



REPORT FOR ACTION

Toronto Food Policy Council 2017-2018 Annual Report

Date: June 28, 2018

To: Board of Health

From: Chair, Toronto Food Policy Council

Wards: All

SUMMARY

The Toronto Food Policy Council is a thirty-member council established in 1991 to advise the Board of Health on issues relating to community food security and a health-promoting food system. In addition, since 2010, the Toronto Food Policy Council has served as the community reference group for the Toronto Food Strategy -- providing advice and support from community-based experts and advocates on the implementation of the strategy.

Toronto Food Policy Council members are appointed by the Board of Health. Current members include three City Councillors, one member from the Board of Health, and 26 citizen members with a range of food system expertise in community-based charities, non-profits, farming and food businesses. These members attend monthly Toronto Food Policy Council meetings, and contribute actively to Toronto Food Policy Council committees on a range of food system issues.

This report provides an overview of key thematic areas of work taken up by the Toronto Food Policy Council, with an account of activities of the last year. It documents responses to the growing demands on the City to address health, social, economic and environmental issues related to food security, and the corresponding increased demands on the Toronto Food Policy Council.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Toronto Food Policy Council recommends that:

1. The Board of Health receive this report for information.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

There is no financial impact associated with this report.

DECISION HISTORY

The Toronto Food Policy Council (TFPC) presented its most recent annual report on October 14, 2016.

<http://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2016/hl/bgrd/backgroundfile-97435.pdf>

COMMENTS

The Toronto Food Policy Council (TFPC) strives to help the City develop more effective policies and programs to address food security challenges. The TFPC does this by brokering opportunities for Toronto Public Health (TPH) and other City staff to engage with a wide range of community-based food organizations and experts.

As several scholarly articles have noted, the TFPC is widely considered the leading food policy council in the world, and was the first food policy council embedded in a major city.ⁱ ⁱⁱ The Toronto Food Charter, unanimously adopted by City Council in 2001, remains a guiding document for the TFPC (see Attachment 1).

The TFPC was created as a response to increased food insecurity in the City, and the rise of food banks in particular. It was established in 1991, prior to the emergence of self-defined food movements, dynamic movements which have grown enormously over the past decade in Toronto, across Canada and around the world.ⁱⁱⁱ Today, food insecurity continues to be an ever-worsening problem. As well, the environmental impacts of our industrialized food system have come to the fore as the world acknowledges that we are reaching the limits of our planetary life support system – most dramatically revealed by the crises around climate change.

On a more positive note, food is increasingly recognized as a lever that can accomplish many goals of multiple divisions of the City. Because of its multifunctional nature, food has the potential to respond to numerous problems simultaneously. In this context, the TFPC, together with the Toronto Food Strategy, has played an important role cultivating relationships, building trust and creating opportunities for collaboration across divisions and between the City and its residents.

The TFPC has also engaged with young people through the Toronto Youth Food Policy Council (TYFPC), founded in 2009. This thriving council organizes panels and events on issues of particular interest to young people, and which can help prepare young people for employment. As well, universities have begun offering food studies programs, which often rely on the TFPC for speakers, internship opportunities and advice. The TYFPC is a source of ideas and energy, and requires some support from the TFPC.

Public education and the forms of public dialogue have been transformed since the TFPC was established. Social media platforms are now central to engaging with diverse audiences. A social media presence is a requirement for organizations committed to

public education and dialogue on food. The TFPC maintains a website and a newsletter, as well as a presence on Facebook and on Twitter. In addition, as the reputation of the TFPC continues to grow in Toronto and outside of the city, speaking requests and requests for advice and support to emerging food policy councils across the country and globally are increasing significantly.

Toronto is one of the original signatories to the Milan Urban Food Policy Pact (Milan Pact) (see Attachment 2), which recognizes that cities have a strategic role in addressing food insecurity, developing sustainable food systems and promoting healthy diets. The Milan Pact commits cities to developing food systems that are inclusive, resilient, safe and diverse. Since signing the Milan Pact, Toronto has continued to play a leading role in promoting a healthy and sustainable food system, and in developing measurable indicators for evaluating progress. One of those indicators overtly encourages the establishment of food policy councils as inclusive governance mechanisms for cities.

Toronto is a member of the Steering Committee of the Milan Pact. Through the TFPC and the Food strategy, the City is also part of other networks such as the C40 network of major cities, Food Secure Canada and Sustain Ontario. The TFPC, because of its years of experience and leadership, is increasingly being called upon to collaborate regionally, nationally and internationally.

Much has changed since the TFPC was established. Toronto has replaced Montreal as the child poverty capital of Canada;^{iv} Toronto has become the fifth most expensive city in the world for housing;^v climate change and food vulnerability have been identified as major challenges; and the need for community resilience in the face of food security threats has been acknowledged.^{vi vii viii} All of these issues have had an impact on the food security of residents of the City of Toronto and on the workload of the TFPC.

The City has responded to these changes in a number of ways. TO Prosperity: Toronto Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS) has been established, with Food Access as one of its six pillars; the Toronto Agricultural Program (TAP) has been created to support interdivisional collaboration to support urban agriculture; food vulnerability and potential public health impacts at the neighbourhood level in the face of climate change-related weather incidents have been recognized in a recent report entitled "Resilient Food Systems, Resilient Cities: A High-Level Vulnerability Assessment of Toronto's Food System"; and developing a resilience strategy for the city has become a high priority.

Throughout its long and influential history, there have been five consistent themes running through all the TFPC's activities. All of these themes remain central to the TFPC today. The TFPC:

1. Identifies emerging issues and facilitates linkages between community-based experts and advocates and staff with Toronto Public Health and the City of Toronto.
2. Advises and supports Toronto Public Health and the City of Toronto on the development of leading edge policies and best practices that enhance the food security of all residents.

3. Works with youth and post-secondary institutions to prepare the next generation of food professionals and advocates.
4. Conducts public education and advocacy on food system issues.
5. Fosters knowledge exchange and collaboration between the City of Toronto and civil society organizations, nearby regions, other cities facing similar challenges, and relevant international bodies.

Activities in 2017-2018

Here are some of the TFPC's activities of the last year. This is not an exhaustive list, but an indication of the breadth of work being maintained. What follows are the highlights of the last year, organized according to the five thematic areas outlined above.

1. Identifies emerging issues and facilitates linkages between community-based experts and advocates and staff with Toronto Public Health and the City of Toronto.

The potential of urban agriculture continues to gain momentum internationally. The decline of pollinators and the role of cities in protecting these species is another urban food production issue that is coming to the fore. Resilience and defining a sustainable diet in an era of climate change are other critical areas. There has also been growing interest and activity on such themes as local and sustainable foods, public sector food procurement and world crops. Such issues are being played out locally and globally against a backdrop of ever-increasing rates of food insecurity, chronic disease and environmental degradation. The TFPC is frequently called upon to contribute to the discussion and action on these issues.

In the past year, these contributions have included a submission to the Federal Minister of Agriculture on the creation of a national food policy, a submission and deputation at the 2018 Provincial Budget Consultations, and a submission to the City of Toronto's Executive Committee on the progress of the Toronto Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS). The TFPC worked closely with other City divisions on a range of emerging issues including sustainable diets, resilient food systems, urban agriculture, food waste, public food markets and pollinator protection.

2. Advises and supports Toronto Public Health and the City of Toronto on the development of leading edge policies and best practices that enhance the food security of all residents.

The TFPC worked closely with Social Development Finance and Administration (SDFA) on the revitalization of the Toronto Agricultural Program (TAP), playing a key role in providing guidance to community-based urban agriculture experts contracted to prepare a report on City supports for urban agriculture. The TFPC staff also developed a brief about the food pillar of the Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS), and moderated the public meeting.

The TFPC, with support from the TYFPC, worked with other City divisions to facilitate the smooth launch of the Urban Hens TO Pilot. A comprehensive list of resources about

backyard chickens, and how to maintain safety standards while caring for them, is available on the TFPC website.

3. Works with youth and post-secondary institutions to prepare the next generation of food professionals and advocates.

As university programs in food studies are established and expanded, the TFPC is seen as an important resource. As well, the TFPC staff is the City liaison on food system research as a contribution to the City's "Town and Gown" research agreement with the University of Toronto. The TFPC works actively with the Centre for Studies in Food Security at Ryerson University, the Equity Studies Program and the Geography and Planning Department at the University of Toronto, and the Faculty of Environmental Studies at York University.

In the past year, the TFPC has helped organize a significant donation of urban agriculture research by a member of the TFPC to the New College Library at the University of Toronto, and continued the long and positive collaboration between New College and the TFPC on programming to celebrate World Food Day in October. The TFPC also supported students focused on food security issues in Canada and internationally who are conducting food system research.

The TFPC also works closely with the TYFPC. Two council seats are permanently allocated to the co-chairs of the TYFPC. The TFPC provides some minor financial support for TYFPC activities, as well as other supports such as providing facilitation for a TYFPC youth consultation on a national food policy for Canada. The TFPC also provides opportunities for short term project engagement for members of the TYFPC. This is a meaningful way for young people involved with the TYFPC to gain valuable experience and build their resumes.

4. Conducting public education and advocacy on a broad range of food issues

All TFPC meetings are designed as opportunities for public education. Formal meetings, held bi-monthly, feature speakers and panels on a range of food system issues. For example, the September 2017 meeting was a public forum on urban agriculture in recognition of the Mayor's proclamation of Toronto's first official Urban Agriculture Day. The meeting was followed the next day by a tour of the sites. The November 2017 TFPC meeting featured a panel on pollinators and an introduction to the Toronto Pollinator Strategy. Another important feature of that meeting was a discussion about the progress of the Toronto Poverty Reduction Strategy with both TFPC members and the public. The February 2018 meeting included a celebration of Black Heritage Month with a spoken word performance about food by a young food activist, formerly an intern at Black Creek Community Farm, and a presentation on backyard chickens and the Urban Hens TO Pilot. The April 2018 meeting featured a presentation on how food is being used as a community development tool in the City's Tower Renewal Program, with a focus on innovative projects in the Rexdale neighbourhood.

TFPC meetings are well attended by TFPC members and the public alike. Panel discussions often attract as many as 75 participants. Regular meetings usually attract about 50 people, including TFPC members. Formal meetings alternate with informal

meetings, where the TFPC's active committees meet and share their progress. Currently TFPC members participate in committees on food justice, urban agriculture, food waste, public food markets and communications. There is also a committee to advise on the development of the TFPC Food By Ward community food asset mapping project. New committees are formed as issues arise.

In October 2017, TFPC members organized a table at the "Feeding the 5000" event on food waste hosted by the Design Exchange. This event included a meal prepared entirely from "surplus" food. The TFPC table featured apples picked by volunteers from the non-profit "Not Far From The Tree", which ensures that fruit from the city's many residential fruit trees does not go to waste.

Also in October, the TFPC staff presented at a public event on the Future of Food in Canada, organized by City Councillors Joe Mihevc and Mary Fragedakis, as part of a nation-wide discussion on a national food policy for Canada. Both councillors are members of the TFPC. This is an important issue because if the federal government adopts a more comprehensive national food policy that goes beyond agricultural policy and endorses the concept of sustainable diets and urban food security, there are clear implications for federal government support of City programs and for the food system as a whole.

More recently, the TFPC partnered with Ryerson University's Centre for Studies in Food Security and Sustain Ontario to organize an All-Candidates Debate on food in advance of the Ontario provincial election.

The TFPC has developed a modest but growing social media presence, with support from a TYFPC member. Over the last year, the TFPC's engagement, following and reach on social media channels have improved considerably. The TFPC website is now regularly updated with news, policy briefs and blog posts. Direct followers of the TFPC through Facebook, Twitter and subscription to the TFPC's monthly newsletter now exceed 10,000 people. This does not include the number of additional people who view posts that have been shared by direct subscribers. Many of the TFPC's Facebook posts now consistently reach more than 1,000 people, rising to more than 4,000 with a popular "good food jobs" listing each month. Previously the reach seldom surpassed 100. The number of tweets now exceeds 40 per month, up from an average of six a year ago.

A major initiative of the TFPC in the last year has been developing the next phase of "Food By Ward", a joint initiative of the TFPC and the TYFPC. This ground-breaking project was launched in 2016 in order to showcase Toronto's food assets and opportunities, and draw attention to food as an integral element of our urban system. The Food by Ward Initiative aims to grow the City of Toronto's appetite for using food assets to solve city problems; make it easier for City staff and officials to see and use community food assets strategically; and inspire, support and guide community Food Champions in their work. The next phase of the project involves launching an online interactive map of Toronto's community food assets that can be easily updated; developing a manual to guide staff, student interns and volunteers who will keep the map up-to-date in the coming years; and creating tools for community engagement. The map will be embedded in the TFPC website by mid-summer. Toronto Food Policy

Council members have been actively involved in the Food by Ward Project, providing advice and expertise.

5. Fosters knowledge exchange and collaboration between the City of Toronto and civil society organizations, nearby regions, other cities facing similar challenges and relevant international bodies.

As rapid world urbanization continues, cities and city-regions have much to learn from each other. The failure of provincial and national governments to tackle food insecurity and climate change means that cities are often required to address these issues. As well, many food issues coming to the fore – urban agriculture, food waste, packaging waste, job creation from local food, and so on – fall directly within the city’s jurisdiction. Toronto is regarded as a city that has a successful model for food policy development with community participation, and the greatest knowledge and experience about how to work within a city government on these issues. For this reason, in the last year, the TFPC has welcomed international delegations from Korea, Germany, Slovakia and Japan.

There have also been numerous invitations to speak about the work of the TFPC and the Toronto Food Strategy – at the University of Michigan; at the launch of the Amsterdam Food Policy Council; in Almere in the Netherlands, a city which is twinned with Toronto; at the International Economic Development Council’s conference in Toronto, at McGill University’s Institute for Health and Social Policy; and at the ICLEI-Local Governments for Sustainability World Congress.

As well, the World Bank is in the early stages of determining how it can support the growing number of cities around the world that are engaging with food issues. The World Bank has historically worked on agriculture and poverty issues only at the national level. The TFPC was invited to Washington to bring its experience to a panel on the social, political and cultural context for engagement in urban food issues. Closer to home, the TFPC works closely with the Golden Horseshoe Food and Farming Alliance, and collaborates with the FLEdGe Research Group at Wilfrid Laurier University’s Centre for Sustainable Food Systems. The TFPC’s advice was also sought by the emerging London (Ontario) Food Policy Council.

These activities provide opportunities for a valuable mutual knowledge exchange, as Toronto learns how other cities and regions are developing policies and practices to address urban food challenges and opportunities.

Increased Opportunities, Increased Responsibilities

When the TFPC was established in 1991, the old City of Toronto had fewer than one million inhabitants. The modern meaning of food security was just emerging as a term and issue. Food banks had been in existence for less than a decade, and there was still the widespread belief that they were a temporary response to an economic downturn. The City Councillors and TPH staff who championed the creation of the TFPC realized that a policy response was required, as well as a charitable response, and that there was much to learn from civil society organizations working on the ground with food insecure families.

The TFPC founding predated contemporary issues such as obesity, local and sustainable food and world crops. Twenty-seven years later, the amalgamated City of Toronto has 2.8 million inhabitants, food is perceived as both a city issue and a global issue, and food policy is recognized as a policy instrument with the potential for wide-ranging health, social, environmental and economic impacts.

Because of the visionary thinking of City Councillors and TPH staff almost three decades ago, the TFPC has helped to put Toronto in a leadership role in addressing food security. The establishment of the Toronto Food Strategy in 2010 has ensured that Toronto continues to be at the forefront of policy and program development on issues of food security. The TFPC now has a role as the community reference group for the Toronto Food Strategy.

Resources are needed to respond to the enhanced mandate of the TFPC, and to provide support to community organizations working on issues of food insecurity in Toronto. The TFPC is in a position to tap into the knowledge of the community and bring that knowledge to staff in Toronto Public Health, but also to staff across divisions. As the refreshed 2018 Food Strategy indicates, there is growing interest and appetite for using food as a lever for accomplishing the goals of the City.

The TFPC continues to be a catalyst for innovation. Food policy councils are unique organizations because they are tools of collective impact which can tap into community experience and expertise. Building capacity can increase impact.

The broader community also needs additional resources to increase its capacity to foster a health-promoting food system. Civil society organizations now shoulder a great burden for food security and related services. These organizations work closely with the City, using food as a tool to promote social inclusion, community and economic development, and environmental sustainability, thereby helping the City achieve its strategic goals.

The Toronto Food Policy Council, the Toronto Food Strategy, Toronto Public Health and the City have responded to emerging food developments over the past three decades. It is now opportune to consolidate these contributions by laying the foundations for enhanced community partnerships and multisectoral collaboration.

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ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1: Toronto Food Charter 2001
Attachment 2: the Milan Urban Food Policy Pact

ⁱ Blay-Palmer, A. (2009). The Canadian pioneer: The genesis of urban food policy in Toronto. *International Planning Studies*, 14(4), 401-416.

ⁱⁱ Friedmann, H. (2007). Scaling up: Bringing public institutions and food service corporations into the project for a local, sustainable food system in Ontario. *Agriculture and Human Values*, 24(3), 389-398.

ⁱⁱⁱ Blay-Palmer, op. cit.

^{iv} Polanyi, M. et al. (2016). *Divided City: Life in Canada's Child Poverty Capital*. Children's Aid Society – 2016 Toronto Child and Family Report Card.

^v Cox, W. and Pavletich, H. (June 2018). 14th Annual Demographia International Housing Affordability Survey: 2018. Frontier Centre for Public Policy

^{vi} Barthel Stephan et al. (2013) Food and Green Space in Cities: A Resilience Lens on Gardens and Urban Environmental Movements. *Urban Studies*, 52 (7), 1321-1338

^{vii} Hoddinott, John. (2014) Understanding Resilience for Food and Nutrition Security. Washington: International Food Policy Research institute.

^{viii} Lipper et al. (2014). Climate Smart Agriculture for Food Security. *Nature Climate Change*, 4, 1068-1072