

LOCAL FARMS AND LARGE INSTITUTIONS

Identifying Opportunities Using a Supply Chain Analysis of MDining



INTRODUCTION

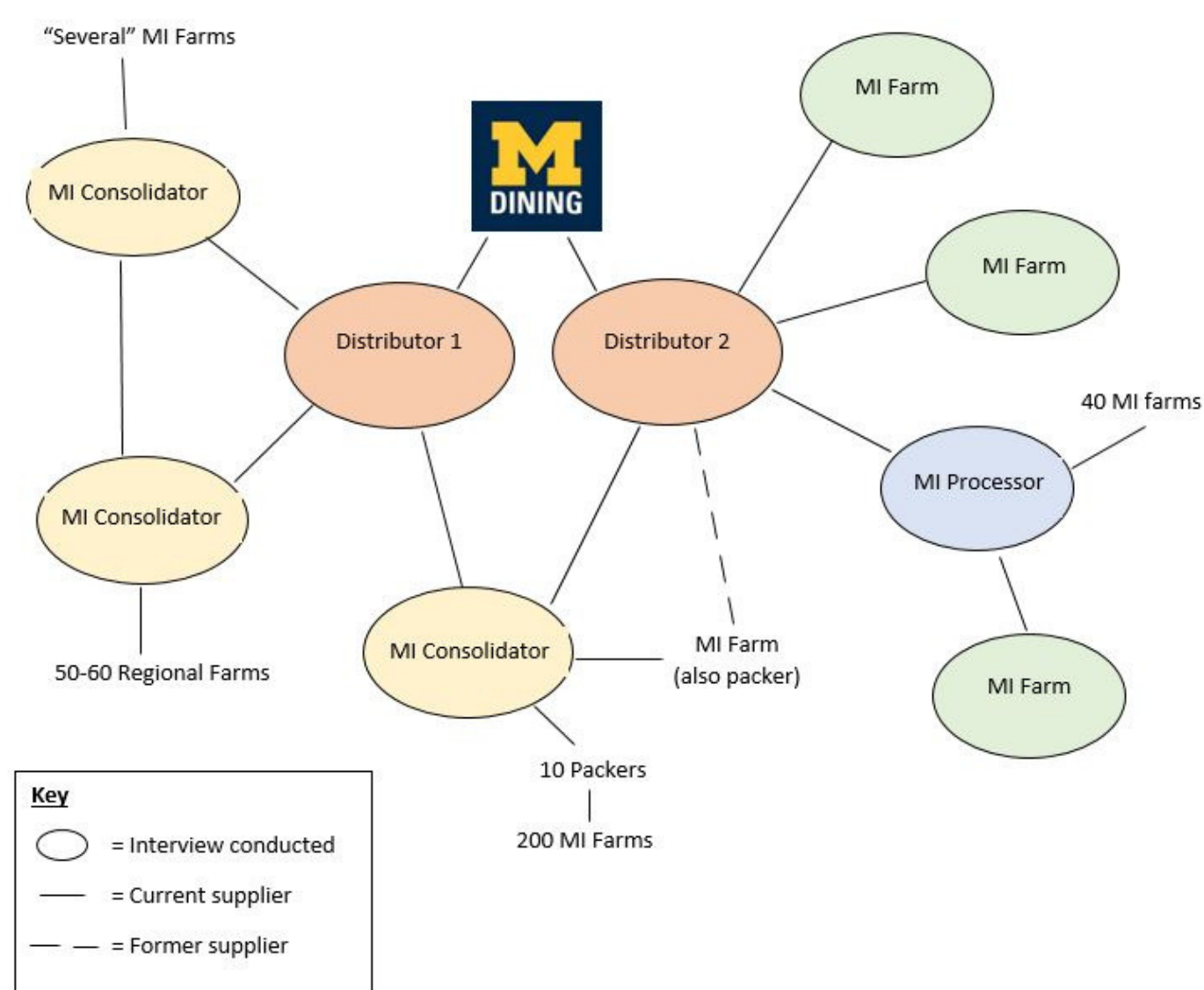
Procurement of local food within higher education institutions presents an opportunity for social and economic engagement between a university and the surrounding agricultural community. However, the volume needs, food safety requirements, and in-house logistics of the institutions themselves presents procurement challenges. Through a supply chain analysis, this research illuminates opportunities for MDining to support the local food economy in feasible ways.

BACKGROUND

In response to strong student demand, MDining developed a system for purchasing produce directly from local farms. In 2018, the financial and logistical challenges of this strategy prompted the department to shift responsibility of local procurement to their contracted distributors.

RESEARCH QUESTION

How can MDining support the local farm economy through their current distributor-based model?



RECOMMENDATIONS

Integration directly into the supply chain is determined by food safety certification, scale, and logistics.

Include in distributor RFP support for local farms to attain the required food safety certifications.

Create scale-appropriate markets for small farmers within the institution.

Coordinate backhauling of local farm products to consolidators in West Michigan and Indiana

RESEARCH METHODS

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with key individuals of the MDining food supply chain. Interviews were then transcribed and coded which produced a road map describing the flow of product, information, and finances through the supply chain. The data were also analyzed against the characteristics of a value-chain which illuminated qualitative aspects of the relationships between suppliers and purchasers.