

GREAT LAKES MIDWEST REGIONAL FOOD BUSINESS CENTER

OVERVIEW

With regional partners, the Michigan State University Center for Regional Food Systems (CRFS) is one of twelve organizations selected by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to establish a Regional Food Business Center. These Centers will help more farm and food businesses access new markets and navigate federal, state, and local resources. The USDA outlines the primary roles of the Regional Food Business Centers as the following:



COORDINATION: Support strategic planning, formalize network of supply chain stakeholders, coordinate with USDA, collaborate with other centers, outreach to underserved communities and businesses.



TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE: Provide direct business technical assistance to small- and mid-sized food and farm businesses and food value and supply chain coordination, focusing on market and business development and managing financial resources.



CAPACITY BUILDING: Provide business builder grants up to \$100,000 to meet emerging regional needs and support businesses working toward expansion and other investment.

Between July 2023-June 2028, the new Great Lakes Midwest Regional Food Business Center will receive \$20 million to launch and coordinate this center with network coordinators in Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, and Wisconsin, listed below. Over \$10 million will be distributed directly to technical assistance providers and eligible food and farm business owners.

	Network Coordinators	Contacts
Regional Tribal Partnership	Menominee Tribe Department of Agriculture and Food Systems & Great Lakes Indigenous Law Center	Gary Besaw, gbesaw@mitw.org Dan Cornelius, daniel.cornelius@wisc.edu
Illinois	Chicago Food Policy Action Council	Rodger Cooley, rcooley@chicagofoodpolicy.com
Indiana	Northwest Indiana Food Council	Anne Massie, info@nwifoodcouncil.org Virginia Pleasant, virginia@nwifoodcouncil.org
Michigan	Michigan State University Center for Regional Food Systems	Colleen Matts, matts@msu.edu Jamie Rahrig, rahrigj1@msu.edu
Wisconsin	Food Finance Institute at University of Wisconsin System	Sarah Larson, sarah.larson@business.wisconsin.edu

To implement the Great Lakes Midwest Regional Food Business Center, CRFS will partner with these network coordinators to lead activities in four states and with tribes across the region. They will work together to develop a grant program and a regional network of dedicated technical assistance providers committed to fostering the sustainable success of farm and food enterprises, with a focus on historically marginalized farmers and food business entrepreneurs.

Together in years 1-2, network coordinators will work together to:

- Assess and identify needs and gaps in assistance for food and farm businesses;
- Develop as a group, including strengthening relationships, fostering trust, and centering equity; and,
- Set the initial collective direction for activities including to launch a Business Builder grant program and to provide different types of technical assistance for food and farm businesses.

After planning activities are underway or completed (years 2-5), network coordinators will:

- Develop and implement a comprehensive technical assistance plan that meets the needs and goals of food and farm businesses and provides accountability and support to providers,
- Engage technical assistance providers to supply paid assistance to farm and food business entrepreneurs within their respective geographic areas and/or across the region, and
- Outreach to small- and mid-sized farm and food businesses to identify potential grantees and support awarded grantees.

BUSINESS BUILDER GRANT PROGRAM

Grant funding will be available for farm and food business entrepreneurs for specific physical, technical, or logistical capacity needs, including activities such as business planning, feasibility studies, staff time, product development, getting products into new markets, brand collateral, consulting, and equipment (with specific conditions and prior approval).

ABOUT THE GREAT LAKES MIDWEST REGIONAL FOOD BUSINESS CENTER

The Great Lakes Midwest Regional Food Business Center is dedicated to offering coordination, technical assistance, and capacity building opportunities for small- to mid-sized historically marginalized food and farm business entrepreneurs in support of a more resilient, diverse, and competitive food system.

Michigan State University Center for Regional Food Systems (MI) coordinates the **Great Lakes Midwest Regional Food Business Center** that is comprised of network coordinators – **Chicago Food Policy Action Council** (IL), **Northwest Indiana Food Council** (IN), **Food Finance Institute of the University of Wisconsin System** (WI), and the **Menominee Indian Tribe of Wisconsin Department of Agriculture and Food Systems** – who seek to take a transformational, rather than transactional, approach.

Learn more at glm-rfbc.msu.edu or contact glm-rfbc@msu.edu

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