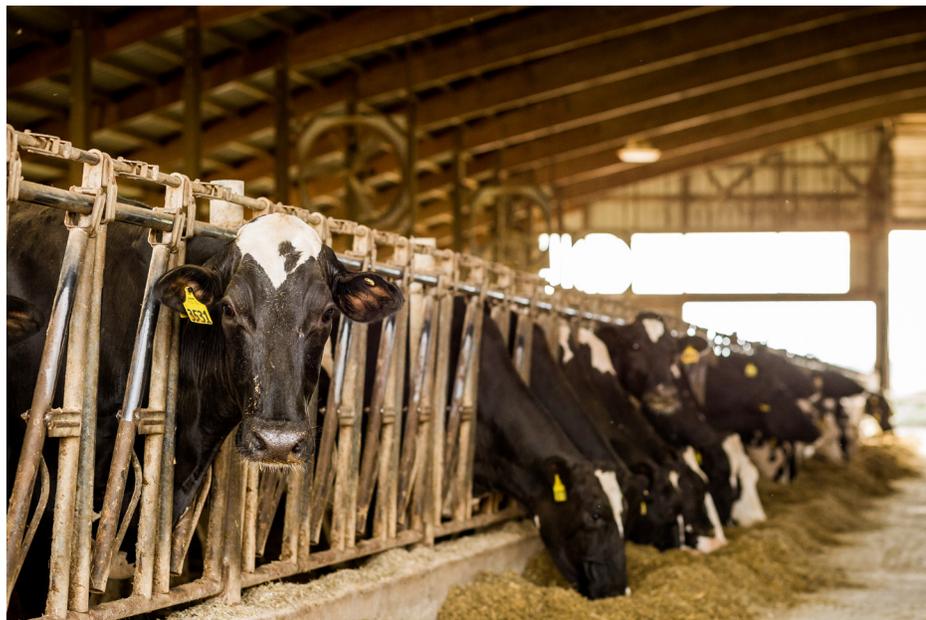




CONSUMER CONVERSATIONS

What's next?



Why have conversations with consumers?

By the year 2050, 9 billion people are expected to be living on Earth. Agriculture will need to raise more food in the next 50 years than in the past thousands of years of civilization (Clark, M. Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation, 2009). Terms such as sustainability have been overused and mean many things to many different people. Today's consumer cares about the land, air and water, embraces technology use and innovation.

How to use this book

Start with MFB's Consumer Conversation Training. Host an event for county Farm Bureau members. Learn the latest strategies and trends in consumer messaging. Then, put it to use! Collaborate with non-agricultural organizations in your community to host agricultural education stations, improve interaction with customers at your farm stand, or host a county Farm Bureau booth at your farmers market simply to answer customer's questions.

Hosting a consumer conversation training

Michigan Farm Bureau offers a 2-hour consumer conversation training seminar. This training is intended to be a stand-alone event for county Farm Bureaus to host for members interested in further developing skills to convey messages about agriculture to consumers. The county Farm Bureau should plan the event in coordination with the MFB staff person who will serve as the facilitator. Contact your MFB Regional Representative to determine what facilitators would be a good fit for your event.

Event planning

1. Set date, time and location. This training will take a full 2 hours. It is not recommended to be conducted in conjunction with another board/committee meeting. Food is always welcome!
2. Invite participants. There is no maximum number of participants. Suggested minimum of 8 people for best interaction.
3. Work with MFB staff facilitator to determine agenda.
4. Two weeks prior send out pre-event questions and agenda (provided by MFB staff). Ask for responses to be sent to the MFB staff person directly, by at least a few days before event.
5. Week of event confirm attendees and send last minute reminders!

Optional goal setting

After learning current techniques for answering consumers' questions about agriculture, MFB staff could conduct a brief goal setting to walk county Farm Bureau members through planning a local consumer engagement event. This goal setting is meant to solely focus on consumer engagement and is not meant to replace annual county Farm Bureau organizational goal setting.

If you have any questions, please contact:

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GET TO THE CORE IN CONSUMER CONVERSATIONS

YOU SAY:	POSSIBLE REACTIONS:	TRY THIS:
We're feeding the world	No. People are starving in every community. And on the other side of things, we're creating a lot of food waste.	We're growing/raising food for communities beyond our own family.
Safe*	We don't know if pesticides, antibiotics, or hormones are safe in the long-term.	Nutritious, high quality, balanced meals
Affordable ; cheap food supply*	How? At what expense to quality?	Our goal is to make food accessible for everyone.
Abundant*	We have an abundance of food, and it's part of America's health problems.	Food choices
Sustainable	Everyone's using that term now that it doesn't give any context.	Give more detail to what you're considering "sustainable" (like caring for resources for water, soil, habitat or air for current and future generations, etc.).
Higher yield	What does that mean?	Better harvest
Operation	Wait – that's scary.	Business; company; farm
Economical	What's in it for me?	Good business sense; efficient use of land/resources
Producing more*	What's the longterm cost to our earthly resources?	Talk about doing more with less: less land, water and resources.
Chemicals	We don't know if chemicals are safe in the long-term & we don't trust the government to know/monitor that either.	Inputs; Crop protection methods are used to overcome threats of mother nature.
Drugs	Aren't we contributing to antibiotic resistance by using drugs in animal agriculture?	Antibiotics are sometimes used to help animals overcome illness and live healthier lives; Farmers work closely with veterinarians and nutritionists to keep animals healthy and comfortable.
(Insert wonky ag technical term)	Huh?	Using new technologies – equipment and software

*From the U.S. Farmers & Ranchers Alliance "Conversation with EASE" publication

MESSAGES THAT MISS THE MARK:

"My farm has been in business for five generations, so it must be sustainable."

- Not relatable or of concern to consumers
- Sustainability is also a green-washed term to consumers

"I care about sustainability because it is the right thing to do."

- Consumers know you're in business to make money – don't hide it
- Simple addition fixes it: "...and my livelihood depends on it."

"Farmers are the original environmental stewards."

- Consumers don't even know what that means.



TESTED CONSUMER LINGO

- Farmers care for animals by providing a **nutritious diet, good medical care and healthy living conditions**
- Farmers work closely with **veterinarians and nutritionists to keep animals healthy and comfortable**
- Antibiotics are sometimes used to **help animals overcome illness and live healthier lives**
- Food access is important to have a **nutritious, high quality, balanced meal**
- Technology helps to have a **better harvest**
- Crop protection methods are used to **overcome the threats of mother nature**
- Technology, water access, GMOs, etc., help to ensure an **accessible food supply**
- Farmers strive to **use water and land sustainably for current and future generations**
- Farmers and consumers alike care about the environment, and **seek to protect our water, soil, air and shared habitat**
- Access to quality, nutritious food
- Doing more with less
- Efficient use of land
- Using new technologies – equipment and software
- Improving human health
- Limiting impact

Familiarize your self with the following resources to help consumers self-discover after you've had a good conversation:

Michigan GROWN, Michigan GREAT
www.michiangrown.org/

Michigan State University Extension
www.msue.anr.msu.edu

CommonGround
www.findourcommonground.com

Best Food Facts
www.bestfoodfacts.org

U.S. Farmers & Ranchers Alliance
www.fooddialogues.com

Animal Agriculture Alliance
www.animalagalliance.org

American Farm Bureau Foundation
for Agriculture
www.agfoundation.org

Modern Agriculture
www.modernag.org

GMO Answers
www.gmoanswers.com



FARMERS MARKET

Example event ideas

- Host an interactive booth with information and the opportunity to win a farmers market coupon for correctly answered agricultural questions.
- Pair up with a local FFA Chapter or a local farm who already have a farmers market presence and clientele.
- Pass out farmers market shopping bags with an agricultural phrase, or Michigan Grown Michigan Great logo on the outside and information within.



Be prepared for...

- Is this organic?
- Do you use pesticides?
- Isn't this price higher than last year?

Event plan for a Farmers Market Connection

Target Audience: Moms, Millennials & Local Foodies

Partner with: Local Farmers Market, FFA Chapters, Farmers with market presence

HOT BUTTONS

Meet: Interested community members

Help: Educate visitors about how their food is grown

Learn: About the concerns of the individuals in our own communities

EVENT SUMMARY

Find a local farmers market, and set up an interactive booth to make a connection with consumers who have an increasing interest in purchasing items directly from growers. Utilize this opportunity to speak about food choices, the care farmers have for community and environment, as well as nutrition. Gather some handouts from Michigan Farm Bureau, and various commodity groups to have available for visitors. Also consider gathering some prizes and promotional signage for the event.

Time to Plan: 2 months **Average Cost:** \$100

Planning Items: Location, brochures, signage, prizes, table and chairs

TIMELINE TO PLAN

2 months: Contact local Farmers Market, along with potential partnering individuals or groups.

1 month: Gather materials from supporting groups, and organize prizes.

1 Week: Confirm arrival with Farmers Market, and gather any additional needed materials.



FAMILY HEALTH & FITNESS

Example event ideas

- Farm Yoga: Pair up with a local goat farm, lavender farm, orchard or brewery to host this fun event!
- Set up a table at a local fitness center to greet gym goers and answer questions.
- Partner with United Dairy Industry of Michigan and local dairy farmers to host “Jump with Jill” or other dairy nutrition and exercise activities for children.
- Join your local Michigan State University Extension to provide nutrition resources and information at one of their cooking classes.



Be prepared for...

- My personal trainer says I should avoid gluten. It's just so unhealthy.
- I really want to purchase local foods. Where can I purchase your products?
- Goat yoga is fun, it's so nice to see animals that are happy and not contained in those small pens inside barns.

Event plan for a Farms to Fitness

Target Audience: Moms, Millennials & Active Families

Partner with: Local fitness centers, orchards/farms, MSUE, commodity groups

HOT BUTTONS

Meet: Health Conscious Community Members

Help: To provide factual, agriculturally based nutrition facts

Learn: About what types of nutritional benefits consumers are wanting to receive from their food

EVENT SUMMARY

Host an event to help health conscious individuals in your community understand the many nutritional benefits that a wide array of agricultural products such as meat, dairy, fruits, and vegetables can provide. This event presents an opportunity to not only tie in MyPlate Connections (choosemyplate.gov), but also creates the potential to pair with other local organizations such as Michigan State University Extension, fitness centers and farms/orchards. Consider handing out a tasty and nutritious snack at this event!

Time to Plan: 2 months **Average Cost:** \$100

Planning Items: Location, brochures, signage, prizes, snacks, table and chairs

TIMELINE TO PLAN

2 months: Contact local fitness center, and potential snack sponsors.

1 month: Gather materials from supporting groups, and organize giveaways.

1 Week: Confirm arrival with fitness center, and gather any additional needed materials.



Example event ideas

- Organize a community 5k, 10k, half marathon and/or marathon.
- Pair with an already established race such as **Farm to Fork 5k**, **Great Pumpkin Run 5k**, etc.
- Arrange gifts for division winners filled with local/state agriculture products and information.
- Set up a table at your local race of choice to provide water/snacks with facts on them.



Be prepared for...

- What items are best to eat for post run recovery?
- I only buy products from my local farmers market to avoid harmful pesticides.
- I've heard dairy is bad for me.

Event plan for a Farm Fun Run

Target Audience: Active Community Members

Partner with: Local FFA Chapters, commodity groups, local races, local run club, local gym, high school athletics

HOT BUTTONS

Meet: Local members of the community

Help: Promote health and nutrition through a fun community event

Learn: About agriculture and nutrition in a fun and unique setting

EVENT SUMMARY

With so many already established fun races in Michigan, look to partner with one of them to provide post-race snacks and water for participants. Set up a booth with signs, information, and nutritious Michigan snacks, like milk, cheese and fruit. Look to partner with state commodity organizations and/or FFA Chapters. Work to promote nutritious food, land use and family farms.

Time to Plan: 6 months **Average Cost:** \$200

Planning Items: Location, tables and chairs, handouts, snacks, partnerships

TIMELINE TO PLAN

6 months: Contact race organizers and reach out to potential partners

3 months: Gather necessary signage, handouts and prizes

1 month: Confirm schedule with race and partners

1 week: Gather necessary snacks and water



FARMER FRIEND PROGRAM

Example event ideas

- Create a “day in the life” video of a local farmer.
- Set up a farm visit for students to tour a local farm.
- Use Skype/Google hangout to bring the farm to the classroom.
- Become a farmer “pen pal” by writing to the class once a month.



Be prepared for...

- Do you have animals on your farm?
- What happens when it rains too much?
- Can I come pick apples at your farm?
- My mom says we buy organic milk because the other milk has chemicals.

Event plan for a Virtual Farm Tour

Target Audience: Grade School Students

Partner with: Local farmers, classrooms

HOT BUTTONS

Meet: Curious grade school students who are interested in learning

Help: Students to understand where their food comes from, and the important role farmers play

Learn: About additional agricultural questions that students have

EVENT SUMMARY

Work with a local farm in your community to help to bring the farm to the classroom. Using today's 360 video technology, create a virtual farm tour for students to enjoy. To create a virtual reality experience, consider purchasing a few 360 viewers from the **National Agriculture in the Classroom** store. Utilize **Google Tour Creator** to make your tour come to life! During this experience, focus on items such as animal care, environmental practice, and careers in agriculture!

Time to Plan: 2-4 months **Average Cost:** \$50

Planning Items: School volunteer documents, virtual reality viewers, handouts or prizes

TIMELINE TO PLAN

4 months: Reach out to school to determine a timeline, contact farm and begin gathering footage.

1 month: Gather any additional footage needed, order viewers.

1 Week: Confirm arrival with school and ensure you have all necessary materials.



CLASSROOM CONNECTION

Example event ideas

- Coordinate agriculturally focused classroom projects with students and collaborate with local FFA chapters or 4-H Clubs.
- Donate/read agricultural books at local library.
- Provide parent-focused agricultural take home materials to students who participated in the FARM Science Lab or Project RED.



Be prepared for...

- Where can I purchase locally raised products for my family?
- How can I find more information about teaching about agriculture in my classroom?
- Kids these days don't know much about farms.

Event plan for a Library Guest Reader

Target Audience: Grade School Students & Educators

Partner with: Local FFA Chapters and 4-H Clubs, libraries, farmers

HOT BUTTONS

Meet: Educators and students in local classrooms

Help: Students and educators to gain a better understanding of food

Learn: What additional needs and resources need to be addressed in local schools

EVENT SUMMARY

Reach out to the local library in your area to find out how you can be a guest reader. Locate an agriculturally focused book, checkout the Michigan Ag in the Classroom website for multiple options, and then determine when the best time would be to come in and read to students. If you feel so inclined after the event, donate the book to the library for many students to enjoy in the years to come!

Time to Plan: 2 months **Average Cost:** \$50

Planning Items: Location, handouts, volunteer forms, book, bookmark prizes

TIMELINE TO PLAN

2 months: Contact local library to determine the process.

1 month: Order the agriculture book or books of your choice.

1 Week: Confirm arrival with library, and gather any additional needed materials.



COUNTY FAIR

Example event ideas

- Create an interactive information booth, in business section, livestock barn, etc.
- Sponsor kid's day at the fair by providing activities and informational materials for students and parents.
- Plan a community dinner during fair week to showcase the many commodities that Michigan has to offer.
- Host a self-guided fair tour where visitors can travel to each barn, receive a stamp and get a small prize upon completion.



Be prepared for...

- How can kids raise their animals then kill them after fair?
- Fairs may attract animal rights activists, so be cautious and alert to questions.
- General animal welfare questions.

Event plan for a County Fair Scavenger Hunt

Target Audience: Students & Families

Partner with: Local FFA Chapters and 4-H Clubs, county fair

HOT BUTTONS

Meet: Community members

Help: Individuals to understand where their food comes from through interactive activities

Learn: About what consumer misconceptions may be present

EVENT SUMMARY

In conjunction with your county fair, plan a self-guided fair tour for consumers. Work to set up a table in each of the barns, and provide a stamp on a card when visitors arrive at each stop. Plan to have some educational signage in every barn. During this event, work to promote animal care, establish commonality between consumers and farmers, as well as address common misconceptions. Provide a small prize at the end for individuals who complete the tour.

Time to Plan: 6 months **Average Cost:** \$250

Planning Items: Location, tables and chairs, handouts, prizes, signage

TIMELINE TO PLAN

6 months: Reach out to the fair to begin discussing the event.

3 months: Gather necessary signage, handouts, and prizes.

1 month: Confirm schedule and setup with fair.



LEGISLATIVE EVENT

Example event ideas

- Schedule a visit with your legislator to discuss key issues.
- Coordinate agricultural tours and ride-alongs.
- Replicate events such as **Ag Day at the Capitol** and **Farmers Market at the Capitol** with your local municipalities.
- Host a “Meet the Candidates Night.”



Be prepared for...

- What issues are you most concerned about as a farmer?
- What efforts are farmers making to be stewards of the land?
- How have farming methods changed in recent years?

Event plan for a Representative Reach Out

Target Audience: Lawmakers & their staff

Partner with: Commodity groups, Legislative staff

HOT BUTTONS

Meet: Law makers and local officials

Help: Share unique regulatory needs of agriculture

Learn: Impacts of agriculture in local environment and economy

EVENT SUMMARY

Every year an event called Ag Day at the Capitol takes place to share Michigan agriculture’s story with state elected officials. Replicate this event in your local community by working with farmer volunteers to interact with your local elected officials. Pass out Michigan agriculture products and messaging. Take this opportunity to discuss misconceptions, nutrition and Farm Bureau policy with officials.

Time to Plan: 6 months **Average Cost:** \$150

Planning Items: Handouts, signage, volunteers, parking, schedule

TIMELINE TO PLAN

6 months: Reach out to local government offices and officials.

3 months: Gather necessary products, handouts, and volunteers.

1 month: Confirm schedule, volunteer help, and parking.



GARDEN PROJECT

Example event ideas

- Help establish a community garden in an urban area near you, pair with local FFA chapter or MSUE.
- Partner with an organization such as **Ronald McDonald House** to establish a community garden that can be utilized by house tenants.
- Partner with a local school to start a garden, and hold workshops/lessons there.



Be prepared for...

- Ways to direct volunteers to local food banks for further food resources.
- Provide simple growing techniques.
- Explanations about chemical use. Are these items grown organically?

Event plan for a Community Garden Partnership

Target Audience: A Diverse Group of Consumers

Partner with: Local FFA Chapters, MSUE, churches, parks, master gardeners

HOT BUTTONS

Meet: Community members concerned about food scarcity and helping others

Help: Provide fresh food for those in need

Learn: How to better serve our local communities, and what challenges they may have

EVENT SUMMARY

Work with Michigan State University Extension and local FFA Chapters to implement a community garden in an untraditional area. Ideas include an urban space, assisted living, Ronald McDonald House or local school. Work to promote local products, in-season fruits and vegetables, and environmental stewardship through this program. Consider hosting monthly or bimonthly events at the garden to create more visibility and connections.

Time to Plan: 1 year **Average Cost:** \$500-\$1000

Planning Items: Location, material, volunteers, community contacts

TIMELINE TO PLAN

1 year: Reach out to whichever location you hope to provide a garden to, in addition to partnering organizations.

8 months: Gather materials, volunteers, and sponsorships.

6 months: Begin garden layout and planning. Consider giving away produce through food hauls or sell produce and donate funds.



NON-AG EVENT

Example event ideas

- Create local agricultural impact by conversing with local consumers via an “Ask a Farmer” booth
- Participate in a local car show or “Touch a Truck” event to engage community members of all ages in farm equipment safety.
- Partner with the Michigan State Police to bring their **distracted driving simulator** to illustrate the dangers of distracted driving.
- Sponsor Michigan agriculture themed snacks for a local movie night.



Be prepared for...

- Road safety/driving tips for driving passenger vehicles around farm equipment.
- Technology in agriculture talking points to show off equipment’s technology.
- Basic examples of technology advancements and/or old equipment and new equipment.

Event plan for a Community Connection

Target Audience: A wide array of consumers

Partner with: Local festival, FFA Chapters and 4-H Clubs, local organizations, families, first responders

HOT BUTTONS

Meet: A diverse set of community members, and individuals who may have a different view point

Help: To share crucial farm safety information, and engage in meaningful conversation

Learn: Concerns that may be present in local communities, and what gaps need to be filled

EVENT SUMMARY

Contact board of local community events for festivals, movie nights, concert series, or car shows. Work with their staff to determine partnership opportunities including setting up an “Ask a Farmer” booth, providing snacks for an event or contributing in another way. By participating in a non-agriculturally focused event, there will be ample opportunity to put your Consumer Conversation training to the test!

Time to Plan: 4 months **Average Cost:** \$300

Planning Items: Local contacts, signage, handouts, location

TIMELINE TO PLAN

4 months: Contact local chamber of commerce/planning committee.

3 months: Gather necessary signage, handouts, and items.

1 month: Compile materials, and confirm details for the event.



PROJECT RED BOOTH

Example event ideas

- Set up an “Ask the Farmer” booth for the chaperones at Project Red.
- Encourage adults to stop at the booth by providing a special prize/gift/food item centered around Michigan agriculture.
- Create a “trivia wheel” with prompted questions to help to spark conversation.
- Develop signage with thought provoking agricultural statements or questions.



Be prepared for...

- I just really want to feed my family healthy, safe food.
- I only purchase organic items to help the small farmers and avoid chemicals.
- I have heard a plant based diet is better for my health.

Event plan for a Chaperone Conversation

Target Audience: Parents & Community Members

Partner with: Commodity groups

HOT BUTTONS

Meet: Local parents

Help: To address questions within a specialized consumer body

Learn: What concerns or questions our local parents may have about agriculture

EVENT SUMMARY

Partner with a local Project RED to bring an adult focused “Ask a Farmer” booth to the event. Encourage adult volunteers, parents and community members to stop by, develop a “trivia wheel” with prompted questions, as well as signage with agriculturally related questions or statements. In addition, have plenty of handouts, as well as a fun prize/ gift/food item to give to them.

Time to Plan: 4 months **Average Cost:** \$300

Planning Items: Location, prizes, volunteers, signage, trivia wheel

TIMELINE TO PLAN

4 months: Contact local planning committee, think of potential wheel questions, signage.

3 months: Gather necessary signage, handouts and prizes.

1 month: Compile materials, and confirm details for the event.

Commodity Fact Posters

- Pick and choose from this set of more than 30 commodity posters.
- Posters are 24x36 inches in size and share facts about plants and livestock raised in Michigan. Posters can be ordered through the MFB Printshop.
- A full set of 11x17 inch laminated posters can be purchased from the Michigan Agriculture in the Classroom online store.



- Apples
- Aquaculture
- Beef
- Blueberries
- Broiler Chickens
- Cherries
- Christmas Trees
- Corn
- Cucumbers
- Dairy
- Dry Beans
- Eggs
- Farmers & Technology
- Floriculture
- Goats
- Grapes
- Horses
- How Ag Measures Up
- Livestock
- Llamas/Alpacas
- Love the Land
- Maple Syrup
- Natural Resources
- Pigs
- Pollinators
- Potatoes
- Pumpkins
- Rabbits
- Safety
- Sheep
- Soybeans
- Strawberries
- Sugar Beets
- Vegetables
- Veterinarian
- Water Use
- Wheat

Consumer Conversation Follow-up Handouts

- After you have engaged with a consumer to answer their questions, use one of the eight 5x7 cards as a follow up to a conversation.
- Each card provides facts about Michigan agriculture then provides trusted, consumer-friendly websites for further information.
- Topics include: Crop Protection, Sugars, Water Use, Farm Types, Food Labeling, Farm Economy, Animal Care and GMOs.

Michigan is home to roughly 10 million acres of farmland. That's 30% of all the land in our peninsula!

Our farmers raise more than 300 different types of agricultural products.

96% of Michigan farms are owned by individual families or family partnerships.

MICHIGAN FARM BUREAU

FARM STRUCTURE

Michigan raises more than 300 different agricultural commodities, making us the second most agriculturally diverse state.

The food, agriculture & natural resources sector contributes \$101.2 billion annually to the state's economy.

706 Michiganders operate farms their full-time occupation. Another 698 work part-time on farms while maintaining off-farm jobs.

Michigan raises more of the following crops than any other state:

- paragus
- cranberry beans
- dry black beans
- niagara grapes
- pickling cucumbers
- squash
- tart cherries

Learn more about many of these locally raised foods, visit michiangrown.org/!

Source: National Agricultural Statistics Service, United States Department of Agriculture (2017), Census of Agriculture.

CROP PROTECTION
Pesticides are just one tool that farmers use to protect their crops from more than 100,000 species of insects, weeds, and diseases in the field.

SUGARS
Sugars can be... naturally occurring (found in fruits, vegetables, dairy products & nuts) or extracted from plants and only added to foods.

WATER USE
Michigan is home to more than 8 million acres of public lands, 11,000 inland lakes and 5,000 miles of freshwater shoreline.

FARM TYPES
Most farms in Michigan are family owned and operated. Each farm is unique in both what they grow and how they grow it.

FOOD LABELING
This seal is the official indicator a product meets the U.S. Department of Agriculture's requirements to be considered organic.

ANIMAL CARE
Sometimes farmers raise livestock (pigs, cows, chickens, etc.) and raise them in ways that give them the freedom to eat, sleep and drink at their leisure.

GMOs
GMOs do not contain pesticides. They are bred to resist chemicals and/or insects or to provide other beneficial traits.

For More Information

Food Dialogues, U.S. Farmers & Ranchers Alliance
fooddialogues.com

Michigan Grown, Michigan Great
michiangrown.org

GMO Answers
gmoanswers.com

American Farm Bureau Foundation for Agriculture
agfoundation.org

National Agriculture in the Classroom
agclassroom.org

American Farm Bureau
fb.org

Best Food Facts, Center for Food Integrity
foodintegrity.org

Common Ground
findourcommonground.com

