

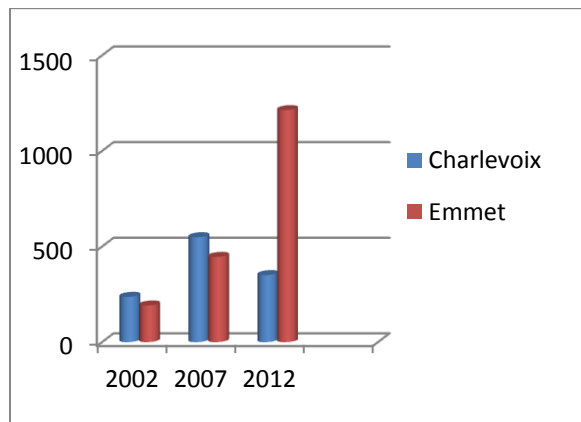
## The State of Agriculture in Emmet and Charlevoix Counties – 2015

*Prepared by the Local Food Alliance of Northern Michigan*

Increased attention given by people in our community to the food they eat and where it is grown is reinvigorating our region's agriculture, countering trends in data from the U.S. Census of Agriculture which show declines in Emmet and Charlevoix Counties over the past 30 years. Statewide, agriculture is one of the top three growth sectors. A Michigan State University study estimated that the annual economic impact of agriculture has grown from \$60 billion in 2006 to over \$100 billion in 2015. Michigan has the highest diversity of agricultural products of any state except California; 81% of these products are grown in the 10-county Northwest Michigan region. The potential impact that agriculture can play in our community in the future—including on jobs, economic growth, and health—is exciting.

### Products Sold Directly to Individuals 2002-2012 (\$000)

*(source: USDA Census of Agriculture)*



Products sold by Emmet County farmers directly to individuals increased from 3% of total market value to 18% between 2002 and 2012, the highest in Northwest Michigan. Families can buy more local produce directly at a farm, through Community Supported Agriculture, at a Farmers Market, or through home delivery. Our community has active Farmers Markets in Petoskey, Charlevoix, Harbor Springs, Boyne City and East Jordan. In 2015, the Crooked Tree Arts Center began a winter Farmers and Artisans Market in Petoskey, and Boyne City is making significant progress toward a year-round pavilion to be home to its dynamic market.

The Grain Train has increased its locally-sourced items by 77% since 2012, to nearly \$700,000 in 2015. Restaurants throughout the area are using more local, fresh produce and you see the names of the local farms proudly displayed on their menus. Institutions from the Friendship Center to our schools are starting to use locally-grown produce.

Coveyou Scenic Farm, Pond Hill Farm and Bill's Farm Market have expanded the production and availability of produce at their on-farm stores. Younger farmers are building a stake in our area at new farms like Bear Creek Organic, Bluestem, and Spirit of Walloon. Many farms are making investments in season-extending technology and infrastructure to produce higher value products for more of the year, including fresh salad greens in February! All of this is adding seasonal and year round jobs.

Local businesses are growing around local farm products. For example, Harwood Gold makes catsup and BBQ sauce and Two Acre Farm makes pasta from local ingredients. Crooked Tree Breadworks is baking a "Local's Loaf" from freshly-ground wheat from Scheel Family Farm in Petoskey. Local Eats Delivery aggregates produce and meat from many small-scale local farmers into market baskets it delivers to homes. And American Spoon Foods—a pioneer in

purchasing from northern Michigan farmers and adding value and jobs through its products and stores—is buying more produce from local sources. Last year, in addition to fresh produce for its Café, it purchased 20,000 lbs. of maple syrup and honey and more than 20,000 lbs. of fruits and vegetables from Emmet and Charlevoix County farms, and won a Sofi Silver award for Chili Jam made with Coveyou Fresno Chilis!

And then there is wine. In recent years, the number of vineyards and wineries in our region has grown enormously. They have formed a non-profit organization that is working to establish an American Viticulture Area (AVA) designation for this region. Nine wineries have formed a Bay View Wine Trail that adds a new dimension to “Up North” tourism; one member winery reports sales and visitor growth of more than 30% last year.

These changes are being supported by many community organizations. The Petoskey Regional Chamber of Commerce’s October “Business After Hours” has focused on local food and farming for the past 3 years. Between October 2014 and December 2015, North Central Michigan College held 67 farming-related classes and activities with 1,185 participants. The Petoskey-Harbor Springs Area Community Foundation has launched a Good Food Initiative to focus on improving the viability of local agriculture. ISLAND, a local non-profit, has helped form 10 farm guilds totaling 420 memberships—for orchards, grain, beekeeping, fiber, green-building, mushroom growing, and three for small farmers—that are vehicles for peer learning, mentoring, demonstrations, bulk orders, and workshops. MSU Extension supports several of these workshops and NCMC classes, and provides business counseling to farmers and farm-related enterprises.

The Local Food Alliance of Northern Michigan is partnering with the Groundwork Center for Resilient Communities (formerly Michigan Land Use Institute) to create a staff position to coordinate community efforts to accelerate change toward a local agriculture that can again be a pillar of our community and economy. Groundwork brings to this partnership more than a decade of work building networks, implementing innovative projects, and raising awareness about the benefits of a strong community food system. Fundraising for this position is underway.

Agriculture has a significant place in our community’s future, not just its past. We have the potential to create something very special around our farms as these new trends grow and mature. What can we do to promote, encourage, and facilitate this growth in local farming and value-added enterprises? We can buy more food and other farm products from local sources. We can work to build agriculture into tourism activities by highlighting restaurants that feature locally-produced products and promoting farms, wineries and farm markets as places to visit. We can develop creative ways to make farmland, finance, training, and mentoring accessible to a new generation of farmers. And we can explore ways to bring together farmers, processors, institutions like schools, health care providers and senior centers, and businesses such as restaurants and groceries to expand the amount of food, fiber, and other farm products they source locally. The result will not only be more viable farms, new business opportunities, more jobs, and a thriving community. It will also be more healthful, nutritious, and better tasting food on our tables.