



Feeding Detroit's Desire for Real Growth

Posted by [Karen Dybis](#) Monday, August 30, 2010 at 9:52 am

I'm a big fan of Detroiters working together for a common cause. 'Cause that's the only way anything of substance is going to happen around here.

So I was delighted to recently join some of the region's best chefs, restaurateurs, food tour companies, agriculture and farming experts, food writers and foodies of all kinds. They met at Royal Oak's [Vintner's Cellar](#) to brainstorm ideas about how to promote Southeast Michigan as a culinary destination. We got the great eats; we don't always get the crowds. (More on Time.com: [See TIME's special report "The Committee To Save Detroit"](#))

The event was co-sponsored by [Culinary Escapes](#) and the [Michigan Culinary Tourism Alliance](#), which is working hard to organize the area and establish strongest connections. Relationships. Coalitions. Unions of food, body and soul.

I was happily surprised and impressed with the plethora of ideas that group came up with and I cannot wait to see what comes to pass. Here's a sampling... Could we create a Detroit-based Top Chef (like the popular Bravo reality show)? Maybe a D-town Throwdown (a la Bobby Flay)? Or a bus tour with the area's best chefs, bringing their wares to the masses? (More on Time.com: [Read about Detroit's newest reality TV show](#))

Yes, yes and yes. Stick a fork in me, I'm done. And I'm hungry for more.

The Michigan Culinary Tourism Alliance is a fairly new organization. It was put together by the Michigan Department of Agriculture, which got a federal grant from the U.S. Dept. of Ag to get this puppy off the ground. Michigan has an amazing diversity of crops (second only to California!) and our culinary tourism is really starting to grow, noted Linda J. Jones, who works for the Michigan department in the state Grape & Wine Industry Council.

The Alliance's goals are simple: to encourage restaurants to local resources and get more outlets for growers. It also works to promote Michigan as a culinary destination. Key to doing this is finding new partners, building networks and getting resources together, Jones added.

When traveling, people want experiences – they want to try new foods, check out cool restaurants and feel like they've lived the life. And research shows that the modern traveler isn't relying on luck to find great eats; they are planning their vacations around tasty restaurants and the like. (More on Time.com: [See 10 things to do in Detroit](#))

So Michigan has to get in on that action, all at the brainstorming session agreed.

"We know how great this region is; we need everybody else to know," said Ann Wilson, founder of the awesome food tour company Culinary Escapes (which gives tours of Detroit, Royal Oak and Birmingham.)

Thus the brainstorming began: How about a Restaurant Week across multiple cities? What about a dedicated Web site or social media area with uploads from chefs and recipe demos? What else could we do to promote our local chefs as celebrities, gaining the public's attention? I like the idea of having some fun events, like Culinary Relays or Waiter Olympics, and expanding on the food festivals around the state. (More on Time.com: [See "Top 10 Protected Foods"](#))

It feels like a great start. I'll share more ideas as they develop into reality.