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A chef's midlife crisis

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Phil Jones with Kmensah of D-Town Farms

By Phil Jones
[Special to the Michigan Citizen](#)

In the Bible, Joel 2:28 states, "And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions." With that said, I must be in the throes of a midlife crisis, because I am dreaming of and envisioning a strong and vibrant food system.

I have a vision of our food system that gives me hope and direction, but I still dream of food and all its beauty and wonder. I am clearly caught right in the middle, and I couldn't be happier. Don't get me wrong, there is still a lot of work to do, but it's not all bad.

A couple of months ago, I found myself feeling guilty about the quality of my life in comparison to those around me. I felt bad that I had access to all the great food that I eat on a regular basis, but it struck me that I, as well as the rest of humanity, have a right to good food.

What was a moment of guilt turned into a clarifying moment of responsibility. We that have the charge to strengthen our community from its most underserved to those of privilege, and food is at the top of the list of needs.

I see a food system that has tremendous warriors working the fields, the phones and the streets, and this is the foundation of a food system vision that will be exciting, nourishing and economically viable for all. I see a vibrant farm stand over at D-Town Farms with the efforts of folks like Kwamena Mensah and their great volunteers.

By the way, beekeeper Aba Ifeoma says she checked out the hives and they are doing fine. I see people taking the step forward to grow and make it an enterprise like the Willerers of Brother Nature Produce, because we need more urban farmers to continue making an impact on the system.

I have a vision of a food system that maximizes the access of our fellow community members to healthy, affordable and tasty food with the policy work that the Detroit Food Policy Council is bringing to the forefront of its activities. I see food businesses popping up with a new eye to what food can be, like the good folks at Detroit Vegan Soul.

My day job at Colors gives me an look into the future of Detroit Food with the impending launch of our Co-op Academy, which will assist people in our great city in building sustainable, just and profitable businesses, and the efforts of food system stalwarts, like Jackie Victor and Jess Daniels, it gives me confidence in the program's success. Just think, ownership as a path to personal wealth — how cool is

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that?

I have a vision of Detroit that is fantastic, but I still find myself dreaming. I dream of returning to Eastern Market in the open air with my friends who produce a wealth of delicious ingredients and products. I woke up with Monkey Bread from Chugga's Bakery on my mind. I dream of slathering it with some cream cheese from Zingerman's Creamery and jams from Russell Street Deli. That was an insomniac moment that I don't complain about having.

I dream of sunflower sprouts from Rising Pheasant Farms, and I have a new salad concept that has to have the arugula from Donald Jones from Occupy Yourself, who brings that wonderful tangle of peppery greens to the restaurant for us. I dream in recipes, so I will be sharing my dreams with you all, soon.

I also dream of the meals I will have the pleasure of tasting with this year's round of Next Urban Chef competition with the leadership of Alison Heeres, whose dedication to empowering and exposing our youth to good food is heroic. Last year I had a meal that I still have rolling through my head. Chefs like Eric Gilles, Sunday Dinner, Andy Hollyday, of Roast fame, Will Branch from Corridor Sausage and Dave Mancini, that pizza king from Supino's, threw down, and their meals were memorable. The youth had a special event to put into their culinary memories, and their knowledge was amazing.

I dream of memories of meals past in honor of where I come from in life — which reminds me: I just found out that the vegetable peeler in my childhood home was actually mine. My grandmother recently told me she just learned how to use one. Go figure! I digress. I have had dreams of spring onions, fresh herbs and an abundance of produce that is second only to California, so they are good dreams.

I dream of a community of people who have a vision of health, wealth and life. Dream with me, and join us as we talk about "What's On Your Plate?" The annual conference hosted by The Detroit Food Policy Council is soon upon us in April. We will be gathering April 4, 5 and 6 at Focus: Hope, and, if that's not exciting enough, the DFPC will be holding a series of our monthly meeting in a location near you. Details are coming soon, so keep an eye out for them.

We have a vision of what the DFPC can be, and we invite you to be a part of it.

Phil Jones is the chair of The Detroit Food Policy Council, general manager of Colors – Detroit and owner of Jones Urban Foods. He can be reached at chefphiljones55@gmail.com. Follow him on Twitter @chefphiljones.

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