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The Kresge Foundation adds support to developing food hub network

EAST LANSING, Mich. – The Michigan State University Center for Regional Food Systems (CRFS) has been awarded a \$450,000 grant by The Kresge Foundation. The grant will support CRFS in developing and providing leadership to a food hub network in Michigan over the next three years.

CRFS will engage food hubs – businesses or organizations that manage the aggregation, distribution and marketing of primarily local or regional food products – along with regional and state leaders and organizations in the Michigan Food Hub Learning and Innovation Network. Participants will learn with food hub entrepreneurs from across Michigan and the nation to increase their capacity to profitably supply food to new markets, including those in areas with limited access to healthy, affordable foods.

“There are a number of existing and emerging food hubs in Michigan that have great potential to support new and underserved markets,” said Rich Pirog, CRFS senior associate director and co-convenor of the network. “The Kresge Foundation grant facilitates the creation of a learning and innovation space to accelerate food business growth and development as well as supply more healthy Michigan food to our residents.”

CRFS and Morse Marketing Connections, LLC, a key partner in building the network, recently gathered food hub representatives and organizations supporting food hub growth from across Michigan to learn more about the network’s goals. These include augmenting food hubs’ access to technical and financial resources, increasing business-to-business collaboration, expanding access to healthy foods in underserved communities and identifying best practices in food hub development.

“This network will really help facilitate relationships that allow food hubs to learn from one another, which is so important to our growth,” said Jane Bush, co-founder of the Four Seasons Produce Co-op and business development specialist for the Food System Economic Partnership in Ann Arbor. “It’s also very inspiring to see our state aligning with the national food hub movement and working to provide resources at this critical point in food hub development.”

The Kresge Foundation’s grant to CRFS augments the state’s \$1.95 million Value-added/Regional Food Systems grant program, administered by the Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (MDARD). A key partner in the Michigan Food Hub Learning and Innovation Network, MDARD recently announced the grant program and the availability of technical assistance to support food system infrastructure and healthy food access.

“We are pleased to partner with CRFS to support the Michigan Food Hub Learning and Innovation Network,” said MDARD director Keith Creagh. “This partnership will build capacity and create jobs while providing technical support in areas such as business planning, food safety regulation, licensing requirements and other issues facing new and expanding businesses.”

Findings from the network will be shared with the recently established National Good Food Network Food Hub Collaboration, which is working to ensure the success of food hubs throughout the United States. It will supply the Michigan network with technical assistance and information gathered from emerging and existing food hubs across the country.

Additional support for developing the Michigan Food Hub Learning and Innovation Network is provided by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation.

The Michigan State University Center for Regional Food Systems unites the applied research, education and outreach expertise of faculty and staff members at MSU to advance understanding of and engagement with regional food systems. CRFS organizers envision a thriving economy, equity and sustainability for Michigan, the country and the planet through food systems rooted in local regions and centered on food that is healthy, green, fair and affordable.

The Kresge Foundation is a \$3 billion private, national foundation that seeks to influence the quality of life for future generations through its support of nonprofit organizations working in its seven program areas: arts and culture, community development, Detroit, education, the environment, health and human services. In 2011, its board of trustees approved 356 awards totaling \$170 million; \$140 million was paid out to grantees over the course of the year. For more information, visit kresge.org.

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