**Food Hub Biz Plan:**

**MISSION:**

Our mission is to provide “creative regional solutions” for small and mid-sized farmers in northwest Ohio while providing a standard of excellence in the development of a regional food supply chain for our communities.

**GOAL:**

Bring more locally-grown foods (produce initially) into mainstream food service supply chains, thus enhancing food security by increasing access to local foods and by strengthening the economics of small to mid-sized farm operations.

**STRATEGY:**

Identify the most promising solutions by which local production and associated value-added activities can enter local retail and food service markets and evaluate and report the results for the benefit of the community.

**MAIN ACTIVITIES:**

Bring more northwest Ohio produce into niche and large-scale markets by:

* + - Working on the supply side to connect small and medium-sized farmers with partner retailers and food service buyers. The project emphasizes training and capacity-building to enable smaller producers to meet the requirements of larger buyers.
    - Working on the demand side to address issues that have typically prevented larger buyers from purchasing from smaller producers. This includes adapting buying protocols and GAP safety requirements to enable purchasing from smaller producers and food hubs.
    - Working on the intermediary steps, including aggregating, processing and distributing. The project seeks to understand and remove barriers that prevent local foods from entering large-scale markets.

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:**

In order to facilitate the development of a sustainable Food Hub operation, the Association developed strategies around four broad goals:

1. Build on each Region’s Competitive Advantages and Leverage the Marketplace
2. Establish and Maintain a Robust Regional Infrastructure
3. Create Revitalized, Healthy and Vibrant Communities
4. Develop Talented and Innovative People

MVGA has identified the challenges that must be overcome to achieve the­se goals, as well as the strategies identified by the various stakeholders, including planning and economic development professionals, non-profits, local elected officials and the priva­te sector community throughout the region. This created a bottom-up as well as a top-down process in developing the plan.

**1: Build on the Region’s Competitive Advantages and Leverage the Marketplace: (Identify the dots)**

Several areas of the region are recognized for their business and industry clusters. However, there are some regions, especially rural areas, do not have adequate assets to build these clusters or they do not have the capacity to maximize the potential of their economic de­velopment assets.

Recommendation:

Coordinate efforts to build, grow and maintain robust, competitive areas of proficiency and innovation throughout the region.

This strategy supports the continued evolution of existing clusters, specifically floriculture, food, energy & agritourism. Applying new technologies and business models could help our food hub leapfrog current industry best practices.

Promote a branding strategy that emphasizes both the floriculture and food industry clusters.

**2: Establish and Maintain a Robust Systemic Infrastructure: (Connect the dots)**

While our region has many infrastructure assets, the full capacity of its potential has not been fully realized. The Toledo Food Hub has the opportunity to coordinate agricultural related businesses, entrepreneurs and residents to capitalize on a well-coor­dinated and robust food supply (value) chain.

Coordinate local food networks to encourage interaction between existing local networks by establishing early connections between market demand and market opportunities to seed the growth of the local foods movement.

Recommendation:

Focusing on strategic investments in its tracking system from farm to fork will ensure the best leverage of efficiency and available resources. A centralized, productive workplace with state of the art energy-efficient buildings, equipment, broadband, wireless, accommodations for public workshops and educational forums should be minimum standards used for operations. Moving goods and informa­tion efficiently are vital to accessing markets and maintaining cost-competitive production of products or services.

**3: Create Revitalized, Healthy and Vibrant Warehouse (food) District: (Quality of life)**

Focus on the immediate neighborhood where accomplishments are personal, meaningful and can be managed. A thriving warehouse district will be impactful not only to the neighborhood but as a piece of the city’s urban development initiative.

Recommendation:

Meet the needs of the Food Hub, area businesses and residents to promote a healthy, safe and dynamic district. Build on unique neighborhood advantages to create an environment where businesses want to locate, but also as places where people of all ages want to spend time perso­nally and professionally. Target smart investment and capitalize on existing, underutilized infrastructure. Promote business entrepreneurship and collaboration as well as the shared learning that happens from close community ties.

**4: Develop Talented and Innovative People: (Seeds of vision)**

Despite moderate-high unemployment rates, many employers still expe­rience difficulty in finding, recruiting, and hiring the kinds of skilled workers the compa­nies need to be competitive.

Recommendation:

Create an environment that encourages the best and the brightest to want to work and live within the warehouse district. Promote opportunities for “natural exercise” such as walking and biking to improve community safety and health. Maintain sidewalks and establish bike paths. Highlight the affordability of living downtown.

Provide opportunities for those interested to work within the neighborhood through agricultural curriculum providers through area universities and colleges. Pursue available veteran workforce.