

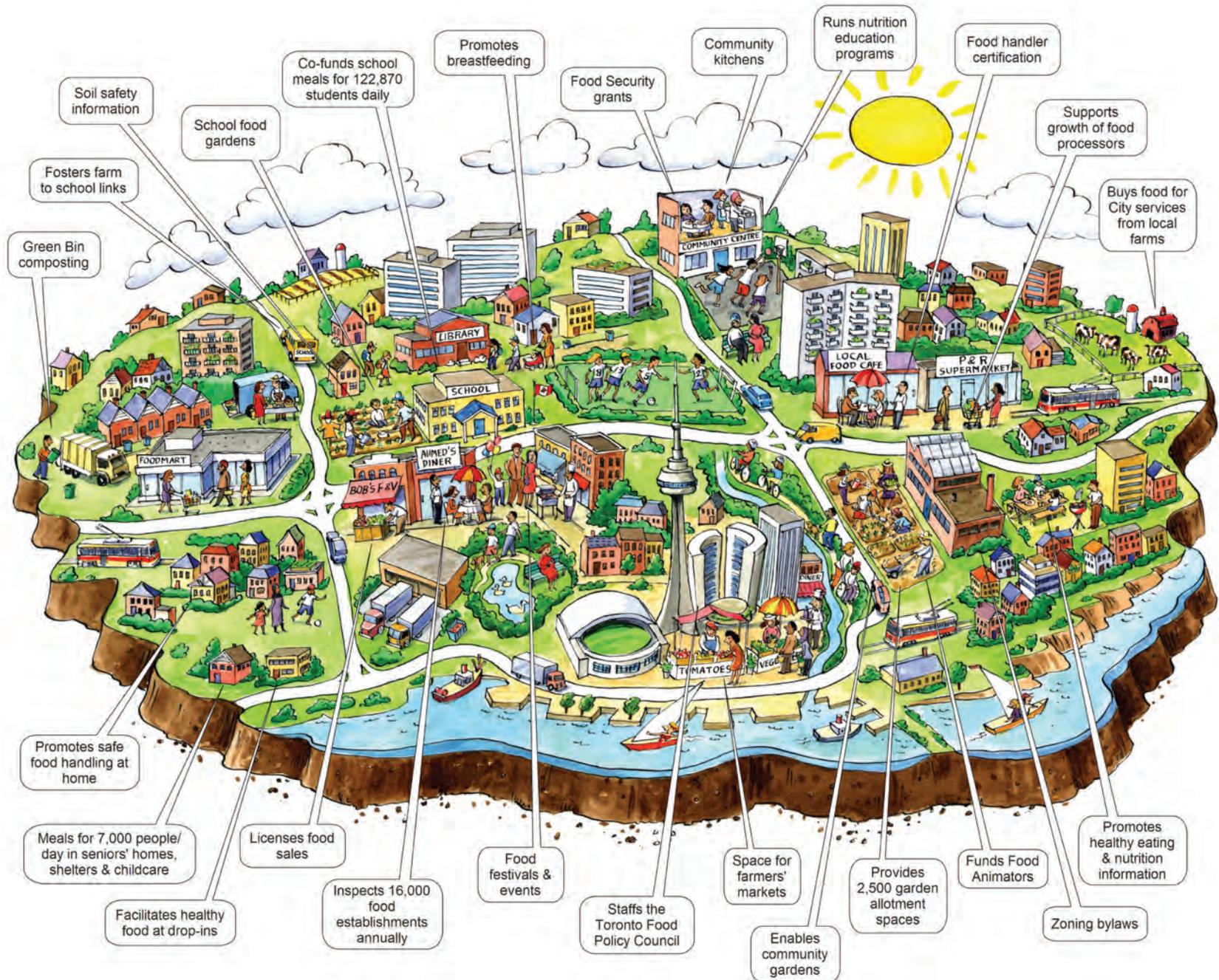


## **Cultivating Food Connections:**

# **Toward a Healthy and Sustainable Food System for Toronto**

May 2010

# 25 Food Connections to the City of Toronto



# Table of Contents

<b>Foreword</b> .....	<b>1</b>
<b>Introduction</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>Toronto is Poised to Lead the Way</b> .....	<b>6</b>
Toronto's Advantages.....	<b>6</b>
<b>Moving Toward a Health Focused Food System</b> .....	<b>10</b>
How We Got Here.....	<b>10</b>
Unintended Consequences.....	<b>10</b>
Carving Up Food.....	<b>11</b>
The Road Ahead.....	<b>13</b>
Thinking Outside the Breadbox.....	<b>15</b>
<b>Local Government's Food Levers</b> .....	<b>16</b>
<b>What Torontonians Told Us</b> .....	<b>18</b>
<b>Embedding Food System Initiatives in City Government</b> .....	<b>19</b>
<b>Priority Areas for Action</b> .....	<b>20</b>
Support Food-friendly Neighbourhoods.....	<b>20</b>
Make Food a Centerpiece of Toronto's New Green Economy.....	<b>24</b>
Eliminate Hunger in Toronto.....	<b>26</b>
Empower Residents with Food Skills and Information.....	<b>28</b>
Connect City and Countryside through Food.....	<b>29</b>
Urge Federal and Provincial Governments to Establish Health-Focused Food Policies.....	<b>32</b>
<b>Conclusion</b> .....	<b>33</b>
<b>Implementation</b> .....	<b>33</b>
<b>Appendix 1: Members of the Toronto Food Strategy Steering Group</b> .....	<b>34</b>
<b>Endnotes</b> .....	<b>36</b>



## Foreword

Food can play a powerful role in promoting health, as well as building strong and diverse communities, protecting the environment and strengthening the economy. That's why food is such an effective vehicle to connect people to one another, to their neighbourhoods and their city.

I believe it is time to build on these connections and challenge ourselves to create a healthy and sustainable food system for all. I initiated the Toronto Food Strategy project to inspire discussion and action that will move us toward this goal.

“Cultivating Food Connections” proposes a new vision for Toronto's food, one that unites health and city building. The report, which lays out numerous opportunities for Toronto to champion food system renewal, is the product of broad consultation with individuals and groups across City government and the community. We heard from a wide range of people – newcomers, neighbourhood organizations, farmers, students, health professionals, business people, and many more. Torontonians told us that they care deeply about making our food better.

Toronto Public Health's 2007 report, “The State of Toronto's Food”, showed that the food we eat comes from a complex system of connected activities – production, processing, distribution, marketing, consumption and disposal – from “grow it to throw it”. It warned of intensifying pressures from a range of food-related problems – hunger, obesity, chronic disease, disappearing farmland, environmental pollution – and highlighted the need for coordinated and strategic approaches.

In 2008, the Toronto Board of Health endorsed the Food Strategy project, and a Steering Group was convened to guide the work, culminating in the “Food Connections” consultation report that was released in February 2010. I'm grateful to the diverse group of community food experts and senior City staff who served on the Steering Group. Its mandate was to help articulate a bold food vision for the city and begin to identify effective short and long term actions to implement it. I'm also thankful for the ongoing support and advice of the Toronto Food Policy Council.



Dr. David McKeown  
Medical Officer of Health, City of Toronto

Toronto already has many examples of food system leadership through the efforts of community organizations, City divisions and agencies, the private sector, and academic institutions.

With the support of the Steering Group, the Food Strategy project has begun the process of reaching out to, and connecting, a wide range of people and organizations in the community and across City government.

Visit our website ([toronto.ca/foodconnections](http://toronto.ca/foodconnections)) for more information. You may also contact Peter Dorfman, Toronto Food Strategy Manager (Tel: 416-338-7935, Email: [pdorfma@toronto.ca](mailto:pdorfma@toronto.ca)), with your questions and comments.

I look forward to working with you to build a healthy and sustainable food system for Toronto.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "D. McKeown". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letter of the first name being a large, stylized 'D'.

Dr. David McKeown  
Medical Officer of Health, City of Toronto

## Introduction

Torontonians are ready for a fresh take on food. Many are looking for new ways to make a difference by unlocking food's potential to contribute to personal health, vibrant neighbourhoods and a great city. People increasingly understand that food is connected to not only health, but the environment, the economy and community. There's growing interest in cooking, gardening, food festivals, farmers' markets, specialty food stores, food entrepreneurship, volunteering with neighbourhood food projects, learning about nutrition, and supporting local farms and healthy and sustainable food.

Food is also becoming central to how residents and the outside world see Toronto. It's recognized as the city's number one service and industrial employer. Diversity will be a defining characteristic of Toronto in the 21st century and the city has food to match. Almost any food craving can be met in our Little India, Chinatown, Greektown, Little Italy and Korea Town in the downtown, and lesser-known restaurants featuring foods from a hundred cultures, scattered across suburban plazas. And newly "fused" cuisines, mixtures of food traditions that exist side by side in Toronto, are spontaneously emerging. Community agencies and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are spearheading made-in-Toronto food projects that are winning international acclaim.

All this excitement has opened many people's eyes to the need for decisive actions that foster progress toward a healthier and more sustainable food system. Toronto, along with the rest of the industrialized world, faces a cascade of health, social and environmental problems connected to food. At least one Toronto household in ten – the rate is much higher among urban Aboriginal populations, households of recent immigrants and lone parents – can't afford regular meals and a healthy diet<sup>1</sup>. This hardship persists in the face of undeniable research that links hunger and poverty to higher disease rates and lower life expectancy<sup>2</sup>.

Alongside hunger, approximately one in three Toronto children (age 2-11) is either overweight or obese<sup>3</sup>. According to a 2010 report from Statistics Canada, children as a group are "taller, heavier, fatter and weaker than in 1981", which may lead to accelerated "non-communicable disease development, increased health care costs, and loss of future productivity"<sup>4</sup>. Newcomers to the city are often more vulnerable to poverty, unemployment, underemployment and social isolation than long established residents. Newcomers also face challenges in adapting to new ways to access, prepare, and eat food in Canada, while attempting to preserve their healthful food knowledge and practices. Together, these factors contribute to a worrisome decline in the health of many immigrants over time.

Food problems are not confined to one population. Children from all social groups are exposed to a greater intensity and frequency of unhealthy food marketing than ever before. Many young people, and adults for that matter, lack basic food skills and information – the ability to cook healthy meals from scratch, read food labels correctly, or know where food comes from. A rapidly aging population means that the nutritional needs of seniors and the role food can play in promoting independent living and reducing the cost of medical expenses will quickly become a priority.

The viability of local agriculture and rural communities is also put at risk by the current food system. The number of farms in the Greenbelt dropped by seven percent between 2001 and 2006, a bad omen for local farm survival<sup>5</sup>. The average Ontario food producer earns a little more than \$8,000 annually from farming operations<sup>6</sup>, while production costs continue to increase for many. It is increasingly recognized that the food system's high energy inputs account for as much as a third of greenhouse gas emissions that are causing climate change<sup>7</sup>. Added to all of this, there are few signs of preparation for a relatively near-term future when fossil fuels for food production, transportation and storage will become scarcer and more expensive. Reliance on today's long-distance, energy-intensive food system will soon become more difficult.

Many of Toronto's food problems exist in spite of enormous advantages. For example, the city has a large number of community agencies that do creative and effective work on food access projects, urban agriculture, and strengthening communities through food. Torontonians are surrounded by the Greenbelt, the largest area of protected near-urban greenspace in the world with some of the most fertile soil in Canada. The food sector is the second biggest employer in the province. The city's chefs, many of whom feature local, sustainable and heritage foods, are another asset. The diverse restaurant and food sector is fueled by dynamic entrepreneurs and is fast becoming as much a signature of Toronto's

### **The Toronto Food Strategy project**

“Cultivating Food Connections” is the next stage in the Toronto Food Strategy. Toronto Public Health spearheaded the project to build a vision and inspire action toward a health-focused food system. A strategy is more than just a report or set of recommendations. It is the ongoing process of identifying, building and strengthening positive connections - between local government and residents, among City Divisions, within the community, and with the countryside. This report reflects the multitude of conversations with City and community partners about the future of Toronto's food and creative initiatives that are flourishing across the city.

creative edge as movies, live theatre, music, comedy, publishing, biomedical research and higher education.

The Toronto paradox - a city with so many advantages beset with so many food-related challenges - calls out for new approaches. This is where a food system perspective and “food system thinking” come into play. The term “food system” is commonly defined as the complex set of activities and relationships related to every aspect of the food cycle, including production, processing, distribution, marketing, retail, preparation, consumption and disposal. Food system thinking is a way of seeing the bigger picture, of developing solutions to food problems by seeing and leveraging their connections to other health, social, economic, and environmental issues. Many initiatives led by community organizations and/or local government that embody this new way of thinking are already underway. In large part, this food strategy initiative is about building on this momentum - finding and implementing new ways of achieving multiple objectives through food. For this to happen, Toronto needs to think in strategic terms about how to leverage and coordinate food advantages and assets to help solve the city’s problems.

This report, and the Food Strategy project overall, is founded upon the idea that the food system should be health-focused. This means much more than making safe and nutritious food more

available. It also refers to a range of influences on the health of individuals, families, neighbourhoods and cities. A health-focused food system, in other words, nourishes the environment, protects against climate change, promotes social justice, creates local and diverse economic development, builds community and much more. This “big picture” approach to health isn’t new. It reflects the holistic view promoted by the World Health Organization and endorsed by Toronto Public Health, sometimes described as the “social determinants of health”. This report envisions an ongoing process whereby the big “c” City (local government), in active partnership with the small “c” city (residents, community organizations and businesses), can continually move toward a food system that promotes health for everyone.

### A Health Focused Food System

- Fosters food-friendly neighbourhoods
- Promotes social justice
- Supports nutrition and disease prevention
- Builds strong communities
- Creates local, diverse and green economic development
- Protects and sustains the environment
- Empowers people with food skills and information
- Nourishes links between city and countryside



*So many of the ingredients to promote health, environmental, economic and social benefits through food are already in place.*



## Toronto is Poised to Lead the Way

Cities are well positioned to play a leading role in fostering a healthy, sustainable food system. Toronto is better equipped to lead than most. The potential of cities to be food leaders may not be obvious, given that many formal food powers related to agriculture, healthcare, imports and infrastructure are in the hands of federal and provincial governments. But the role of cities is rapidly changing in this century. With more than half the world's population and more than 80 percent of Canadians living in urban areas, cities are a nexus of change, where health, social, economic and environmental challenges are felt most acutely, and where ongoing opportunities for innovation, community participation and positive change are most abundant.

Many policies and programs that Canadians take for granted began with experiments by local governments. On the international level, the role of cities as breeding grounds for innovation is becoming ever more important in the era of climate change. Cities all over the world are uniting in action and Toronto is among them, earning a reputation as a global environmental leader. Similarly, big cities are becoming leaders in food system renewal. New York, London, San Francisco, Chicago, and Belo Horizonte, Brazil, among others, are spearheading efforts through a wide range of initiatives. Whatever their inspiration, all agree that cities can release the untapped potential of food to

address a wide range of urban priorities and, that food can release the untapped potential of cities to address food issues.

### *Toronto's Advantages*

When it comes to the list of what's required for cities to lead the way in food – knowledgeable and engaged residents, abundant natural assets, economic strength, “collaborative infrastructure”<sup>8</sup> and dynamic leadership – the Toronto region has a lot going for it. Many of the ingredients to produce health, environmental, economic and social benefits through food are already in place, available to be leveraged by a strategy and connected through a common vision.

As individual community members, Torontonians have repeatedly shown their willingness and generosity in support of projects that help the environment and society. The city has a respected, popular and effective group of community organizations with a long history of achievements in food access projects, urban agriculture, capacity building and strengthening communities through food. Indeed, a host of community agencies, NGOs, university institutes and publications are earning Toronto a reputation as a world leader in food thinking and action. A broad network of community food programs also provides emergency food to thousands of people every day.

When it comes to natural assets, the GTA is home to some of the best agricultural land in the country. On a clear day, over one third of Canada's class one farmland can be seen from the top of the CN Tower<sup>9</sup>. At a time of increasing water scarcity in other parts of the world, Toronto has access to vast amounts of freshwater. There's some comfort in knowing that governments have protected the Greenbelt, over 1.8 million acres. However, much work remains to reconcile the interests of farmers, conservationists, local residents, and developers.

As for economic clout, Toronto shoppers spend about \$7 billion per year on food<sup>10</sup>. Many consumers use their purchasing power to support products that express their values, especially through local, fair trade, organic, vegetarian and sustainable choices. To a remarkable degree, the success of new food "niche markets" has been driven by demands from consumers, rather than governments, major corporations or food producers – signalling a dramatic increase in the role of eaters and citizens in shaping the emerging food system. While these markets are still relatively small, they are being actively sought out by major food retailers, suggesting a potentially powerful role for consumers in creating larger structural changes to the food system.

Toronto is the second largest food distribution hub on the continent. The provincially-charted Ontario Food Terminal, located in the city's west end, is

Canada's largest wholesale market for vegetables and fruits. With more than five million pounds of produce moving through the Terminal each day, small and medium-sized retailers are able to rely on it to compete with large retail chains. The existence of the Terminal, one of the few public food distribution centres on the continent, is a big reason why Toronto possesses a dynamic sector of independent and diverse neighbourhood retailers who have ready access to well-priced, high quality foods. Surprising to those who think that food's importance is restricted to the rural economy, it is a foundational economic sector, providing one in eight jobs in Toronto and generating \$85.2 billion in annual revenues across the province<sup>11</sup>. Niche markets for local, sustainable, organic, artisanal and ethnically diverse food are all growing rapidly, as are efforts to stimulate, protect and recover regional food infrastructure.

The food cluster in the Golden Horseshoe has great potential for growth. Internationally recognized nutrition research in Southern Ontario universities, agri-food research in Guelph, a bustling agricultural technology centre in the Niagara fruit and wine region, along with a wealth of nearby financial, biomedical research, information technology, logistics expertise, and a culturally diverse customer base, all point to a region poised for a breakthrough in food system renewal. The strategic challenge is to build the links within this common foodshed. In other words, create a synergy of these advantages



**Ontario Food Terminal:** The Terminal is the largest wholesale fruit and vegetable distribution centre in Canada and supports diverse and independent retailers across the region.

so that their combined efforts are greater than the sum of their individual efforts. A pressing strategic opportunity is to link the evolving food cluster with the developing green economy and market the region as the continent's go-to region for food innovation. Toronto is already building a world reputation as a centre for green investment. The Toronto Stock Exchange, for example, has more “cleantech” companies listed than any other exchange in the world<sup>12</sup>. Food is an equally important building block for a green economy. Food growing, after all, is the original solar and renewable industry.

Toronto has also built “collaborative infrastructure” – opportunities for people from all walks of life to work together on solutions to common problems, instead of splitting into polarized groups. Scholars have argued that cities which embrace collaborative infrastructure are the ones most likely to succeed in the 21st century. A leading example of Toronto's success in this direction is the City Summit Alliance, organized by the late David Pecault. Leadership for food system improvements has grown out of this civic culture of engagement and collaboration. It encourages solutions, founded on “horizontal” partnerships, a precondition for successful and long-lasting teamwork around food.

Toronto enjoys a history of dynamic leadership in the broad area of food, going back to the crusading Medical Officer of Health Dr. Charles Hastings, a major force shaping the city during the early 1900s.

Hastings championed nutrition promotion, prenatal care, food safety and water treatment as central to the public health agenda, resulting in Toronto winning a reputation as the healthiest big city in the world in the 1920s<sup>13</sup>. Toronto Public Health continues to work with community partners to deliver and support a wide range of programs that link food with neighbourhood development and the social determinants of health. Prenatal and early childhood supports, nutrition education, food skills training, the Student Nutrition Program, working with Children's Services to remove trans fats from meals, support to school gardens, the newcomer focused Peer Nutrition Program, Nutritious Food Basket monitoring, support in moving to healthier choices in vending machines, food safety promotion and enforcement, and dental services for people on low income, all testify to ongoing public health leadership.

During the 1990s, Toronto's Board of Health created one of the world's first food policy councils. The Toronto Food Policy Council (TFPC) is a City-supported, community-led organization that has pioneered the field of urban food system thinking. It has helped put a whole range of new food issues on the radar of local, national and international policy makers, including community and rooftop gardens, local and sustainable food, rural-urban partnerships, nutrition labelling and GE-free milk. The TFPC was a major participant in the Food and Hunger Action Committee, established by the



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#### **Student Nutrition Programs:**

The City collaborates with the Toronto Partners for Student Nutrition to provide nutritious food for over 122,870 children and youth in schools and community sites.

newly amalgamated City of Toronto. It also helped write the Toronto Food Charter (2001) which has inspired dozens of charters across the continent. More recently, TFPC launched the world's first Youth Food Policy Council, an idea that is already spreading internationally.

Toronto Food Facts	
Number of jobs in Toronto directly connected to food	1 in 8
City's ranking in North America as the largest food distribution hub	2nd
Average annual income earned by Ontario farmers from agriculture	\$8,001
Number of kilometres that the average food item sold in stores has traveled	4,497 <sup>i</sup>
Number of food calories that Canada produces or imports, as percentage of what the average person needs	145% <sup>ii</sup>
Number of meals/snacks served per week by charitable food programs in Toronto	128,000 <sup>iii</sup>
Number of Toronto children that are overweight or obese	1 in 3

Similar forward-thinking approaches to food are evident in many parts of local government. For example, Toronto Community Housing uses gardens as a cornerstone of tenant engagement and green programs. Shelter, Support and Housing Administration Division collaborated with Toronto Public Health, George Brown and Daily Bread Food Bank to make healthier and more culturally appropriate emergency meals available through drop-ins. Economic Development and Culture regularly works with members of the Toronto Food Policy Council, including co-sponsoring a 2009 conference on local food infrastructure. The Parks and Environment Committee directed staff, led by the Interdivisional Workgroup on Urban Agriculture, to prepare an inventory of City-owned land that could be used for urban agriculture. Staff are also investigating the feasibility of allowing backyard chickens.

All these advantages exist at a time when enthusiasm for food's potential is at an all time high. But our strengths also highlight the need for concerted action. With more than enough produced or imported to feed everyone well, there are still hungry families in Toronto. Likewise, most farmers are having a hard time making a living from their farms, even though they live on fertile land next to a prime market. These challenges, in the midst of so many advantages, call out for a comprehensive vision and strategy to make the most of our food system's potential to build a healthy Toronto.



**Toronto Drop-Ins - Creating Health Plus:** Creating Health Plus is a partnership among the Daily Bread Food Bank, George Brown College and the City of Toronto to produce healthier meals in drop-ins by increasing the nutritional knowledge and culinary skills of cooks who prepare the food.

## Moving Toward a Health Focused Food System

Since the 1950s, a focus on mass production methods has dramatically increased food availability in wealthier parts of the world. The modern, highly mechanized, commercial food system that supplies most of Toronto's supermarkets, restaurants and dinner tables, has many successes to its credit. Despite significant population growth over the last 60 years, farmers and fishers produce more than enough food for everyone on the planet. Year round, it's possible to find a diversity of reasonably priced tropical foods in grocery stores, along with locally grown vegetables. Modern technology has also reduced some of the back-breaking and dangerous work traditionally required in primary food production.



Gelek Badheysang

### Greenest City:

Parkdale youth enjoy Greenest City's garden and cooking programs, one of many community-based programs funded by Live Green Toronto grants.

### How We Got Here

Many of today's food production technologies and institutions are legacies of the period following World War II, when the modern food system took shape. Most people at that time shared high hopes for a post-war world of plenty and freedom. Many had painful memories of hunger and famine during the 1930s and food rationing during the war. The talk of those days was about building strong bodies, conquering hunger, and declaring war against poverty and disease. This explains why the Food and Agriculture Organization and the Charter of Human Rights were created so early in the United Nations' history.

The modern food system surged ahead during the 1950s, when methods so effective at mobilizing resources during war were adapted to food. Tanks morphed into tractors, and chemical warfare turned into weed warfare. The logic of industrialization, centralization and compartmentalization, so successful in factories, was applied to agriculture and food processing. Huge increases in food availability followed. The idea that increased food production would automatically improve health and serve the public was logical for that time. Cheap fossil fuels, transformed into diesel, pesticides and fertilizers, made specialized or monoculture (one crop) farms possible. High input technologies, from tractors to irrigation, became standard. The term "agri-business" was first coined in the 1950s, when dominant food players became national and international conglomerates. Economies of scale led to greater concentration of ownership everywhere in the world, but particularly in Canada's processing, distribution and retail sectors. By 2005, for example, just four grocery retailers controlled 78 percent of market share<sup>14</sup>. Likewise, the number of farms in Canada declined by more than 47,000 between 1996 and 2006 (a 17 percent drop), even as total farm acreage rose, an indicator that food was coming from ever larger farms<sup>15</sup>.

### Unintended Consequences

A system focused on mass production methods succeeded in making large quantities of food available at relatively low prices across North America. Indeed, by the 1990s, the portion of

household income spent on food had plummeted to about 10 percent, down from 20 percent in the 1950s<sup>16</sup>. At the same time, a whole new category of highly-processed “convenience” foods filled supermarket shelves. Today, more than enough food is grown or imported into Canada – 3,339 calories for every person, every day of the year<sup>17</sup>.

Notwithstanding such successes, the food system is increasingly identified as a contributor to many serious problems, sometimes referred to as “negative externalities” or “unintended consequences”. Unforeseen back in the 1940s, the food system has become a major source of climate change emissions and pollution. Likewise, the overproduction of calorie-dense, nutrient-poor products that come out of processing plants fosters an unhealthy or “obesogenic” food environment, where the cheapest and most accessible choices are often the least healthy. These and other emerging problems are partly the result of a system that continues to prioritize mass production, rather than the health of people and the environment.

### *Carving Up Food*

A focus on high volume production has become institutionalized, often without the checks and balances needed to support public health and protect the environment. For example, most farm incentives and supports encourage farmers to produce more commodities at a lower price, rather than rewarding them for growing healthier food or providing

environmental benefits. This problem is partially a result of the specialization that developed to support the modern food system. After the 1950s, a whole range of new specializations flourished, both within agriculture (producers of growth hormones or genetically modified seeds, for example) and across the food system (logistic experts, food scientists, information technology specialists, marketers, and others).

Based on the same logic of specialization, distinct food issues became separated or “siloed” within a labyrinth of government ministries, departments and authorities. Food, which by its nature connects health, social, economic, environmental and cultural goals, became disconnected. Seemingly separate food issues – nutrition, agriculture, safety, job creation, waste, for example – were carved up into different government departments, making it more difficult to treat them in interconnected ways. It also made it harder to prevent problems early on by getting at the root of the matter, or by focusing on what public health experts call the “cause of the causes”, as distinct from the symptoms of the problem.

For example, early environment ministries were designed to deal with “end of pipe” impacts on soil, water and air pollution, rather than helping farmers or processors reduce their environmental impact. Likewise, health ministries concentrate on treating chronic disease and other “downstream problems”

“  
*We have a health system  
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doesn't care about health.*  
”

caused partly by poor nutrition and unhealthy food environments. For much of their histories, each government domain focused on its own mandate, rarely collaborating with others to seize common opportunities and solve food-related problems. Siloed structures bred siloed thinking. The signs of disconnect between food and health are everywhere now. Think of hospitals. They're institutions dedicated to restoring health. But few hospitals see providing healthy food to patients as a key part of their mandate. Wendell Berry, an American philosopher of food and farming, famously addressed this paradox: "we have a health system that doesn't care about food and a food system that doesn't care about health".

The "small picture" thinking encouraged by compartmentalization also stands in the way of adapting to new conditions of the 21st century. Few of the factors driving success of the food system in the post-war period exist any longer. The producers of that era relied on seemingly unlimited and cheap energy. Ours can't. They didn't anticipate that fossil fuels or irrigation water, fundamental to increased production, would ever become scarce or unaffordable. That generation didn't know that there was a limit to the amount of waste or pollution that the soil, water and air could absorb. This generation does.

Likewise, few anticipated that an overriding focus on high volume production at low price could threaten regional food self-reliance. But by the 1990s, food companies followed in the footsteps of auto and textile companies, pursuing ever-increasing cost efficiencies by becoming global. Farmers and processors became suppliers to global food chains, rather than local communities. The basics of local food infrastructure – from farmers' markets to canning facilities and meat packing plants – started to disappear. In recent years, interest in rebuilding local food systems has grown rapidly.

Sometimes, both the local food movement and its detractors have become absorbed in debates expressing the same compartmentalized thinking that characterizes the dominant food system. "We need to cut down on food miles to save the environment", say some. "We need to keep food prices low, no matter where it comes from", say others. This report suggests that these discussions would be better served from a broad food system perspective. The issue is not so much which single food choice is "best", but how can we accelerate progress toward a comprehensive health-focused food system where goals of affordability, environmental protection, local farm viability, land use planning and others, can be reconciled. One of the functions of this food strategy project is to promote this kind of dialogue.



**Tinashe Kanengoni - Community Food Security Coordinator, Lawrence Heights:** "My role in our community centre is to engage and involve children, youth and the rest of the community in food-related activities and programs. We use food as a tool for learning, living and recreation. Cooking classes, growing an organic garden filled with vegetables and making these activities fun for participants fills my day. Food is our connection."

## The Road Ahead

The food system of the future will be quite different from the system we've known. This section has described how the current dominant food system developed and pointed to some emerging trends – scarcer and more expensive energy, increasingly expensive health, social and environmental externalities, and the need for more integrated, collaborative solutions. The road ahead will bring other challenges, but also opportunities, for Toronto. For example, the increase in newcomers will grow the need for access to culturally appropriate foods, while also offering great economic opportunities for Ontario's food sector to meet that demand. The decline in car ownership (down 9% in Toronto since 1991<sup>18</sup>), among other factors, points to an opportunity to make food retail more accessible to residents through walking, public transit and other means. An ageing population will test the city's ability to support healthy food access for seniors, and many others who are on low income, socially isolated and have physical activity limitations. But a rising senior population also brings opportunities for volunteers to serve as community food animators, teachers of cooking and gardening and mentors to young people. For all of these reasons, Toronto needs to take action now to prepare itself for the food needs of a 21st century city and seize a whole range of opportunities.

The table below highlights some of the key differences between the existing dominant commercial food system, as it relates to cities, and the emerging system envisioned by this report.

In simpler terms, the emerging food system reflects three underlying principles - resilience, equity and sustainability, all primary goals of any truly health-focused food system.

Existing Food System ➔ Emerging Food System	
Prioritizes mass production	➔ Prioritizes health
Food is not seen as the business of cities	➔ Food is seen as a strategic vehicle for meeting city goals
Founded on access to cheap fossil fuels	➔ Environmental protection is a cornerstone of food production, processing and distribution
Market forces determine location of food stores	➔ Neighbourhoods are planned with food access in mind
Food pricing unconnected to nutritional benefit	➔ Food pricing favours healthy choices
Food issues carved up into separate government departments and jurisdictions	➔ Food solutions come from collaborative partnerships within and among governments and civil society



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### Good Food Markets:

Many neighbourhoods lack access to fresh, healthy food. FoodShare works in partnership with community organizations to run 17 Good Food Markets across the city featuring seasonal produce purchased from local farmers and the Ontario Food Terminal.

Resilience can apply to a system as a whole or to individuals, neighbourhoods and cities. A resilient food system is able to meet the needs of consumers in the face of short-term crises and resilient people are able to cope with adversity in ways that are not only effective, but enhance their capacity to deal with future problems. No government can ensure or instil resilience, but public supports can be put in place to facilitate it at every level of society. At the individual level, a food system that values resilience would empower people with a broad range of food skills and information. It would foster strong neighbourhoods with a sense of community where people feel they can rely on each other in difficult times.

A system that promotes equity ensures that food is accessible to everyone. Too many neighbourhoods in Toronto are underserved by quality and affordable food stores. Many residents, in the inner suburbs especially, are now primarily dependent on public transit or walking to reach food stores. For some people, this adds a minor inconvenience. But for a large portion of the community, especially those without money for transportation, those with health problems that limit their mobility, seniors, as well as mothers with young children, the lack of nearby stores is a significant barrier to a healthy diet. In a food system that prioritizes equity, people would have access to enough safe, nutritious and culturally appropriate food, as well as access to accurate and understandable information about their purchases.

All neighbourhoods in Toronto would have nearby, quality and affordable food stores, as well as spaces to grow, share and celebrate food – allotment gardens, community kitchens, restaurants and food festivals, for example.

Sustainability has been defined in numerous ways, but fundamentally it refers to meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs<sup>19</sup>. A sustainable food system prioritizes the protection of the environment so that the soil, air and water will be able to continue producing food long into the future. Beyond the environment, a sustainable food system is also economically and socially viable over the long term, especially for local farmers. Individuals would embrace elements of a sustainable food system by composting and choosing more locally grown and seasonal foods. At the neighbourhood level, food stores would be easily accessible on foot or by public transit, and would offer sustainably grown foods with minimal packaging. Local government would embrace “good neighbour” policies. This could mean building links between local food producers and urban eaters by expanding government purchasing of sustainable food, promoting farmers’ markets, and supporting the expansion of local, sustainable food infrastructure. It could also mean implementing even more advanced waste diversion strategies related to nutrient recycling and greenhouse gas mitigation.

Resilience, equity and sustainability, therefore, are not only prerequisites for a health-focused food system. They reinforce each other. One way of expressing mutually reinforcing influences is the notion of a “virtuous circle”. For example, the way food is produced can protect against climate change by storing carbon in the soil and further nourishing the land, as well as the economy. Or, food production can be a vicious cycle by exacerbating climate change through fossil fuel dependence, leading to further environmental destruction, depleted soil and more public funding diverted to fix those problems. Using food to create a virtuous circle of continuing benefits is an objective of a food strategy.

### *Thinking Outside the Breadbox*

Thanks to a long rich history of “out of the box” food initiatives, Toronto is primed for success in food system innovation. Indeed, many parts of local government, as well as non-profits and businesses in the city, have been evolving in this direction without actually naming the process or adopting a formal food strategy plan.

There are several key characteristics that most of these successes have in common. For example, they typically identify a wide range of nutritional, cultural, economic, community and environmental benefits. Toronto Public Health staff embraced this thinking in preparing their 2006 fish consumption education and guidance documents, the first

in North America to integrate advice covering nutrition, food safety and ecological criteria, all in one package. Food system thinking is also demonstrated when one City Division sees food-related activities as enhancing its own seemingly non-food objectives. The Transportation Division’s Public Realm Office, responsible for keeping the city “green and clean”, acted on this principle when it funded signage and transit posters for community gardens and farmers’ markets. The Office understood that people maintain and protect the beauty of spaces for which they feel ownership and affection, both of which food activities help build. Food system innovators commonly have a knack for finding and leveraging underused resources with assets that hadn’t been visible to those who thought in less holistic ways. The non-profit organization Evergreen has transformed the former Don Valley Brick Works from a collection of deteriorating heritage buildings into an international showcase for urban sustainability and green design. Similarly, through a collaboration among Artscape, the Stop Community Food Centre, the City of Toronto, and many community and government stakeholders, the Wychwood Barns now offer public green space, a greenhouse, a farmers’ market, and office space for many community groups. Finally, food system projects frequently make full use of partnerships among different levels of government and with citizens and community groups. One of the most effective examples is the Student Nutrition Program, a collaboration among school boards, the City of



**Toronto Food Business Incubator:** Susan Ho, founder of TeaAura Inc, developed her line of tea-infused shortbread cookies at the Toronto Food Business Incubator. With support from the City of Toronto, the TFBI provides access to business resources and industry-standard equipment to help start-up micro-enterprises become commercialized food businesses.

Toronto, the provincial government, community organizations and parents, which now provides healthy food to 122,870 students in 433 Toronto schools daily.

## Local Government's Food Levers

Cities don't have the full toolkit to remake an entire food system. They need partnerships with residents, neighbours, businesses and other orders of government to make this new vision a reality. However, cities have more influence over how food systems work than many suppose, and could have even more influence if they started to identify, name and intentionally leverage what they can do in support of a healthy, sustainable food system.

Cities regulate food sales, provide business licenses, carry out food safety inspections, support community gardens and provide allotment garden spaces, promote healthy eating, offer breastfeeding support, run nutrition education programs, fund school food programs, serve food in childcare centres and seniors' homes, provide social housing, fund dental clinics for low income families, support the growth of food processors and retailers, apply zoning rules, coordinate food festivals and events, and more.



**Nutrition Education Programs:** Toronto Public Health Dietitians and Nurses help residents build their food skills such as reading labels, learning nutritious recipes, shopping skills and cooking economically.

Food is also rooted in the work of many agencies, boards and commissions funded by, or connected to, City Council. For example, Exhibition Place hosts a food pavilion, a range of food outlets and the annual Royal Agricultural Winter Fair, the largest fair of its kind in the world. The City-owned St. Lawrence Market has been a vital part of Toronto's food scene since the early part of the city's history and has been named one of the top 25 markets worldwide<sup>20</sup>. The Toronto Public Library, the largest public library system in North America, houses a wealth of information on every aspect of food, including no less than 2,500 cookbooks.

A lot of municipal spending goes to food, directly or indirectly. Three City Divisions – Children's Services, Homes for the Aged, and Shelter, Support and Housing – spend a combined \$11 million a year to feed 7,000 people each day<sup>21</sup>. Parks, Forestry and Recreation coordinates millions in foodservice contracts. The City spends millions more on food in less obvious ways when you consider garbage collection and composting (Toronto picks up the tab for much of the 20-40 percent of the food that's wasted in the system), and a portion of the millions spent each year to maintain Toronto's roads (it is commonly accepted that 20 percent of all vehicle trips are for food).

The City has already taken advantage of many levers for food system change. In 2008, Toronto adopted a local food procurement policy to begin

to leverage its purchasing power in favour of home-grown products. Toronto has earned a reputation as an environmental champion by adopting green technologies, requiring green roofs on new developments, restricting cosmetic pesticide use, and supporting urban agriculture projects. And this report builds on work done a decade ago by the Food and Hunger Action Committee and the subsequent adoption by City Council of the Toronto Food Charter in 2001.

There is a new energy in government and agency circles focused on place-based initiatives and services. The closer that supports and services are to the place they're serving, the more accessible they are to residents needing the service, the more flexible they can be in adapting to local needs, and the easier it is to build trust and ongoing relationships in the community. The hundreds of projects happening in Toronto's thirteen priority neighbourhoods are examples of local government and communities, led by Neighbourhood Action Partnerships, working together to complement each others' efforts. The initiative has leveraged more than \$86 million in funding from non-government sources since its inception. The food strategy's proposed creation of food-friendly neighbourhoods as a key action area fits well with this approach.

Fortunately, great cities are not limited by their authority to command and control. They also use their capacity to animate and inspire residents.

Successful cities work with residents to help the community grow in ways that fit their own needs and desires. This is especially relevant for food because, while eating habits and food purchasing decisions may be supported by public policy, they require the consent and participation of individuals and families. That's why community animation – the task of tapping the creativity of residents and fostering collaboration on projects – is such an important lever for cities, all governments, and community agencies to use.

Animators are already playing pivotal roles in establishing food-friendly neighbourhoods across Toronto. The Toronto Community Food Animators, funded through the City's Community Partnership and Investment Program, have helped residents in underserved neighbourhoods organize farmers' markets, community kitchens and community gardens. They are now working with Toronto Community Housing to develop a comprehensive strategy to grow and support community gardening as a neighbourhood engagement and capacity building project. Toronto Public Health's Diabetes Strategy has funded ethno-culturally specific community outreach workers to animate its work. Livegreen Toronto Community Animators, funded by the Toronto Environment Office, are using food projects to breathe life into neighbourhood activities that also advance the city's environmental agenda.



**Y Café at Metro Hall:** Toronto Employment and Social Services and the YMCA have collaborated to open the Y Café at Metro Hall. Participants receive hands-on training in a realistic kitchen environment for 18 weeks under the direction of professional instructors.

But even with the power of animation, there are limits to what City budgets can fund. Like all cities, Toronto needs other levels of government to help with adequate funding and supportive legislation. Many planning, zoning, licensing, public health, taxation and similar roles that influence food in cities are governed by provincial and/or federal authorities. Consequently, cities must also lead by leveraging their ability to partner with, and advocate to, other levels of government.



Anfernee Chansamoorth

**Evergreen Brick Works Farmers' Market:** Throughout the summer, the Saturday market features fruits, vegetables, wild fish, meat, cheese, milled flours, eggs and oils – all from local producers.

## What Torontonians Told Us

In early 2010, staff conducted a Food Strategy consultation and engagement process. The consultation report, “Food Connections: Toward a Healthy and Sustainable Food System for Toronto”, formed the basis for discussions with residents, community organizations, business, farmers, City staff and other levels of government. A more detailed summary of the process and feedback is provided in the “What We Heard” report, available on the Food Strategy website ([toronto.ca/foodconnections](http://toronto.ca/foodconnections)).

In total, staff met with, and heard from, more than 60 community organizations across the city. The Toronto Food Policy Council also organized discussions on key themes, including urban agriculture, small green business, poverty, hunger, the environment, and coordinated specific sessions for youth, academics and chefs/food artisans. To ensure that the food strategy was informed by a

wide range of community perspectives, Toronto Public Health invited community groups that are often under-represented to participate in the process. Twenty-five community groups organized self led consultations on food systems issues in their community. Groups included Aboriginal communities, newcomers, seniors, women’s groups, people living with AIDS, and persons with disabilities, ..

Some key themes emerged from the consultation process, especially the affordability of healthy food, lack of access to quality food stores, the specific needs of newcomers adjusting to a new food system, a range of food safety and quality issues, concern about the lack of basic food skills and the unhealthy diets of children and youth, and the poor quality of food available through food banks. At the same time, many groups expressed interest in acting on community-based food solutions, including growing and cooking food (for consumption and sale) in their communities, purchasing food from local farmers, starting small food businesses and getting better access to neighbourhood food stores that sell fresh food. Many residents expressed frustration with the lack of clear information and resources to create solutions in their own community. Most expect governments to play a role in facilitating solutions.

Toronto Public Health staff also initiated a number of meetings with Divisions across the City, including the Affordable Housing Office, City Planning, Economic Development & Culture, Long-Term Care, Homes & Services, Parks, Forestry & Recreation, Social Development, Finance & Administration, Toronto Employment & Social Services, Toronto Environment Office, Toronto Office of Partnerships, Transportation, as well as with interdivisional committees and the City Manager's Office. There were also ongoing discussions with Toronto Public Health staff, Local Health Committees and several Agencies, Boards and Commissions, including Toronto Community Housing Corporation. The discussions resulted in a number of new collaborative initiatives that are identified later in this report. Discussions with staff revealed the many links between food system issues and their ongoing work. Many felt that some barriers to progress were beyond their control and welcomed initiatives that linked their efforts to the work of other City Divisions and community initiatives.

## Embedding Food System Initiatives in City Government

This report supports Toronto taking the next steps to champion a healthy and sustainable food system. In doing so, the city stands to reap multiple benefits – healthier residents, more vibrant and

livable neighbourhoods, stronger and more diverse economic development, better environmental protection, and a growing reputation as a leader in food system renewal. To achieve this, it's essential to make food system innovations an intentional part of all that the City does. In other words, local government needs to embed food system initiatives, as well as food system thinking, into existing work and priorities. Embedding food system initiatives is not about making food a priority that competes with other City priorities for resources and attention. On the contrary, it is about being proactive and using food activities as a way to enhance efforts to meet Toronto's ongoing goals.

This report recommends that the City Manager request all City Divisions, Agencies, Board and Commissions, to identify and implement opportunities to embed food system initiatives in City policies and programs. The following sections describe specific initiatives that the City of Toronto can take, in active partnership with residents, community organizations and businesses.

Torontonians told us that they want governments to be enabling and proactive leaders in food issues. But they also emphasized the need for efficient use of existing assets and concerted efforts to align resources across different Divisions. City staff are also well aware of current budget limitations and are looking for ways to leverage scarce resources to meet the needs of Torontonians for a healthy, safe



**Oriole Community Peanut Garden:** The Peanut Garden is a welcoming place for newcomers in the heart of the Don Mills and Sheppard area. Moving into its seventh season, the organic garden is a partnership between Advent Lutheran Church and Working Women Community Centre, and funded by the City of Toronto's Food Security Investment Program.

and livable city. The initiatives listed here reflect what Torontonians told us. Thus, the list features opportunities to leverage existing resources and initiate food activities that will help meet the health, economic, environmental and social challenges that Toronto faces. Along with specific actions, the sections below point to momentum that's already producing positive, creative and collaborative food system initiatives.



**The Toronto Community Food Animators:** Food Animator Anan Lololi of the Afri-Can FoodBasket, at the Varna garden in Lawrence Heights.



## Priority Areas for Action

1. Support Food Friendly Neighbourhoods
2. Make Food a Centerpiece of Toronto's New Green Economy
3. Eliminate Hunger in Toronto
4. Connect City and Countryside through Food
5. Empower Residents with Food Skills and Information
6. Urge Federal and Provincial Governments to Establish Health-Focused Food Policies



## Support Food Friendly Neighbourhoods

Many Torontonians told us that they want their neighbourhoods to become living models of a food-friendly city. People understand that food and strong neighbourhoods belong together. In other words, they reinforce each other. Safe and friendly neighbourhoods offer healthy and vibrant food scenes, and lively food environments bring neighbours together. Neighbourhood is where a relationship-based food system – one that strengthens the relationships among people and between people and nature, as well as people and the source of their food – takes shape. For that to happen, many areas of the city will need better access to quality, affordable food stores, more opportunities for food growing, more local food festivals and celebrations, and multiple opportunities to use food activities to build stronger and more vibrant neighbourhoods.

Traditionally, lively neighbourhoods have formed around key public services such as libraries, schools, parks, community health clinics and recreation centres. A similar way to link food and neighbourhoods is to integrate a wide range of food activities into community centres, and employ Food Animators to help organize and mobilize communities around food to produce community-based solutions. In ways that are complementary to their core functions, these centres can provide essential services, including drop-ins, perinatal

programs, community kitchens, nutrition education and community gardens. Though links between food and neighbourhood may develop spontaneously in some areas, City staff community agencies should seek to animate these connections wherever they need some start-up assistance.

### *1. Expand food animation to serve every neighbourhood*

#### *Already Underway:*

- The Toronto Community Food Animators, funded through the City's Community Partnership and Investment Program, have been highly successful in helping residents in underserved neighbourhoods organize fresh produce markets, community kitchens and community gardens. The Toronto Environment Office's Live Green Animators are also incorporating food initiatives into their work.

#### *Next Steps:*

- City staff will work with community partners and potential funders to expand food animation capacity to serve every neighbourhood by 2014, including integrating food into existing animation efforts.
- City staff will work with community partners to identify existing animation capacity, needs and resource implications of citywide expansion of food animation.

### *2. Integrate food activities into community centres/ hubs and neighbourhood action teams*

#### *Already Underway:*

- Community hubs, currently in development by the City in collaboration with United Way and community and private sector partners, are being designed with enhanced kitchen facilities to enable community cooking programs and greater capacity for food programs of all types.
- A number of Neighbourhood Action Teams have supported community-based food initiatives.

#### *Next Steps:*

- City staff will work with community partners to increase and integrate a broad range of food activities in community and recreation centres, libraries and community hubs.

### *3. Leverage existing food-related assets*

#### *Already Underway:*

- Parks, Forestry and Recreation is developing an inventory of kitchens, gardens, food-related programs and activities in community centres.
- Toronto Community Housing is conducting an inventory of kitchens in their buildings.
- Toronto Homes for Long-Term Care is conducting an inventory of food-related



**Mount Dennis Community Kitchen:** Thanks to United Way's Action for Neighbourhood Change initiative, residents organize many community activities and events which bring them together to cook, garden and plan neighbourhood improvements.

programs and activities in their homes and services

#### *Next Steps:*

- City staff will conduct inventories of food-related assets and infrastructure in all City Divisions and Agencies. These inventories can be a starting point for enhancing community access, new programming, and capital improvements such as upgrading kitchens to allow for greater utilization.

#### *4. Expand urban agriculture*

##### *Already underway:*

- The Toronto Environment Office supports many new urban agriculture initiatives through the Live Green Toronto program. For example, in 2008 and 2009 almost \$800,000 was invested in the community in support of developing and expanding food production spaces and projects and the Live Green Toronto Community Animators continue to work in neighbourhoods to assist with the establishment of community and backyard gardens.
- The Toronto Environment Office coordinates an interdivisional team that has been identifying and evaluating barriers and opportunities to increase urban agriculture initiatives in the City.



**The Duncan Mills Co-op Rooftop Garden:** Looking for ways to build a greater sense of community and improve the quality of life for many senior residents, the Duncan Mills Labourers' Local 183 Co-operative Home built a rooftop garden on its terrace. The raised bed design means that even residents with limited mobility can garden and become more physically active, while getting to know their neighbours.

#### *Next Steps:*

- The Toronto Environment Office is preparing a report(s) for the Parks and Environment Committee, from the interdivisional team, that will discuss policy and program options to support an increase in urban agriculture activities, including a discussion on permitting the raising of chickens in backyards and how City owned lands, outside of parks, may be utilized in support of urban agriculture.

#### *5. Establish enabling city policies to expand healthy food access*

##### *Already Underway:*

- Parks, Forestry & Recreation is in the process of developing and updating a range of food-related policies (e.g. markets, gardens, community bake ovens) as part of their service planning.
- Toronto Public Health is working with schools to develop school nutrition policies.

#### *Next Steps:*

- City staff will establish or update City policies to expand access to healthy food through community gardens, allotment gardens, children's gardens, bake ovens, farmers' markets and fresh food markets on City land, while adhering to food safety regulations and requirements for maintenance and administration.

## 6. Identify neighbourhood food access problems and solutions

### Already Underway:

- Social Development, Finance & Administration and Toronto Public Health have developed maps that identify the location of a wide range of community food-related assets, including large and small food stores, restaurants, food banks, farmers' markets, community gardens and recreation centres.

### Next Steps:

- Toronto Public Health, City Planning and Social Development, Finance & Administration will identify specific neighbourhoods in need of better access to quality, affordable food stores and food growing spaces and identify opportunities to use planning and other municipal levers to enable food access.
- Toronto Public Health will include food access considerations in its review of health impacts of the built environment.

## 7. Facilitate fresh food retail in underserved neighbourhoods

### Next Steps:

- Toronto Public Health, Municipal Licensing & Standards, Transportation Services and Tower Renewal staff will implement a pilot of mobile sales of fresh produce, whereby fresh

fruits and vegetables can be sold from trucks in underserved areas of the city where it is presently not permitted.

## 8. Support Toronto's Aboriginal Communities

### Already Underway

- The City Manager's Office has convened a staff group to develop the Toronto Urban Aboriginal Framework to identify how the City can best serve local Aboriginal communities and engage them in the decision making process.
- Toronto Public Health has convened a Roundtable on Urban Aboriginal Health, a collaboration of people and organizations focused on promoting and protecting the health and well-being of Aboriginal peoples in Toronto.
- Toronto Public Health's Peer Nutrition program provides a range of food security and nutrition services to individuals and agencies in the Aboriginal community. The Peer Nutrition Program has played an active part in the Roundtable and Toronto Urban Aboriginal Framework.

### Next Steps:

- In the planning of the Toronto Urban Aboriginal Framework and the Roundtable on Urban Aboriginal Health, participants will



**Aboriginal Nutrition Program:** As part of Toronto Public Health's Aboriginal Peer Nutrition program, participants use traditional foods to prepare and enjoy nutritious, affordable and tasty meals.

consider how to meet the unique food needs of Aboriginal communities, e.g. food co-ops, access to game meat, indigenous vegetables and fruit seedlings, community dining circles and nutritious emergency food.

### 9. Support food opportunities in Toronto Community Housing

#### Already Underway:

- Toronto Community Housing is developing a community garden strategy, in collaboration with the Toronto Food Animators, to facilitate greater access to food growing opportunities for tenants.

#### Next Steps:

- Toronto Community Housing to collaborate with key City Divisions and community partners on expanding food initiatives (community gardens, community kitchens, bake ovens and fresh food markets) to foster strong, vibrant neighbourhoods.
- Toronto Community Housing to integrate food infrastructure and programming, where feasible, in their revitalization and redevelopment efforts.

### 10. Expand access to healthy and culturally appropriate food in city food programs

#### Next Steps:

- City staff will explore opportunities for increased funding to enable expanded provision of healthy and culturally appropriate meals in City of Toronto shelters and childcare centres.
- City Council to urge the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care to provide a top up of the \$7.31 per diem for food in order to expand the provision of healthy and culturally appropriate foods to residents living in long-term care homes.



### Make Food A Centerpiece of Toronto's New Green Economy

In speaking to Torontonians during the consultation and engagement process, most people were surprised at just how important food is to Toronto's economy. Many felt that the City should profile food's economic potential and include it in efforts to build a more environmentally sustainable or "green" economy. But people also stressed the need to support small business start-ups too, including social enterprises, micro-businesses and community-based businesses.

Food is already a foundation of Toronto's economic success. Food production, processing, distribution, marketing, retail and services employ about one person in eight. On top of that, the \$7 billion that Torontonians spend on food every year could generate and sustain a wider range of local jobs



#### Community Catering Business:

The Flemingdon Health Centre started the Community Caterer Program in 2008 to help residents launch small catering businesses. One day each week, the caterer prepares food in the health centre's kitchen to sell to staff and other tenants in the building. "Suluv's Catering" is the fourth company to get its start through the program.

and careers. The City already supports many start-up, diverse and artisanal food businesses but the potential to create quality and environmentally conscious jobs in the food sector is still very much untapped.

In an era of heightened environmental awareness, there is an opportunity to make an expanded food sector a centerpiece of an emerging green economy as well as a cultural and environmental success story. According to the Martin Prosperity Institute, Ontario's food sector has the potential to rival the once dominant auto industry as a pillar of economic strength and a generator of employment opportunities of many kinds in the manufacturing, service and creative sectors<sup>22</sup>.

### *1. Cultivate small food business start-ups*

#### *Already Underway:*

- The City-supported not-for-profit Toronto Food Business Incubator supports a wide range of start-up, diverse and artisanal food entrepreneurs. Funding is provided, in part, by Economic Development & Culture, along with the Federal Government and private sector. The demand for the Incubator has grown rapidly and has potential to nurture and scale up many more diverse food enterprises.

#### *Next Steps:*

- Economic Development and Culture to continue to support the Toronto Food Business Incubator and expand its outreach to:
  - include community-based and social enterprise programming, and
  - increase its capacity to support the scale up of new and existing businesses to serve emerging markets.

### *2. Support social enterprises*

#### *Next Steps:*

- Toronto Public Health, Economic Development & Culture and Toronto Employment & Social Services to identify opportunities to support or create community-based and food-related social enterprises that combine skills development, opportunities for income generation, environmental protection and safe and nutritious food.

### *3. Create a "Hiddenlicious" event to promote diverse cuisines across Toronto*

#### *Next Steps:*

- Economic Development and Culture to work with local Business Improvement Associations (BIAs), the Toronto Food Policy Council,



**St John's Bakery:** St. John's Bakery is a social enterprise that provides training and employment for people with significant barriers to employment. It is operated by St. John the Compassionate Mission. Their 23 varieties of organic artisanal bread are sold throughout Toronto.

Toronto Public Health, Special Events, the Ontario Culinary Tourism Alliance and other eco-food initiatives to establish a “Hiddenlicious” event that highlights lesser-known businesses across the city that feature culturally diverse, healthy and/or sustainable food.

#### 4. *Embed food into green employment strategies*

##### *Next Steps:*

- Economic Development and Culture and Toronto Public Health to work with the Green Jobs Action Group to highlight opportunities to create green jobs in Toronto’s food sector.



**Congregate Dining at Harmony Hall:** The Harmony Hall Centre for Seniors provides many services, including affordable congregate dining and transportation to supermarkets. In 2008-2009, the Centre prepared and served over 8,000 nutritious meals to more than 500 residents.



### **Eliminate Hunger in Toronto**

Torontonians told us that the existence of hunger, especially among so many of the city’s children, is unacceptable in a city that strives to be an economic and social leader of the 21st century. One in ten Toronto households can’t regularly afford to put enough healthy food on the table. Many single parents, those with disabilities, Aboriginal people and racialized communities suffer disproportionately. There is undeniable research that links hunger and poverty to higher rates of disease and lower life expectancy. But its impact goes well beyond the physical. The overlapping cycles of poverty and hunger

negatively impact early childhood development, and can produce poor mental health outcomes, social exclusion, and make it much more difficult for families and communities to survive and thrive.

In spite of their best efforts, food banks are the first to acknowledge that they are not a solution to hunger or poverty. Some are striving to evolve into multi-service hubs as a way to link the nutritional needs of clients with housing, food skills, settlement, community engagement, and other services.

Eliminating hunger needs to be a priority health, social and ethical issue for the whole city. Local government itself has limited powers to address income inadequacy. The City has no powers to set social assistance or minimum wage rates. In addition, income redistribution programs cannot be sustained through a municipal budget that is heavily dependent on a property tax base.

Toronto must continue to champion the right of all residents to adequate amounts of safe, nutritious and culturally-acceptable food to maintain health and live a dignified life. This means urging the federal and provincial governments to establish a comprehensive income security system. Such a system would build on existing income support mechanisms and include a range of income supplements so that all Ontario residents, including people on social assistance and the working poor, would be able to obtain and

retain without penalty, sufficient income to live a dignified life (e.g. Housing supplement, childcare subsidy, Ontario Child benefits, nutrition allowance, income supplements for medical conditions, etc.).

In the absence of a comprehensive income security system, inequities in food access will continue to cause unnecessary suffering for individuals and impose preventable and excessive financial burdens on all governments.

### *1. Champion food and income security*

#### *Already Underway:*

- City Council has already adopted positions in favour of a stronger income security system, including increasing social assistance rates.
- The City of Toronto is taking steps to strengthen and better integrate services, such as working with communities to develop Neighbourhood Action Partnerships and strengthening pathways to employment.

#### *Next Steps:*

- City of Toronto to continue to take a leadership role in advocating for income support systems that reflect the cost of healthy eating.

### *2. Establish community food centres*

#### *Already Underway:*

- Multi-service food centres, such as the Stop Community Food Centre, as well as community centres that integrate food activities, such as Scadding Court, Lawrence Heights and East Scarborough Storefront, already operate in Toronto. These centres breathe life into neighbourhoods by being places where people can get food, learn food skills, participate in community gardens, organize community events and meet neighbours.

#### *Next Steps:*

- Establish a new community food centre in an underserved area of Toronto, based on the expertise of existing centres, such as the Stop Community Food Centre. The City to work with community, private and public sector partners to secure the necessary funding and determine an appropriate location.

### *3. Expand provision of nutritious food in drop-in programs*

#### *Already Underway:*

- Shelter, Support and Housing Administration, Toronto Public Health, George Brown College and The Daily Bread Food Bank have worked together to improve the quality of food in 24 drop-in centres and provided food-related job skills training.



#### **The Stop Community Food Centre:**

At the Stop, neighbours participate in a broad range of programs that provide healthy food, foster social connections, build food skills and promote civic engagement. Among the Stop's initiatives are community kitchens and gardens, cooking classes, drop-in meals, perinatal support, a food bank, outdoor bake ovens, food markets and community advocacy.

### *Next Steps:*

- In the absence of an adequate income security system, Shelter Support and Housing Administration will work with Toronto Public Health and community partners and funders to support efforts of drop-in centres to provide nutritious and culturally appropriate food.



## **Connect City and Countryside Through Food**

Torontonians told us that they're increasingly interested in reconnecting with their food – where it comes from, what it takes to produce it and what's in it. In an era of rising energy prices and threats from climate change, it's essential for Toronto to support farmers and help protect local farmland. The City has already begun to strengthen the regional foodshed through the adoption of a local food procurement policy. Consumers who are more knowledgeable about where their food comes from are also more likely to seek out more locally grown products. One job of a food strategy is to connect city and countryside, and thereby bring the understanding of mutual benefits closer to home. By working together as good food neighbours, Toronto and communities across Southern Ontario could help generate an economic boon for Ontario.



**Southern Horizons Market Gardening:** Rodney Garnes and Margaret Zondo got their start on a 2.5 acre plot on the McVean farm. The land is owned by Farm Start, an organization dedicated to building a new generation of farmers by providing low-cost access to near-urban farmland. They now grow and sell diverse vegetables and herbs, including okra, mustard greens, pumpkin leaves, callaloo, and calyso tomatoes.

## *1. Build farm to school links*

### *Next Steps:*

- City staff will work with school boards and community agencies to expand urban farms, farm-to-school programs, and purchases of local and local-sustainable food.
- City staff will explore partnerships with the Ontario Food Terminal and the Student Nutrition Program to purchase local, healthy and more affordable food.

## *2. Expand City Procurement of Local Food*

### *Already Underway:*

- In 2008, the City adopted a local food procurement policy to start to leverage its purchasing power in favour of locally grown products, beginning with Children's Services.

### *Next Steps:*

- City staff will continue to explore funding opportunities to expand the City's purchases of local and local-sustainable food.

### *3. Work with GTA neighbours on a regional food strategy*

#### *Next Steps:*

- The City and the Toronto Food Policy Council to collaborate with the GTA Agricultural Action Committee, the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, GTA governments, public health units and food producers to develop a regional food strategy that addresses the needs of farmers and Toronto residents.

### *4. Link local producers with urban consumers*

#### *Next steps:*

- Economic Development and Culture to collaborate with the Friends of the Greenbelt Foundation, the GTA Agriculture Action Committee, the Ontario Food Terminal, the Ontario Culinary Tourism Alliance, the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs and other stakeholders to build links between local farmers and Toronto's diverse markets.



## **Empower Residents with Food Skills and Information**

Torontonians told us that they want to know more about the food they eat and they're concerned that children are growing up without the skills and information they need to choose a healthy diet. Food literacy is essential to building a healthier, more sustainable, equitable and resilient food system. As people told us, the work begins with ensuring that the next generation is more connected to the food that goes in their mouth – how to buy, grow and prepare healthy food, and be able to pass these essential skills and information on to their own children. Parents also told us they want schools to teach food literacy to reinforce what children learn at home.

Moving towards a healthy and sustainable food system cannot take place unless citizens and consumers make choices to support that goal. Residents told us of the anxiety they experience about not having enough clear and understandable information to make food choices. They expect governments to champion greater food system transparency. This is especially important in a multicultural city such as Toronto, where many newcomers want opportunities to find culturally appropriate foods, understand food marketing messages, and generally adapt their food skills to their new home.



Green Thumbs, Growing Kids

**Garden at Winchester School:**  
In classrooms without walls, more than 30 Toronto elementary and secondary schools link food activities to math, science and other subjects.

## 1. Expand Student Nutrition Programs to all schools in Toronto

### Already Underway:

- The City collaborates with the Toronto Partners for Student Nutrition and the provincial government to provide nutritious food for over 122,000 children and youth in schools and community sites. Student nutrition programs help to create healthier eating habits, prevent obesity, the early onset of diabetes and cardiovascular disease, and provide students with the nutrients and energy they need to be ready to learn.

### Next Steps:

- City Council to extend municipal funding to all provincially designated school communities in Toronto over 2010-2014 in accordance with the five year plan endorsed by the Board of Health, and provide annual funding increases to address the cost of nutritious food.
- The Medical Officer of Health will report to the Board of Health on best practices for a student nutrition strategy, including administrative structure, outcomes for children's health, educational outcomes and behaviours, and financial information for the 2011 budget process that allows for one, two or three year phase-ins.



### Let's Talk Support Program:

The Toronto Public Health Let's Talk program has found that food discussions can be a great way to open up conversations about other important issues. For example, talking about children's food needs can lead to parenting strategies and talking about an upcoming BBQ opens the door to sharing concerns about community safety.

## 2. Require nutrition information on restaurant menus

### Next Steps:

- The Medical Officer of Health will report to the Board of Health on a City bylaw requiring selected nutrition information to be posted on the menus of chain restaurants in Toronto.

## 3. Integrate food skills into city programs

### Already Underway:

- Using a train the trainer approach, Toronto Employment & Social Services and Toronto community food animators are collaborating to train social assistance recipients in food and animation skills with a view to job creation and expanding food access, using funding from the Investing in Neighbourhoods initiative.
- The Investing in Families program for single parents on social assistance is beginning to use food as a vehicle to develop job and life skills.

### Next Steps:

- Toronto Public Health, Social Development, Finance & Administration and Toronto Employment & Social Services to establish a pilot community food handler certification and food skills training program, for people on social assistance and other low income residents, delivered in a community setting.

- Toronto Public Health and Tower Renewal will establish a pilot community food handler certification and food skills training program in St. Jamestown.
- All City Agencies, Boards, Commissions and Divisions to explore opportunities to integrate food skills into their programs.

#### 4. Develop guidelines for soil safety

##### Next Steps:

- Toronto Public Health to lead the development of a soil contaminant protocol as a resource to guide and inform urban gardeners about ways to minimize the risks associated with soil contaminants, including options for soil testing.

#### 5. Make City food policies clear and accessible

##### Already Underway:

- Toronto Public Health is producing clear language materials to inform residents of commercial kitchen requirements. Many residents want to use kitchens in community centres to learn food skills and to cook for community events. Toronto Public Health is working with communities to enable kitchens to be classified for commercial uses, while ensuring food safety requirements are met.

##### Next Steps:

- Economic Development and Culture, Toronto Public Health, Parks, Forestry & Recreation, Toronto Environment Office and other appropriate Divisions to develop and distribute clear language information in multiple languages to make it easier for residents to understand food-related City policies and requirements (e.g. regulations related to food safety, food sales, zoning, urban agriculture, starting a food business, commercial kitchen designs, etc.).

#### 6. Promote food literacy in schools

##### Already Underway:

- Twenty four food gardens in Toronto schools are funded through the School Food Garden Project, a partnership among Toronto Public Health, FoodShare and school boards. The gardens link food activities to science, math and other subjects.

##### Next Steps:

- Toronto Public Health and other City Divisions continue to work with community groups, parent groups, school boards and the Ministry of Education to weave food literacy broadly into the curriculum and the school experience (school gardens, nutrition education, cooking, food and the environment, for example).



##### Beyond 3:30 Junior Chefs Program:

Beyond 3:30 is a unique after-school program offered in seven TDSB schools. The Junior Chefs Club introduces youth to healthy food choices and cooking skills, something that can have a big impact on their lives today and throughout adulthood. The program is made possible by a partnership among TDSB Model Schools for Inner Cities, the Toronto Foundation for Student Success and the Toronto Community Foundation.

## 7. Integrate Food And Health Into Newcomer Settlement Supports

### Already Underway:

- Toronto Public Health's Peer Nutrition program serves parents and caregivers from ethnically and culturally diverse communities in Toronto to improve infant and child feeding practices, food selection, purchasing and preparation skills among parents of young children aged six months to six years. The program has a reference group that provides a forum for sharing ideas, coordinating training opportunities, and partnering to reach newcomer communities.

### Next Steps:

- Toronto Public Health and Social Development, Finance & Administration to collaborate with settlement agencies to expand opportunities for newcomers to adapt their food skills (accessing culturally appropriate foods, navigating supermarkets, adapting recipes, understanding food marketing messages, etc.) and share their knowledge.



### Health-focused food policies:

Toronto needs all levels of government to work together to ensure that the food system serves a broad range of health goals. This includes making the healthiest food choices more accessible and available to consumers.



## Urge Federal and Provincial Governments to Establish Health-Focused Food Policies

This report has described a variety of ways that Toronto can foster a healthy and sustainable food system through better collaboration among local government, residents, community organizations and business. But even with these efforts, Toronto still needs other orders of government to do their part by establishing enabling food policies.

In the broadest sense, Toronto needs the Federal Government and the Government of Ontario to establish comprehensive food policies that identify optimal health as a key goal of the food system and enhance the capacity of cities and communities to take action. Governments can support the approaches listed above in many more specific ways. This includes establishing a federally-funded universal student nutrition program, implementing regulatory measures related to eliminating trans fats and reducing sodium, restricting commercial advertising targeted to young children, and adopting agricultural policies that allow farmers and farm communities to thrive.

### *Already Underway:*

- The Toronto Board of Health has advocated to the federal and provincial governments on a number of health policy issues, including:
  - Urging the Government of Canada to implement the recommendations of the federal Trans Fat Task Force, and to ensure that artificially produced trans fat is regulated in the Canadian food supply;
  - Calling for a federally funded universal student nutrition program; and,
  - Calling for a total ban on all commercial advertising targeted to children under 13 years of age.

### *Next Steps:*

- Toronto Public Health will continue to monitor and evaluate federal and provincial policies and assess the feasibility of City of Toronto regulation where voluntary measures are inadequate.

## Conclusion

The need for action to improve the food system is clear. Toronto faces a range of health, social and environmental problems related to food. Torontonians told us they are ready for a fresh take on food and want governments to champion creative and effective solutions. This means thinking in food system ways - seeing the connections in the City's work and implementing food activities that will help Toronto meet its existing objectives, while also building a healthier Toronto. In spite of the challenges, Toronto is fortunate to have numerous advantages that make us well poised to take the next steps in championing a healthy and sustainable food system for all.

## Implementation

The Toronto Food Strategy is an ongoing process. Toronto Public Health staff will initially coordinate the Food Strategy, including seeking new opportunities to leverage funding and provide support to City staff and the community to implement the actions identified in this report. Among other supports, staff will develop tools that will guide City staff and communities to compile inventories of existing assets, identify gaps and opportunities. Part of the ongoing work will be to develop an evaluation framework and indicators to measure the effectiveness of the Food Strategy project. The Medical Officer of Health will report to the Board of Health and City Council on progress in early 2011.



**Afri-Can FoodBasket's Ujamaa Farm:** As part of Afri-Can FoodBasket's Cultivating Youth Leadership program, youth grow food and share the harvest with food banks and their families.

## Appendix 1: Members of the Toronto Food Strategy Steering Group

Below are the members of the Food Strategy Steering Group who guided the development of this project with valuable insights and advice all along the way. Members were invited to participate in the process as individuals, rather than as representatives of any organization or interest group. Affiliations listed below are for identification only and don't necessarily represent an organization's endorsement of this report.

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## Endnotes

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### Table Notes - Toronto Food Facts

- i) Xuereb, M. (2005). *Food Miles: Environmental Implications of Food Imports to Waterloo Region*. Region of Waterloo Public Health.
- ii) This figure is derived from dividing the estimated total number of calories available from the Canadian food supply – 3,339 [see Statistics Canada (2010). *Food Statistics 2009*. Cat. No. 21-020-X. Note that the total does not adjust for losses, such as waste and/or spoilage, in stores, households, private institutions or restaurants or losses during preparation.] by estimated daily energy requirements – 2,300 [Energy estimate is based on Health Canada recommendations (see [http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fn-an/food-guide-aliment/basics-base/1\\_1\\_1-eng.php](http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fn-an/food-guide-aliment/basics-base/1_1_1-eng.php)), using the median age of Canadians (40) and averaging the daily energy requirements (assuming 30 - 60 minutes of daily moderate physical activity) for 40 year old men (2,600) and women (2,000) = 2,300]. Therefore,  $3,339 / 2,300 = 1.45$  (145%).
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