



Ensuring Food Security in Michigan's Upper Peninsula

*Left: Dow Fellows team worked with a community in the western Upper Peninsula on food systems
Right: Team members at the 2019 Dow Symposium*

GLOBAL IMPACT ARTICLE SERIES

The Upper Peninsula (UP) of Michigan is rural and residents are experiencing significant food insecurity. Counties such as Houghton and Ontonagon in the western Upper Peninsula are classified as food deserts because there are many low-income communities and a number of residents that live a significant distance from the nearest grocery store. Only 10% of adults in the UP consume five or more servings of fruits and vegetables per day, and there are about 3,800 people in need of better food access. Residents living in this rural area rely on food imported from multiple locations. The reliance on imported food is challenging because of frequent severe weather episodes in the UP. As a result, there is a growing demand for local food production.

Working with the Western Upper Peninsula Planning and Development Region (WUPPDR) and the Western Upper Peninsula Food Systems Council, a University of Michigan Dow Sustainability Fellows team worked to advance sustainable food systems planning in the western UP. The main goal of WUPPDR is to develop a comprehensive food system plan for the region that enables western UP residents the equitable access to healthy foods. The Dow Fellows team helped lay the groundwork to develop a food system plan.

“The challenges facing the UP are pretty unique with how rural and isolated it is from other communities,” says Max Woody, a graduate student at U-M and member of the Dow Fellows team. “The growing season is short, and a lot of different factors make it hard to establish good local food options.”

COMMUNITY HEALTH PROFILES

To develop a comprehensive food system plan for the region, the Dow team created individual community health profiles. WUPPDR will use these profiles to better understand the needs of the community concerning access to food, and the profiles will serve as a foundation for future work to map available resources.

The Dow Fellows team completed profiles for six western UP counties and focused on seven categories:

- 1. demographics
- 2. public health
- 3. food resources
- 4. social services

- 5. institutional factors,
- 6. natural landscape, and
- 7. built environment.

Recommendations For WUPPDR to Leverage the Profiles:

- Use the detailed profiles to write sustainable food systems grants (with the Food Council).
- Use the profiles as stakeholder engagement tools for future projects. However, they suggest that WUPPDR update the data annually, so the profiles remain up to date.



PLANNING TOOLKIT

The Dow Fellows team also developed a food systems planning tool kit for local municipalities. The planning toolkit was created through extensive analysis of policy documents and interviews with city and regional planners across the state of Michigan. The planning toolkit provides examples of policies that have been used in communities outside of the Western UP to encourage and promote local food systems. “WUPPDR can use the toolkit as a resource to help identify what other communities have done in the past and how successful they have been. They can then identify which of the policies might work best for them,” says Woody.

“We were helping WUPPDR develop resources for establishing more local food options in their communities. We looked at ways that other communities have tried to address those issues, and [investigated] strategies that are effective in the UP specifically,” adds Woody.

POLICY AND PLANNING FOR ADDITIONAL COMMUNITIES

The team also created a Master Planning Addendum Template, which can serve as a prelude to a food policy section of a city or county master plan. Essentially, the planning addendum is a template that provides a general introduction to the importance of food systems planning.

- This addendum is designed to be broadly applicable to many communities in the western UP and has the potential to be applicable to many rural communities.
- **Recommendation to WUPPDR:** Use the Planning Addendum as a starting point for incorporating food policy into their planning documents.

In addition to other tools, the Dow Fellows team created a Food Policy Master Planning Catalog to assist WUPPDR in engaging with local food systems planners who wish to incorporate aspects of sustainability into their food systems. It contains action-oriented food policy language from the master plans of other Michigan communities. This policy catalog was developed through research, stakeholder conversations, and client engagement.

- **Recommendations to WUPPDR:**
 - Use the Planning Catalogue as a key resource to assist in policy and planning resources in local communities.
 - Consider the Planning Catalogue as a living document and update it accordingly.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT & NEXT STEPS

The Dow Fellows team visited the western UP to engage with members of the Keweenaw Bay Indian Community, clients from WUPPDR, key stakeholders from the Western UP Food Systems Council, and community members. This visit expanded the team’s understanding of the western UP, the role of indigenous communities, and the historical and cultural importance of local foods.

Overall, the three deliverables are designed to provide a suite of tools to WUPPDR that will be directly applied through its works with its partner communities on food systems planning.

PROJECT TEAM

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- **Western Upper Peninsula Planning and Development Region (WUPPDR)**

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- [Western Upper Peninsula Food Council](#)
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This project addresses the following United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

