

May 15, 2024

Good morning!

My name is Mama Erin Preston Johnson, and I'm the chair of the board of the Detroit Black Community Food Sovereignty Network (DBCFSN). It is an honor to join you today!

With me is Mama shakara tyler, and her son Tendaji. Mama shakara is one of the incoming co-executive directors of DBCFSN.

We bring greetings from Detroit's Black community, Black growers, Black agriculturalists, Black Land Stewards and Black-Owned Businesses!

Our work, and the work of DBCFSN, is work of self determination. We were founded to ensure that Detroit's Black population, as a vast majority of the population in Detroit, is in leadership of local food movements to positively and culturally impact where our food comes from. Through urban agriculture, food education, cooperative buying, healthy eating and more, DBCFSN has immeasurably impacted the local Detroit food system it took large part in creating. Our movement provides the Black community and the wider Detroit community with fresh, locally grown, organic produce, on a local urban farm, teaching our community self-reliance and sustainability. Thank you for the invitation to hear from us.

HISTORY AND FEATURES OF DBCFSN - Mama shakara

I'll begin by thanking Representative Young, for your leadership in our District, where D-Town Farm resides, although our offices and the cooperative are now in another district! We hope some or all of you have been to the Detroit People's Food Coop as you do NOT need to be a member to shop there - although member-ownership, especially of Black Detroiters, is paramount to ensuring that in this endeavor too that Detroit's Black community continues to lead the charge in local food movements like grocery and producer cooperatives.

We are excited and say thank you for the opportunity to support the Michigan Department of Education's (MDE) Local Food Purchase Assistance Cooperative Agreement with Eastern Market, where a "Grop-Op" producer cooperative of farmers from the Detroit Black Farmer Land Fund (DBFLF) contributed local Detroit grown produce to MDE boxes during the 2023 growing season. The new Local Food Purchase Assistance Cooperative Agreement Program (LFPA) with the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) supports the expansion of cooperative local food partnerships like these and is beneficial for both local underserved communities and socially disadvantaged farmers. It is exciting to see both community and government embracing cooperative ideals, and we encourage the State and the legislature to procure ongoing funding support from USDA for the work we are already doing to close some of the gaps that exist between these communities. We also suggest that the legislature carefully review the EAT Local Foods Act of 2024, which would expand the LFPA program and make it more sustainable and long term.