

School Food FOCUS
Transforming Food Options for Children in Urban Schools

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FOCUS on Michigan State University

We are pleased to introduce one of our core partner organizations, The C.S. Mott Group for Sustainable Food Systems at Michigan State University (MSU). The C.S. Mott Group began in January 2003 as a vehicle to engage communities in applied research and outreach to promote sustainable food systems. As a team of researchers and educators, the group's goal is to improve access to and availability of locally produced food.

MSU is involved in School Food FOCUS in a number of ways. First, the MSU research team is a major partner in the research for the School Food Learning Lab, focusing on the supply-side. In addition, as Technical Assistance providers in Food Systems for the Kellogg Food and Fitness Initiative, members of the Mott Group will liaise with the Knowledge Café. MSU also serves as the fiscal agent for the W.K. Kellogg Foundation grant for School Food FOCUS.

Background

Because food systems have become so consolidated, with very few companies serving the food needs of large school districts, a food-by-food road map is needed for shifting procurement—from identifying points on the map (farms, processing facilities, school districts) to laying out shipping routes, product specifications and formulation, quantities, etc. The Mott Group will take the lead on the supply-side of this equation, helping to collect and synthesize information that will be of use to school districts as well as farmers and food service management companies seeking to serve the school food market.

They will address questions such as:

- What exactly is the current regional production ... for specific foods?
- How would regional production capacity change if large school districts began to scale up their purchase of healthier, more local foods?
- How does the production capacity vary from one region to the next and what difference does this make?

The MSU Team

School Food FOCUS is fortunate to have an excellent resource team from MSU (consisting of Mike Hamm, Chris Peterson, David Conner, and Getachew Abate) to conduct research related to the regional food supply surrounding and food supply chains serving selected school districts.

Working with school food service directors, staff and others, they will identify opportunities and obstacles to increasing school purchases of healthier, more local foods. The research will be shaped in a collaborative effort with the two pilot school districts and the “demand-side” team from Liquori and Associates, and the commodities expertise of Alliance for a Healthier Generation. Participants in this “School Food Learning Lab” are currently exploring how they and the project itself can be guided by participatory leadership methodology.

In addition to the research team, Cheryl Danley and Ruth Blackburn will lead an outreach effort to ensure that other W.K. Kellogg Foundation-funded food initiatives—in particular the nine WKKF Food and Fitness communities throughout the country—have access to the School Food Learning Lab findings ([Food and Fitness Site](#)¹).

Among them, this team has decades of experience in farming and food systems, supply chains, research and communications to name just a few arenas that are key to School Food FOCUS. They also bring a wealth of perspectives and insights that have already contributed greatly to the project, and will continue to do so over the coming months and years. The bios below will give you a little better sense of this great group of people, and we're sure you'll look forward to meeting many of them in St. Paul next month.

Bios

Getachew Abate is a Product Market Analyst at the MSU Product Center for Agriculture and Natural Resources. He received his Ph.D. from the University of Hanover, Germany in Horticultural Economics. His recent research includes analyzing, exploring and assessing agri-food sector economic impacts, farm-to-institution programs, and community and regional economic development. With School Food FOCUS, Getachew is part of the MSU team that will examine production, supply and distribution issues within procurement systems of selected school districts.

Ruth Blackburn works as a Program Associate with the C.S. Mott Group at MSU, and as a consultant to the Ann Arbor Ecology Center's Healthy Food in Michigan Hospitals initiative, a project of Health Care Without Harm. She is also on the leadership team of the Food System Economic Partnership in Southeast Michigan. A registered dietitian with a Masters in Public Health Nutrition, her role at MSU is twofold: to serve as a liaison between the School Food FOCUS initiative and the Mott group; and to assist in connecting the work of FOCUS with the goals and initiatives of the Kellogg Food and Fitness communities.

David Conner is a research specialist with the CS Mott Group at MSU. He holds a Ph.D. in agricultural economics from Cornell University and a Masters in Extension Education. His recent research experience concerns the economics of sustainable agriculture and food systems. As part of School Food FOCUS, David will be leading research in current supply chains and opportunities for greater use of healthier, more local foods in school food service.

Cheryl Danley is an Outreach Specialist with the C.S Mott Group at MSU. She holds a Bachelors degree from Wellesley College and an MS in Food and Resource Economics from the University of Florida. With more than 20 years of experience on issues of environment and sustainable development, Cheryl's primary responsibility is to engage with the Food and Fitness Initiative communities to strengthen their access to fresh, locally grown, healthy and affordable food.

¹ <http://www.wkkf.org/default.aspx?tabid=75&CID=383&NID=61&LanguageID=0>

Michael Hamm is the C. S. Mott Professor of Sustainable Agriculture at MSU and head of its C.S. Mott Group, which focuses on small and medium scale family farm viability, equal access by all members of a community to a healthy diet, and dispersing animals in the countryside. Mike's own research is in the areas of community food security, community and sustainable food systems. His role in the School Food FOCUS project is to oversee the MSU staff involved in the program and strategic planning.

Chris Peterson is an agribusiness economist, professor in the Department of Agricultural Economics, and Homer Nowlin Chair of Consumer-Responsive Agriculture at MSU. His own research activities focus on strategic management of agribusinesses, including studies on globalization strategies, supply chain management, social capital, cooperative finance, scenario analysis, and strategic planning methods and practices. Chris works extensively with agribusiness and food firms in the area of strategic management, agri-food supply chain relationships, product-oriented agricultural marketing, and cooperative strategic and financial management.