producers. In 2006, Taste the Local Difference produced a food buyers survey. Of the 136 Northwest Michigan restaurants surveyed, 59 of them purchased directly from farmers, and 70% of them purchased locally grown vegetables directly from a farmer or from a distributor (Krieger, 2006).

Still, undeniable barriers to purchasing local food exist for business owners and consumers alike. Few Northwest Michigan restaurants seemed strongly committed to purchasing local food. Only 25% went out of their way to purchase local foods, and only 12% bought local foods when it was more expensive (Krieger, 2006). When ranking the perceived barriers to purchasing locally grown foods, the restaurants ranked unpredictable availability as the largest barrier on average. Barriers such as the high price of local food, inconsistent product quality and size, not being available year-round, and inadequate storage, delivery, and packaging were also ranked as important barriers (Krieger, 2006).

It is important to understand the current state of local food on Mackinac Island in order to reach the goal of 25% local in four years. This paper culminates a year-long journey attempting to identify the demand, opportunities, and barriers around local food on Mackinac Island. I spoke with residents familiar with Mackinac Island food history, restaurant and grocery food purchasers, tourists, and Michigan local food experts to realize the story of local food on

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Mackinac Island. Although I had limited time on the island and often sparse information, I hope my efforts will provide valuable insight to enhance the local food efforts on Mackinac Island.

### **Methods**

I spent three weeks on Mackinac Island in May 2018. Being on the island was important because I was able to talk with many people on the island about their experiences and collect anecdotal evidence of the food norms on the island. While I was not on the island during the peak tourist season (June-August), I was able to interact with many seasonal workers and experience busy tourist weekends.

On Saturday, May 5 and on Sunday, May 6, 2018, I stood on Main Street, Mackinac Island and asked people if they were interested in answering a few questions about their food experience on Mackinac Island. Many individuals did not want to stop and take the survey, but I was able to talk to 51 people. The short survey (Appendix A) asked about the importance of eating local food while visiting a destination, the amount of money one is willing to pay for a local product, and for comments about the food on Mackinac Island.

To gain an understanding of food business sourcing decisions on the island, I interviewed 5 Mackinac Island Food Purchasers that made purchases for 11 different food businesses on Mackinac Island. Two of the interviews took place in person while I was on the island in May, and the other three were conducted remotely over the phone. The interview questions were adapted from an interview guide created by New Growth Associates LLC (*newgrowthassociates.com*) (Appendix B). The interviews asked about the businesses' food procurement processes, food purchase planning, interest in local food purchasing, barriers to purchasing local food, and costs related to local food purchasing. I then coded question responses in themed categories based on similar answers.



## **Results**

### Street Survey

Most of the survey takers said that local food was important to them. Of the 51 people surveyed, 62.7% (32) said that it was important that the food they ate on a trip was grown or raised in the place they visit. (Appendix C). Additionally, many said they were willing to pay more for a locally grown food product than for food from further away. 76% (39) said they would pay at least one dollar more for locally grown food items, and 41% (21) said they would be willing to pay at least three dollars more for locally grown food items. (Appendix C).

I conducted a chi-square goodness of fit test to see if there was a significant relationship between the first two survey questions and the respondent's age range. With a sample size  $n=46$  (I removed 5 respondents from the test because four of the respondents did not want to share their age, and there was only one respondent who was between 18-24), I found there is a significant relationship ( $p = <.05$ ) between the age of the respondent and the importance of local food on a vacation (Appendix C). It seems as though younger people are more interested in local food on vacation than older people. 71% (10) of the respondents between the age of 25-34 said that it is important that they ate local food, while only 47% (9) of the respondents 55 and older said it was important to them. There was not a significant relationship ( $p=.55$ ) between the willingness to pay more for locally grown food items and the respondent's age.

Most of the respondents did not have any comments following the survey questions, and there were a handful of people commented that they are pleased with the variety and quality of food on Mackinac Island. A few respondents had interesting comments about their food experience on Mackinac Island (Figure 1). These comments reflect that there is some lack of healthy, vegetarian food options on the island.

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<b>Age</b>	<b>Hometown:</b>	<b>Comment:</b>
N/A	Wisconsin	<i>I want [food] that is different than we have back home</i>
55+	Paw Paw, MI	<i>[Mackinac Island] needs more fresh food and more variety</i>
N/A	Ann Arbor, MI	<i>Most of the places [on Mackinac Island] are like Coney Islands. The Icehouse has good food but it is not even open yet.</i>
25-34	Mackinac Island, MI	<i>Healthier food options would be better</i>
45-54	St Joseph, MI	<i>Lots of bar food but not a lot of fresh produce. We had to work to even find a salad!</i>
45-54	Flint, MI	<i>Vegetarian options are lacking.</i>

Figure 1- Interesting comments from the Mackinac Island Street Survey

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### Local Food Purchasing Interviews

All the food purchasers on Mackinac Island that I interviewed use local food products in varying capacities. During the interviews, they described their reasons for having local options in their establishments, as well as some of the barriers to sourcing locally grown products. In addition, they explained the distributors and local farms that they source their products from, and the types of local produce, meats, and specialty items they source.

#### *Reasons for Local Food*

The food purchasers I spoke with have a positive attitude towards local food and the mission of MFF. Each of the businesses has a statement saying they source from local farmers or “use the freshest local ingredients” on their menus and/or website. The food purchasers described several reasons that they source some of their food locally. (Figure 2). They described the **freshness** of the local food as a big selling point, and that having the food spend less time in

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shipment will enhance the freshness of the products. One purchaser said that the freshness contributes to better tasting food options. They also said that **demand** for local food is important in their decision to source locally. One purchaser described how diners are becoming more educated about their diet and that people are becoming more interested in knowing where their food comes from. They also said that the national trend is moving towards local food consumption, so it is smart business sense to have local options. **Supporting the local economy** was another reason the purchasers endorsed sourcing locally produced items. They said that local food helps the Michigan economy, provides jobs, and supports farmers. They also said that they feel that it is important to support others in their community. One purchaser described the **environment** as a reason to source local food, because sourcing local food reduces the global footprint.

### *Barriers to local food*

The Mackinac Island Food Purchasers described many barriers to sourcing local food (Figure 3). **Supply chain issues** were one of the major barriers discussed. The remoteness of Mackinac Island was seen as a common problem for getting local food to the island. While there are a handful of large distributors that ship products to the island on a daily basis and have the shipping process streamlined, there are only a few local farms that regularly get food products to the island. One purchaser mentioned that there is a very little margin of error for shipping mistakes because there is not an option to go to a store on Mackinac to and buy all the product they need to run the business for the day. Ultimately, they trust the large distributors to deliver the goods on time more than they trust the local farms.

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Reason	Examples
Freshness and Taste	<p><i>"I would prefer to buy something local because it is fresher."</i></p> <p><i>"If I'm ordering a product that's grown out in Iowa, what are the steps and how fresh is it when it gets to [the distributor]... and then when it gets to me after 3 days, what's my situation with the freshness?"</i></p> <p><i>"Well [Local food] tastes better normally because it is traveling a shorter distance and it is on a truck less time"</i></p>
Demand	<p><i>"People are very appreciative of local products"</i></p> <p><i>"As people become more educated as diners, the reality is that people want to know what they are eating and where it came from."</i></p> <p><i>"the local trend is huge, not only here but on a national basis, so we all have a stake in it, whether it is for selfish reasons or not."</i></p> <p><i>"[buying local] it is a good business sense, because it is a very popular trend right now to, and I don't think it will go away"</i></p>
Supporting The Local Economy	<p><i>"We have a stake in our community in where we live and we want to help each other"</i></p> <p><i>"[Local food] helps the Michigan economy, it provides jobs and helps farmers."</i></p> <p><i>"[Local food] helps the farmer, it helps us, people want to eat more that way"</i></p>
Environment	<p><i>"[Local food] Reduces the global footprint"</i></p>

Figure 2 - Mackinac Island Food Purchasers' reasons for sourcing local food with examples of quotes from the interviews.

**Limited demand** was a concern for the food purchasers. They said that even if the tourists try to eat local at home, they put their food preferences aside when they go on vacation. They also discussed how seasonal employees and homeowners on the island are not going to be interested in local food. One purchaser said that people may be more interested in local food five years from now, but the island isn't ready for local food yet. Additionally, getting some of the local produce at a restaurant **quality** level was difficult. They also described how the **packaging** was "more rustic" than packaging from the big distributors, which makes the product seem less appealing.

**The seasonality and consistency** of locally grown food was another barrier for Mackinac Island Food Purchasers. They described that local produce is not ready for harvest for most of the year. When it becomes ready it is already half-way through the busy tourist season. The winter on Mackinac Island is especially difficult for sourcing local food for this reason. The purchasers added that a **limited selection** of local food products is an issue in Northern Michigan, compared to areas like Southeast Michigan where there are more small farms selling goods.

The limited **volume** of local food items that the purchasers were able to obtain on a regular basis is a large barrier to increasing local food on the island. A purchaser explained that for the number of customers that they receive during peak tourist season on the island, the local farms could not supply what they need. Even the local farms that do produce a lot of high-quality goods are swamped with purchasing requests from around the region, and it may be easier for them to do business off of the island to avoid the island shipping process.

Lastly, the **price** is a huge barrier for Mackinac Island Food Purchasers to increase their sourcing of local food products. Most of the food purchasers explained that there are many locally grown products that can be double or triple the cost of the same product that is sold from national distributors. They said that the price of food on Mackinac Island is already higher than on the mainland, so they don't want to have to pass the additional costs of local food on to their customers.

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<b>Barriers</b>	<b>Examples</b>
Supply Chain Issues	<p><i>“It’s really sadly difficult logistically to work with farms off the island just to get us product, because we are in such a remote location.”</i></p> <p><i>“The only difficult side of food ordering being so remote is you can’t mess up. We can’t just go to a grocery store and pick up the two cases of chicken that we forgot to order or whatever it is, you really have to be really well organized.”</i></p> <p><i>“Not everyone ships to Mackinac Island.”</i></p>
Limited Demand	<p><i>“Tourists often put food preferences on the backend when going on vacation.”</i></p> <p><i>“The employees don’t have kitchens, most of them have a meal plan. A lot of the blue collar homeowners are blue collar workers, they are going to go to Walmart”</i></p> <p><i>“I just think that Mackinac, in my opinion, right now isn’t there yet [for eating local food], I think it will be in say 5 years when you see 19-year-old kids eating this way and they don’t care about the dollar amount, that’s when [local food will become prevalent].”</i></p>
Quality and Packaging	<p><i>“Getting salad greens table ready is difficult, they are easy to grow in Michigan but hard to process at restaurant quality”</i></p> <p><i>“Their packaging is not the best. It’s not like I’m buying it from [a large distributor] with great packaging, It’s pretty rustic.”</i></p>
Seasonality and Consistency	<p><i>“Tomatoes are not ready locally until mid-July, so it is better to focus on another vegetable that you can have for the whole summer”</i></p> <p><i>“We live in this environment where typically the growing season in Michigan is short because we are so far north, but It is nice that we have local purveyors is that they know that local strawberries are going to be around anywhere from the first of June to the fourth of July and that’s the window you have to work with”</i></p> <p><i>“We have problems with shipments that every day all winter long. Every day in the winter it is me working with someone put this in the cooler, put this in a heated room, put this in the freezer, an ongoing task that is very hard on any fresh produce”</i></p>
Limited Selection	<p><i>“If you live in Southeast Michigan, the micro-local is a lot bigger than it is in Northern Michigan [so there are more options in southeast Michigan.”</i></p> <p><i>“I have had a hard time getting Michigan cherries in the past two years and I was able to get them the first few years I was here”</i></p>

Figure 3- Mackinac Island Food Purchasers Barriers to sourcing local food products with example quotes from the interviews

<b>Barriers (Cont.)</b>	<b>Examples</b>
Volume	<p><i>“I’ll call a lot of local farms, and after I explain to them what we do and the volume that we go through, It’s almost like they just hang up on me.”</i></p> <p><i>“The farms are not that big, they are small. They don’t produce that much, they produce so much but it such slow volume, so I think that’s the downfall. If there was a farm up here that grew the most amazing asparagus, I guarantee they’ll be swamped”</i></p> <p><i>“We are very high volume mid-season, and it is impossible to keep up with things without help from the outside, I need giant cases of things that I’m not able to get from local farms.”</i></p>
Price	<p><i>“Sometimes the cost to do local is more, and if it is double or triple I can’t justify getting a pig from an hour away vs a pig from Massachusetts that’s half the price”</i></p> <p><i>“The local chicken costs twice as much as the non-local chicken”</i></p> <p><i>“We’ve quit carrying [a local farm’s products] halfway through the year because it wasn’t moving because the price point was so high”</i></p> <p><i>“The prices though for the local farms are very expensive. If I’m buying 20 pound of carrots, verse if I’m buying 20 pounds of carrots from one of these local farms is double the cost.”</i></p> <p><i>“If [local produce price] going to affect the menu price I don’t risk it, because at the end of the day its business and I have to hit margins and I have to make money”</i></p> <p><i>“It cost money to get it here, more so than it would “in the real world” if you will, and we need to find seasonal help and house seasonal help, so all of those things go into the equation.”</i></p>

Figure 3 Cont.

*Food Distributors and Farms*

The Mackinac Island Food Purchasers discussed their main distributors and local farms that they source their food products from (Figure 4). Gordon Food Service, Sysco, Superior Foods, and Carmella are the non-local distributors used by multiple food businesses on Mackinac

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Island. Many of the non-local distributors do source products from Michigan farms, and some even source from Northern Michigan farms within 100 miles of Mackinac Island. One food purchaser described how 70% of the products he gets from Sysco are from the state of Michigan, and that they check to see where the food is coming from before they make an order. However, much of the food from these distributors comes from around the country or areas in the state further than 100 miles from Mackinac Island, so it should not be considered entirely local. Presque Isle farm was the only local farm that sourced to more than one of the food purchasers I spoke with. However, one purchaser explained that stopped using Presque Isle Farm because it was expensive and the customers were not buying the products from the farm because of the high price.

<p>Non Local Food Distributors used on Mackinac Island</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Gordon Food Service (Grand Rapids, MI)</li> <li>● Sysco (Grand Rapids, MI)</li> <li>● Superior Foods (Grand Rapids, MI)</li> <li>● Carmella (Detroit, MI)</li> <li>● Lagrasso Produce (Detroit, MI)</li> <li>● US Foods (Wixom, MI)</li> <li>● Heeren Brothers Produce (Grand Rapids, MI)</li> <li>● Great Lakes Food Distributing (Menominee, MI)</li> </ul>
<p>Local Distributors and Farms used on Mackinac Island</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Presque Isle Farms (Rogers City, MI)</li> <li>● Open Sky Organic Farms (Pellston, MI)</li> <li>● Mackinac Bluffs (Pickford, MI)</li> <li>● Friske Farm (Ellsworth, MI)</li> <li>● Harvest Thyme Farm (Cheboygan, MI)</li> <li>● Plath's Meats (Rogers City, MI)</li> <li>● Massey Fish Company (St. Ignace)</li> <li>● Syrup from Rudyard, MI</li> <li>● Chicken from Sue St. Marie, MI</li> <li>● Sausage from Rogers City, MI</li> <li>● Tomatoes from Petoskey, MI</li> </ul>

Figure 4 Food Distributors and Farms mentioned by Mackinac Island Food Purchasers



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### *Local Food Products of Mackinac Island*

There was a large variety of local products that the Mackinac Island Food Purchasers say they use (Figure 5). These products come directly from local farms or non-local distributors that say they source their products from local farms. Multiple food purchasers said they use local onions, tomatoes, asparagus, and chicken in their businesses.

Local Vegetables and Fruit used on Mackinac Island	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Microgreens</li><li>● Carrots</li><li>● Onions</li><li>● Beets</li><li>● Radishes</li><li>● Edible Flowers</li><li>● Turnips</li><li>● Parsnips</li><li>● Asparagus</li><li>● Corn</li><li>● Tomatoes</li><li>● Green Beans</li><li>● Romaine Lettuce</li><li>● Kale</li><li>● Apples</li></ul>
Local Meat, Dairy, or Specialty Items used on Mackinac Island	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Cheese</li><li>● Maple Syrup</li><li>● Chicken</li><li>● Whitefish</li><li>● Bacon</li><li>● Maple Syrup</li><li>● Pork</li><li>● Duck</li><li>● Sausage</li></ul>

Figure 5 Local food products mentioned by Mackinac Island Food Purchasers

## **Discussion & Conclusion**

### *Summary*

The results from the Mackinac Tourist street survey indicate that tourists on Mackinac Island do care that the food they eat while on vacation is from the place they visit. Younger tourists (ages 25-34) are significantly more likely to care about eating local on vacation than older tourists (ages 55+). A majority of respondents also indicated that they are willing to pay more for the for local food products. While it was a relatively small sample of respondents (n=51), this may indicate a larger trend that people visiting Mackinac Island would be interested in purchasing local items, even at a price premium.

From the food business interviews, I learned that Mackinac Island Food Purchasers perceive local food products to be fresher and taste better than products from further away. They also indicated that there is some demand for local food products, that purchasing local food products supports the local economy, and that it is good for the environment. Yet, food purchasers say that there are difficulties with shipping food from local farms to the island, that the products lack quality packaging and consistency, that there is a limited selection of local products available, and that there is not enough food grown in the region to support the volume they need to operate their businesses. Additionally, some of the food purchasers said there is a limited demand for local products on the island, and local food was more expensive and that they did not want to pass the price on to their customers. The food businesses on the Island source from a variety of similar national distributors, and the businesses only have business relationships with a select few local farms. The food businesses sourced a variety of types of local produce, meats, cheeses, and syrup from those few local farms and national distributors that source their produce from Northern Michigan farms.

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### *Recommendations*

A majority of the barriers to purchasing local food described by the Mackinac Island Food Purchasers are out of their control. The volume and consistency of local food able to be produced, the realities around shipping food to the island, and the high price of local products are not likely to change without years of drastic institutional and political efforts centered on localizing the Mackinac Island food system. Mackinac Food Forest, by itself, cannot make the changes necessary to increase the production and lower the prices of local food. However, there are a few ways MFF can help make the reasons for purchasing local food more salient and connect more local farmers to Mackinac Island food businesses.

To highlight how fresh and tasteful local food products can be, MFF can help organize a Mackinac Island local cookbook. Every island restaurant that wants to participate can submit a recipe to the book that showcases local products and the farms they source from. The cookbook can be sold in Mackinac Island bookstores and can be advertised on storefronts. People may see the local recipes in the cookbooks and want to try the dish in the restaurants, cooked by the chefs that submitted the recipe. This idea originated from a Mackinac Island summer resident I spoke with on the island.

To emphasize that buying local produce can support local farmers and the local economy, MFF can organize a farm stand on Mackinac Island where a local farmer can sell their products. MFF can sponsor a grant where a farmer could set up a stand on the island in a prominent location for multiple days. The grant would support some overhead costs and farmer lodging on the island while they sell their goods. The leftover produce that is not sold during the farmer's stay could be sold to the local grocer at a discount price, and then sold in the grocery store. This

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idea was conceptualized by a Northern Michigan regional food expert I spoke with after I left the island.

The next step in the Localizing the Mackinac Island Foodshed project is to conduct interviews with local farmers. The farmers will undoubtedly share different information about the benefits and barriers around local food on Mackinac Island than the Mackinac Island Food Purchasers shared. After MFF conducts the interviews, MFF can act as a broker between the local farms and the food businesses on Mackinac Island. Talking to farms that work with multiple Mackinac Island food businesses, such as Presque Isle Farms, can help illuminate the practices that make their farm successful in business with Mackinac Island. Those practices could be shared with other farms to replicate the success of the ‘local farm to Mackinac Island’ relationship. Taste the Local Difference has an institutional sales directory where farmers have indicated that they are interested in selling in large quantities to institutional buyers. In the Michigan counties located within 100 miles of Mackinac Island, there are 23 produce farms that are interested in connecting with institutional food buyers (Buy Local Food, 2019). Targeting these farms for future interviews, along with the farms mentioned by the Mackinac Island Food Purchasers, will be a way to garner information from farms that are likely to be able to source to Mackinac Island.

### *Limitations*

I conducted a limited amount of interviews, and there is certainly more information about food purchasing practices on the island that I was not able to capture. More interviews need to be done with Mackinac Island restaurants to gain a fuller picture of the current state of local food on Mackinac Island. Furthermore, the interviews I conducted were from a self-selected sample of food business owners, and they all already have some experience sourcing local food. These

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businesses were the ‘low-hanging fruit.’ Interviews with restaurants that do not already source local food products are needed. Additionally, the sample size of the street survey was small, and the survey was informal. Future surveys relating to tourists’ food perceptions on Mackinac Island can be more formal surveys that are distributed to a larger pool of vacationers.

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## Appendix A

### Street Survey

#### Mackinac Island Community and Tourist Food Assessment

“Thank you for taking this short survey about food preferences on Mackinac Island. It should only take a minute!

This survey is part of a larger project with Mackinac Food Forest. Mackinac Food Forest is an organization that works to develop community vision and engagement, facilitate local food workshops and projects, promote healthy eating habits, enable equal access to nutritious, high-quality, safe and affordable food, and protect the quality of soil, air and water.

Please ask if you have any questions!

Q1: As a visitor is it important that the food you eat on a trip is grown or raised local to the place you visit?

- Yes
- No

Q2: How much would you be willing to pay for a locally grown food product?

- Less money than food from farther away
- The same amount as food from farther away
- \$1-\$2 more
- \$3-\$5 more
- \$6-\$10 more
- Over \$10 more
- I would not purchase locally grown food

Where are you traveling from?

What is your Age?

- 18-24
- 25-34
- 35-44
- 45-55
- 55 and older
- I prefer not to say

Do you have any comments about the food options available on Mackinac Island?

# Localizing the Mackinac Island Food System

## Appendix B

### Mackinac Island Community Food Assessment Interview

Interview Purpose:

- Collect information about the institution (operations, facilities, staff)
- Learn about the “local story” (motivation for becoming involved in local procurement efforts, etc.,)
- Learn about barriers and facilitators in implementing local procurement goals
- Learn about additional procurement efforts from the institution’s perspective
- Discuss feasible interventions to facilitate farm to institution sales and profitability

#### SECTION I. CONSENT LANGUAGE

We are conducting a local food demand study for Mackinac Island.

We reach out to you because your institution is interested in the purchasing of local foods from area farmers. We would like to ask you some questions about what it takes to purchase products from local farms. This interview will take approximately 1 hour.

This study is completely voluntary. You can choose to skip any question that you prefer not to answer. You can choose to stop or withdraw from participating in this interview at any time. There are no negative consequences if you choose to stop participating in this study.

Your responses will not be confidential unless you specify otherwise. Your responses will be shared completely with the research team. You may be quoted directly in the final report and your specific purchasing requirements may be published for general use, but your specific financial data will not. If we quote you directly in our report, you will be given the opportunity to approve the quotation ahead of publication. Digital interview notes and any audio recordings will be held on a secured, external hard drive by the research team. Paper notes will be destroyed by the end of the study period.

Do you have any questions about the interview or the study?

Are you willing to participate in this interview? Are you willing to be recorded?

1. How many meals do you serve daily?
2. How many meals do you serve per year?
3. Estimated total value of food-related products purchased annually: \$
4. Who are your primary vendors/distributors? Please list up to 6.
5. Is your organization part of a buying co-op?

*Follow up: Ask more about buying co-op*

7. What is your procurement process?
8. Do you participate in purchasing outside your contract? What are the constraints of your contract?
  - a. What percentage are you allowed to purchase outside your contract?
9. How often and far in advance do you plan your food purchases? I.e. How much time do you need for purchasing, product delivery, and determining floor space and staff to prepare and stock items?
10. Are there any industry requirements or certifications your site must require from producers before purchasing products?



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11. Please describe your entity's interest/involvement in purchasing local food items:
  - Direct from local farmers
  - Directly from a farm co-op or collaborative
  - Items labeled and marketed as "local" directly from a full service, broadline distributor (e.g. Sysco)
  - From an on-site farm or garden
12. Do your primary vendors offer Michigan-grown/raised products?
13. Which distributors or farms supply your **local products**?
14. If your site currently buys locally produced items, what percentage of your food is local (by expenditure, or % of budget)?
15. Do you have the capacity to scale up your local purchases?
16. Have you or your organization set specific goals regarding local food purchasing?

### *Follow up questions:*

- *What are your motivations around local purchasing?*
  - *Why are you doing it or want to do it?*
  - *What about local products or local purchasing practices is important to the organization?*
17. What are your biggest challenges to buying local products? How did/are you dealing with these challenges?
  18. What would enable your institution to increase purchases of local items?
  19. Would you be willing to pay more for locally grown products? If so, how much?  
*Follow up:*
    - *Give me an example of something you paid more for?*
    - *Was it worth it?*
    - *What strategies have you employed for managing your budget to account for paying higher prices for some items?*
  20. Are there locally produced items that you are interested in purchasing that you have not being able to procure?
  21. Of all the things we've discussed today, which issues do you think are highest priority to resolve?
  22. Which issues would you consider low hanging fruit and easiest to address?
  23. Do you have any questions or additional comments?

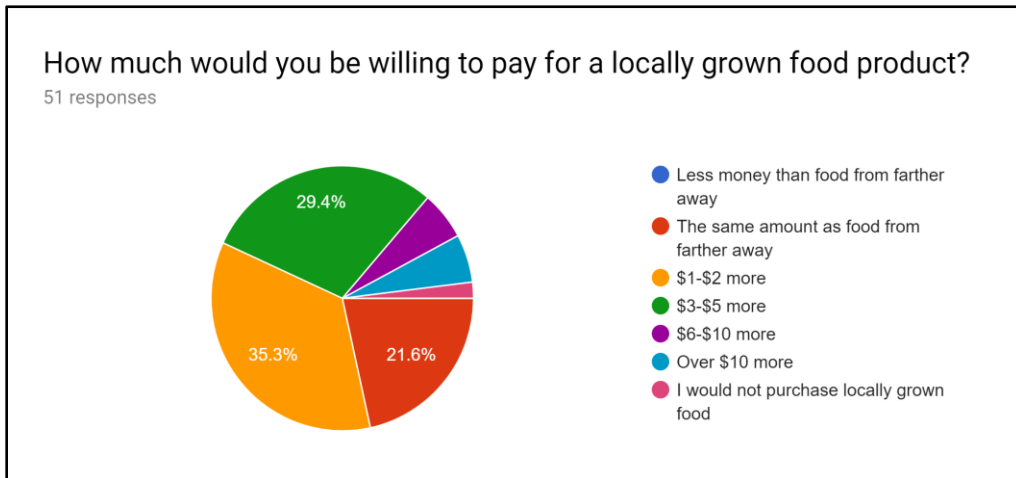
### MFF Mission

"Mackinac Food Forest is a social enterprise focused on improving the local food system on Mackinac Island, MI. We work to develop community vision and engagement, facilitate local food workshops and projects, promote healthy eating habits, enable equal access to nutritious, high-quality, safe and affordable food, and protect the quality of soil, air and water."

24. How valuable and applicable do you feel the MFF mission is to Mackinac Island?

**Appendix C**

Street Survey Results



Age of Respondent and the Importance of Local Food on Vacation

	<u>25-34</u>	<u>35-44</u>	<u>45-54</u>	<u>55 and older</u>	<u>Total</u>
<u>No</u>	4	2	2	10	18
<u>Yes</u>	10	3	6	9	28
<u>Total</u>	14	5	8	19	46
Chi-Squared Goodness of Fit				6.59613E-12	