

Food & Farming Network Meeting: Study Session
April 22nd 2014
Grow Benzie – Frankfort, Michigan
Hosted by Josh Stoltz

In Attendance:

Via Video Conference: Wendy Wieland, Larry Dyer, Jen Schaap, Sarha Eichberger
In-Person: Bill Palladino, Zane Schwaiger, Jim Barnes, Josh Stoltz, Sandy MacArthur,
Tracy Chipley, Sharron May, Mark Coe, Brian Bordauges, Heather Ratliff, Tricia Phelps,
Paul May

Here's a summary of what was said and discussed at the meeting. It was led by Network co-chair Heather Ratliff. After the meeting was adjourned there was a walking tour of the Grow Benzie facility and property. There is a video of that posted to our YouTube channel. Go to the website for more information.

Thank you to everyone who came to the Summit. It was a great turnout and a wonderful way to acknowledge that we really are a sum of all of our parts.

We decided to switch off every month to do a study session and a business session. Today is one of those study sessions.

Josh Stoltz, Executive Director—Grow Benzie

Grow Benzie started 6 years ago. At Marty Demers graduation party, a bunch of cool people thought it would be great to start a community garden. Within 90 days they purchased this property with 4 signers on the deed. 6 years later they hired Josh as the first full-time executive director. Board initiatives from the get-go, it was all based on volunteer passion and hard work.

Historically the space was similar to the State Hospital where the folks at the top of the hill farmed the whole property.

The incubator kitchen at Grow Benzie is one of the great things in Benzie county. 27 community gardens are also located on the property. 4 master gardeners use some of the space and donate their food to the local food pantries. The greenhouses are a

youth space brimming with ideas. Raised beds will be constructed this year with help from the council on aging and the disability network. We have a sewing studio that has 8 sewing machines. Classes will start this month. A knitting studio as well. Our biggest resource is our space. We also have the reach of the surrounding counties because we're centrally located.

We hope to convert this space into the welcome center for northern Michigan food. A food chamber of commerce. The taste the local difference magazine would welcome visitors into the area. We'd have a yard to table cafe, where everything from out in the greenhouses is turned into food, two days a week (Friday & Saturday). Mondays we have the farmers market, with aggregation opportunities for farmers to reach out to chefs and retail. We'd have extra food on Tuesdays that we've aggregated from the farmers and find a way (food truck possibly?) to get it out to the end users. This is our vision, but it can't all happen at once. We need funding and support.

This is a campus, a model kitchen, the growing, the education. It all starts with soil, building healthy soil, planting the seed, growing the plants, maintaining and harvesting, processing and preserving. Training for the culinary community, advancing culinary professional development. Retail can be taught right in this facility. It's all in one place. We can fit up to 200 people here for a class. We want others to buy into the community. We want to help market the food region.

Questions:

We're looking for a group to provide educational opportunities for farmers and food producers if they are interested in selling at the retail level. Prospective sellers. How do we put that into place? The process should be as easy and thorough as possible. Classes on Marketing, Packaging, Safety, GAP certification, label design, Excel QuickBooks, producer to restaurant, producer to retail.

I've found that there is a lot that is going on regionally but it's going on in compartmentalized ways. We need a better way to communicate and share resources. Perhaps a digital presence to act as a storage house of information.

Goodwill's MI Fresh Start Program has been working on job training and hospitality training for years. In the past they've done 8 people at a time training for serve safe,

and they are now kicking off a an opportunity for Good Food Handling Practices. They provide training opportunities from the front of the house to the back of the house as well as processing and preparing of food.

What is the process or vision for the use of Grow Benzie as site for Health Education?

Cooking Matters has been a partner for awhile, but we will also be doing outreach now to connect with people to let them know that the space is available. We want to create more of a series throughout the summer.

Takeaway: We need an internal mechanism for us to communicate and access each others resources.

A tour of Grow Benzie followed the meeting. Look for the video on the FFN Website.