



Possibility grows here.



Local Food Use and Food Literacy in Child Care and Student Nutrition Programs

Farm to School in Ontario
Thursday February 28th, 2019



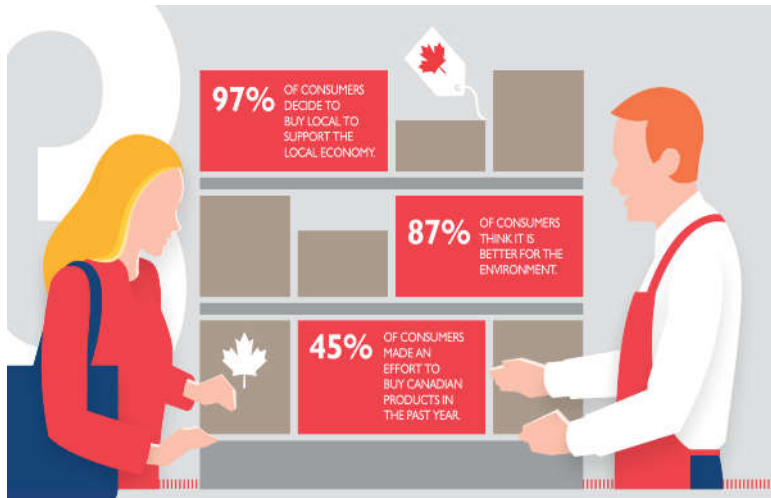
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Project Goal

- To identify what is needed to support more local food use and local food literacy in meal and snack programs targeting young children.

Why do this study?



Mintel Research, 2017



Why children ages 4 to 7?

- Early childhood food experiences lead to later food choices and are an important factor for future health.
- Food skills programs offering experiential learning to young children contributes significantly to increasing vegetable and fruit consumption.
- Educating young children about local food and healthy eating will give them a lifelong head start in adopting healthy and sustainable eating habits.

Mensah, 2016

De Cosmi, 2017



Why target childcare and student nutrition programs?

- More than 5400 licensed child care centres and 3500 student nutrition (SNP) programs in Ontario.
- Significant opportunity to influence the selection, consumption and awareness of healthy local foods through menu offerings, local food literacy and nutrition education in these settings.



Our research methods...

- **Key informant interviews** with selected providers of meal or snack programs for young children including food suppliers and distributors, student meal program caterers, child care program administrators and SNP area coordinators,
- **Online survey** with program administrators and staff (food preparers, educators, supervisors) and volunteers working in SNPs and child care, including before and after school programs located in the early childhood elementary school or community setting,
- **Scan of resources** currently used and/or available to educate cooks/caterers and program staff of early childhood meal and snack program on local foods, local food literacy and healthy eating

Who responded?

- Interviews with **5 major food suppliers/distributors** and **7 caterers** servicing meal and snack programs for young children in Ontario.
- Interviews with **5 child care program managers** and **7 student nutrition program (SNPs)** food logistics coordinators/program managers.
- Online survey: **213 child care and SNP program managers or staff**
 - Of those responses: 128 were from Ontario SNPs or other meal and snack programs offered in school or community setting (60% of total respondents) and 85 were from licensed child care programs, recreational camps or other child care settings (40% of total respondents).

Suppliers and Caterers

Local Food Availability

- There is a network of suppliers, distributors and caterers interested in and able to provide local food for meal and snack programs for young children in childcare, school and community setting.
- Caterers use distributors like Gordon Food Service, Sysco and Flanagan's to source food and the GTA Ontario Food Terminal.
- Access to over 100 suppliers of local ingredients and products.
- Some caterers have farmers that grow for them and others pay a premium to purchase local foods, which to them are more desired.

Suppliers and Caterers

Local Food Use

- **Seasonality** impacts food purchases and menu development of the caterers. Small caterers can be more nimble and change ingredients, while large suppliers can't.
- Accessing local food for caterers is not the biggest challenge. **Pricing may be a limiting factor** for some as their budgets may limit any use of any expensive ingredients, but it appears the desire for fresh often outweighs the price.
- There was **no use of buying groups** mentioned by any catering respondents.

Child Care and SNPs

Local Food Use

- Supportive of using local foods and would like to use them more.
- Local foods used most often are fruit and vegetables; milk, cheese, yogurt; eggs; grain products and meat.
- Child care (47%) and student nutrition programs (56%) utilize grocery stores over food suppliers and distributors or caterers as their number one source of food for their programs.



Child Care and SNPs

Challenges and Barriers to Using Local Foods

- lack of consistent local food availability
- local food costs too much
- lack of local suppliers
- local food supplier/farmers don't deliver small orders
- lack of staff or volunteers to prepare local food

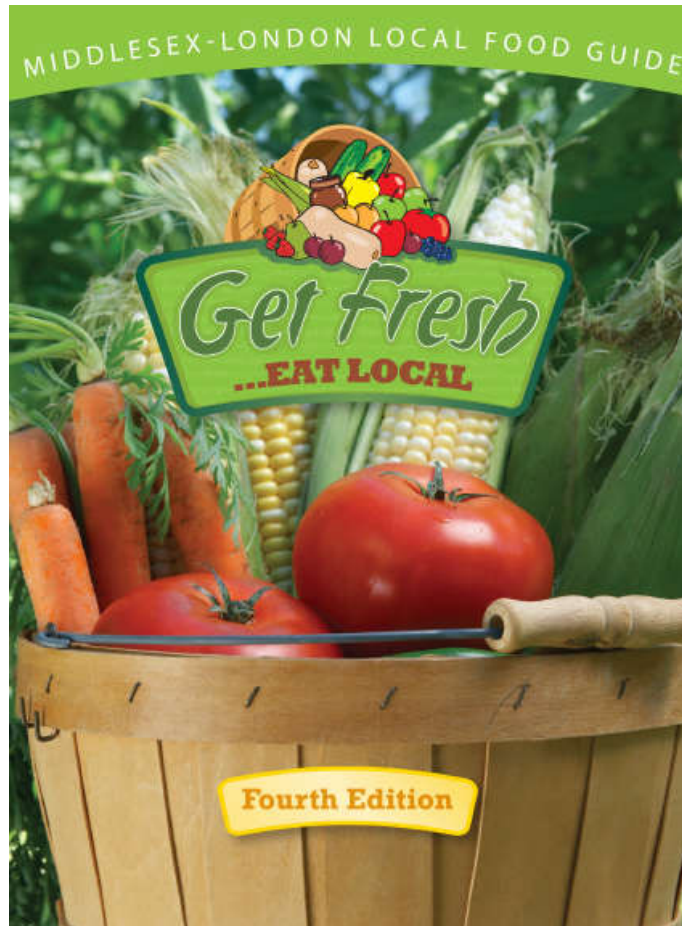


Child Care and SNPs

Successes and opportunities for local foods

- Most successes revolve around local availability via markets, stores, distributors, farmers, etc.
- Some solutions: financial support/lower prices; provision of local foods through existing supplier, easier availability (e.g. through one source); more information on where to access; and transportation/delivery to site.
 - For example, a central ordering site and development of a provincial online tracking system, such as the food sharing program and webtracker portal used by several Eastern Ontario SNPs.
- The majority of programs supplying meals for young children, either child care (78%) or SNPs (52%), report they do not participate in group purchasing, which presents an opportunity for further exploration.
 - For example, group buying was mentioned as a way to increase ordering of local food: [Ontario Student Nutrition Services](#) and [MealSource](#).

Increasing awareness of local foods



- Food program buyers and cooks need to understand where the ingredients are coming from when contacting “local” suppliers.
- Promotion of local food could be ramped up, with targeted communications to cooks and buyers of programs that provide food to young children.
- Need to increase connections between child care organizations and local food producers to strengthen relationships and partnerships.

Suppliers and Caterers

Food Literacy

- Not clear on how to define food literacy.
- Food suppliers and distributors create a number of products to inform their staff and clients about local foods (e.g. websites, magazines, blogs, reports, etc), and this is also a component of their marketing of local food products. Not specific to the education of young children or parents about local food or healthy eating.
- Some caterers create materials and offer activities to support local food literacy and were very interested in promoting local foods for the betterment of children's health.

Child Care and SNPs

Food Literacy

- More familiar with the concept of food literacy and most describe it as “knowing where food comes from” or “identifying what is a healthy food”.
- Child care programs are more likely to offer programming related to food literacy compared to SNPs. However, child care programs also reported a lack of educational resources and training of staff to do this and that food literacy was not the most important priority.
- SNPs reported that food literacy was important to connect students to the community and food system and to help children eat healthier, however because this is outside of their mandate they do not incorporate food literacy into their programming. They also lacked the funding and supports to offer food literacy.

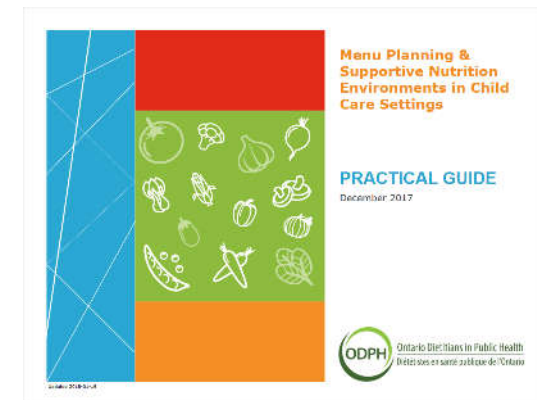
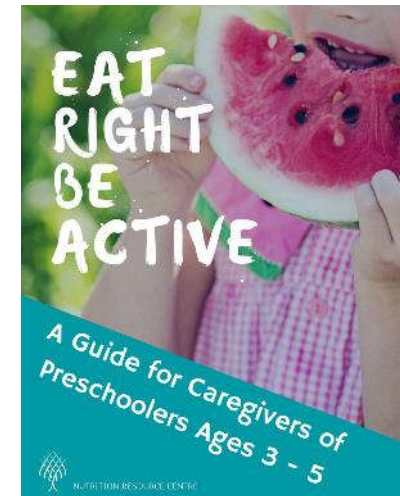
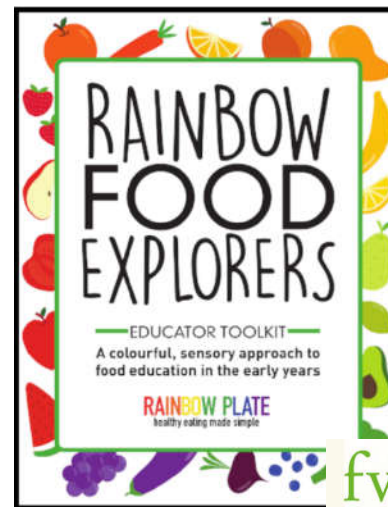
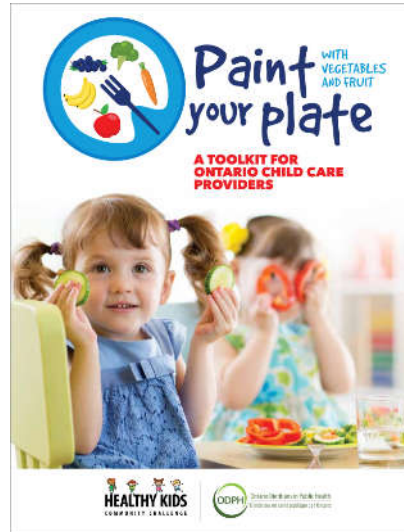
Child Care and SNPs

Supports needed to enable food literacy

- **Child care programs:** education and training for staff; educational resources appropriate for young children and/or parents; funding; help from outside experts; and more time to allow for this in their program.
- **SNPs:** educational resources (especially curriculum-based); education and training for staff; help from outside experts; funding; more staff and volunteers; and more time to allow for this in their program.

Resources

- **179 unique resources**
Government, not for profit charities and public health produced the most resources.
- The majority of resources were developed for child care educators (124), followed by parents/caregivers (60) and health professionals/public health (34).
- **Only 25 resources were found to highlight or reference local foods.**



Potential Opportunities



- More education, communication and collaboration around using local foods in meal and snacks programs targeting young children.
- More hands on food literacy in programs in child care and early school years.

Questions?



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....thanks to the organizations who contributed to this research



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