



SPRING 2016

# Making a local difference

About five years ago, our board member and good friend Chip Hoagland approached me and said, "You know, Hans, Taste the Local Difference is creating real value for farmers and food entrepreneurs. You should make it a private company—it has what it takes to succeed."



because as TLD succeeds, it provides another angle on advancing our mission of protecting the environment, strengthening the economy, and building community—and, in this case, moves us further toward our longstanding goal of strengthening the local food economy.

And here's more good news! On top of TLD, we have a whole local food and farming program that is advancing that same goal and accomplishing breakthrough results. Diane Conners and Meghan McDermott are doing terrific work to get more local food in school cafeterias, expanding access to local food for lower income populations, and helping to connect local food to hospitals and community wellness networks. The result is a stronger agricultural economy, healthier people, growing numbers of young farmers, and a working rural landscape that will continue to produce good food for all.

If you know Chip, he's a big thinker, always coming up with new ideas. And sometimes he turns his ideas into reality—like he's done with Cherry Capital Foods, an innovative local food distribution company that is accelerating the growth of the local food economy.

Other trusted allies gave me similar advice. I thought it through and decided the time had come to pursue it. So, two years ago, we started a formal business planning process. We talked to growers, business leaders, grocery stores, and restaurant owners that we've worked with for years. All were encouraging and ready to make the transition from supporters to customers. We explored the viability of taking TLD to other regions and found the same warm reception.

In February, the Groundwork Board of Directors officially launched TLD as a company operating as a social enterprise within our nonprofit umbrella. Under the truly exceptional leadership of Bill Palladino and Tricia Phelps, I am happy to report that it's off to a terrific start.

It's a hugely important move for Groundwork. We worked hard over the years to grow TLD and make it a true catalyst for increasing local food sales. Now, as it takes off as a targeted local food marketing company, we are thrilled

I am so excited about all the good work we are carrying forward. As a supporter of Groundwork, you have had a big hand in making all this important work possible. Thank you for being a part of it. It's taken incredible perseverance and real creativity to build this package of powerful organizational resources. There's so much to celebrate—and it only happens because of your dedication and support.

I hope you enjoy this newsletter and find time to enjoy the magic of spring in the Great Lakes State—and that you, like me, are ready for fresh Michigan asparagus!

Groundwork Executive Director



SAVOR THE DATE: OCT. 8



Harvest at the Commons brings friends, neighbors, and newcomers together to support our work and celebrate everything we love about northern Michigan. Located on the historic grounds of the Grand Traverse Commons. Tickets are coming soon! Watch [groundworkcenter.org](http://groundworkcenter.org) for details.

## JOIN US!



### BE A PART OF RESILIENCE IN ACTION

[groundworkcenter.org](http://groundworkcenter.org)

# Taste the Local Difference: Resilience in Action

Local food is thriving in northern Michigan. Restaurants are highlighting local ingredients—and filling their dining rooms with customers. Farmers markets are busier than ever—and direct sales between farmers and consumers have nearly doubled in the past 10 years. Schools are bringing more local fruits and vegetables into their cafeterias, teaching kids that eating healthy food can be delicious—and providing local farmers with a new revenue source. And grocery stores are dedicating more and more shelf space to local produce and products, and seeing their profits increase.

Fifteen years ago, when we launched our entrepreneurial agriculture program, the traditional agricultural establishment didn't have much interest in promoting local food. We realized there was important work to do to prove that local food makes economic sense and should be taken seriously.

We started making the case that local food offers a big opportunity for northwest Michigan and the state by telling stories of small farmers and their successes. In 2002, we published "The New Entrepreneurial Agriculture," a report highlighting the economic opportunities offered by local food and farming.

Groundwork realized we could play a big role in supporting local agriculture. In 2004, we launched our Taste the Local Difference program to offer something of tangible value to the network of growers



and retailers: to make the connections with consumers that weren't previously available. There was a niche to fill, and Groundwork stepped in to fill it.

We started publishing guides to all the local farms and farmers willing to sell directly to consumers. Within a few years, we were printing 30,000 of these publications and it was clear consumers were clamoring for ways to find local food.

In 2013, we changed formats and began publishing maps, along with a smartphone app, to make it even easier for people to connect with farmers. And last year, TLD published its first magazine, with 50 pages of farm listings and maps, plus articles highlighting some success stories in the region.

TLD's success prompted a question—there's a clear demand in the region for a

marketing agency to promote local food, but is Groundwork the right place for such commercial work? Could TLD be viable as a self-sustaining business?

Now, after two years of intense planning and collaboration with partners, it's clear the answer is a resounding YES. TLD is now a for-profit company acting as a social enterprise under Groundwork's umbrella. It's a unique arrangement that will allow TLD to grow and expand as a business, while still supporting Groundwork's mission to promote the economic and social value of local food.

Now TLD is expanding statewide. The magazine will be twice the size in 2016, with more maps and listings than ever, distributing 55,000 copies. The website and smartphone app are gaining more users

## Groundwork's Food & Farming Program

Groundwork's Food & Farming program continues to advocate for local agriculture and farmers:

Our **10 Cents a Meal** program is pushing hard for state legislators to budget for more local fruits and vegetables in school cafeterias.

Our **Farm to School** educators and FoodCorps service members are teaching kids the importance of eating healthy, local food—and connecting local food to existing curriculum.

And the **Food, Farms & Health** program is connecting the dots between health care, wellness, and local food.

Learn more at: [groundworkcenter.org](http://groundworkcenter.org).

every day. And grocery stores are coming on board, purchasing TLD licenses to market and promote local food on their shelves and in their produce departments.

Groundwork incubates innovative programs, building models of resilience here in northwest Michigan that can be replicated statewide. Taste the Local Difference is an outstanding example of that model, and as it embarks on its new path in the private sector, it's a successful demonstration of resilience in action.

## Other News from Groundwork

### Solar campaign shines

Solar panels are still a rare sight in Michigan, but some folks and organizations in our region are working to change that.

As winter moved in late last year, those folks—local solar contractors and advocates—started meeting with us here at Groundwork to figure out how to pick up the pace of putting panels on homes around Traverse City and Frankfort. Our new Groundwork Shines project will make it as easy as possible for people to go solar—helping homeowners determine if panels will work on their roofs, connecting them with contractors, providing panel options for their needs, and connecting them with financing options to make it as affordable. For all the details, visit [groundworkcenter.org/shines](http://groundworkcenter.org/shines).



### '10 Cents' on path to expansion

Last spring state Sen. Darwin Booher, of Evart, heard from Traverse City's school food service director about the importance of Groundwork's 10 Cents a Meal for School Kids & Farms pilot project. It provides area schools with a match of up to 10 cents a meal to buy locally grown fruits and

vegetables.

Sen. Booher was so impressed that he started working with Groundwork staffer Diane Conners to explore how the program could be expanded into a statewide pilot, which was our goal from the start.

Fast-forward exactly one year later, and the state Legislature took its first step in a senate subcommittee vote on March 23 by including \$500,000 for a 10 Cents a Meal pilot for schools in northwest and west Lower Michigan, and the Thumb.

"This will improve our children's nutrition and also support Michigan farmers and the local food business economy," said Sen. Booher, following the vote.

If you are interested in how this measure moves forward through the full budget process this spring, you can reach Diane at [diane@groundworkcenter.org](mailto:diane@groundworkcenter.org).

