

On Wednesday, May 14, 2014 representatives from the East Michigan Council of Governments Regional Food Assessment Team spent the day at Cherry Capital Foods in Traverse City. Mr. Evan Smith, Cherry Capital Foods Operation's Manager, was their guide. Participating on behalf of both EMCOG and the Tuscola County Food Hub were: Zygmunt Dworzecki, Tuscola County Planning Commission, Steve Erickson and Bill Bushaw of the Tuscola County EDC.

Cherry Capital Foods is a Michigan-based for profit business that deals with local farmers and food entrepreneurs in Michigan. What makes Cherry Capital Foods different from a traditional food wholesaler is that they aggressively promote Michigan grown food products. Their product output has expanded to include the whole state as they seek to meet the need and fill the demand for Michigan based locally grown fresh foods. They distribute products to the state's Upper and Lower peninsulas. Their strong business distribution formula of 1/3 to institutions, 1/3 to restaurants and 1/3 to large food chains has produced wide spread coverage throughout the state.



Picture permission from Cherry Capital Foods

Pictured: (Left) Evan Smith, (Center) Bill Bushaw and (Right) Steve Erickson

Building a network of producers and consumers dedicated to providing quality products sufficient to meet demand has resulted in Cherry Capital Foods tripling in size. As a result, they are building a new facility near their present location. Our group missed an opportunity to visit the new facility as our guide's busy schedule would not allow for a tour. The new facility will be 50,000 sq ft with the room needed for refrigeration, freezer units and cold storage for perishables that need constant 48°F

temperatures for long-term storage in order to maintain freshness. The new facility will be in operation by October 2014.

Cherry Capital Foods school liaison and special projects contact, Kelly Lively, works directly with school districts to promote small farm fresh food production as well as value-added product development. Ms. Lively helps establish strong school and farmer connections within the State. This, in turn, provides sustainable livelihoods for entrepreneurs by creating or sustaining new business. So much depends on these types of businesses in terms of contributing to an overall healthier population and economy as well as keeping local money from leaving the state.



Picture permission from Cherry Capital Foods

Pictured: (Left) Steve Erickson, (Center) Bill Bushaw and (Right) Evan Smith



Picture permission from Cherry Capital Foods
Pictured: Mr. Evan Smith, Cherry Capital Foods

Cherry Capital Foods chose not become organic food certified. They are certified by a third party to meet food industry food regulations required by the USDA and its policies. With this certification, they are able to acquire contracts with large food chains like Kroger for local food distribution.

Kroger, as a case in point, has demonstrated that they have complete confidence in Cherry Capital Foods. This is clearly reflected by their decision to have Cherry Capital Foods supply their stores with products deemed appropriate to sell at local Kroger locations as opposed to having the company try to determine themselves what type of product(s) will sell in each area. This is also a good way to introduce products from local food entrepreneurs to the public. Cherry Capital Foods has a process to evaluate products to ensure they are worthy of going public as well as if suppliers are able to meet the production supply and demand. Noted also was that the product(s) do have to be certified by the USDA in order to move along in the process (pre certification).

Cherry Capital Foods is also moving into product development utilizing techniques such as hydroponics of greens (leaf lettuce as an example). This is a value added crop that local restaurants desire as a quality item on their menus. At this time the restaurants can only get items like this that are grown locally during growing season. By developing these greens through hydroponics, the growing season will be extended.

When evaluating “regional food systems” nearly everyone has a different idea as to what that is or represents. It is possible to draw a circle one hundred miles wide to represent a region. Cherry Capital Foods promoted the whole state of Michigan as a region and everything else as a sub region

demonstrating that we connect like spokes on a wheel. This business concept seems to be ideal. It is working well and thriving with sufficient growth factors to move on into the future.

Zygmunt P. Dworzecki