

MICHIGAN LAND USE INSTITUTE

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Contact:

Diane Conners, *Healthy Food for All* project director

Michigan Land Use Institute

Phone: 231-941-6584 ext. 16 • Fax: 231-929-0937

Email: diane@mlui.org • Web sites: www.mlui.org; www.foodandfarmingnetwork.org;

www.doubleupfoodbucks.org

Farm Network ‘Doubles Up Food Bucks’

Campaign helps struggling families purchase local food from area growers

Traverse City — The Northwest Michigan Food & Farming Network has launched a \$75,000 fundraising campaign to help financially struggling families purchase fresh, healthy food and, at the same time, support the region’s local farm economy.

The campaign will raise funds for Double Up Food Bucks Northwest Michigan, a program that doubles the money SNAP Bridge Card users spend at farmers markets to purchase healthy, fresh fruits and vegetables. Two-thirds of the \$75,000 fundraising goal must be raised locally. The Ann Arbor–based national non-profit Fair Food Network, originator of the Double Up program, will donate 50 cents for every dollar raised locally, or an additional \$25,000.

Double Up’s \$75,000, combined with \$75,000 in SNAP spending, means \$150,000 for the region’s farms.

The program immediately will benefit about 22,000 people receiving SNAP food assistance (food stamps) in Benzie, Grand Traverse, Leelanau, and Manistee Counties—more than 40 percent of whom are children. More people will benefit in additional counties as new markets sign up. Double Up Food Bucks will match up to \$20 spent by Bridge Card users each time they use their card at a farmers market. That adds up to \$40 for healthy, locally grown food each market visit.

“Double Up Food Bucks provides a welcome economic boost to financially struggling families, our region’s farms, and the local economy,” said Diane Conners, director of the Healthy Food for All program at the nonprofit Michigan Land Use Institute, which is home to the *Taste the Local Difference* guide to regional farms. Conners also chairs the health and youth networking group of the Food & Farming Network.

The Utopia Foundation of Leelanau County is accepting donations on behalf of the Food & Farming Network and is adding its own 25 percent match for all donations, up to a cap of \$20,000.

“Healthy local food helps make us all feel better, and being local keeps the jobs and prosperity in our local region—it’s all good!” said Paul Sutherland, Utopia board chairman, explaining why Double Up was selected for one of the foundation’s first 12 “Utopia Gifts” opportunities for people to give for “the good of the world,” and as an

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alternative to traditional gift-giving.

Organizations in northwest Lower Michigan are already responding, with a total \$17,695 pledged so far—enough to start this year:

- United Way of Northwest Michigan launched the fundraising effort with a \$5,000 grant from its emergency needs program.
- Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan and the Little River Band of Ottawa Indians in Manistee have also each made \$5,000 grants to Double Up.
- The Fresh Food Partnership, a Traverse City nonprofit that purchases food from local farmers and provides it to area food pantries, is providing \$2,000.
- Munson Medical Center Gifting Committee has provided \$250.
- The Leelanau Farmers Market Association also donated \$250.
- And the Traverse City Coop Loop, which supports and educates about backyard, urban chicken-rearing, raised \$195 for the effort.

Double Up Food Bucks is a “great example of how gifts given through United Way help create new ways to respond to those in need,” said Steven Wade, executive director.

“Our volunteer grant review team recognized the value of Double Up Food Bucks for its ability to get a lot of healthy food to people who otherwise might not have access to food that is both affordable and natural,” he said.

Farmers markets will launch the matching program in August. Those participating this year are: Sara Hardy Downtown Traverse City market in Grand Traverse County; Suttons Bay and Lake Leelanau markets, Leelanau County; the Manistee farmers market in Manistee County; and Grow Benzie, Frankfort, and Crystal Mountain farmers markets and the Marvin’s Gardens Spot farm market store near Interlochen, all in Benzie County.

“Fair Food Network is thrilled with the local efforts to bring Double Up Food Bucks to northwest Lower Michigan – it’s great to see local partners so invested in improving access and affordability of fresh, local foods for all,” said Oran Hesterman, president and CEO. “The program has been a great success in other parts of Michigan, and expanding the program to the Traverse City area is the next step.”

Between June 1 and July 7, customers have visited the 46 participating markets in southern Michigan 4,418 times, spending a total of \$144,573 in combined SNAP and Double Up Food Bucks on fresh, healthy locally produced food. The statewide Double Up Food Bucks program is funded by over 30 foundations, including Open Society Foundations, the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, and the Kresge Foundation. For a full list of funders and additional information on the program, visit www.doubleupfoodbucks.org.

Food & Farming Network members working to bring the program here include: Jennifer Berkey, Michigan State University Extension; Cindy Buss, Head Start, Northwest Michigan Community Action Agency; Diane Connors, Healthy Food for All Project, Michigan Land Use Institute; Tom Emling, MSU North and Traverse Bay Poverty Reduction Initiative; Mary Jo Fifarek and Mary Manner, Great Start Traverse Bay/Manistee Collaborative, Traverse City Area Chamber of Commerce; Kristine Lagios, Benzie-Manistee Department of Human Services; Joyce McClellan, Benodjenh Center,

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Grand Traverse Band of Ottawa and Chippewa Indians; Dawn McLaughlin, Grand Traverse-Kalkaska-Leelanau Department of Human Services; Kit Mikovitz, Grand Traverse County Health Department; Jenifer Murray, Benzie-Leelanau District Health Department; Cassidy Edwards, Fresh Food Partnership; Michelle Northrup, Traverse Bay Poverty Reduction Initiative-Grand Vision; Brandon Seng, Manistee Community Kitchen; Robert Serrine, MSU Extension community food systems education; Val Stone, The Northwest Food Coalition; Pam Ward, Child Care Connections-Northwest Great Start Regional Resource Center; Brigid Wilson, Child Care Services, Munson Medical Center.

The Food & Farming Network is a network of farm, business, economic development, nonprofit, school, and health partners working to increase the resilience and double the value of the region's local food economy by 2019, and one of its strategies is to make sure that all residents have an ample, healthy, and culturally diverse diet. MLUI convenes the network, and Michigan State University Extension chairs it.

More information, including how to donate to Double Up Food Bucks Northwest Michigan, is available at foodandfarmingnetwork.org, or by contacting Diane Conners at diane@mlui.org or 231-941-6584.

About the Institute

The Michigan Land Use Institute is an independent, nonprofit research, educational, and service organization founded in 1995. More than 3,000 households, businesses, and organizations have joined the Institute in support of its mission to establish an approach to economic development that strengthens communities, enhances opportunity, and protects Michigan's unmatched natural resources.

About Fair Food Network

Fair Food Network is a national nonprofit dedicated to building a more just and sustainable food system. FFN works at the intersection of food systems and social equity to guarantee access to healthy, fresh and sustainably grown food, especially in underserved communities. FFN implements model programs and brings the right people together to generate ideas, share resources and promote policy changes to repair our food system. To learn more about Fair Food Network, visit www.fairfoodnetwork.org.

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