



2ND ANNUAL REPORT • 2020

WESTERN UP FOOD SYSTEMS COLLABORATIVE

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We first acknowledge that Michigan's Upper Peninsula is the ancestral, traditional, and contemporary lands and waters of Indigenous nations, including the Anishinaabeg— the Three Fires Confederacy of Ojibwe, Odawa, and Potawatomi peoples. We also acknowledge our many more-than-human relatives who call this region home, and have done so since time immemorial. The Upper Peninsula is located within Ojibwa (Chippewa) homelands and ceded-territory established by the Treaty of 1842, the territory of Native American nations in *Gakiwe'onaning* (Keweenaw Bay), *Getegitgaaning* (Lac Vieux Desert), *Mashkii-ziibing* (Bad River), *Odaawaa-zaaga'iganing* (Lac Courte Oreilles), *Waaswaaganing* (Lac Du Flambeau), *Miskwaabikong* (Red Cliff), *Wezaawaagami-ziibiing* (St. Croix), and *Zaka'aaganing* (Sokaogon Mole Lake). As the original caretakers of our region's lands and waters and life beings, we are most grateful to all our relatives. We thank you for your continued care for our foodways in partnership with Upper Peninsula communities, and local, state, federal, and other governance entities throughout the Great Lakes.

PANDEMIC YEAR

2020 ANNUAL REPORT

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SUMMARY

We had thought our 2020 annual report would look differently than this report does; while we were lucky to move much to virtual spaces, we missed the in-person interactions and creative energy we share when we are together. And yet, this report is a testament to our dedication to a shared future that prioritizes health and justice in our food systems.

2020 was not an easy year for our country, communities, families, or food systems. The global COVID-19 pandemic coupled with the escalation of white supremacist violence laid bare inequities in our country and the importance of mutual aid in helping one another get through these trying times.

In our own communities in the Western UP, many of us felt compelled to prioritize care in the midst of these crises; care for the lands and waters we are fortunate to call home, care for our neighbors so that they might be safe from harm and stay well or regain health, care for the plants and pollinators of our gardens, care for the local farmers who fed us, care for our teachers who motivated us to learn new things or reconsider old things even as isolation kept us apart.

As our WUPFSC 2020 report goes to press, the largest mass protest ever documented in human history continues in India as rural people stand up to protect their agrarian livelihoods. While this may seem a world away from the Western UP, our work toward food sovereignty here is in solidarity with their struggle. What more can we each do to protect the seeds that feed us? What more can we do to strengthen our food systems to make sure all have access to the foods they want and need?

We are already doing, sharing, learning a lot from one another in regards to these questions, as you will see. Because we believe in abundance rather than scarcity, we have a plentitude of accomplishments and moments of beauty to share with you in this second Western UP Food Systems Collaborative report. We look forward to another year growing food and growing our network, respecting that we come to this work to learn how to keep doing it better, together.

The Western Upper Peninsula Food Systems Collaborative

Photograph by Rachael Pressley



INVESTING IN REGIONAL GARDENS - A PHF INITIATIVE

BY MICHELLE SEGUIN MD

In an effort to increase food access points and community growing spaces within the Western U.P., the Portage Health Foundation (PHF) awarded \$37,400 in grant funding to support nine community garden projects in 2020. The projects funded will serve a wide cross-section of the community in a variety of different settings including: traditional community gardens, schools, and residential housing complexes. The projects funded include:

Chassell Township Schools - Chassell School Garden (\$5000), City of Hancock - Herb & "Three Sisters" Garden (\$1900), Dollar Bay-Tamarack City Schools - DB-TC Tower Gardening Project (\$2500), Finlandia University - Ryan Street Community Garden (\$5000), Gogebic-Ontonagon ISD - School Community Garden (\$5000), Hancock Public Schools - Barkell Elementary School Garden (\$5000), Ontonagon Village Housing Commission - Pedestal & Raised Bed Gardens (\$3000), Osceola Township - Dollar Bay Community Garden (\$5000), Village of South Range - South Range Community Garden (\$5000). The projects highlight a variety of collaborations including: school-community-based partnerships, involvement with the Lake Superior Stewardship Initiative, and opportunities for intergenerational learning.



Photographs by Michael Babcock and Emma Stout



WESTERN UP FOOD SYSTEMS PHOTO CONTEST WINNER

Wild Medicine and Food Foraging - Heather Wright Wendel

"As a farmer-forager, eating locally and seasonally means sustainably foraging from wild and domesticated perennial crops for food and medicine."
Heather Wendel Wright



Photograph by Kathleen Smith

NATIVE PLANT RESTORATION AT SAND POINT

BY KATHLEEN SMITH

As the public becomes more concerned about the environment, the interest in preservation and restoration of native plant communities also increases. Native plants are valued for their economic, ecological, genetic, and aesthetic benefits, in addition to the growing revitalization of our traditional medicines and foods in their essential value as living species.

For the 2020 season, Keweenaw Bay Indian Community - Natural Resources Department (NRD) habitat specialist, plant technicians, and youth interns planted about 20 species of native plants. Over 13 acres hosted nearly 6000 plants species grown in the NRD biodome to enhance plant diversity and wildlife habitat. There were also native plant species that were established previously that had an abundance of flowers and were (mostly) going to seed.

In June, many strawberries blossomed and were in abundance, as the fruit ripened. With the first round of plantings many were compromised by a late frost, followed by a week long heat wave. Unfortunately the blueberries had blossomed with minor fruit development, only to be dried up by the heat.

With the climbing temperatures the plants had to be watered thoroughly utilizing a John Deere Gator with a 100 gallon tank and pump to assist the plants to establish. Despite the heat, many plants were successful and went to seed. With observation, many of the plants that were assisted with extra watering were successful. As a result, plant loss was minimal. Invasive species such as Spotted Knapweed, Eurasian Watermilfoil and Purple Loosestrife, were monitored and controlled by using mechanical methods.

Seed collection for specific plant species were harvested. There is only a short window of opportunity when seeds are ripe and available for collection. Sites for potential seed collection were evaluated and observed. Seed collection commenced when seeds were ready to offer themselves. Native species collected were common milkweed, red milkweed, boneset, fireweed, asters, echinacea, evening primrose, white sage, pearly everlasting, Joe Pye-weed, and blue vervain. Seeds collected were then broadcast over 13 acres. Common milkweed seeds were planted throughout the area of the restoration at Sandpoint and along the sides of the road.

COLLECTIVIZING COMMUNITY SUPPORTED AGRICULTURE TO INCREASE FOOD ACCESS

BY MICHELLE SEGUIN MD

The Portage Health Foundation (PHF) launched a new program aimed at connecting local families with local, nutritious produce. The program was developed in an effort to increase food access and support local growers during the COVID-19 pandemic. The program served 20 families, including 54 children reaching a 60 mile radius from Skanee to Calumet. Families received a box of fresh, locally grown produce each week for 12 weeks. Farmers were paid market value for the produce. Home delivery and curbside pick-ups were provided at designated sites in the outlying communities. The families also received tools to prepare fresh food, and educational materials (including seasonal recipes) to assist with utilization of the fresh food. Participant families were identified by non-profit and human service organizations including: UP Kids, Keweenaw Family Resource Center, BHK Child Development-L'Anse, KBIC Health System. A small volunteer corps completed the weekly produce pick-ups from 5 area farms and conducted a centralized food packing at the Portage Lake District Library. The program aimed to remove common barriers to food access while safely fostering a connection to the local food system and supporting the local agricultural economy during the pandemic. Given the preliminary success of this pilot program, PHF is looking to continue and expand it in 2021. Learn more about the program by watching this 2020 highlight [video](#).

Photograph by Michael Babcock





WESTERN UP FOOD SYSTEMS PHOTO CONTEST WINNER

Gratitude for the Garden's Goodness - Lisa Reitz

"As I brought this harvest in, I was struck with the beautiful diversity the garden had just provided me. The color, shapes, sizes, flavor profiles...this collective of fruits, vegetables, and flowers all grew together in one space, in harmony. I was struck with the profound idea of how this reflects what our human society is capable of and how deeply pleasing life can be when we focus on the beauty in each other." - Lisa Reitz

5 WAYS TO GET FREE SEEDS FOR YOUR GARDEN

BY RACHAEL PRESSLEY

1. Local Seed Libraries

Public libraries in Marquette and Houghton host local seed libraries. Seed packets are made available to the community (no library card required) with hope that seeds will be saved and returned to the seed library to keep it sustainable.

2. Local Gardening / Native Plant Orgs

Many communities have local gardening clubs that host seed swaps or give away seeds to community members. The Keweenaw Garden Club is an active local group that hosts educational opportunities for gardeners. The local Wild Ones also has a tradition of sharing and collecting seeds. Get in touch with your local chapter to see what they might be able to offer.

3. Facebook Seed / Plant Swap Groups

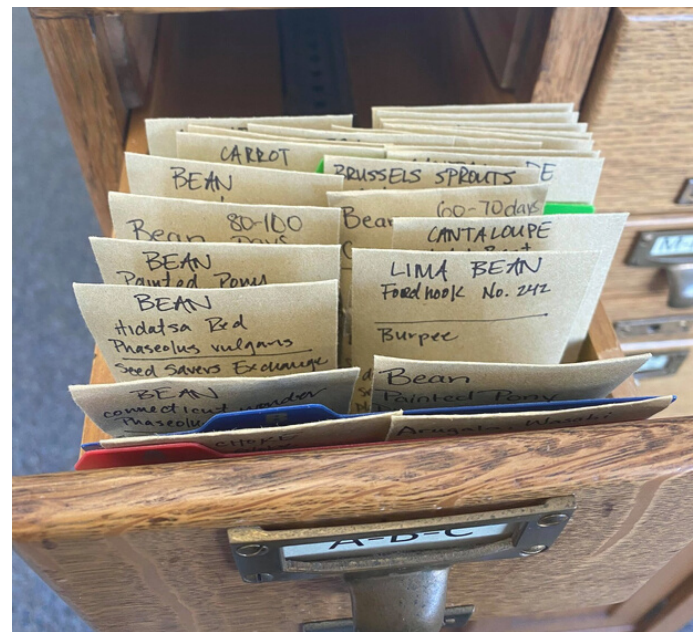
If you're on Facebook, search for seed swaps or seed exchanges on there. The local groups we are aware of include *Keweenaw Seed Swap and Plant Exchange* and the *Northern Seed Savers*.

4. Virtual Seed Exchanges

Since the pandemic started, virtual seed swaps have grown in popularity. The Queen City Seed Library held a successful online seed swap in 2020 and will host again in 2021. The Michigan Seed Swap is hosted by the Homesteaders of Michigan group and only charges shipping for participants. For a small fee you can have locally adapted seeds delivered to your front door!

5. Nature - Collect them yourself!

We encourage folks to grow a portion of their garden to seed in order to harvest and sow seeds from year to year from your favorite veggies. You can also forage for local seed in the forest, along walking paths, or even while you're at the beach.





WESTERN UP FOOD SYSTEMS PHOTO CONTEST WINNER

County Fair Lamb Project - Carol Saari

"Dawson Saari with a market lamb 2019. Livestock available to buy at the junior market livestock auction" - Carol Saari



GARDEN FOR HEART

Photograph by Rachael Pressley

BY KARENA SCHMIDT

The Garden for Heart program, located at the Debweyendon Indigenous Gardens, began in the spring of 2020, with financial support from the Michigan Health Endowment Fund, and is the manifestation of many years of envisioning tangible ways to care for our community through access to healthy, homegrown foods. The program grew from the KBIC Natural Resources Department making available to community members sizeable garden plots, garden seed and seedlings, and providing educational resources. When the request went out to engage volunteers to help at the garden, the joy in community service would be all the greater by giving to each participant a high quality, practical garden tool and freshly harvested fruits and vegetables in exchange for their commitment to tending the garden.

Garden for Heart is a volunteer reciprocity-based community capacity program that encourages outdoor exercise, preparation and enjoyable eating of healthy fruits and vegetables, and acknowledges the vital role community service plays toward healing and good health. As part of this summer long program, volunteers learned to care for fruit

trees, vegetables and medicinal plants, worked with dedicated gardeners and teachers from KBIC-NRD staff, tended native plants and wildlife-friendly habitat gardens, and engaged in many ways to help -- weeding, planting, pruning, and watering. Volunteers enjoyed bringing home fresh surplus produce from the garden and starters of vegetable and medicine plants. Turning to Indigenous knowledge for guidance in tending to the garden - believe in it -- is at the essence of the program.

In total, 27 different individuals participated, some volunteered as many as seven times, others only once, but each three-hour commitment was filled with meaningful team-work. Each volunteer day contributed to the overall health of the garden, and brought together community members to share garden stories and to connect to one another and the garden.

Garden for Heart will continue into 2021, scheduled for the first and third Saturday each month from nine to noon. An additional 75 fruit trees and 100 cranberry plants will be planted in our small fruits orchard. We may as well plant what grows best in our area!



"Growing up with Gardening" by Samantha Richardson. Acrylic on Canvas.



FARMER'S MARKET OUTREACH

BY MEGHAN JASZCZAK

Photographs by Emma Stout

The Portage Health Foundation (PHF) recognizes local Farmers Markets as a vital access point to fresh local produce in our community. In 2020, PHF focused on increasing local Farmers Market support through a few different avenues. First, each Farmers Market in the 4 county area (Houghton, Keweenaw, Baraga, Ontonagon) was provided with educational bundles that included handouts featuring seasonal food grown here in the Western Upper Peninsula, as well as corresponding recipes. The goal for the educational bundles was primarily to simplify how to utilize fresh produce and ultimately help our community make healthier choices. In addition to the educational bundles, PHF collaborated with the Michigan Farmers Market Association (MIFMA) to survey the local Farmers Markets in the 4 county region, to assess priority needs and which markets were utilizing programs such as Double Up Food Bucks, WIC Project Fresh, and Senior Market Fresh. This survey can be found at wupfoodsyste.ms.com/reports. Another approach PHF took to supporting local Farmers Markets was to fund a small grant to Calumet Farmers Market, which helped provide tokens for SNAP participants. By using the token system it simplified the overall SNAP payment process, created a more discreet experience for families, and decreased the workload for vendors. Lastly, PHF offered mini-grants, totaling to over \$3,500, available to all Farmers Markets in the 4 county area. This mini-grant was targeted to help markets purchase necessary items to comply with safe practices for COVID-19.



WESTERN UP FOOD SYSTEMS PHOTO CONTEST WINNER

Chickens First Snow - Heather Wright Wendel

"This is my first year as a full-time small-scale regenerative farmer (I transitioned from an engineering career) and this mixed flock is my first ever experience with chickens. It's been exciting to learn how to free-range chickens, including going through our four seasons. Winter is a lean time and watching our flock makes me appreciate the resourceful of the local wildlife who are not guaranteed daily food and unfrozen water. I strive to be a good land steward and farmer and seeing the world through our chickens' experiences is helping guide how we manage our land for all wildlife and future generations." - Heather Wendel



MICHIGAN TECH STUDENTS LEARN FROM AND CONTRIBUTE TO STRENGTHENING LOCAL FOOD SYSTEMS

BY ANGIE CARTER

Graduate and undergraduate students at Michigan Technological University in Houghton, MI continued ongoing collaborations with the Western UP Food Systems Collaborative through classes and research projects in the Department of Social Sciences. These collaborations with WUPFSC provide important opportunities for students to learn about community-based research, the long-rooted histories and abundant diversity of local food in our region, the intersecting realities of food inequalities, and how food systems support community resilience and sustainability. Most importantly, many of the students went beyond studying these questions to become active leaders and contributors in the collective organizing of food systems efforts beyond the scopes of their assignments or classes.

"...many of the students went beyond studying these questions to become active leaders and contributors in the collective organizing..."

In Spring 2020, students in the Food Systems & Research class shared food stories and recipes with the MTU HuskyFAN (Food Access Network) Pantry for distribution on website and social media, as well as developed recommendations and artwork in support of food access, food sovereignty, and local food systems (See Samantha Richardson's painting included in this report). Savannah Obert-Pfeiffer, an undergraduate student enrolled in the new Undergraduate Program for Exploration and Research in Social Sciences (UPERSS) course, assisted with updating the Community Supported Agriculture and on-farm sales information for the Upper Peninsula Food Exchange's Western Upper Peninsula market guide.

In Fall 2020, the Communities & Research class assisted with research and evaluation of WUPFSC programs. Isadora Mitchell and Ava Miller analyzed a preliminary listening session and researched culinary gardens for the Horizons Culinary Garden project. Katherine Dvorak developed a logo for the Growing from the Heart program and began an evaluation of the program's pilot season. Beth Bartel, Matthew Fooy, and Meghan Schultz created a mechanism for story and photo solicitations and launched a photo contest platform that can be used from year-to-year. Lynn Roberts researched how seed libraries are pivoting during the pandemic to continue to offer this important resource and knowledge sharing within their communities.



Photograph by Alex Palzewicz

Allanah Woodring, an undergraduate student awardee of MTU's Pavlis Honors College's Undergraduate Research Internship Program (URIP) and Summer Undergraduate Research Fellowship (SURF), assisted with research for therapy and children's sensory gardens at the Gundlach Women's Shelter in Calumet, MI during summer 2020 and throughout the academic year. Additionally, two Environmental & Energy Policy graduate program students, Hongmei Lu and Courtney Archambeau, began research projects. Archambeau's thesis will study the inclusivity of local farmers markets. Lu conducted a policy analysis of the local, regional, and national policy infrastructure supporting food accessibility in the Western UP region, resulting in a paper to be submitted in Spring 2021.

These efforts were supported through funding provided by a Portage Health Foundation Michigan Tech University Research Excellence Fund research seed grant (\$27,051) and a Rural Sociological Society Early Career Research Award (\$1680), as well as an ongoing grant in partnership with Portage Health Foundation and the Western Upper Peninsula Planning & Development Region focused on culinary and therapy gardens funded by the Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development.



WESTERN UP FOOD SYSTEMS PHOTO CONTEST WINNER

Group Ice Fishing - Carol Saari

"Ice fishing is popular in Houghton / Baraga Counties. Teaching youngsters is important" - Carol Saari



Photograph by Rachael Pressley

LAKE SUPERIOR STEWARDSHIP INITIATIVE UPDATES

BY LLOYD WESCOAT

In 2020, the Lake Superior Stewardship Initiative assisted ten specific school/community garden projects in the five county region of the Western UP, providing ongoing mentorship, granting funds, helping to secure additional funding, sharing resources, professional learning, and more.

As part of the COVID response, a collection of Outdoor Field Explorations for home or school were developed, including the unit, Planting in the UP. Additional units for ethnobotany and Great Lakes fisheries were developed in 2020 and are being edited. This has been a joint project between the Copper Country ISD and the Lake Superior Stewardship Initiative, which is a collaboration of the Western UP MiSTEM Network, MTU's Center for Science & Environmental Outreach, and regional partners to connect schools and communities in the stewardship of Lake Superior and its Watershed. Funding for this is through MiSTEM Network Regional Funds, NOAA B-Wet, NASA/MSGC Virtual Field Exploration.

Professional learning opportunities included a book study of Square Foot Gardening (Bartholomew) and virtual learning sessions highlighting the work of the Outdoor Field Explorations. In connection with Western UP Foodways project, several video interviews were developed focusing on the Copper Harbor Community Garden, composting, and rose propagation.



BIBLIO BISTRO

BY MEGHAN JASZCZAK

Photographs by Michael Babcock

Biblio Bistro (BB) is a dynamic cooking series featuring local, nutritious and seasonal produce. This cooking series is created in collaboration between the Portage Health Foundation (PHF) and the Portage Lake District Library (PLDL). The co-hosts for the series include Chef Michael and Dietitian Meghan, where they break down barriers in the kitchen and discuss health benefits of eating seasonally and locally. This series aims to be accessible to all cooking comfort levels, ranging from beginners to a well-tuned chef. Find the videos, recipes, and shopping lists at pldl.org/biblio-bistro.





WESTERN UP FOOD SYSTEMS PHOTO CONTEST WINNER

Manidoo Gitigaan - Rachael Pressley

"Kathleen Smith is working the garden during a hot summer evening" - Rachael Pressley. The photo was taken at the Keweenaw Bay Indian Community Garden / "Manidoo Gitigaan" means spirit garden or creator's garden

TASTE THE LOCAL DIFFERENCE SUPPORTS WESTERN UP FARMERS

BY ALEX PALZEWICZ



Photograph by Alex Palzewicz

Taste the Local Difference (TLD) is Michigan's food and farming marketing and media agency, working to help make connections to support food and farming businesses in selling more products grown, raised, foraged or processed in the state. One important way TLD has been working to build a stronger food system is sharing stories from the region, including a print article in the 2020 Local Food Guide to a handful of newsletter articles on the statewide blog. TLD also spent time supporting the Grower Community Check-ins in the spring of 2020 taking notes and lending connections or resources. TLD continues its mission to provide WUP food and farming businesses the tools and people to help them accomplish success.

In the past, TLD has spent time at WUP Farmers Markets helping educate consumers on the economic importance and health benefits of eating fresh, locally sourced foods. Over 3,000 Local Food Guides are distributed across the WUP region each year, helping communities have more knowledge on how to access local foods. TLD continues to work alongside the WUPFSC to support its food system, as well as recognizes how the work of the Collaborative continues to make a positive impact on the region's food security.

CHECKING IN WITH GROWERS ACROSS THE UPPER PENINSULA

BY ALEX PALZEWICZ

Photographs by Todd Gast

The U.P. Food Exchange is a resource portal for farmers, businesses, and individuals looking to connect with and actively participate in their local food system. Community partners across the Upper Peninsula coordinate and support local food projects of all kinds, including policy work, community education, food safety, business development, farm to school, and more. Key to the work of the U.P. Food Exchange is the Online Marketplace, a food hub that aggregates local food products for institutions in Michigan's Upper Peninsula.

In 2020, UPFE collaborated with WUPFSC to coordinate Community Grower Check-ins for the region. These were initiated to support food producers in the unprecedented time of COVID 19. This was a space for growers to share issues and resources, offer services or support, and make requests. UPFE also developed a stronger relationship with the WUPFSC through coordinated outreach efforts in newsletters and social media. The U.P. Food Exchange looks forward to working with WUPFSC on future events, education, aggregation efforts, and more.





Photograph by Rachael Pressley

WESTERN UPPER PENINSULA FOODWAYS

BY RACHAEL PRESSLEY

The Michigan Local Food Council Network (MLFCN) brings together food councils in order to build their individual and collective capacities to work on food and food policy issues, operate effectively, and engage their communities.

Since WUPFSC's beginning in October of 2018, MLFCN has supported the Collaborative's vision for the Western Upper Peninsula: *We aim to create a supportive, interconnected, and equitable food system across our region through service and stewardship for the wellbeing of our earth, air, and water, and all living beings.* In 2020, our goal for the MLFCN seed grant was to work with partners across the region to create communities-of-practice and host workshops. Due to the COVID-19 Pandemic, we had to shift our plans and came up with the idea to pay specific community members to film themselves and share their knowledge with the Western Upper Peninsula. These videos have now been uploaded to the Western U.P. Food System [YouTube channel](#) and shared across the state.



Photograph by Rachael Pressley

GROWING FROM THE HEART

BY ANGIE CARTER

Growing from the Heart began as a community growing effort in late spring 2021. As the reality of the pandemic set-in, we looked for ways to better support the increased need for food we were already seeing among our neighbors and to support the connections we knew would sustain us through this hard time. We wished to honor the many ways that growing and sharing fresh foods connects us with one another and the Earth.

Through a series of virtual Zoom meetings incorporating collaborative brainstorming and collective visioning, we agreed to organize as a grassroots collective with an aim of increasing access to fresh, local, and nourishing food grown by and for our friends and neighbors throughout the Western UP region.

We decided upon a name that reflected our values as community members -- reciprocity, healing, care, health, abundance. We invited individuals to sign up to share seeds, plant starts, and fresh-grown produce with neighbors, friends, family, and local pantries.

In our first year, those who logged in their food gifts reported sharing over 90 lbs of food with our neighbors. Many shared foods they did not report, but the reporting log gave us a rough estimate of our collective impact. In addition to the seeds, plants, and produce, we also shared land on which to grow foods and even a compost bin. We also developed our collective mission, vision, logos, and a shared listserv to share questions and resources.



Photograph by Alex Palzewicz

We look forward to continuing to organize through this effort in the future, including in-person knowledge sharing and celebration as pandemic restrictions ease and we can safely be together again. As we continue to grow and redistribute food, we work together toward food sovereignty throughout our region.

Our Mission

We are a grassroots effort of individuals and groups growing, harvesting, sharing, transporting, eating, and celebrating food with the shared goal of increasing access to healthy, fresh, and nourishing food for all. Food is a right; together, we commit to actively creating new processes, networks, and infrastructure so that all members of our community can access and enjoy the abundance of foods offered by the lands and waters of the Western UP. This collaborative care reconnects us today and helps us work toward stronger communities tomorrow. If you are participating in any step, you are a part of this important and needed work towards food sovereignty for all.

Our Vision

We envision a community in which all members' food needs are met through access to healthy, fresh, nourishing food grown and shared through our collective creativity, knowledge, and efforts. These shared efforts of growing, sharing, and celebrating food, as acts of decolonization and liberation, honor the treaty of 1842 and support food sovereignty across the Western UP region.

Join us

More information about this year's efforts can be found on the Western UP Food Systems Collaborative website or by emailing wupfoodsystem@gmail.com.



Photograph by Rachael Pressley