

# *The Albion Statement*

## **HEALTHY PEOPLE, PLACES, AND COMMUNITIES**

### **A 2025 VISION FOR MICHIGAN'S FOOD AND FARMING**



**The Citizens' Network for Michigan Food Democracy**

September 2005  
Revised November 2005

# HEALTHY PEOPLE, PLACES, AND COMMUNITIES: A 2025 Vision for Michigan's Food and Farming

By

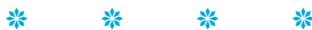
**The Citizens' Network for Michigan Food Democracy**

## Vision

*Our vision is for a more self-reliant, secure, and sustainable Michigan by 2025. A Michigan where a widespread recognition of the need to nurture and sustain our people, communities, and environments combines with a broad and active citizens' movement to make substantial gains towards:*

- \* *food security for all*
- \* *sustainable family farms and foodways that provide a significant portion of Michigan's food*
- \* *healthier, more self-reliant communities and cities built upon meaningful livelihoods for all*
- \* *healthy air, waters, soils, and habitats throughout the state.*

*We envision a Michigan where everyone has a voice and is heard.*



Ken Dahlberg, Jim Bingen, and Kami Pothukuchi authored this statement. After many e-mail exchanges, a complete statement took shape at a meeting at Albion College's Kellogg Center. Hence the name, *The Albion Statement*.

A Citizens' Network for Michigan Food Democracy is part of our vision and something we hope will emerge from public discussion of this statement, and from other discussions, such as those led by the newly created Michigan Food Policy Council.

Throughout the booklet, we use the term "citizen" in a broad and inclusive sense. In such basic matters as food and farming, every person's voice counts. Working definitions of other key terms are found at the end of the statement.

For more information, browse: [www.mifooddemocracy.org](http://www.mifooddemocracy.org)

## **Food Democracy I**

### Our Heritage - Richness and Losses

Michigan's rich natural resource endowments support one of the most diverse agricultural states in the country. Michigan leads the U.S. in production volume for ten crops and ranks in the top ten for forty more. From apples to zucchini, more than 52,000 farms produce over \$37 billion in annual, gross farm sales. Michigan's unique physical resources (soil, water, topography) enable this diversity, and the surrounding Great Lakes buffer its climate and extend its growing season. Specialty crops alone account for almost \$1 billion in farm revenues for Michigan producers, most of whom are small and mid-sized family food growing operations. Michigan is truly one of the nation's last bastions of a crucial American heritage: diversified family farming.

Yet there have been significant losses to our environmental, social, and cultural heritage. The rapid exploitation of forests, especially between 1870 and 1910, reduced biodiversity and left many scars. A variety of industries - especially mining, automobile, chemical, and paper industries - have polluted air and waters. Urbanization combined with corporate consolidation has decreased the number and vitality of rural villages and towns. The loss of local farming and food system elements - farm input and credit suppliers; local processors, distributors and warehouses; local bakers, cafes, florists, and grocers; as well as local systems for food waste recycling - has led to a steady loss of small- and medium-sized farms and has reinforced rural decline. Crop and livestock diversity has been reduced and some species have been lost. Finally, there are ongoing losses - less visible, but very important - in local and regional food and farming knowledge, skills, and culture.

Current trends suggest that major changes will be required to provide a growing population with healthy food. Urban sprawl threatens the land available for food production. Rural towns and especially farmers are threatened by large groundwater drawdowns and exports. Michigan's energy-intensive food supply is especially vulnerable since ten energy calories are needed to put one food calorie on a plate. This means energy price increases will raise our food prices exponentially. Moreover, with eight out of every ten dollars spent on fossil fuels immediately leaving the state, we will have fewer dollars to spend and invest.

The steady growth of urbanization and economic inequities now leave many of our citizens vulnerable as well as unhealthy. Few Michigan residents eat healthfully and many are food insecure. Only about a quarter of Michigan residents eat five servings of fruits and vegetables daily. In 2004, Michigan had a monthly average of nearly a million residents in the food stamp program, almost a 60 percent increase from 2001. Over three-quarters of a million Michigan residents seek food assistance from charitable sources annually; most are from households with children or elderly persons. Moreover, supermarkets and grocery stores - sources of fresh produce - are closing down in urban and rural areas across the state. Clearly, Michigan's long-term public, social and economic health is compromised.

In response to these trends, many citizens and groups across the state are pursuing creative ways to change course by rebuilding foodsheds to integrate food, farming, communities, and cities. They are exploring how to combine local food and farming, farmland preservation, and environmental protection with community revitalization, increased access to healthy foods, and better diets. Some of these efforts draw upon our state's long history of local food and environmental activism, while others pursue altogether new paths.

To strengthen their efforts, we need to address three long-term questions:

- \* How can currently disparate interests in food, farming, environment and health become a new, concerted 21st century voice for healthy people, places, and communities in Michigan?
- \* How can the people of Michigan become more fully engaged in this process?
- \* How can Michigan assure food security and justice for all residents in a sustainable way?

The vision, goals, and priorities in this statement represent a first step toward addressing these questions. They are offered to stimulate more public discussion of how to build a better future for Michigan by 2025 through a vigorous and effective citizen-based movement.

## **Food Democracy II**

### Goals for Healthy People, Places and Communities

#### *Goal 1: Build a Food-secure Michigan*

Michigan must become a state where citizens, communities, cities, regions and all branches of government work vigorously to ensure that every person has access to nutritious, affordable, and culturally suitable foods at all times. We must assist, enable and empower more residents to gain their daily bread, while providing for those in need. Michigan should lead the country in recognizing food security as a human right. Public debate about this right and how to achieve it will deepen our understanding of the fundamental significance of food and social equity.

#### *Goal 2: Build Sustainable Food Systems*

Our food security is ultimately based upon the health of our surrounding resources, environments, and habitats. Our food and farming systems must mirror and reinforce that reality by greatly reducing the use of harmful and toxic substances and by becoming more diverse, more localized, and more sustainable. These measures will also help reduce the vulnerability of Michigan farming to the vagaries of national and international markets, resource shortages, and global climate change. Basic structural threats - urban sprawl, corporate consolidation, and federal commodity subsidies which reduce the number and diversity of family farms - must be addressed. Food, family farming, community and household gardens, CSAs and other local production systems must, once again, be valued as

the lifeblood they are to our cultures, economies, and environments. To rebuild them as guarantors of our food security, we must act now to reestablish their long-term health and sustainability.

*Goal 3: Develop Healthy Communities Through Food*

Food and farming can help to strengthen the health and economies of our villages, towns and cities through greater food security, jobs, and sound environmental stewardship. Bringing local food systems into public health and nutrition programs is a crucial part of reducing food-related diseases and obesity and their associated community costs. Placing farming and food at the heart of state and local economic development will require “place-based” approaches in community and state planning and policy-making. Reconstruction of local infrastructure and markets consistent with principles of equity and social justice will be required. Also needed are more meaningful and sustainable livelihoods - “chains of valued relationships” - where all participants enjoy respect, trust, living wages, decent housing, and health care. The processes used and the knowledge already gained in developing sustainable food systems can well be applied to other local systems and problems.

*Goal 4: Build a Self-reliant Michigan Through Food*

To achieve a more self-reliant Michigan, a greater portion of the food consumed in the state needs to be produced and processed here, and done so more sustainably. More locally reliant food and farming systems will undergird food security, support healthy communities, and reduce its energy imports. However, their construction must be based upon careful assessments of several important issues: How vulnerable is our food and farming to energy price increases, market and trade instabilities, declining federal support, or global warming, among others? How much will localizing our food and energy cycles decrease energy imports, save dollars for local investment, and increase self-reliance? Similar assessments in other key sectors, for example, health, will help to identify where significant synergies justify action. Even in the face of severe budget constraints, state government has an important role to play: it must provide a safety net for the loss of federal food programs, while it facilitates and strengthens local and regional actions, and takes the lead in offering new incentives and policies for building self-reliance.

*Goal 5: Build Michigan Food Democracy*

Every citizen has a stake in vibrant food and farming systems, vital communities, and the natural systems that sustain them. We must develop an informed and engaged citizenry, where everyone has the opportunity to participate actively in decisions that affect these systems. Grassroots-based food groups and a larger citizens’ coalition have important roles to play in building Michigan food democracy. They can expand and deepen our understanding of the culture of food and of food citizenship. Such groups can also work to counteract trends that de-culture, displace, and commodify food. They can help to rebuild our diverse cultures of food and place by adding a broad and practiced

understanding of food as a force that enables life, nourishes families, and sustains communities; where natural and historic heritages are preserved - including local foodways; where the value of local foods and shared meals is clear; and where everyone learns the skills of growing, preparing, cooking, and preserving food as well as composting wastes. In short, to achieve food democracy in Michigan, we must all move beyond thinking of food as just another commodity.

Food citizenship aims to make the food system and the politics of food visible, and to place them in a democratic framework of equity and shared responsibility. Awareness of our economic dependency, food system vulnerabilities, and the threats to our renewable resources from degradation and contamination needs to be increased, discussed, and addressed. Healthy food-related alternatives need to be recognized and supported by citizens – at work, in volunteer activities and through our local and state governments. A diversity of local food cultures and citizen food groups offers the best avenue to multiple levels of health and security - individual, family, neighborhood, community (including the natural communities upon which we are dependent) - that enable societies to adapt, regenerate, and to be sustainable over the generations.

In short, our vision and our goals are for a Michigan where citizens, communities, and cities are actively engaged in building strong and sustainable food and farming systems; a state where there is food security for all; where there are healthy people and communities; and where Michigan's diversity - cultural, natural, and regional - is sustained.

### **Food Democracy III** Priorities for Action

To make substantial gains toward a healthier, stronger, and more secure Michigan by 2025, we will need to identify, refine, and implement key priorities. Here is a beginning list.

#### *Build a Food-secure Michigan*

Major priorities here are to:

- \* move as quickly as possible toward food security in Michigan by developing collaborative plans at each level that involve decision-makers, advocates, and ordinary citizens
- \* make available to all who need them nutrition and food assistance programs that teach and deliver healthful food choices
- \* increase food self-reliance by encouraging cities and counties to promote household gardening and to provide land for community gardens through sales or long-term leases
- \* integrate food skills and the knowledge of how to build community food security into K-12 education
- \* broaden nutrition and food assistance programs to include job and livelihood skills
- \* build firmer foundations for community food security by developing supportive community planning frameworks and state policies

- \* advocate for a legal right to food security and developing the outlines of the policy, planning, and legal approaches needed, and
- \* ensure that homeland security planning for natural disasters, food processing accidents, and food terrorism includes full consideration of emergency food needs as well as the vulnerabilities of today's centralized food and agricultural infrastructures.

### *Build Sustainable Food Systems*

Major priorities here are to:

- \* develop a 20 year plan for making farming a more attractive way of life that, along with other measures, will increase the number and sustainability of small to mid-size, diversified, family farms, including those operated by minority farmers
- \* assure an adequate retirement for farmers and decent wages, working and living conditions for farm workers
- \* build local diversity, self-reliance, and sustainability by reducing average "food miles" and increasing the amount of local food waste that is composted or recycled
- \* link food and farming more directly with the food-related activities of public health, environmental, energy, economic development, and transportation agencies and non-profits
- \* require factory farms to meet all the worker safety, health and retirement, and environmental requirements of other industries
- \* expand conservation programs and reducing urban sprawl by requiring real estate developers to pay full costs of new infrastructure required, and
- \* encourage local food economies through vigorous antitrust action to reduce corporate concentration.

### *Develop Healthy Communities Through Food*

Major priorities here are to:

- \* develop long-term local, regional, and state plans to reduce potential public health risks of food poisoning, antibiotic resistant diseases, water contamination, and livestock-based pandemics from all sources, including large-scale animal production and food processing facilities.
- \* build sustainable and self-reliant communities and cities through "local-first" food planning and policy efforts led by communities and cities, and supported by regional bodies and state government
- \* rebuild lost food processing, wholesaling and marketing infrastructure and capabilities;
- \* source schools, colleges, hospitals, jails, and other institutions with local foods
- \* create new "chains of valued relationships" within local and regional food systems, where everyone from the migrant farm worker to the supermarket checkout clerk is treated with respect and earns a reasonable livelihood, and
- \* promote educational programs that rediscover Michigan's cultures of place and food – drawing upon and integrating existing traditions while remaining open to new approaches.

### *Build a Self-reliant Michigan Through Food*

Major priorities here are to:

- \* develop a 20 year plan to increase the portion of Michigan-produced and -consumed
- \* food, fish, and forestry products as well as the proportion produced sustainably
- \* reduce fossil fuel dependency by building local food economies, reducing food miles and imported inputs, and increasing energy conservation and efficiency, including the recycling of “wastes”
- \* ensure that public policies affecting the use of Michigan’s agricultural resources give food security priority over biofuel production
- \* develop more flexible and scale-sensitive laws and regulations to meet the needs of small food producers and processors, and
- \* extend to other sectors the emerging “Select Michigan food” approaches for retail grocery, restaurants, conventions, schools and local institutions.

### *Build Michigan Food Democracy*

Major priorities here are to:

- \* build a citizens’ network which can become a vigorous, democratic, and non-profit base for the above and following priorities
- \* educate ourselves and the public on key farming and food system issues, particularly sustainability and the right to food security
- \* work to lift the veil of invisibility that surrounds the politics of food and farming
- \* identify and promote the skills and knowledge required for healthy farms, foods, and people, and
- \* incorporate a culture of food as part of our cultures of place.

## **Food Democracy IV** Beginning the Transformation

We have outlined goals and priorities for transforming today’s unsustainable food systems. We are convinced that changes implementing them will also help Michigan’s rather rusty industrial ship of state become more maneuverable, buoyant, and durable - all while sailing in troubled waters. To help change the course and restructure the ship, we will broadly need to:

### *Connect, Discuss, and Debate*

- \* In what ways can local and community food groups and professional organizations around the state use this statement to inform their programs and activities?
- \* What are the most effective ways to broaden the public discussion of the issues raised in this statement among friends, colleagues, and other groups?
- \* If thought useful, how best can information/discussion sessions on this statement be organized at food-related meetings, with interested groups, and with local and state officials?

### *Collaborate*

- \* How can we create a broad-based citizen and non-profit network (a citizens' coalition) that will lead to a concerted and focused strategy for state and national policy advocacy?
- \* How can we encourage more involvement in such a network by college and university faculty and students around the state?
- \* How can we better inform the work of local governments, the Legislature, and the various state agencies on food systems issues?
- \* What are the most effective means to contribute to the work of the Michigan Food Policy Council ( <http://www.mda.state.mi.us/mfpc/> )?

### *Build and Share our Knowledge Base*

- \* How best can we share information on our activities?
- \* How can we encourage collaborative analysis and action-oriented research among all sectors related to food, food systems, and food security?
- \* What is the best strategy for the wide dissemination of reports, white papers, policy and planning proposals, papers on key leverage issues, and capacity-building recommendations?
- \* How best can we seek support for an action research team/network to assist food groups, non-profits, and agencies that have specific knowledge needs?

We welcome your responses to the above questions as well as any other comments and suggestions you have regarding this Statement. We also encourage readers to duplicate and widely distribute this Statement. We have established a web site to facilitate this:  
<http://www.mifooddemocracy.org/>

## Some Key Terms

**Food Democracy:** Democracy is the process of ordinary people coming together as citizens to deliberate and devise ways to improve their communities and society. Through trial and error they also expand their knowledge, skills, and political and moral awareness. To expand the small circles of food democracy found in today's world, many more of us must:

- \* Recognize that all aspects of policy-making for food and farming are political—something large corporations have long realized.
- \* Educate ourselves and others about the structures of power and influence in food and farming systems.
- \* Band together democratically so that citizens can ensure that food and farming serve public rather than just private interests.
- \* Ensure that food and farming systems at all levels are accountable to people, responsible to communities and the environment, and socially just.

**Sustainability** as it applies to food means that societies pass on to future generations all the elements required to provide healthy food on a regular basis: healthy and diverse environments (soil, water, air, and habitats); healthy, diverse, and freely reproducing seeds, crops, and livestock; and the values, creativity, knowledge, skills, and local institutions that enable societies to adapt effectively to environmental and social changes.

**Self-reliance** is the process whereby communities, regions, and states build, maintain, enhance, and largely control their social and economic capabilities and resources. It is based on cooperation and a sense of belonging—both to place and community.

[Note: these are our working definitions. If you would like to comment on them, contact us at [www.mifooddemocracy.org](http://www.mifooddemocracy.org) ]