We’ve all seen the headlines touting northern Michigan’s local food scene on national Top 10 lists: “Best Foodie Town,” “Best Beer Destination,” “Up and coming food city” to name just a few. But over the past decade, the region has become known for more than just great local meals and drinks; we’ve emerged as a diverse and dynamic hub of innovation in the local food economy. We’re growing more than just cherries here; we’re growing models for resilient communities that the rest of the state—even the country—can follow.

For example, Groundwork’s Taste the Local Difference® enterprise lists nearly 700 farms, restaurants, wineries, breweries, grocery stores, and food businesses in the region. To bring local food to a broader audience, TLD has also partnered with Tom’s and Oleson’s to promote local food in grocery stores.

From the beginning, the goal for TLD was to create a model for marketing local food that could be replicated in other communities. This year, it happened. TLD is partnering with Think Local First in Ann Arbor to launch a new marketing campaign in Washtenaw County. It’s the first step in a plan to expand TLD throughout Michigan—and ultimately to the rest of the nation.

Northwest Michigan’s farm to school movement also stands out as a model for the rest of the state. In the fall of 2013, Groundwork and the Traverse Bay Area Intermediate School District launched a program to support schools in buying locally grown fruits and vegetables. Schools typically only have 20 to 30 cents to spend on produce; the “10 Cents a Meal” program provides an extra dime per meal to buy local fruits and vegetables up to three times a week.

With pilot projects in Traverse City, Suttons Bay and Glen Lake schools, community members, foundations, and local businesses pooled money to establish a “10 Cent” fund that was matched by the three school districts and resulted in $84,621 spent on 27 different local fruits and vegetables grown by 17 area farmers.

The program’s success is now driving a state-level policy discussion about increasing funding to school lunch budgets while also supporting the state’s economy. State Senator Darwin Booher, a Republican from Evart whose district ranges from Leelanau to Mason to Ogemaw counties, is working now to see how the 10 Cents program could expand in Michigan. If fully funded, a statewide 10 cents a meal program could put $28 million into Michigan’s agriculture-based economy.

The success of programs like TLD and “10 Cents” is a cause for celebration—and what better way to do that than with an authentic family-style farm-to-table dinner.

We hope you can join us this October 10 at Harvest@theCommons. It’s going to be an amazing night of great food, drinks, music, and community. We sold out last year, so make sure you get your tickets soon. Just visit www.groundworkcenter.org/harvest.

Meanwhile, I hope you enjoy all the wonders—and tastes—that a northern Michigan summer has to offer.

Sincerely,

Executive Director

Sowing seeds statewide
Groundwork Advances Campaign to Shut Down Line 5 Pipeline in the Mackinac Straits

Two years ago, practically no one in Michigan was aware of the aging, twin oil pipelines lying at the bottom of the Mackinac Straits, and the catastrophic risk they pose to the Great Lakes and our Pure Michigan economy.

Today, as a result of the Groundwork and partners like FLOW (For Love of Water) seizing the issue and building a strong public outcry, we are closer to Line 5 becoming the first major oil pipeline in North America to be decommissioned.

On July 14, the Michigan Petroleum Pipeline Task Force, appointed by Gov. Rick Snyder to explore the risk, acknowledged that Line 5 is dangerous, that it poses a real threat to our Great Lakes, and that the state has the authority to do something about it.

The fact that the state has investigated the threat and issued the report is a huge success—especially considering that nothing has changed with the 62-year old pipelines to trigger this reaction other than a massive public awareness and outreach campaign launched by Groundwork in 2013.

In fact, exactly two years before the report was released—July 14, 2013—Groundwork led a rally at the Straits of Mackinac with a group of Traverse City climate activists known as TC 350 calling for action to eliminate the risk to the Great Lakes. The next summer, Groundwork launched the Oil & Water Don’t Mix campaign with a new logo and website, and a television commercial that played across northern Michigan. Today there are more than 20 groups involved in the coalition.

This May, Groundwork helped lead a public awareness event at the Mackinac Straits to coincide with the Detroit Chamber of Commerce Mackinac Policy Conference, including a rally in Mackinaw City and a press conference on Mackinac Island. As a result, there was an explosion of media coverage about the pipeline.

The task force report is an important milestone in this campaign as it reflects how far this issue has risen in the public consciousness. But there’s still so much work left to do. The report calls for more analysis of pipeline alternatives, but unfortunately, no one can guarantee the lakes will remain oil free as the state conducts further research. We don’t need any more delays. We need an immediate shutdown, and we’re prepared to keep fighting for it.

Campaign to Bring Rail to Northern Michigan Gains Steam

Transportation Policy Specialist James Bruckbauer has been traveling up and down the state to build support for the return of passenger rail to northern Michigan. He is working with citizens and public officials to build local and legislative support for a 2016 passenger rail feasibility study to determine what it will take fiscally and logistically to bring back the rail connection between Traverse City and Ann Arbor.

Groundwork is also working closely with MDOT to plan a “demonstration train” ride from Ann Arbor to Traverse City in the summer of 2016 to better understand track conditions, the safety improvements required, and the interaction between the tracks and the communities along the route.

Learn more at groundworkcenter.org/a2tc

Taste the Local Difference Releases 2015 Magazine

Taste the Local Difference’s 2015 guide looked a little different this year. TLD and Groundwork partnered with MyNorth Media to produce a 50-page magazine that connects readers to northern Michigan’s vibrant food community.

The revamped Taste the Local Difference Guide is filled with easy-to-use regional maps, beautiful photography, farmers market listings, and compelling stories featuring local farmers and retailers. Editorial features highlight community supported agriculture, full-transparency farming, organic farming, local wine, craft beer, availability of local foods in stores, and more.

There are 32,000 copies of the guide are in circulation, and a network of partners is distributing it, including retail grocers, chambers of commerce, restaurants, businesses, and farm stands.

Learn more at www.localdifference.org.

“You would not build a Straits pipeline in this decade. I’m doubtful it will be open in future decades. … Its days are numbered, its duration is limited in my opinion.”

~Attorney General Bill Schuette