

Food Education Outside of the Classroom - Draft Action Plan
Laurie Thomson, Grey Bruce Centre for Agro-Ecology
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This draft action plan summarizes the input from those respondents who filled out the “Food Education Outside of the Classroom” section of the Ontario Edible Education Network Action Planning Survey.

Summary of Current Environment and Needs

The survey was completed by 15 respondents who came from a **variety of backgrounds** (i.e. farmers, educators, chefs, grocers, etc.) and from a **variety of locations** around the province (although, so far, concentrated more in SW Ontario):

- Hamilton Farmers' Market, City of Hamilton
- Grown in Grey
- Garden Party
- UNICEF Canada
- Growing up organic/imagine a garden in every school
- Hillhurst Sunnyside Community Association
- Georgetown Agricultural Society Agricultural Awareness Program
- byteSMART Digital Visions
- Culinary Capers
- Gammondale Farm Family Fun
- The Sweet Potato
- Grey Bruce Centre for Agro-Ecology
- Ontario Agri-Food Education Inc.
- InTheKitchn.com

Food literacy was noted as the most common primary focus of the educational programming provided by survey respondents, with **hands-on food and/or garden education, food advocacy, and supporting teachers/educators** also among the most common.

The most common activities survey respondents are currently involved in include **special events for families/communities** (e.g. harvest festivals, Seedy Saturdays, etc.), **teaching skills/learning activities/workshops** outside of the school, and **farm/restaurant/facility tours** for children and youth. Activities respondents most commonly noted that they would like to be more involved in include on-farm activities offered on a regular basis, speaking to youth groups (e.g. 4H, Junior Farmers, Scouts, Guides), and workshops for teachers/educators.

The majority of survey respondents noted that **some or all of their programming is linked to the Ontario curriculum** and most said that they are directly connected in some way with teachers and schools.

Key Elements Identified as Contributing to Success of Existing Food Education Programming

Responses included the following:

- networks
- skills
- resources
- farm and rural organizations
- volunteers
- school boards
- teachers
- access to schools through school board foundation for enriching education
- personal knowledge and passion for agriculture and food
- education and experience in farming and food production
- determination, passion and timing

Challenges Experienced in Becoming (more) Involved in Educational Programming for Children and Youth Regarding Food

- Nature & availability of **funding/financing** (to allow farmers to reallocate valuable time, to provide quality programming, to expand offerings of existing programming, etc.)
 - **limited amount of funding available** for these types of programs/activities/initiatives
 - **most funding goes to not-for-profit organizations/programs**, leaving independent, private operators to charge user fees to cover costs
 - **“keeping costs acceptable”** – for schools, parents, organizing groups
 - **limited budgets** of organizations trying to offer programming – difficult to pay for educator(s), develop materials, and provide/expand quality programming to large(r) groups (as requested by teachers)
- **Time constraints** (e.g. growing season is very busy for farmers, children have very scheduled lives outside of school, daytime is ‘ideal’- either during school hours [“getting into schools”] or directly after with parental assistance)
- **Connections with schools/school boards/teachers**
 - Getting information from farms to classroom teachers
 - School boards not offering workshops as often to teachers as in the past
 - Lack of awareness/familiarity by teachers and principals of programming available outside the classroom
 - Lack of support of school administrators re: farm field trips, etc.

- **Limitations/restrictions** in place in certain school boards **due to safety concerns**
 - Following a student death on a non-farm field trip, farm tours in one Ontario school board declined drastically – school board has been very cautious, particularly regarding field trips involving tractors/wagons/large animals
- **Current education policy**
 - “Not enough importance and emphasis on 'agucation' - locally, regionally, provincially and federally.”
- **Lack of openness to change from status quo**
 - Very little support for education around ecological food production – farmers in this sector struggle for legitimacy
- **Competition from other programs**

Connections

Many connections amongst groups involved in food education outside of the classroom already exist, according to survey responses, some even between respondent groups.

How connections and partnerships have helped in development and delivery of food education programming:

- development of safety protocols and promotional ideas
- not-for-profit groups obtain funding to work with farmers to deliver on-farm programming
- materials and facilitation support
- information and ideas sharing through contacts' networks to help ensure programming is accurate and up-to-date
- funding
- workshops offered by agricultural organizations like Ontario Farm Fresh Marketing Association
- program offered through school board's Foundation for Education - teachers apply to attend workshop

Barriers/Challenges to connecting with other groups to support food education:

- unrealistic budget for activities
- expectation that farmers will volunteer their time and farm – need for compensation

- limited funding and undervaluation of food education work
- urban-rural divide and lack of understanding between groups
- lack of network

Connections in First Nations, Francophone, and Northern Communities:

Limited within survey respondents, although one farm in the Thunder Bay area has connections with all three communities and found that 30% of farm tours last year were by groups from areas more than 100 km away, where soil and climate conditions limited/did not permit farming. Respondent noted that attending a farm tour was a “huge educational experience” for people from those groups.

Also, one southern Ontario respondent involved with local agricultural fairs has connections with individuals/groups operating fairs in northern Ontario and has provided them with workshops and seminars. This respondent has also worked with NOAFEM (Northern Ontario Agri-Food Education & Marketing, Inc).

Supports identified that the following would be helpful for increasing connections to schools/overcoming barriers to working with schools:

- being listed in a directory that is promoted province-wide to teachers
- greater recognition/focus in schools on the importance of educating students about healthy eating and where their food comes from
- support from educators, school boards, and others (e.g. OEEN) to improve (re: safety, etc.) and promote farm tours
- charitable or private funding
- more funding to expand existing programming to more schools and students
- OAFE support noted as “most useful” by an organizer of a co-operating group of agricultural organizations that offers special events for students to help them better understand farming and food production – “Need to get more of our organizations to use them.”

Action Plan – Moving Forward

Goals and objectives

- Increase /improve networking, skills sharing and partnership opportunities between and among groups involved in food education for children and youth
- Increase/improve co-operation between school boards, schools, and teachers and those offering or interested in offering outside-the-classroom programming to make more programming happen
- (Begin/continue to) bridge urban-rural divide
- Build on/establish more connections in First Nations, Francophone, and Northern communities
- Help to resolve funding issues

Recommendation for how to achieve goals and objectives

- *See priority ideas below for more specific detail regarding how goals and objectives can be achieved.
- Create/develop directory of outside-the-classroom food education programming promoted province-wide to teachers
- Identify champions in both urban and rural communities who can effectively collaborate with counterparts in communities outside of their own to help bridge rural-urban divisions
- Work with groups/organizations/individuals identified as having established connections in First Nations, Francophone and Northern communities to further the OEEN's connections with these communities and enhance involvement with other groups involved in food education across the province
- Create/develop links between willing funders and groups in need; help connect program providers with government funding program information; lobby government to provide more funding for such initiatives

Priorities, timelines, roles and responsibilities *(*More information required to fully develop this section. To be completed for final report.)*

The following ideas were ranked highest by survey respondents, in terms of priority, from a list of suggested ideas for the OEEN to initiate:

1. Build capacity for partnerships e.g. connect communities to schools (individuals wanting to participate in classroom education; connect farmers and teachers)
START: 2013
2. Provide a means for information sharing; provide information such as: groups or personnel that provide various skills or offerings; details about farms that

- provide learning experiences; courses and programs for young adults.
START: 2013
3. Develop best practices sheets, fact sheets, statistics that can be used when presenting. **START: 2013**
 4. Provide training and professional development for educators, administrators and school boards. **START: 2014**
 5. Publish program start-up guides with tips from experienced groups.
START: 2014
 6. Provide a means for groups to network and request skills or resources from each other. **START: 2013 (ASAP)**
 7. Provide public awareness: develop a media committee to generate ongoing awareness of progress in this area; regular public broadcast messages about local foods; a video of community efforts; find celebrity champions; find subject experts for events and workshops. **START: 2014**
 8. Develop tools to support documentation, evaluation, and measuring success.
START: 2014
 9. Provide partnering suggestions that have worked in other areas. **START: 2013**
 10. Link players to develop collaborative grant proposals. **START: 2013/2014**
 11. Advocacy: Support advocacy efforts to achieve, for example: Resources for healthy, local foods and production at schools in Northern communities; Food literacy in the Ontario curriculum. **START: 2013**

Other ideas suggested by survey respondents as priorities for the network include:

- Critically examine the nature of the CONTENT in training and resources and focus on the HOW of sustainable food production, rather than more tool kits or more training that simply reinforce current food system practices that are unsustainable
- Lobby Faculties of Education to include Healthy Schools legislation into their training
- Provide money to schools for students to travel to real working farms that are already providing tours that are curriculum-based. These farms must satisfy curriculum criteria for content and safety.
- Give consideration to providing monetary help to qualifying family farms for liability insurance (Insurance is expensive and almost prohibitive for many farm operators)
- Provide workshops for family farm operators who may be considering educational tours.

Concrete next steps

- Continue to build and develop OEEN by ensuring that all survey participants who indicated interest in being connected are, in fact, connected by any and all means currently available – email, newsletter, website, Bring Food Home conference
 - Provide a venue and facilitation at the 2013 Bring Food Home conference for food educators from across the province and sectors to meet and (re)connect
- Identify and connect groups where any crossovers exist between/among action plan survey respondents and other suggested groups or individuals (respecting privacy concerns, of course) – by whatever means available (e.g. email, phone, etc.)
- Begin developing a directory of outside-the-classroom food education programming and initiatives to be promoted province-wide to teachers – possibly to be included as part of a more extensive handbook for educators regarding food education for children and youth available at a later date
 - Begin with survey participants who wish to be included
- Develop a list of possible sources of funding, both private and public, to be made available to groups and individuals involved, or wanting to be involved, in providing food education programming outside the classroom
 - Does not have to be exhaustive at this stage, but should be divided into sections targeted to different types of applicants (e.g. farmers, not-for-profits, etc.) and should be made available as soon as possible, in an effort to begin to alleviate funding issues

Resource and funding plan

**More information required to fully develop this section. To be completed for final report.*