Lakes to Land Regional Initiative
Food Innovation District

Phase 1:

REGIONAL FOOD SYSTEM ASSESSMENT

Introduction

One of the cornerstones identified by the Lakes to Land Regional Initiative is agricultural vitality. The participating townships, villages, and cities that define the Lakes to Land region in northwest Michigan identified the need to encourage farm profitability and vitality, encourage the continuation and growth of small agricultural operations, and sustain and enhance the agricultural economy of the townships. As a result of this need for collaborative efforts in agriculture and related food production and processing, the Alliance for Economic Success (AES) included the creation and initial implementation of a Food Innovation District as a priority for Lakes to Land implementation in a grant application to the Department of Treasury Competitive Grant Assistance Program and the project subsequently received funding.

Background

A **food system** is defined as "the chain of activities and processes related to the production, processing, distribution, disposal, and eating of food" (as cited in Raja, Born, & Russel, 2008, p. 3). It encompasses all of the people, processes, and places involved in food.

"With a conventional food system, food production and processing is industrial in scale and relies on advances in bio-technology, food distribution occurs over large distances, disposal of food generates a significant amount of packaging waste, and consumers are removed – physically and metaphorically – from the source of their food" (Raja et al., p. 3). According to the Center for Urban Education about Sustainable Agriculture in California, food for an average meal travels about 1500 miles from farm to plate.

On the other hand, a community food system "emphasizes strengthening and making visible the relationships between producers, processors, distributors, and consumers of food" (Raja et al., p. 3). A community food system is place-based, supports local and regional networks, promotes environmental sustainable practices, advocates for social justice, and provides food security. **Food security** is defined as "resident's access to healthful, affordable, and culturally appropriate foods at all times" (Raja et al., p. 3). Although the terms have similar definitions, there has recently been a shift in discussion among planners from a community food system to a **local food system**, defined as "food produced, processed, and distributed within a particular geographic boundary that consumers associate with their own community" (as cited in Urban Planning Practicum, 2012, p. 13).

A **Food Innovation District** is defined as a "geographic concentration of food-oriented businesses, services, and community activities that local governments support through planning and economic development initiatives in order to promote a positive business environment, spur regional food system development, and increase access to local food" (Contrell et al., 2013, p. 2). The activities that occur in these districts include:

- Regional food hubs
- Business incubators

- Farm-to-table retail and restaurants
- Farmers markets
- Food festivals and other events
- Nutrition and cooking education
- Healthy food assistance
- Urban agriculture production
- Community kitchens
- Public spaces, neighborhood uses

Suggested Methodology

REGIONAL FOOD SYSTEM ASSESSMENT
The first step in the creation of a Food Innovation District according the Northwest Michigan Council of Government's Food Innovation District Guidebook is conducting an assessment of needs and assets. A food system assessment is essential to understanding the components and interrelationships of the regional food system and vital to the success of a Food Innovation District designed specifically to enhance coordination within the region. (Contrell et al., 2013)

An assessment is different from other forms of analysis such as research, review, and evaluation. By definition, an **assessment** is a "critical analysis of information for the purposes of guiding decisions on complex, public issues" (Ross & Simces, 2008, p. 5). In general, a **food system assessment** identifies the current condition of the food system. On one hand, a community food assessment analyzes community concerns related to food as a "participatory and collaborative process that examines a broad range of food-related issues and resources in order to inform actions to improve community food security" (Ross & Simces, 2008, p. 5). The Lakes to Land Food Innovation District project will begin with a regional food system assessment, designed specifically to gather information on the existing food system in Benzie and Manistee counties.

The goals of the assessment outlined below are to:

- Develop an understanding of the existing food system in the study area
- Identify economic opportunities related to food and agricultural production that would result in the implementation of a Food Innovation District

Study Area
The geographic area for this study has been defined as the townships, cities, and villages in northwest Michigan that are participating in the Lakes to Land Regional Initiative. They include the following: the townships of Arcadia, Bear Lake, Blaine, Crystal Lake, Gilmore, Joyfield, Lake, Manistee, Onekama, and Pleasanton; the Villages of Bear Lake, Elberta, Honor, and Onekama; and the Cities of Frankfort and Manistee. When information is not available for the specific geographic regions of the participating communities, the study area is defined as the areas within the Benzie and Manistee County boundaries recognized by the U.S. Census.

Design of the Study
The approach is designed to match the "bottom-up" process consistent with the Lakes to Land philosophy; therefore it is necessary to identify the genuine needs of those involved in the regional food system. The regional food assessment will be an open and transparent collaborative process that uses a variety of methods to collect information, focuses on community assets and strengths, and ensures shared ownership of the process and results by involving stakeholders.

The comprehensive food system assessment in the Lakes to Land Region will be comprised of three (3) parts listed here and further explained below.

1. Environmental Scan
2. Inventory of Assets and Opportunities
3. Stakeholder Interviews

The study will be conducted from June to August 2014.

The Food Assessment will be a mixed method approach, both quantitative and qualitative. Quantitative methods will include a review of secondary data sources to illustrate current conditions in the environmental scan.

Qualitative Research for the inventory of assets and opportunities will include synthesizing the opportunities and challenges identified by different stakeholders in the Lakes to Land regional food system through informal face to face interviews, telephone interviews, public meetings (workshops/public house gatherings), observation, and mapping techniques.

Scope
The regional food assessment is designed to address economic growth in agriculture and related food activities. This study encompasses **agriculture**, as defined by Webster, as "the science, art, or practice of cultivating the soil, producing crops, and raising livestock" intended for food. For the purposes of this study, **food** is defined as any nutritious substance that people eat or drink in order to maintain life and growth. This assessment will focus on food production, processing, distribution, and consumption of food at the regional level. The scope of the study will cover these core components as defined below.

Production – The cultivation of edible plants and domestication of animals, including rural and urban farms as well as community or school gardens, rooftop gardens, urban and rural greenhouses, edible landscaping, backyard gardening and others.

Processing – All the processes that add value to and/or transform raw commodities into food products, including baking, cooking, freezing, canning, and packaging.

Distribution and Marketing – All activities related to getting raw and processed foods to consumers, including transporting, storing, and retailing. This includes wholesale, retail, direct to consumer, food service, and emergency market channels.

Consumption – All the activities and processes that individuals, society and culture engage in to acquire and use food that has been produced and distributed.

Limitations
This study does not encompass the production, processing, distribution and marketing, and consumption of food for animals or plants. The assessment also excludes the evaluation of crop production for products other than food, including greenhouse, nursery, and floriculture production.

This study does not evaluate health or assess the diet-related health status of residents of the study area.

Due to resource availability, the assessment has a time constraint and is being completed during the summer months, a less ideal time of the year for participants. Some stakeholders may not be available to fully participate in the assessment within the assessment time period.

Data Analysis
All data will be gathered and analyzed by the project's Leadership Team and Beckett & Raeder researchers.

ENVIRONMENTAL SCAN
The purpose of the environmental scan is to gather basic information about the region, assess the context of the current regional food system, develop a population profile, and identify key variables that will offer opportunities for the Food Innovation District. The Food Innovation District Guidebook recommends the following data be gathered: population, demographic, agricultural production, and food consumption.

Statistical data will be collected from the U.S. Census, the U.S. Census of Agriculture, and the USDA Economic Research Service Food Consumption Data System. When available, U.S. Census data will include the 2010 Census and 2012 American Community Survey. The economic data collected will also include the 2012 County Business Patterns.

Study area specific data will be gathered from the Lakes to Land Master Plans and the M22 Economic Development Strategy.

Data will be mapped using ESRI GIS when appropriate. Maps will include demographic information, agricultural property, productive capacity of the growing region, and existing resources.

INVENTORY OF ASSETS AND OPPORTUNITIES
The second part of the assessment involves identifying and mapping the assets and opportunities in the region. The intention of compiling an inventory and map of all food related assets in the region is to provide a "full picture of food sector assets, their interconnections and their gaps, as well as data needs" (North American Food Sector, 2013, p. 19).

Assets are "forms of human, social, financial, physical, and natural/environmental capital that are essential and interactive building blocks for an investment and its wealth generating capacity at varying scales" (North American Food Sector, 2013, p.15). In this study, **food system assets** are forms of capital

related to the production, processing, distribution, disposal, and eating of food. The assets are producer (ex. Storage, distribution, processing), community (education and local food purchasing programs), and place oriented (restaurants and events) (Contrell et al., 2013). See the asset examples in the specific producer, community, and place oriented categories below.

The inventory of assets and opportunities will involve two mapping aspects. Regional assets according to the below categories will be identified and mapped in place geographically. In addition, a food system flow map will identify the products and illustrate their movement originating at the producer.

Producer-Oriented

- Farms
- Cottage Industries
- Retail Trade Facilities
- Wholesale Trade Facilities
- Organizations that Provide Coordination/Assistance
- Processing Facilities
- Distributors
- Food Hubs
- Storage Facilities
- Marketing Services
- Farm to Institution Programs
- Infrastructure available
- Industrial Property available
- Business Support Services
- Available loans, grants, and fiscal incentives

Community-Oriented

- Community Gardens
- Community Supported Agriculture
- Farmers Markets
- Community/Incubator Kitchens
- Educational Programming
- Food Assistance Programs
- Community Food Partner Organizations

Place-Oriented

- Placemaking Initiatives
- Supportive Policy – zoning regulations and regional food business incentives
- Events/Agritourism
- Farm-to-fork restaurants

The inventory of assets and opportunities will answer the following questions:

1. What is the quality of local food available? Is it affordable based on the income of the region's residents? Is it culturally appropriate based on the region's demographics?
2. What is being produced in the study area and where is it going?
3. Is there an emerging food business cluster in the community?
4. What assets are key to successful project-level investment? For multiple project investments? For establishing food industry clusters?
5. Which assets would best support the planning and development of food industry clusters or innovation districts?
6. What are the regional food business needs and gaps in existing regional food infrastructure?
7. Which assets are benchmarks to track progress/performance over time?

Participants
The participants include individuals currently involved in the food system in the study area. The first stakeholders or participants will be those listed in the Taste the Local Difference Guide and/or those recommended by the local researchers. A snowball sampling method will be used to encourage participation in the informal face to face interviews, telephone interviews, and public meetings (workshops/public house gatherings). Snowball sampling is also known as chain referred sampling, and is a purposive, non-random sampling method where contacts use their social networks to find and recruit others to contribute to the study.

STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS
Interviews with stakeholders will be conducted to gather information important information, exemplify a "bottom-up" process, and ensure shared ownership in the process and results of the regional food assessment. Questions below will gather information for the inventory of assets and opportunities and assist in the understanding of the existing food system by gathering information directly from major stakeholders.

Stakeholders include: farmers, processors, restaurants, institutional buyers, retail grocery stores and those that represent the following distribution and marketing channels: wholesale, retail, direct to consumer, food service, and emergency market.

References

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Phase 2:

      PROJECT INITIATION

Forming the Food Innovation District and Strategy

    A. Vision
    B. Missions
    C. Strategic goals, actions, schedules, and responsibilities
    D. Resource needs/requirements
    E. Executive summary action plan
    F. Define district boundaries

Phase 3:

      IMPLEMENTATION

    A. Based on strategy
    B. Planning and zoning changes
    C. Business attraction and economic development