
**Turn up the Volume:
Growing Opportunities in Local Food**

Communications Plan
Fair Food Network
Specialty Crop Block Grant

Overview

The **purpose** of the *Turn up the Volume* project is to communicate the existence of emerging local markets to specialty crop producers and processors/distributors in a way that is credible and believable to them. **Objectives** are to place messages in trusted media and further build awareness through stakeholders and opinion leaders. The project's implementation **timeline** is fall 2011 and winter 2011-2012.

Audiences

Primary: Specialty crop entrepreneurs interested in building a business future with products, facilities, and services needed to satisfy the range of value propositions inherent in demand for local food.

Secondary: Stakeholders key to improving the business environment for these entrepreneurs, such as lawmakers, business development officials, other entrepreneurs.

Venues: Specialty crop and related agriculture media and industry outlets are primary, with regional business media next, and community media third (for reaching farmers among general readership of local newspapers etc.).

Messages

Messaging must acknowledge significant gaps and challenges for specialty crop entrepreneurs while using evidence of demand and other factors to demonstrate local/regional food as a long-term reality around which to plan a business future.

The project then provides practical information about innovation and investments that can help specialty crop entrepreneurs navigate the local/regional food business landscape. This orientation covers: 1) Private sector innovations in the supply chain 2) Public sector investment in such innovation, including Food and Farm bill priorities.

Content

Series

1. Overview article
2. New supply chain relationships (value chain)
3. Public sector interest, initiatives

Materials

Turn up the Volume will reach audiences with:

- A 3-part series for core messages, evidence.
- Complementary “capsules” (4-6) of content profiling innovations, entrepreneurs
- Composite presentation
- Postcard promotion
- Facebook page and associated Twitter posts

Strategy

Establish *Turn up the Volume* as the credible place for news and views on scaling up specialty crop opportunities in local markets for Michigan growers, processors, distributors:

- *Starting with* — a core series published in Fruit-Vegetable Growers News, commodity newsletters and other agriculture, business, community media.
- *Augmenting with* —
 - Additional capsules of content for these outlets and Internet opportunities, including Facebook and Twitter pages for *Turn up the Volume*.
 - Composite presentation for speaking at stakeholder meetings/events through fall 2011 and winter 2011-2012.
 - Postcard promotion of *Turn up the Volume* coverage (handout, mailing, and/or enclosure).
- *Ending with* — a recognized and respected source of business information that could carry ongoing coverage of local/regional food system scaling for specialty crop entrepreneurs in MI, including Food and Farm Bill priorities.

Capsules will encompass:

- Healthy food in retail, e.g. Double Up Food Bucks
- SE MI Producer-Processor Council, featuring Eastern Market role, regional surveys. Pair with review of “food hub” projects and related enterprises in development across Michigan, with contact info.
- Feature on growers working collectively to supply demand for local (Fresh Fields and Farmers on the Move cooperatives)
- Institutional purchasing and food service innovators (Bronson, Sparrow hospitals, Sysco, MSU, F2S)
- Policy – Food and Farm bill priorities, incl. Michigan Good Food Charter context
- Finance – Farm Credit Administration “diversity and inclusion” rule, other resources.
- Technology — Developments that build local food capacity and reach, e.g. Smart phone debit and credit processing, Local Orbit.

Future Coverage

The project could become a vehicle for communications about the business of scaling up and regionalizing local food for Michigan’s specialty crop industry. Determining factors include the project’s initial success, other funding available, and whether such a communications vehicle is a priority.

Future coverage could include:

- Developments in MI legislature and U.S. Congress.
- Business to business news about buyers, sellers, processors investing in local/regional food.
- Directories and resource lists for entrepreneur networking, community economic development (e.g. food hub contacts, progress)
- Potential advertising, other paid promotion to the project if *Turn up the Volume* gains business-to-business momentum, value.

Evaluation

Questions and measures for assessing the project’s effectiveness include:

- Has the project placed content in communications outlets that reach its primary and secondary audiences?
- Has the project driven traffic to its Facebook page and other Internet postings of content?
- Have opinion leaders and stakeholders begun to reference *Turn up the Volume* and/or seek out the project for information and perspective?
- Do readers want more? (measure by asking outlets for feedback on interest in the content and tracking direct requests).
- Did the communications reach audiences in a timely manner for their own research and planning purposes? Late fall and winter 2011 and into 2012 is the relative “off season” with time for business planning.
- Does the communications project have the potential to sustain ongoing production and uptake by media and other outlets of its coverage of local and regional opportunities for Michigan specialty crop industry?

