**The Western Lake Superior Food Hub**

The Western Lake Superior Food Hub is a new community based pilot project connecting regional food producers and institutional food service buyers. The project aims to demonstrate shared community-wide benefits of a long term stable investment in our regional food economy.

This project will provide a direct investment of approximately $150,000 annualized into the local economy, with indirect benefits estimated at $450,000-$750,000. Institutions will be provided with carrots, broccoli, cauliflower and ground beef raised by producers under the [Superior Grown](http://lssfa.org) label.

This project is a community response to the multiple impacts of our current industrial food system and the shared interest in local socio-economic development. As our current industrial model, relies on large transnational players (distributors, processors, producers) which have little incentive to recreate and build local economies, creation of a localized food system needs to be locally driven and supported

An essential catalyst in the development of a regional food system is a short term guaranteed market for area producers, by anchor institutions (hospitals and universities) and other aggregated demand. This guaranteed market is expressed in a commitment to purchase a certain amount of local, sustainable food, which allows regional producers to secure financing, scale up production, and improve any associated infrastructure, while the anchor institutions are able to ‘back fill” from the national distribution system until their commitment is met.

As producers and buyers have a variety of competing interests, central to the success of a food hub “brokerage” model, is the recognition and support of shared values by all partners. Through this effort, project partners developed a Food Hub “value statement” (attached) which provides a “moral compass” for this effort.

The “Hub”, is a project of the Institute for a Sustainable Future and includes an advisory team of

Jamie Harvie, Institute for a Sustainable Future.

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Randy Hanson, UMD Sustainable Agriculture Project

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**Funding Support**

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**FAQs - Frequently Asked Questions**

**What is the timeframe for the project?**

Currently, producer and buyers have made a commitment to pilot this project through the end of 2012. The future of this project is dependent on a variety of factors including community and institutional support and financial support for business planning. There is a shared interest by all partners, to date, to continue this initiative.

**What is a Food Hub**

Regional food hubs are an evolving concept, typically an organized entity that actively manages some, or all, of the aggregation, distribution, and marketing of food products from local and regional producers. Food hubs have positive economic, social and environmental impacts in their communities, and fill a critical gap in regional food systems.

**What is our regional food system?**

There is no set definition for a regional food system, but they are loosely defined by a “sense of place” which includes shared regional agriculture, distribution, geography and population centers, culture and more. Our regional food system is loosely defined as the Western Lake Superior Bioregion, or “Lake Superior Compact”. This has been organized into a new network of peoples and organizations through the Lake Superior Good Food Network. The Network has developed a bioregional Food Charter, a local purchasing goal of 20% by 2020, is supported by a local food label. See [www.goodfoodnetwork.org](http://www.goodfoodnetwork.org)

**Where is the Hub?**

The Hub is virtual. It is a series of relationships and commitments. Experience from successful hubs nationally show a staged evolution to physical aggregations centers facilitated through appropriate business software applications. A key goal of a hub is shared marketing and a reduction in business transactions.

**Can more producers or institutions join?**

The project is in a pilot feasibility phase with an intentionally small project team of representative producers and buyers so as to facilitate shared understanding of needs and concerns. If successful, and with sufficient resources, the goal is to create criteria and an open membership process.

**What are Anchor Institutions**

Anchor institutions are place-based organizations (typically hospitals and universities) firmly established in their communities. They are economic engines for cities and regions, acting as real estate developers, employers, purchasers of goods, magnets for complementary businesses, community-builders, and developers of human capital.  Anchor institutions have a large stake in a community, usually through a combination of internal missions and also have important economic impacts due to their employment, revenue-garnering and spending patterns. Anchor institutions can transform a local economic base, creating industry-based clusters which multiply their economic impact many times over. There is a growing recognition about the responsibility and benefit of linking their economic activity to the socio-economic health of the communities in which they are anchored.

**Are there other State or National Food Hub examples?**

**Fifth Season Cooperative**

In the 7 Rivers Region of southwestern Wisconsin, a parallel initiative has achieved regional success with the development of local food hub. The Fifth Season Cooperative, headquartered in Westby WI, is a multi-stakeholder cooperative made up of producers, producer groups, food processors, distributors, and buyers from the 7 Rivers Region. Members of the Fifth Season Cooperative include regional farmers, ranchers, creameries, food distributors, hospitals, schools and community organizations. For more information about the Fifth Season Cooperative, visit their website at <http://fifthseason.coop/>

**The United States Department of Agriculture**.

According to the USDA website… the USDA is committed to food hubs because we believe that food hubs offer strong and sound infrastructure support to producers across the country which will also help build a stronger regional food system. Here are some links to USDA’s research, findings, and support of food hubs. Much of USDA’s work on food hubs is done in partnership with the National Food Hub Collaboration, which includes [Wallace Center at Winrock International](http://wallacecenter.org/), [the National Good Food Network](http://www.ngfn.org/), [the National Association of Produce Market Managers](http://www.napmm.org/), and [Project for Public Spaces](http://www.pps.org/). <http://www.ams.usda.gov/AMSv1.0/foodhubs>

**What is the socio-economic benefit of local food system investments?**

Spending involves a choice about the kind of future we want to have**.** A variety of studies demonstrate economic and social benefits from local food system investments. University of Minnesotoa Duluth researchers found the economic potential of over 1 billion dollars for a local food diet in the Western Lake Superior Region. <http://superiorfoodweb.org/LAFS/HFHL_4pgr.pdf>

A study of the Central Puget sound region of Washington State, *Why Local Linkages Matter*<http://www.sustainableseattle.org/images/Programs/LocalFoodEconomyStudyLFE%20REPORT%20FINAL-2.pdf> explains why we should care about our spending choices when it comes to sustainability. A shift of 20% of food dollars into locally directed spending would result in a nearly half billion dollar annual income increase in King County alone and twice that in the Central Puget Sound region.

In a similar study by the Cleveland Foundation similar increases in jobs and economic activity were reported. These are highlight in their report, *The 25% Shift - The Benefits of Food Localization for Northeast Ohio & How to Realize Them*. [**http://www.neofoodweb.org/sites/default/files/resources/the25shift-foodlocalizationintheNEOregion.pdf**](http://www.neofoodweb.org/sites/default/files/resources/the25shift-foodlocalizationintheNEOregion.pdf)