

DETROIT FOOD ACADEMY WINS BIG FOR TEACHING DETROIT STUDENTS TO BE FOOD ENTREPRENEURS.

Detroit nonprofit wins Impact Award at Crain's Food Summit

By Amy Haimerl for Michigan Good Food Fund.

In the past four years, Detroit Food Academy has engaged more than 800 students in Detroit, helping grow the next generation of leaders and food entrepreneurs.

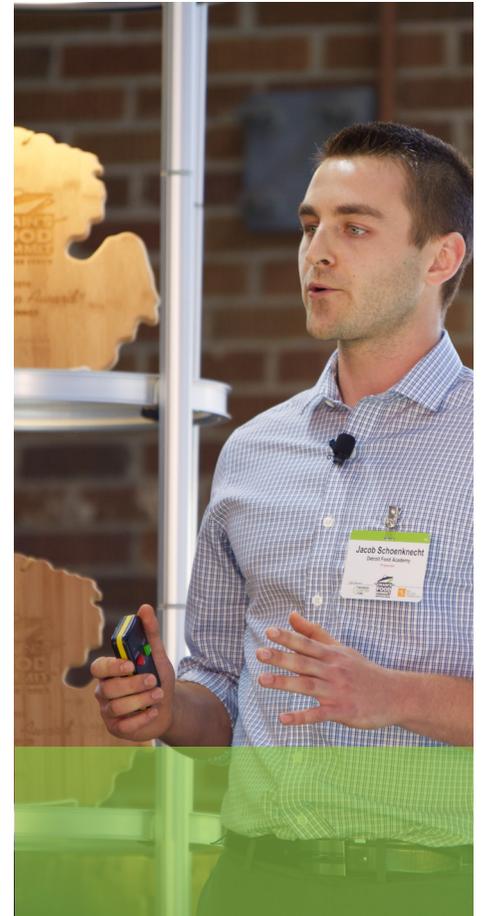
That effort was honored last week at the inaugural Crain's Food Summit, which brought together more than 400 investors, entrepreneurs, farmers, processors, retailers, and others to take stock of the state of Michigan's food economy.

At the morning invite-only investor forum, a dozen food businesses participated in a pitch competition with the chance to win three awards, including the Michigan Good Food Fund Impact Award honoring an organization that is improving access to healthy food in underserved Michigan communities.

Detroit Food Academy won the title and took home \$7,500 in business assistance support supplied by the Michigan Good Food Fund.

"What we decided as a team of judges is there is no greater impact we can have in the future food system than preparing the next generation of food entrepreneurs, and that's what Detroit Food Academy is doing," said judge Oran Hesterman, president and CEO of the Fair Food Network, a core partner of the Michigan Good Food Fund. "The impact on the future of our food system by helping young people get exposed to entrepreneurship skills and ways to use them ... that impact is immeasurable."

Annually, the economic impact of food and agriculture in Michigan is \$101.2 billion. The state ranks No. 3 in the country for farmers markets, with more than 300, and has more than 50,000 farms. And the Michigan Farm Bureau estimates that there are nearly 55,000 agriculture-related job openings annually for people with college degrees – plus many more for those in skilled trades.



Jacob Schoenknecht of Detroit Food Academy gives his five-minute pitch to the audience at Crain's Food Summit Investor Forum.

Getting young people prepared for those positions – and to create jobs of their own – has been the dream of Detroit Food Academy since its inception four years ago. And the dream is becoming reality.

Several recent Detroit Food Academy graduates are starting culinary school this fall. The nonprofit’s first advanced cohort hosted a four-course dinner this summer at (revolver), a restaurant in Hamtramck that features a rotating cast of chefs. And the organization’s student-developed all-natural snack bar, Mitten Bites, are now being carried in Papa Joe’s Gourmet Market and at the Caribou Coffee locations in the Detroit Metro Airport.

“I’m the most proud of every accomplishment that the kids keep having,” said Jacob Schoenknecht, who pitched Detroit Food Academy at the Food Summit. “And now this Impact Award is going to help us hone in on how to expand the breadth of our program.”

He is particularly focused on growing Small Batch, the Detroit Food Academy for-profit arm that he started two years ago. Small Batch develops products created by Detroit Food Academy students -- such as the Mitten Bites and a line of gourmet ice pops -- and has already earned more than \$90,000 in revenue and paid out \$34,000 in student wages. That will only accelerate with the resources from the Impact Award and meeting investors and others at the Food Summit.

“The event itself was really good for the connections we made through it,” Schoenknecht said.

That includes the Michigan Good Food Fund, which has \$30 million to invest in food businesses that are benefiting underserved communities.

“We read a lot about Detroit being the comeback city, but when it comes to food, it never left,” said Hesterman. “Detroit has a rich history of food entrepreneurship that is a part of the fabric of the city. Especially in tough times. Because of those deep roots, Detroit is now being seen as one of the leading cities in the country in terms of food creativity and entrepreneurship.”

Amy Haimerl is a journalism professor at Michigan State University and freelance journalist for such publications as the New York Times and Fortune. Her first book, Detroit Hustle, was published in the spring. She lives in Detroit with her husband and 16 paws worth of critter.



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Oran Hesterman
representing the **Michigan Good Food Fund** at Crain’s Food Summit