



[WATCH: Leaders Planning for Food, Farming, and The Grand Vision](#)

Leaders from across the Grand Traverse region gathered last month to start looking for ways to make sure that The Grand Vision—a six-county, 50-year, citizen-based growth plan—and one of the area’s top industries—farming—work well together to strengthen the local economy while preserving the region’s rural character.

The group held an initial summit meeting, called *Farm Route to Prosperity* on Feb. 24 to get the ball rolling. The standing room only crowd of about 85 government, business, civic, non-profit, research, public health, and educational leaders met all day about ways to evaluate or influence everything from local zoning ordinances and food processing and distribution business investment to agricultural financing and youth programs. Their goal: making sure that growers, food distributors and processors, and food retailers—from restaurants to school cafeterias—guide the Grand Vision’s ultimate regional plan to preserve farmland and boost local prosperity with local food and farm business success.

The summit, sponsored by 15 different organizations and businesses, used a just-issued report, [Northwest Michigan’s Farm Factor](#), as a springboard for discussion. The report, commissioned by the Michigan Land Use Institute, finds that the area’s local farm and food economy has great potential to create new jobs, keep large amounts of local food dollars in the region, and stimulate strong economic growth that also protects land and restores rural communities. But the report emphasizes that local governments, businesses, non-profits, and educational institutions must work for policies and plans that fit with and fulfill The Grand Vision process. The two-year Grand Vision project rolls out its “Final Vision” for township-by-township regional implementation this fall.

After the summit, Patty Cantrell, the founder and director of the Michigan Land Use Institute’s *Taste the Local Difference* local farm and food project, and Bob Russell, of the Neatawhanta Center, chatted about the work they and their colleagues accomplished. The two also issued an invitation for others interested in local farming and food to get involved as the group expands and acts on the “To Do” list the summit produced.

Goal and objectives

Approved Feb. 24, 2009 at *Farm Route to Prosperity* summit.

GOAL: Increase the resilience and double the value of the six-county region’s food and agricultural system in 10 years.

OBJECTIVES

1. Double the market value of food and agriculture sales.
2. Increase to 10 percent (from current est. 2 percent) the market share of regional food expenditures going to regional food and agriculture businesses.
3. Ensure that all residents have access to an ample high-quality, healthy, and culturally diverse diet.



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4. Increase the profitability and diversity of the regional food and agriculture system's participants, products, markets, services, and facilities.
5. Secure the availability and affordability of sufficient regional farmland and associated water and energy resources to build and maintain a long-term, sustainable business environment for local agriculture and food production.

Priority strategies by working group

Developed at the Feb. 24, 2009, *Farm Route to Prosperity* summit.

HEALTH AND YOUTH

- Ensure that families involved in the federal Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) assistance program are able to find and purchase local produce.
- Identify, link, and promote community gardening efforts in the region.
- Identify, link, and promote food/farm youth entrepreneurship programs.
- Use available community information media to link people and promote programs.

FARMLAND

- Develop a comprehensive inventory of farmland in the region.
- Produce a planning and zoning toolbox, based on empirical research, to help local governments encourage farm business development and farmland preservation.

GOVERNANCE

- Provide a series of food and farm business certifications as part of a menu of learning options in the community (i.e. through Northwestern Michigan College), including information for local governments on removing barriers to success, such as restrictive zoning.

INFRASTRUCTURE

- Establish an industry roundtable of regional food producers, buyers, distributors, and processors to identify and address gaps in market infrastructure, such as a lack of smaller scale pre-processing facilities (coring, seeding etc.) or the ability of individual farms to supply larger orders, such as through cooperative regional branding.

BUYERS/FOOD SERVICE

- Increase and enhance efforts to build the demand and supply of regional foods, such as working in conjunction with the Michigan Food Policy Council.
- Recruit and work with more regional food buyers, such as grocers, not yet engaged.



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PRODUCERS/SELLERS

- Develop an education initiative for producers about market opportunities and distribution options.
- Develop a capital injection initiative to bring needed equity financing to regional food and farm operations.
- Work to maximize the reach and effectiveness of existing programs, such as the Northwest Michigan Horticultural Research Center.

FINANCING/FUNDING

- Establish a high-visibility Web location for comprehensive information about financing opportunities and support services for local food and farm businesses.
- Conduct a meat processing facility feasibility study.

SUMMIT PLANNING PARTNERS

Black Star Farms

Grand Traverse Band of Ottawa and Chippewa Indians

Grand Traverse Regional Land Conservancy

iOmni LLC

James Bardenhagen Farm

Leelanau Conservancy

Michigan Land Use Institute

Michigan Small Business and Technology Development Center

Michigan State University Extension

Neahtawanta Center

Northwest Michigan Council of Governments

Northwest Michigan Horticultural Research Center

SEEDS

Traverse Bay Economic Development Corporation

USDA-Rural Development



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