



2013

# Ontario Edible Education Network Action Plan

## Food Skills and Cooking Programs

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This document provides the Ontario Edible Education Network's Action Plan to advance its Food Skills and Cooking Programs focus area.

The Ontario Edible Education Network's process involved the development of 6 Action Plans for the following priority areas: (1) Food in the Curriculum, (2) Food Education Outside of the Classroom, (3) School and Community Food Gardens Engaging Children, (4) Food Skills and Cooking Programs, (5) Local/Sustainable Food in Schools, and (6) Student Nutrition Programs.

More information about the Ontario Edible Education Network is available at:  
<http://www.sustainontario.com/initiatives/ontario-edible-education-network>

# Ontario Edible Education Network: Food Skills and Cooking Programs Action Plan

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## Summary: Action Plan Goals and Objectives

1. Form panel of experts and provide additional supports to develop age-appropriate food skills/food literacy benchmarks and a common evaluation for cooking skills and culinary programs.
  - a. Example of age-appropriate learning benchmarks in literacy/language can be found beginning on page 32 of link: <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/curriculum/elementary/language18currb.pdf>
  - b. Example of a common evaluation tool (questionnaire and scoring template/guide) for measuring physical activity levels in children/youth: [http://www.dapa-toolkit.mrc.ac.uk/documents/en/PAQ/PAQ\\_manual.pdf](http://www.dapa-toolkit.mrc.ac.uk/documents/en/PAQ/PAQ_manual.pdf)
2. Build an online database of food skills program providers.
3. Create How-to Manual for implementing portable Culinary Programs.
4. Advocate for making cooking and food skills programs accessible to all Ontario children.
  - a. Recommend developing / expanding portable food skills programs to eliminate the need for capital investment for kitchen spaces.

## Priority Actions and Implementation Details:

★ = “Quick Win”: Priority action that can be taken in the next year, using limited resources, to demonstrate movement, and build momentum

### A. Network Building and Connecting

#### *Facilitated Relationship Building*

<i>Priority Actions</i>	Priority Level	Implementation Details
<b><i>Appoint a panel for the purpose of developing Age Specific Food Literacy and Food Skills Benchmarks for children and youth.</i></b>	High	Contact and encourage involvement from ground level NGOs providing food skills programs; Government of Ontario; Municipal Level Government, Health Units, and Boards of Education  Hold webcasts as part of implementation strategy (detailed concept, how/why they would be used, how to implement, details for measuring success)

## Funder Education

<i>Priority Messages</i>	<i>Priority Level</i>	<i>Implementation Details</i>
<b><i>Lack of Cooking Skills/ Food Literacy are barriers for people struggling with making healthy food choices.</i></b>	High	Develop fact sheet detailing the need for inclusion of sequential food literacy and food skills benchmarks in K-12 food and nutrition curriculum.
<b><i>Age-appropriate benchmarks for food literacy and cooking skills will enable educators and program providers to reflect upon and evaluate the experiences they provide for children and youth.</i></b>		Develop fact sheet detailing the need for inclusion of sequential food literacy and food skills benchmarks in K-12 food and nutrition curriculum.
<b><i>A common evaluation system is needed in order to measure the collective impact of current food literacy / skills programming.</i></b>	High	Develop fact sheet detailing the need for a common evaluation system for all food skills programs to provide rationale for support

## B. Aggregating Thought and Information

### *Sharing information, resources and stories:*

<i>Priority Actions / Areas</i>	<i>Priority Level</i>	<i>Implementation Details</i>
<b><i>1. Create How-to Manual for implementing portable Culinary Programs</i></b> 🌟	High	Build on existing how-to-manuals for cooking/food skills programs  Address how large or small community organizations with no access to commercial or teaching kitchen spaces can offer effective and low cost culinary programs. Address alternatives to investing or searching for kitchen space suitable for teaching larger groups of children. Including Recommendations for choosing the right staff; Equipment lists; Time management recommendation; Program delivery resources.
<b><i>2. Promote culinary programs and the recommendations from this report</i></b>	High	As was evidenced in the initial survey, culinary programs ranked low (12.0%) in terms of current programming. It is essential to continue to include this as a priority area that is given adequate support, resources, and time.
<b><i>3. Provide an online database of food skills program providers.</i></b> 🌟	Medium	Expand Sustain Ontario member profiles to include a searchable function to sort by which priority areas they are working in (and the potential option to include links to resources they are willing to share).
<b><i>4. Build on existing monthly Network newsletter to highlight the different</i></b>	Medium	Develop a template to include a priority area each month in the newsletter that is consistent.

<i>priority areas. (can be used to share info on benchmarks development &amp; Implementation)</i>		Include links to resources and success stories.
<b>5. Expand newsletter archive to include links from the newsletter (see #2 above)</b>	Low	Add to newsletter archive to include a page that is just resource links (organized by priority area)

### Research Gaps / Data Collection:

<i>Priority Actions to Address Research Gaps</i>	Priority Level	Implementation Details
<b><i>Build relationships to better represent / recognize the needs of a diversity of players</i></b>	High	Although a strong effort was made to include representation from francophone, and northern Ontario this report does not reflect / represent the specific needs of the diversity of the province of Ontario.
<b><i>Share best practices to support the development of benchmarks and evaluations systems</i></b>	High	Gather and share results from NGOs who have implemented benchmarks and evaluation systems.

### C. Advocacy and Government Relations

<i>Priority Policy Objectives / Opportunities</i>	Priority Level	Implementation Details
<b><i>Advocate for the development and implementation of (a) age appropriate benchmarks and (b) a common evaluation system for food literacy and food skills</i></b>	High	Specifically the Network should advocate for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The inclusion of sequential food literacy and food skills benchmarks in K-12 food and nutrition curriculum.</li> <li>• School teachers and food skills program providers to be trained in effectively incorporating nutrition education into their curriculum using food literacy benchmarks.</li> <li>• The development and implementation of a common evaluation tool for food literacy and food skills</li> </ul> (See item #1 below for elaboration)
<b><i>Advocate for cooking and food skills programs to be made accessible to all Ontario children</i></b>	High	Recommend developing / expanding portable food skills programs to eliminate the need for capital investment for kitchen spaces.  (See item #2 below for information)
<b><i>Advocate for all Ontarians to develop a better understanding of our local food system and how to cost effectively</i></b>	High	The Local Food Act, The Healthy Kids Panel and the Ontario Poverty Reduction Strategy have outlined the need to make good healthy foods more accessible to Ontario families. Yet the Healthy Kids Panel addresses concerns from parents on their inability to purchase fresh, healthy foods, and they

<b><i>shop for and consume more local foods</i></b>		<p>lack the skills and time to prepare them.</p> <p>Cooking and food skills programs with a focus on helping families learn to cook, shop, meal plan and budget their time need to be made accessible in all Ontario communities.</p>
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1. **Concern:** Currently, NO one really knows what our children/youth know (or don't know) about food. It is also difficult to measure the effectiveness of any food skills program as there is not a valid assessment tool for program providers to use. This makes it difficult to gain an understanding of the impact of food skills programs.

**Opportunity:** The development and implementation of (a) age-appropriate benchmarks and (b) a common evaluation tool for food literacy and food skills will enable educators and program providers to reflect upon and evaluate the experiences they provide for children and youth.

The evaluation manual and system could be made available to all program providers within the Network and the Network could offer to display a list of all organizations using the system and aid in collecting the evaluation findings.

**Justification:**

Benchmarks:

- Understanding exactly what it is that children of certain ages should be learning in any given cooking activity will help educators and program providers to deliver more consistent and effective learning experiences.
- Clearly defining what children need to know about food will help in the current push to change the Food Environment in Ontario and attempt to reduce childhood obesity by 20% by 2018 (as described in the Healthy Kids Panel Report)
- Implementing age-specific learning benchmarks has been done in every other subject area. The education system will be pressured to speed up the implementation process if ground-level community organizations and program providers begin using the system right away,
- Training schools teachers and food skills program providers in such benchmarks will allow them to effectively incorporate nutrition education into the curriculum.

Common Evaluation System:

- A common evaluation tool for food skills / culinary programs will help providers identify common goals for food skills programs and improve how they deliver their programming. It will also help to effectively measure the collective impact of the many small programs taking place in communities across the province.

The Healthy Kids Panel report clearly states that we need to increase food literacy and better develop cooking skills.

*“The shift away from preparing and eating family meals also means that children have fewer*

*opportunities to learn about cooking and nutrition.”*

*“When it comes to food choices, there continues to be a gap between what we know about healthy foods and what we choose to eat. Parents told us they would like opportunities to develop the knowledge, shopping skills and cooking skills to choose healthy foods most of the time...”*

2. Proper kitchen space was identified as one of the main barriers that program providers face when offering culinary or food skills programs. To address this barrier, the Network could advocate for:
  - Creative solutions to food skills and culinary programs in schools that address the issue of high cost of building or renovating large kitchen teaching spaces in schools and community centres.
  - Investing in experienced staff and using structured lessons / classes that take a fun approach to cooking. Portable equipment can be used to offer programming at satellite locations throughout a community. If coordinated properly, a travelling food skills program would require only one kitchen to serve as a home base and could serve 20 - 30 different locations, or even an entire school board. (For example Growing Chefs! Ontario runs a successful part-time program which, in only a year and a half, has offered over 90 cooking classes in partnership with over 12 community agencies who do not have appropriate kitchen facilities for cooking programs. Other organizations around the province have most certainly found other solutions to this issue.)

## Appendix A: What was heard – Environmental Scan (Survey and Interviews)

### **Background - Ontario Food Education Network survey:**

The Ontario Food Education Network survey was conducted from January 2012 to February 2013 as a basic scan of activities taking place in the province. Responses revealed that less individuals and groups are currently involved in or wish to be involved in culinary programs than most other listed programs (12.0% engaged in culinary programs, and 21.0% indicated they would like to be involved in them).

Although a number of culinary skills were identified as important (basic safe/healthy food preparation, budgeting for independent living, summer culinary camps for elementary school aged children, and avenues for local chefs to engage in the community to support food sustainability and food education), response to this portion of the survey highlighted the need for further investigation in terms of both defining “culinary programs” as well as what was currently being done/needed to be done in the future.

Results from the survey also revealed that in-class culinary training, classroom food education, teaching young adults with street background to budget, planning meals, and eating for better health were identified as desired activities / gaps for culinary programs.

### **Food Skills and Cooking Program Action Planning Survey:**

The Food Skills and Cooking Program Action Planning Survey was administered from June - September 2013. The objective of this survey was to enhance and expand upon the findings of the 2012 needs assessment survey by soliciting more in-depth information about what is happening in Ontario - in terms of both food skills and cooking programs.

The Food Skills and Cooking Program Action Planning Survey was developed to collect similar, but somewhat varying, information from a range of perspectives (i.e. modified versions of the survey were sent to Government Ministries, Universities, Health Units, Culinary Community in post-secondary school and high school, NGOs providing food skills programs, First Nations representatives, private business community, board of education/teachers, Rural Interest Representative etc.). In addition to making the survey available, a targeted interview process was chosen to solicit responses. Although the online survey was sent out to potential participants, follow-up e-mails and phone calls were made with participants to book one-on-one interviews.

This final Food Skills and Cooking Program Action Planning Report highlights findings from both online and telephone interviews with key informants who responded to the “Food Skills and Cooking Programs” priority area of the Ontario Edible Education Network action planning process. In total, 19 people were interviewed via telephone, and 11 online responses were obtained.

The key informants interviewed for this report responded to standard questions and offered helpful information based on their experience developing, implementing and evaluating cooking and food preparation skills programs.

Once data collection was completed, a researcher from the University of Western Ontario performed inductive content analysis, combining the content of both the interviews and online surveys. To promote the trustworthiness and credibility of the findings, inductive content analysis was assisted by the qualitative software QSR NVivo (QSR NVivo 9, 2010, QSR International: Victoria, Australia). Additionally,



to avoid potential bias, investigator triangulation took place; and as the analysis proceeded, a coding template evolved that allowed for the expansion of key themes, which were:

1. Current status of culinary programs in Ontario
2. Barriers to offering food skills programs to children (and suggestions to address or overcome challenges/barriers)
3. The need for province-wide age-specific food literacy and cooking benchmarks established for children
4. The role of the Ontario Edible Education Network in successfully delivering food skills programs to children

### *Current Status of Culinary Programs in Ontario*

#### *i) There are resources that currently exist:*

An initial environmental scan and results from the Food Skills and Cooking Program Action Planning Survey revealed that several culinary programs currently exist across the province of Ontario. Many participants were involved in culinary programs:

*“I run a program right out of my high school here”*  
*“Yes, we do have a program – we teach kids how to cook using recipes that we create together”*  
*“Our program is well known in the community, we teach kids and the word has spread”.*

In addition to being involved in programs, other respondents described that they were aware of programs:

*“I’m certain that information is already out there, given the hard work done by established 'soup/kitchens' or community groups”*  
*“Oh yeah, there are a bunch, it’s just knowing about them that is key.”*

#### *ii) A standard list of equipment/kitchen supplies for organizations looking to start a food skills and/or cooking program would be beneficial:*

When asked about what would be beneficial in terms of developing existing programs, respondents described the need for a list of equipment that they could use to begin or expand programs:

*“A list would be helpful for program that are starting from scratch”*  
*“It would take some of the stress out of cooking with kids if you could check an equipment list”*  
*“Yeah, a list back when I started would have been great, like a road map instead of stumbling around lost”.*

Furthermore, participants expanded upon this concept and described that it would be useful if culinary programs had a substitution list or a list of various options:

*“In addition to the standard list, a list of possible substitutions, like a glass or stainless bowl over a pot rather than a double boiler, and ideas of how to create things, like an air lock from wine-making used to ferment, rather than specialized and expensive equipment”*

*“If I could get a list of things that might serve a dual purpose of things that can makeshift as others so I could have less equipment that would be awesome.”*

**iii) Lack of evaluation of food skills and cooking programs:**

In terms of evaluation of existing culinary programs, there was little being done among surveyed respondents:

*“No, we don’t do any [evaluation]”*

*“I wish I had time for that, but it just falls through the cracks”*

*“I know it is working, but I can’t show it other than I can tell you it is by looking at the kids”.*

Additionally, although very little formal evaluation is currently being conducted, there is an interest in doing so:

*“I don’t know how to really tell people that my program is effective. I know it is, but it would be great to show it somehow in a way other people could see and understand”*

*“Yeah, I would love to have someone come do it – or show me how so I know. It’s not my forte you know?”*

Finally, participants identified challenges with conducting evaluation:

*“Cooking programs vary by organization and participant characteristics”*

*“I think that every site is so different, even in my program that it is hard to evaluate things all by the same measure.”*

**Barriers**

In both the online survey and interviews, respondents were given a list of potential challenges / barriers / gaps to offering food skills programs to children and asked if they believed they were, in fact, barriers. Participants were asked to respond with a dichotomous yes or no:

<i>% Total Agree</i>	<i>Challenge/Barrier/Gap</i>
<b>90.0%</b>	Funding
<b>86.7%</b>	Suitable Location
<b>86.7%</b>	Transportation for participants
<b>73.3%</b>	Kitchen Space

<b>73.3%</b>	Time
<b>66.7%</b>	Proper Equipment
<b>56.7%</b>	Participation of children/youth
<b>46.7%</b>	Access to healthy ingredients
<b>43.3%</b>	Easy, healthy, practical recipes
<b>36.7%</b>	Qualified Staff
<b>26.7%</b>	Lack of Staff Training
<b>26.7%</b>	Safety

Following this list of challenges / barriers, participants were asked how they felt the major obstacles could be overcome. The top three that were overwhelming cited included:

### *Funding*

*“Money would be the answer to so many of those things you just listed.”*

*“If we had more money we would be able to provide more programming and not charge as much, we are missing so many kids who can’t afford this. If we had more money to subsidize that would help.”*

*“Funding needs to be provided for agencies that wish to incorporate healthy meal prep in their programming for children and youth.”*

*“What we really need is more grants for cooking programs”*

*“Money makes the world go round, this is no exception.”*

### *Support / time*

*“If I had more cooks in my kitchen, that would be great – ha ha, didn’t ever think I’d say that”*

*“Umm...you know if I had more people to help, it’s just me most of the time, and it’s a lot.”*

*“Time is such a huge barrier. If we had more staff or support we could manage our time better.”*

*“We are understaffed and always rushing. More hands and more time is what we really need.”*

### *Space*

*“Look at individual’s spaces rather than those available in the community, do we really need government inspected, endorsed facilities? Students and children should be encouraged to work in their own spaces.”*

*“Finding places to run our program is often a challenge – and then once we find space it’s about getting people there and back from it.”*

*“We have to keep moving our program around to make it work. It would be nice to have a home base for us.”*

### *Need for province-wide age-specific food literacy and cooking benchmarks established for children*

One of the primary reasons the current Food Skills and Cooking Program Action Planning Survey was conducted via interviews was to explore dialogue about developing province-wide age-specific food

literacy and cooking benchmarks for children. When asked about this concept, respondents overwhelmingly supported the idea:

*“Oh that sounds like a really cool idea, I’d love to see that”*

*“Would be great – it would put a lot of people on the same playing field”*

*“I would really love to be able to look at other programs to see how our kids stack up”*

*“Yeah, to have the same ruler all across the board makes sense – it’s in schools in other subjects, why not cooking?”*

Although the response to the idea was positive, some potential challenges were identified:

*“Yeah I think this is a good idea in theory, not sure how you would actually make it – and then even if you did how you would make people do it? There is just so much on our plate, literally”*

*“If there was a standard, it would be difficult to tailor the program to unique participant needs and interests”*

*“I get it, I like the idea, but it’s just that day to day I don’t know how it would work – things would need to be really clear...I would need to know why I’m doing it and exactly how it is beneficial.”*

### **Ontario Edible Education Network role**

This final theme arose from questions about how the Network could help play a role in food skills and cooking programs. Participants were optimistic and responded in a generally positive manner that they were open to receive support from the Network. The four main ways that they identified that the Network could play a role included:

#### **i) Teaching**

*“It’s all about what we learn, what we know. I’m always learning and would love a place I knew I could always go to learn or even to ask questions or look for support.”*

*“I have witnessed people on fixed incomes using highly processed food or take-out for the majority of their primary meal. If this has been the norm from one generation to the other, teaching people how to prepare affordable healthier meals is practical. Learning how, can be introduced during childhood.”*

*“The Network can learn the good things that are being done and teach that to others, you know, spread the good stuff around so others don’t need to learn the hard way.”*

*“Share ideas and what is working – use example that are working and let others know about them.”*

#### **ii) Funding Awareness and Assistance**

*“Share information about funding opportunities. Create a database of resources.”*

*“Show me the money – or at least where I can go to get it...and how to get it.”*

*“Let us know where we can find money.”*

*"I don't have time to look for grants – I'm worried about what is happening today. I could use help with that."*

*"Grants – that's a scary word to me – I cook, I don't know how to write grants. But I need money to cook, so it would be great to have help with the grants so I can focus on what I do."*

### *iii) Networking*

*"I bet there's a lot going on around me I don't know about. It would be nice to know more...about programs and other things that are similar to what I'm doing."*

*"Create opportunities for people to come together and share-great networking can be done that way."*

*"Bring us together. There are so many people doing things that we can share, if we had a way...and it would have to be easy and clear."*

### *iv) Mentorship*

*"Encourage and support mentorship – allow people to learn from those that are already doing great things or have learned and lived experience. That is powerful."*

*"Teach others – I want to learn from people doing what I'm doing. I would be open to teaching people too –we all want the same thing."*

## Appendix B: Expanding on the Idea of Food Literacy Benchmarks and a Common Evaluation System

- It is difficult to determine the best way to evaluate food skills programs when what a child should know about food has never been defined.
- Creating food literacy benchmarks and a common evaluation system that can be used by food skills / culinary program providers will help to focus the goals of food skills programs and the way they are delivered to participants. It will also help to effectively measure the collective impact of the many small programs that are current happening in communities all over the province.
- The Network can help in this process:
  - By aiding in and supporting the collaborative process needed to ensure that the benchmarks and evaluation tool will be validated once produced.
  - Help identify key players to contribute to the development of the benchmarks and evaluation tool.
  - Help to ensure that the collaborative process represents all Ontarians.
  - Aid in making the tool known to the many program providers in the Network by making the Benchmarks and Evaluation tool available through the Network Website.
  - Aid in helping teaching program providers understand how to use the Benchmarks and Evaluation tool. This can be easily accomplished by including an instruction manual on the website.
  - Aid in collecting the results of the evaluations from program providers, thus helping organizations paint a bigger picture about the impact of programming. i.e. This could have a ripple effect as organizations should be able to make stronger arguments for the effectiveness of their programs, which will aid in funding requests.
- The Network can help advocate at the provincial level for the development, implementation, and evaluation of the benchmarks by advocating for the implementation of the evaluation system and benchmarks through Government Ministries.
- Many ground-level NGOs using the system will provide leverage to the government to use it on a broader scale.
- However, these organizations will not have time to keep track of who else is using the tool and what the collective evaluation results will show. The Network can take the lead on tracking and collecting the findings of organizations using the common evaluation tool.
- The Network can measure the collective impact that culinary and food skills programs are having on children, youth and families across Ontario.
- The Network can establish itself as the collective voice for all of the organizations offering food skills and culinary programs across the Province and help make a stronger case for funding new programs or expanding or increasing capacity for successful existing programs.