



# GROWING A LOCAL AND REGIONAL MEAT INDUSTRY IN MICHIGAN: THE MICHIGAN MEAT NETWORK AS A CASE STUDY OF COLLECTIVE IMPACT THEORY

JUNE 2019

**MICHIGAN STATE**  
UNIVERSITY

Center for  
Regional Food Systems

# GROWING A LOCAL AND REGIONAL MEAT INDUSTRY IN MICHIGAN:

## THE MICHIGAN MEAT NETWORK AS A CASE STUDY OF COLLECTIVE IMPACT THEORY

### TABLE OF CONTENTS

---

BACKGROUND	4
THE MICHIGAN MEAT NETWORK	5
OUTCOMES OF THE NETWORK	5
REFLECTION AND LEARNINGS	7
Collectively impacting .....	7
THE THREE PRECONDITIONS OF COLLECTIVE IMPACT AND THE MICHIGAN MEAT NETWORK	8
An influential champion .....	8
Financial resources.....	8
Urgency for change .....	8
THE FIVE CONDITIONS OF COLLECTIVE IMPACT	9
Common agenda.....	9
Shared measurement.....	9
Mutually reinforcing activities.....	9
Continuous communication.....	10
Backbone support.....	11
SUMMARY	12



# GROWING A LOCAL AND REGIONAL MEAT INDUSTRY IN MICHIGAN:

## THE MICHIGAN MEAT NETWORK AS A CASE STUDY OF COLLECTIVE IMPACT THEORY

### Authors

---

Jude Barry  
*Assistant Director*  
Center for Regional Food Systems,  
Michigan State University

Noel Bielaczyc  
*Value Chain Specialist*  
Center for Regional Food Systems,  
Michigan State University

Mark Lelle  
*Independent Evaluator*

### Photo Credits

---

Cover: Khalid Ibrahim  
Page 11: Getty Images

### Suggested Citation

---

Barry, J., Bielaczyc, N., & Lelle, M. (2019). *Growing a local and regional meat industry in Michigan: The Michigan Meat Network as a case study of collective impact theory*. Michigan State University Center for Regional Food Systems. Retrieved from: <http://foodsystems.msu.edu/resources/michigan-meat-network-collective-impact>

### Acknowledgements

---

The authors wish to thank Rich Pirog of MSU Center for Regional Food Systems (CRFS) for reviewing this publication. The authors also wish to thank Andrea Weiss of CRFS for communications guidance and Blohm Creative Partners for copyediting and layout.

This work was made possible through funding from United States Department of Agriculture's Agriculture and Food Research Initiative (USDA AFRI), AFRI award number 2014-68006-21870.

# GROWING A LOCAL AND REGIONAL MEAT INDUSTRY IN MICHIGAN: THE MICHIGAN MEAT NETWORK AS A CASE STUDY OF COLLECTIVE IMPACT THEORY

## Background

The MSU Center for Regional Food System's Livestock Workgroup, a group of faculty and staff at Michigan State University (MSU), convened stakeholders from the Michigan meat and livestock industry in February 2013 to identify challenges and opportunities in producing, processing, marketing, and buying Michigan-sourced meat and livestock products. Twenty-three stakeholders from across the Michigan livestock and meat industry were in attendance, including producers, processors, distributors, wholesale buyers, and consumer groups.

The framework for this meeting, and future activities, was strongly influenced by the concept of “values-based supply chains,” that is, the formation of values-based strategic business partnerships that create and distribute rewards and responsibility across the supply chain.<sup>1</sup> As a follow-up to this meeting, a report was generated<sup>2</sup> highlighting the constraints and opportunities of the Michigan livestock industry defined at this stakeholder meeting. The key takeaways of this document are summarized here.

Constraints to the regional meat industry based in Michigan include:

- Seasonal livestock production preventing a consistent year-round supply of meat,
- State and federal regulations and meat inspection,
- Consumer price sensitivity,

- Need for effective marketing of differentiated local food products,
- Record keeping, and
- Intermediaries needed to connect to markets and respond to trends.

Opportunities to increase business viability and local and regional meat sales include:

- Capitalizing on marketing and consumer demand,
- Regulatory assistance and education,
- Economic research and education,
- Product and business development,
- Production research and education, and
- Public-private partnerships.

In 2014, per guidance from the stakeholders, a part-time “market intermediary” was hired by MSU CRFS to:

- Assist livestock farmer decision-making with respect to appropriate farm management strategies and technologies to enhance efficiency and sustainability, including competitiveness of small and medium-sized livestock and processing operations;
- Evaluate and implement strategies to enhance access to markets for small and medium-sized livestock farms in Michigan;

<sup>1</sup> Stevenson, G.W., & Pirog, R. (2008). *Values-based supply chains: Strategies for agrifood enterprises of the middle*. In Lyson, T., Stevenson, G.W., & Welsh, R. (2017), *Food and the mid-level farm: Renewing an agriculture of the middle* (pp.119-143). MIT Press.

<sup>2</sup> Barry, J., & Pirog, R. (2013). *Challenges and solutions for the Michigan-based meat and livestock value chains supplying local and regional markets*. East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Center for Regional Food Systems.

- Research and assist in the development of local and regional meat value chains;
- Implement programs that assist small/medium-sized farms and beginning farmers by exploring private/public options and alternative strategies; and
- Examine the public-private strategies that can transfer information to inform relevant public policy impacting small and mid-sized producers.

**The Michigan Meat Network**

The overall goal of the Michigan Meat Network is to improve business viability for Michigan’s livestock producers and meat processors, while helping to meet the rising consumer demand for local and regional meat products. The Michigan Meat Network was developed in response to stakeholder feedback in meetings from 2014-2015 and follow-up interviews with key stakeholders in the meat and livestock industry.

In response to information gathered, the Michigan Meat Network was developed as a business-to-business network to improve communication, as well as support the growth of strategic alliances between farms, processors, and other supply-chain partners, such as food distributors, institutional food service, retail businesses and educators, researchers, and regulators. There was no cost to join the network.

The network offered:

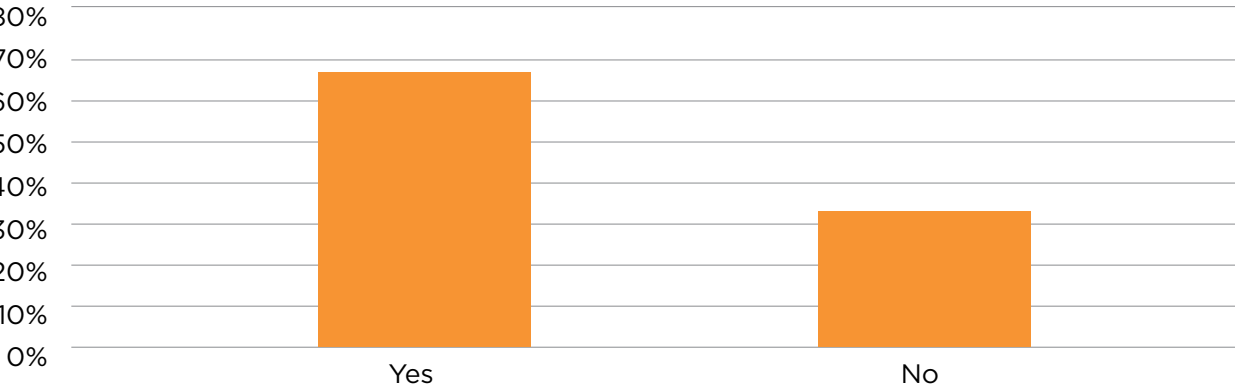
- Educational and networking events for businesses and individuals along the value chain;
- Use of the MI MEAT NET Google group to post questions, seek business connections, make announcements, and share resources and tools;
- General business and technical resources for producers, processors, and other meat value chain businesses, including research, webinars, and business tools;
- Customized business and marketing support through a market intermediary.

**Outcomes of the Network**

To evaluate network activities, surveys were distributed to the entire Michigan Meat Network and faculty and staff at MSU who were involved in meat and livestock work. Responses were recorded from network participants (*n* = 33) and Michigan State University faculty and staff (*n* = 7). In addition, evaluations on the tours and interviews with project stakeholders (*n* = 10) were conducted to better understand the outcomes of the network activities.

Figure 1 shows that 65% of participants in the Michigan Meat Network noticed an impact on their business. More specific impacts of the Michigan Meat Network on meat and livestock businesses in the state can be seen in Table 2, where at least half of the participants adopted

**Figure 1: Percentage of Michigan Meat Network Participants Reporting Business Impacts**  
**Did the Michigan Meat Network have any impact on your business?**



**Table 2: Specific Business Impacts of the Michigan Meat Network**

<b>What impact has the Meat Network had on your business?</b>	
Made new business connections with livestock producers	35%
Made new business connections with restaurant and retail buyers	50%
Connected with schools, hospitals, institution food service buyers	25%
Increased sales and/or profitability of my business	35%
Adopted new business practices	55%
Sought new inspection status for my business or plan to	10%
My business is more financially sustainable	20%
My business is more environmentally sustainable	10%

new business practices and made new business connections with restaurant and retail buyers. At least a third of those business claimed to have increased sales and/or profitability and made new business connections with livestock producers.

**Meat processing and business research, educational resources, and networking opportunities were rated the most valuable parts of the network.**

When asked which network activities participants found to be most valuable (Table 3), meat processing, business research, and educational resources were rated highest with over 65% of Michigan Meat Network survey respondents stating they were most valuable. Networking opportunities with producers, processors, distributors, and buyers were also considered valuable (59%) to network respondents. Approximately 1 in 4 identified value in tours of different meat and livestock businesses, the Michigan Meat Network website of resources, and the email connection to the network. Only 6% thought that the Michigan Meat Network provided direct technical assistance of value.

**Table 3: Value of Michigan Meat Network Components**

<b>What pieces of the network are most valuable to you?</b>	
Meat processing and business research and educational resources	66%
Networking opportunities with producers, processors, distributors, and buyers (including institutional buyers)	59%
Tours of different meat and livestock businesses	28%
The Michigan Meat Network website of resources	28%
The email connection to the network	28%
Technical assistance	13%
Other (please specify)	6%
My business is more environmentally sustainable	10%

## Reflection and Learnings

---

The MSU CRFS coordinates networks to support infrastructure change and private-public partnerships in local and regional food systems. In addition to Michigan Meat Network, CRFS provides leadership and coordination for the Michigan Farm to Institution Network, the Local Food Council Network, and the Food Hub Network.

These networks are seen as a key strategy to achieving impact using a well-documented and successful theory known as the collective impact model.<sup>3</sup> Through these networks, we have sought to demonstrate, with varying degrees of success, the adoption of the five conditions of collective impact (common agenda, backbone organizational support, mutually reinforcing activities, continuous communication, and shared measurement).

The reason CRFS uses this model is because a number of common agendas have been identified within Michigan in developing local and regional food systems (for example, the Michigan Good Food Charter<sup>4</sup>). Through a tried and tested system of collaboration infrastructure being more effective through “collective impact” vs. “isolated impact,”<sup>5</sup> we can support a community’s desire for change.

As we reflected on the outcomes of the Michigan Meat Network through 2019, we felt it of value to document some of the learnings and takeaways that can help others develop networks for change.

### Collectively impacting

According to the evaluation results, the primary goal of the Michigan Meat Network “to increase business viability” has to some extent been met, with businesses working collectively across the network. Quite simply, people learned from each other and used what they learned to be more

profitable. The main beneficiaries of the network were the businesses that the funding intended to support, namely the small and medium-sized producer participants of the network.

Not all businesses within the network saw impact on their business, with approximately 35% of evaluation respondents reporting no direct impact. To better understand the successes and failures of the network, this publication reviews the process of desired change through collective impact theory<sup>6</sup> and highlights some of the potential gaps in the work of the Michigan Meat Network.

Collective impact theory is described as a “disciplined, cross-sector approach to solving social and environmental problems on a large scale.”<sup>7</sup> It is widely regarded as a way to successfully collaborate and collectively make change — socially, environmentally, and economically.

The theory was first documented in 2011 by Kania and Kramer,<sup>8</sup> who identified five conditions for the theory’s success (common agenda, shared measurement, mutually reinforcing activities, continuous communication, and backbone support). Hanleybrown, Kania, and Kramer<sup>9</sup> later identified that collective impact isn’t just about the five conditions, but a further three preconditions (an influential champion, adequate financial resources, and a sense of urgency), and a number of micro-conditions within the five conditions (examples include boundary conditions, strategic action framework, leadership, staffing, collaboration, and even the presence of food at the meeting).

Effectively delivering impact collectively is a mindset shift with numerous collaborative partners, organizations, and outputs, but also very dependent on a variety of factors and resources, resulting in a very nonlinear, inconsistent process from one network to the next.

---

3 Kania, J. & Kramer, M. (2011). Collective Impact. *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, Winter 2011. Retrieved from: [https://ssir.org/articles/entry/collective\\_impact](https://ssir.org/articles/entry/collective_impact)

4 Colasanti, K. et al. (2010). *Michigan Good Food Charter*. C.S. Mott Group for Sustainable Food Systems at Michigan State University, Food Bank Council of Michigan, Michigan Food Policy Council.

5 Kania, J. & Kramer, M. (2011). Collective Impact. *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, Winter 2011. Retrieved from: [https://ssir.org/articles/entry/collective\\_impact](https://ssir.org/articles/entry/collective_impact)

6 Ibid

7 Kania, J., Hanleybrown, F., & Splansky Juster, J. (2014). Essential Mindset Shifts for Collective Impact. *Stanford Social Innovation Review*. Retrieved from: [https://cffi.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/Essential\\_Mindset\\_Shifts\\_for\\_Collective\\_Impact.pdf](https://cffi.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/Essential_Mindset_Shifts_for_Collective_Impact.pdf)

8 Barry, J. & Pirog, R. (2013). *Challenges and solutions for the Michigan-based meat and livestock value chains supplying local and regional markets*. East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Center for Regional Food Systems.

9 Kania, J. & Kramer, M. (2011). Collective Impact. *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, Winter 2011. Retrieved from: [https://ssir.org/articles/entry/collective\\_impact](https://ssir.org/articles/entry/collective_impact)

Evaluating the Michigan Meat Network highlights the complexity and science of network development and provides an appreciation of some of the opportunities that the network presented and also some of the challenges. To review the challenges and opportunities in relation to impact, we consider here the three preconditions and five conditions that Hanleybrown *et al.*<sup>10</sup> identify, as well as summarize our conclusions on what led to some businesses being impacted and others not.

### **The Three Preconditions of Collective Impact and the Michigan Meat Network**

---

#### **An influential champion**

The need for the Michigan Meat Network was conceived by leaders across the meat and livestock value chain, first with regular meetings followed by one-on-one interviews. Different organizations were involved to different degrees in the decision-making. Key stakeholders from processing, production, and different organizational and educational groups were involved in development and decision-making to start the Michigan Meat Network.

MSU CRFS, experienced in food systems and network development, was the backbone organization that provided network support and coordination. MSU CRFS was not part of the existing meat and livestock infrastructure but augmented the work of MSU Extension, MSU Product Center, MSU, and the Michigan Meat Association. MSU CRFS' ability to influence change may have been limited, although collaboration with some key contributors was definitely in place.

Identifying the appropriate influencer(s) is challenging in groups of very diverse businesses, and while it clearly may have ensured a more sustained group of individuals, it may also have brought an emphasis on one area of the network more than another.

Reflecting on this process for the Michigan Meat Network, it is difficult to say how we might have structured the network development differently to ensure the right influential champion was in place. In retrospect, this network in

particular would have benefited from one or more champions from across the industry.

#### **Financial resources**

This United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) grant specifically supported work that helped MSU develop public-private partnerships and resources to support small to mid-sized farmers in increasing their profitability. This funding created the backbone support for the Michigan Meat Network and in doing so, supported some activities with MSU Extension (MSUE). Building the capacity of networking and research for the benefit of the livestock industry is likely to have influenced MSUE, MSU faculty and the Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (MDARD) through information on the capacity of the industry and through the engagement of a number of businesses.

### **Developing trust in a network can be a lengthy process**

Ultimately, the end of this grant and failure to secure additional funding to support ongoing meat and livestock work lead to the necessity to cease the backbone support for the Michigan Meat Network. Developing trust in a network can be a lengthy process and by the time the funding was concluding, trust between partners was just building. Ongoing financial resources or financially strong leadership are a necessary part of sustaining networking for the longer term.

#### **Urgency for change**

We are led to believe from the evaluation results that not all businesses along the value chain experienced the benefits of collective impact in the same way. It is our assessment that some levels of the value chain likely had a greater need for change than others. Over one third of Michigan producers in a survey conducted in 2015<sup>11</sup> indicated that they were either barely breaking even or not breaking even with their livestock businesses, indicating that some producers are, out of necessity, looking to make changes to their businesses. The survey also showed

---

<sup>10</sup> Ibid

<sup>11</sup> Barry, J. et al. (2018). *Michigan Livestock Producer Capacity Assessment Final Report*. Michigan State University Center for Regional Food Systems. Retrieved from: <http://www.canr.msu.edu/resources/michigan-livestock-producer-capacity-report>



that 1 in 4 producers were interested in new markets, and more than half of the respondents who said they were interested in selling to new markets were interested in order to increase their net income. One can conclude that there are many producers that have an urgency for change to keep their business operational. On the other hand, processors in a 2014 Michigan meat processor capacity assessment study<sup>12</sup> indicated other things that impact their bottom line, including regulation and labor issues.

One consequence of having a network comprised of very diverse businesses, is that the urgency and motivation from sector to sector may differ, thus creating different levels of engagement from participants. Our evaluation of the Michigan Meat Network shows respondents each reporting a different impact on their business.

## **The Michigan Meat Network's goals were to improve business viability for livestock producers and help meet consumer demand for Michigan meat products.**

### **The Five Conditions of Collective Impact**

#### **Common agenda**

The overall goal or common agenda of the Michigan Meat Network was to improve business viability for Michigan's livestock producers and meat processors, all while helping meet consumer demand for local and regional meat products. The Michigan Meat Network was unique in that businesses from across the value chain were engaged with a common goal. Resources to support profitability through events, research, and publications were certainly well received and evaluation results suggest that to some extent the goal was realized. Certainly, participants were exposed to new innovations and ideas that they would never have experienced without the network.

<sup>12</sup> Schwehofer, J., Wells, S., Miller, S. & Pirog, R. (2014). *Michigan Meat Processing Capacity Assessment Final Report*. Michigan State University Center for Regional Food Systems. Retrieved from <http://foodsystems.msu.edu/resources/mi-meat-processing-report> in December 2016.

<sup>13</sup> Kania, J and Kramer, M. (2011). Collective Impact. *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, Winter 2011. Retrieved from: [https://ssir.org/articles/entry/collective\\_impact](https://ssir.org/articles/entry/collective_impact)

<sup>14</sup> Schwehofer, J., Wells, S., Miller, S. & Pirog, R. (2014). *Michigan Meat Processing Capacity Assessment Final Report*. Michigan State University Center for Regional Food Systems. Retrieved from <http://foodsystems.msu.edu/resources/mi-meat-processing-report> in December 2016.

<sup>15</sup> Barry, J., et al. (2018). *Michigan Livestock Producer Capacity Assessment Final Report*. Michigan State University Center for Regional Food Systems. Retrieved from: <http://www.canr.msu.edu/resources/michigan-livestock-producer-capacity-report>

## **Producers need support to achieve business viability. Processors need assistance with labor and regulations.**

### **Shared measurement**

As documented by Kania and Kramer back in 2011,<sup>13</sup> shared measurement is a critical piece of the collective impact model. As mentioned previously here, at the onset of this work, MDARD supported surveying Michigan meat processors about their businesses.<sup>14</sup> The USDA funding enabled a follow-up study to the Michigan processing capacity survey that looked specifically at livestock producer capacity in Michigan.<sup>15</sup> These studies examined both the meat and livestock industry at the producer and processor level and enabled some baseline data for change.

It is clear that producers in particular need support to achieve business viability, and processors need considerable assistance with labor and regulatory issues. Continuing to monitor the industry in this way is key to ensuring cross sector communication and targeted programming for businesses, but would require adequate funding to conduct ongoing data collection.

### **Mutually reinforcing activities**

Throughout the formation of the Michigan Meat Network, mutually reinforcing activities helped engage business owners across the value chain and create collaborative spaces for people to meet that would otherwise not have had a chance to.

To encourage business-to-business collaboration and support cross-network connections, the Michigan Meat Network coordinated a variety of educational and networking events from 2015 – 2018, including:

- A tour of Ebels General Store, a USDA-inspected slaughter and meat processing facility in northern Michigan. The tour was followed by a presentation from a bison producer in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. Producers, processors, retailers, and educators were present.

- A tour of Jake’s Country Meats, a pasture raised pork operation in southwest Michigan. This tour was planned in coordination with the Michigan Farm to Institution Network (MFIN) to help introduce institutional food buyers to scale-appropriate regional producers.
- A tour of Wernette Beef, a beef ranch in mid-Michigan. This tour was also planned in coordination with MFIN, with institutional food service professionals as the target audience.
- A tour of a Grand Rapids retail butcher focused on whole animal sourcing from local producers. Producers, processors, and other retailers experienced an innovative meat retail establishment and discussed emerging marketing opportunities.
- A tour of Byron Center Meats, a USDA meat processing facility south of Grand Rapids, followed by discussion at a local brewery that sourced local meat product from a local producer via Byron Center Meats.
- A networking event coinciding with the Michigan Meat Association’s (MMA) annual convention. MMA is a membership organization specifically for Michigan’s meat processors.

Evaluation of these activities yielded mixed responses. While almost two thirds of those surveyed found value in networking opportunities overall, only about 1 in 4 said they found the individual networking events valuable. This variance in response may be because not all participants attended each event and therefore did not regard all activities as valuable.

Based on survey feedback and anecdotal evidence, however, MSU CRFS felt that these events succeeded in developing new connections, supporting marketing innovation, and helping businesses learn from each other’s successes and failures. It is our experience that these networking events were a unique educational opportunity for peer-to-peer learning for those that were able to attend. These spaces also allowed industry innovators to generate new ideas and build strategic partnerships, which is a critical step to overcoming challenges inherent in local and regional food system development.

Shortly after the launch of the Michigan Meat Network, other groups, such as the Michigan Meat Association, began to offer networking mixer events for specific sectors of the meat and livestock industry. These continue successfully to this day.

### Continuous communication

To allow for continuous communication between participants, Michigan Meat Network formed a Google Group forum for discussion and connectivity across the network. While many network participants joined the Google Group, including many who were previously unknown to the network, engagement and communication remained low.

There are many possible explanations for the failure of this platform to engage participants. First, and perhaps most importantly, the platform was not particularly intuitive or easy to use. It required a high level of technological literacy, and in some cases required participants to create a Google account. Second, to be successful the Google Group needed “influential champions” to be actively engaged in communication, which the Michigan Meat Network group lacked. This point was reinforced by our partner organization, the Niche Meat Processors Assistance network, which has built a successful email forum with 1,000+ meat industry subscribers through trial and error.<sup>16</sup>

Another point we noted is that participants were already fatigued by the overuse of email communications, which made the platform less effective for this purpose. Also, with trust building in its infancy, it may have been difficult for individual businesses to put proprietary information on the Google Group without concern about who was reading it.

To improve our communication for the network, it may have been better to increase communication with existing channels rather than start a new one. For example, MSU Extension sends out regular livestock emails, and although conversation between individual businesses could not have occurred, contributing to this may have reached more businesses more easily.

<sup>16</sup> Niche Meat Processors Assistance Network (NMPAN), personal communication

Research and outreach publications were produced in direct response to the needs identified by the initial stakeholder group.<sup>17</sup> These communications were posted on the Michigan Meat Network resources page.<sup>18</sup>

### Backbone support

Establishing a network is a long-term commitment that requires sufficient time and funding resources to build trust and participant engagement. MSU CRFS is a neutral party that has convened a number of networks successfully within Michigan and is well positioned to provide backbone support. The backbone support CRFS provided to the Michigan Meat Network helped to lay the groundwork of collaboration infrastructure, but failed to achieve long-term sustainability for the network.

The market intermediary role was deployed early on as a connector between buyers and sellers. A key function of the Michigan Meat Network was to support the match-making efforts of the market intermediary. While the intermediary was successful in making some key connections and expanding new markets, network participants were really

only beginning to become aware of and utilize this business resource as the project funding began to run out. We believe that the intermediary role would have been more impactful if the necessary collaboration infrastructure had been established first, rather than developed concurrently.

### Long-term funding is necessary to develop a network.

We cannot overemphasize the need for long-term funding strategies when undertaking a network development project. While some success was measured in the Michigan Meat Network, we feel there was still much more to do before the network could become even partially self-sustaining. An important takeaway from the Michigan Meat Network would be for members and the industry to acknowledge the need for ongoing funding to support the activities of such a network. We note, as an example, the Iowa Niche Pork Working Group that began making progress after 10 years.<sup>19</sup>

17 Barry, J. & Pirog, R. (2013). Challenges and solutions for the Michigan-based meat and livestock value chains supplying local and regional markets. Michigan State University Center for Regional Food Systems. Retrieved from: <https://www.canr.msu.edu/foodsystems/uploads/files/livestock-stakeholders-report.pdf>

18 Michigan State University Center for Regional Food Systems. Michigan Meat Network Resources. Retrieved from: [https://www.canr.msu.edu/michigan\\_meat\\_network/resources](https://www.canr.msu.edu/michigan_meat_network/resources)

19 Lammers, P. (2011). Efficiency of Niche Pork production - Lessons from Iowa. Oregon Pork Producers Council. Oregon State University Department of Animal and Rangeland Sciences. Retrieved from: <https://anr.oregonstate.edu/sites/agscid7/files/anr/nicheporkproduction-lammers.pdf>



## Summary

---

With positive social change and new endeavors in business comes an element of risk, and MSU CRFS recognizes that unless we are prepared to take that risk, we will not make an impact on food systems change — where more people in Michigan have access to local healthy food and local food systems contribute to economic growth and job creation. This work is new and innovative and it is important to share lessons and observations with others working in this field.

Our learnings and next steps are summarized in the following:

- The Michigan Meat Network identified that the activities and actions of the network had a positive impact on a number of businesses that supported their growth and viability.
- Not all that participated were equally impacted by the network. This may be in part due to the varying degrees of urgency and capacity participants expressed in regards to making changes to their business.
- Maintaining continuous communication with very busy business owners is difficult and should be carefully considered. Utilizing existing communication channels is recommended based on our experiences.
- Activities that bring people together across the value chain (from producer to retail) can be extremely valuable to businesses, if thoughtfully organized and facilitated.
- Time and financial resources are key to providing backbone support and sustaining regular network activities that are critical to nurturing trust within networks. The time necessary to build trust is easily underestimated and should be factored in to financial planning when building a cross-value chain network.
- Even though the Michigan Meat Network no longer has backbone support, some network functions, such as networking activities and communications via the Google Group, will be continued by partners within the industry such as MSU Extension and the Michigan Meat Association.
- Not everything tried in network development is successful, but when it is, practices can create impact that is unique and unattainable in any other way. We continue to think that social and economic change can be achieved through network development across the meat value chain with more time, funding, and the ability to build trust.

**MICHIGAN STATE** | Center for  
UNIVERSITY | Regional Food Systems

*The Michigan State University Center for Regional Food Systems advances regionally-rooted food systems through applied research, education, and outreach by uniting the knowledge and experience of diverse stakeholders with that of MSU faculty and staff. Our work fosters a thriving economy, equity, and sustainability for Michigan, the nation, and the planet by advancing systems that produce food that is healthy, green, fair, and affordable. Learn more at [foodsystems.msu.edu](https://foodsystems.msu.edu).*

**Center for Regional Food Systems**  
**Michigan State University**

480 Wilson Road  
Natural Resources Building  
East Lansing, MI, 48824

**For general inquiries:**

**EXPLORE:** [foodsystems.msu.edu](https://foodsystems.msu.edu)

**EMAIL:** [CRFS@msu.edu](mailto:CRFS@msu.edu)

**CALL:** 517-353-3535

**FOLLOW:** @MSUCRFS

Email addresses and phone numbers for individual staff members can be found on the [people page of our website](#).

