

## Pillar Updates January, 2018

The West Michigan Shoreline Food Processing Initiative (Initiative) program team will issue periodic updates about each of the key pillars (implementation, education/incubation, and logistics-Cross Lake Shipping-CLS) as the initiative evolves through Phase II into Phase III. The first updates released at the end of October, 2017 were by individual pillar, but going forward, the initiative will release a combined update to include information about each pillar if there are significant changes to report. Questions can be directed to Marty Gerencer, Initiative Co-Director ([marty.gerencer@gmail.com](mailto:marty.gerencer@gmail.com)) or Dennis Marvin, Pillar Manager-Implementation Communications and Logistics-CLS ([dcmarvin@aol.com](mailto:dcmarvin@aol.com))



**WEST MICHIGAN SHORELINE FOOD PROCESSING INITIATIVE LAUNCH:** The initiative was officially launched in a ceremony on October 30, 2017 at the Muskegon Farmers Market. Hosted by the Consumers Energy Foundation, which provided a seed grant to launch the program, the ceremony featured Ms Jamie Clover Adams, Director of the Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, along with Mr Steve Cooper of Continental Dairy and Mr Jason Murray of La Colombe. Staff from Kitchen 242 provided a variety of prepared food from local sources for the post ceremony luncheon with locally produced ready-to-drink coffee samples provided by La Colombe.



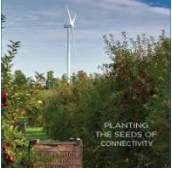
**FAM TOUR-FINGER LAKES REGION:** The Initiative's Finger Lakes Region FAM Tour final report was completed and prepared for release on January 11, 2018. The core leadership team of the West Michigan Shoreline Food Processing initiative completed a benchmark tour of the Finger Lakes Region of New York from September 20 to 22, 2017 to learn more about the region and its support for a similar initiative announced and implemented in 2011. The Finger Lakes Food Processing Cluster Initiative was a three-pronged effort to provide practical, hands-on assistance programs, training, and partnerships. Among the results achieved with the Finger Lakes initiative between 2011 and 2016 were a 20% increase in food processing jobs, a 17% increase in annual wages, and a 40% increase in total wages. Finger Lakes officials also claim the initiative also **“successfully increased the connectivity of the food sector within the region.”** The final report includes recommendations based on “lessons learned” to include in the West Michigan Shoreline Food Processing Initiative as it is fully implemented and evolves.



**FOOD PROCESSING INDUSTRIAL PARK DEVELOPMENT:** Initiative Co-Director and site consultant John Sisson along with Jonathan Wilson, who coordinates economic development for both Muskegon County and the City of Muskegon, conducted an exhaustive research into available industrial sites suitable for food processing, resulting in the availability of two sites to present to new and expanding food processing clients. Forsite Development Inc is in negotiations for a 90-acre site next to the Muskegon Waste water treatment site that will be a strong location for food processors with large waste water requirements when developed. Concurrently, we began evaluating potential locations within the region for the development of food processing specific industrial park. Evaluations of potential locations continue along with discussion with prospective developers. In addition, John has been providing advice to City and County officials relative to enhancing their economic development programs to be “site consultant and prospect ready.”



**FOOD PROCESSING FOCUS GROUP SESSION:** The initiative team in conjunction with officials from Michigan State University and Muskegon Community College hosted a focus group with a number of food processing company officials from the region on November 29, 2017 at the new downtown campus location of Muskegon Community College. The daylong session covered a number of topics ranging from workforce education and development needs to logistics. The initiative team is finalizing its analysis of the focus group feedback results and will issue a report in the near future.



**West Michigan Shoreline Food Processing Initiative Web Site:** The initiative team is beginning to develop a web site as a potential resource tool for local food processing companies and others who have interest in expanding the sector. The initiative has tapped Muskegon based Revel to handle the design and development. The web site is scheduled to be on-line by the end of the first quarter, 2018.



**CROSS LAKE SHIPPING STATUS:** Eco Ships, in conjunction with Supply Chain Solutions, continue to move forward with establishment of a private sector funded Cross Lake Shipping service beginning in 2018. Principals of the company are finalizing agreements with officials and dock operators at the Port of Muskegon and Port of Milwaukee along with shipping agreements with companies that believe they will benefit from the service once it begins. More details are forthcoming in the weeks ahead.



**EDUCATION/INCUBATION STATUS:** Upon benchmarking the Finger Lakes Region of New York, which launched a Food Processing Cluster Initiative in 2011, the West Michigan Shoreline Food Processing Initiative and its principal supporters believe the following steps are integral to expanding the food processing sector in West Michigan:

- In conjunction with MSU, work with food processing industry leaders to evaluate the academic outcomes of the two year certificate and associate degree programs that will be piloted in partnership with Muskegon Community College, Northern Michigan College and Kellogg Community College.
- Seek feedback from industry on parameters for an incubator space
- Integrate more soft skills training in classrooms
- Informing counselors and educators about the opportunities within the food and agriculture industry
- Career Tech Education to include food processing
- Boot camp, short courses, and certificate programs to address immediate needs
- Two-year certificate and degree programs for future employment in skilled and management positions
- Programs at Community Colleges for a 2+2 program for Bachelor Degree
- Exploration of a tech education ‘promise’ scholarships with incentive for students to stay in state
- Expand commercial kitchen and production development incubation programs
- Consider development of a chef incubator facility similar to the [Smallman Gallery](#) in Pittsburgh