

### Developing Markets for Local Farm Products

According to the Washtenaw Land Trust, Washtenaw County loses about 10 acres of farmland every day. Buying locally-grown products can help area farmers to stay in business. And when food is produced locally vs. brought in from faraway places, transportation fuel is saved and less pollution is produced.

Washtenaw County and the surrounding area have both a multitude of farmers interested in developing local markets for their products, and a large number of consumers that are interested in buying more locally-produced foods. On March 15<sup>th</sup> there will be a conference devoted to helping to link the two.

The conference is organized by the “Food System Economic Partnership,” an initiative which is supported by Washtenaw County. The conference is called: “Building a Better Food System in Southeast Michigan,” and will run from 9:00 a.m. to 2:30 p.m.. This excellent networking and educational opportunity will be held at the Sysco Foods Conference Center in Canton, near I-275 & I-94.

Concurrent sessions will explore the potential of emerging market opportunities—both what they are and how to tap into them. Topics offered include:

- Food buying clubs or cooperatives—new programs are linking urban buyers with growers in surrounding areas.
- Farmer’s markets—Michigan has room for many more farmers markets than its current total of 65. For instance, Illinois and Wisconsin have more than twice as many.
- Expansion of livestock processing capacity in Southeastern Michigan—a lack of federally inspected meat processing facilities is making it difficult for livestock producers to tap into niche retail markets, such as the growing interest in “heritage” varieties of poultry and livestock.
- Ethanol—a growing market for this alternative bio-fuel is providing an opportunity for corn growers.
- Organic foods—their sales are growing at a rate of 20% per year. Although challenging, the transition to organic methods can be worth pursuing.

## **Registration Information**

The \$15 early registration (postmarked by March 3<sup>rd</sup>) includes sessions and lunch. Register by 1) phone—734-222-3986, 2) on the web—[www.fsep-michigan.org](http://www.fsep-michigan.org), or 3) or at the door. If you have questions about the conference please contact Mike Score, Michigan State University Extension, at 517-403-1025.

Submitted by,

Barbara Lucas, Program Assistant  
Washtenaw County Planning and Environment  
Office: 734-222-6874  
E-mail: [lucasb@ewashtenaw.org](mailto:lucasb@ewashtenaw.org)  
Webpage: <http://recycle.ewashtenaw.org>