



## Regional Food Processing Program Expanded

*Expansion includes formation of industry association and development of food processing incubator and accelerator*

MUSKEGON, Mich., April 24, 2020 – Officials of the West Michigan Shoreline Food Processing Initiative announced expansion of its program that was established in 2017 to grow and expand West Michigan’s substantial agriculture economy by forming the West Michigan Food Processing Association. The Association, based in Muskegon, seeks to expand the three-year work under the Initiative to grow the region’s strong agricultural and food processing base with focus on six strategic pillars including a new core initiative, [Future Food 21.](#)

The Association, supported by Muskegon Area First, is being sponsored by numerous organizations and food processing companies including Gerber Products Company, Fremont Community Foundation, and Swanson Pickle Company among others.

The Association will also move forward with construction of the [FARM](#) (Food, Agriculture, Research, and Manufacturing) incubator and accelerator. The 12,000 square foot facility will be located at Muskegon Community College’s (MCC) main campus. FARM is a collaboration between the Association, MCC, Michigan State University, and the Community Foundation of Muskegon County as current owner.

“We launched the West Michigan Food Processing Initiative nearly three years ago which proved to be a good addition to the attributes of the region’s food processing sector. As we grew, it made sense to establish a formal organization with expanded focus on growing the food processing sector especially toward the future of the industry,” said Marty Gerencer, Executive Director of the Association. “Healthy food processing, sustainable practices including energy, packaging, and waste control, along with entrepreneurial and new product development are key to our Future Food 21 program. In addition, starting construction on the FARM is just another indication of the importance of the industry. We believe the Association and the FARM will help create jobs and generate a ripple effect throughout the West Michigan economy,” Gerencer said.

The Association is focused on West Michigan for several reasons, including:

- Strategic access to prime fruit and vegetable growers and proximity to other agricultural suppliers;
- Access to underutilized wastewater treatment capacity;
- Michigan's Great Lakes access and fresh water capacity;
- Access to skilled and highly educated labor;
- Infrastructure supportive of the food processing sector;
- Educational and research institutions that specialize in the sector, and
- Michigan's growing renewable energy sector and the ability to market fruits and vegetables produced using renewable energy.

“Michigan's food and agriculture sector already contributes over \$100 billion annually to Michigan's economy, and today's announcement only strengthens its future both locally and well beyond the state's borders,” Gerencer said. “Access to Michigan's diverse agriculture, our incredible natural resources, a talented workforce and an array of infrastructure options such as the FARM really puts the West Michigan Food Processing Association in a great position for success.”

For more information on the Association, contact Marty Gerencer, Executive Director at [marty.gerencer@gmail.com](mailto:marty.gerencer@gmail.com).

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*For more information go to <https://www.westmichfoodprocessingassn.com/>*

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