

MI Tour Links Transportation and Food Issues

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Main Contacts:

Marty Heller and Michelle Ferrarese

734-474-7166

hellerm@msu.edu

ferrares@msu.edu

<http://www.globconference.org/csatour2006/>

Regional Contacts:

Southeast MI: Michael DiRamio, Food System Economic Partnership, Ann Arbor, MI

734-222-6859

diramiom@ewashtenaw.org

<http://www.fsepmichigan.org/>

Southwest MI: Chris Dilley, Fair Food Matters, Kalamazoo, MI

269-342-5686

chris@fairfoodmatters.org

<http://www.fairfoodmatters.org/>

Grand Rapids area: Tom Cary, West Michigan Environmental Action Council

616-451-3051

tcary@wmeac.org

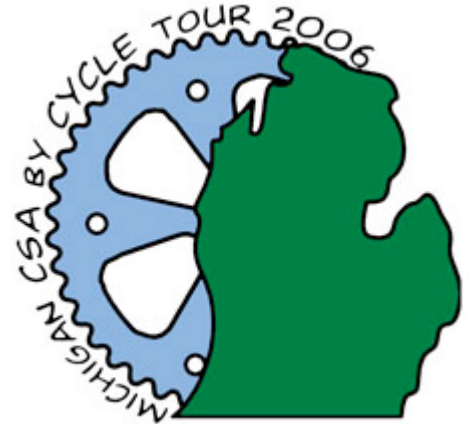
<http://www.wmeac.org/programfood.shtml>

Northwest MI: Sarna Salzman, SEEDS, Traverse City, MI

231-929-3663

sarna@ecoseeds.org

<http://ecoseeds.org/>



Farming Couple Tours Michigan by Bicycle to Raise Awareness of Community Supported Agriculture Farms

For many conscious eaters this summer, the search continues for the freshest, healthiest, tastiest food available. Trends across the country point this search in one direction: locally grown. As health care costs soar and Michigan squirms from the discomfoting title of having the nation's second-highest obesity rate, health promoters are looking to connect people of all incomes with fresh, nutrition-packed foods – especially tasty, just-picked, locally grown fruits and vegetables. Meanwhile, a heightened awareness of energy consumption due to rising gas prices makes lettuce and tomatoes from California or Mexico less appetizing. But one emerging trend shows potential to address all of this and more. Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) farms are

playing a growing role in maintaining small family farms, providing fresh food locally, and building community. In 1999 there were only 8 surveyed in Michigan; today there are nearly 70.

From June through October, 2006, Marty Heller and Michelle Ferrarese will be pedaling – and farming – their way across Michigan to learn what’s behind the growth of CSA farms. They will visit over 30 CSA farms from Ann Arbor to Petoskey by bicycle, volunteering at the farms and helping to raise awareness of CSA and bicycle transportation as they go.

CSA typically involves purchasing a ‘share’ of a local farm’s seasonal production. In return, the farmer provides a weekly basket of the freshest fruits and vegetables available. CSA creates a direct connection between eaters, farmers and the land; CSA members know their farmer and know where their food comes from, and CSA farmers know who is eating the food they grow. This connection can include more than just food: members and their kids often visit the farm to feed the goats, pick the flowers, or help with the weeding.

Michelle and Marty both have farming experience and plan to start a CSA farm of their own in the coming years. When asked why a bicycle tour of CSA farms, Marty Heller says, “CSA’s can create a deep connection to place, to belonging, for both members and farmers. Similarly, bicycling offers a speed and an intimacy that allows for a deeper appreciation of the countryside. It’s a perfect match. Plus, it beats paying for gas!” Michelle Ferrarese adds, “I love CSA and I love bicycling. I’m looking forward to digging in the dirt with and learning from the CSA farmers and members we’ll meet along the way.”

As Mike Hamm, C.S. Mott Professor of Sustainable Agriculture at Michigan State University, puts it, "We could all use more fruits and vegetables in our diet to improve our health; while CSA's can provide a broad range of foods, most grow a diversity of vegetables for the lucky members. Find one, experience one."

The Michigan CSA by Cycle tour will start in Ann Arbor on June 3. After visiting a number of farms in the Ann Arbor area, the tour will head west across the state and then north along the Lake Michigan shoreline, reaching Petoskey before the end of October. Farm stops include [The Community Farm of Ann Arbor](#) (Chelsea) – the oldest CSA in Michigan –, [Eater’s Guild](#) (Bangor), [Trillium Haven](#) (Jenison), [Meadowlark Farm](#) (Lake Leelanau), and many more. A complete listing and an itinerary (updated weekly), as well as a running blog of the tour, can be found at: www.glbconference.org/csatour2006/. Michelle and Marty are also inviting other riders to join them for portions of the tour.

For additional information about CSA’s and the Michigan CSA by Cycle tour, and to identify CSA farms in your area to highlight in a farm- or food-related article, visit the web at: <http://www.glbconference.org/csatour2006/>. Marty and Michelle are available by appointment for comment and interview. The regional contacts listed above can also answer questions and provide comment.