

Food Retail Access and Food Security for Toronto's Low-income Citizens

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This is a work in progress. The Toronto Food Policy Council is interested in discussing the issues and strategies presented here as part of its on-going efforts to improve the food and agriculture system in Canada, and to help create food security. Please forward any comments, and requests for additional copies, to the Toronto Food Policy Council, 277 Victoria St., Room 203, Toronto, ON M5B 1W1

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Executive Summary

The Toronto Food Policy Council is concerned that weaknesses in the Toronto food retail system leads to reduced food security for nutritionally vulnerable sub-populations (people living in poverty - especially children, people with disabilities or illness, seniors, refugees, first nations, pregnant women, and the homeless). Nutritionally vulnerable citizens can live in areas that are the least well served by the dominant system. They also are the least likely to have access to cars to travel to more competitive food retail areas in the suburbs. These populations are dependent on local food retail outlets. This paper considers what food retail structural problems these citizens face and what improvements to the system should be recommended. Is there ready access to quality grocery stores or alternate food sources for low-income Toronto citizens?

Canada has an oligopolistic food system¹ and this corporate concentration extends through the food retail structure. The dominant supermarket chain stores have preponderant market power. They are concerned with profit, not the health status of low-income citizens. These citizens are served as a by-product of selling to middle and upper-income clients.

Toronto's food retail system functions better than that of many USA cities, which may be completely lacking food retail stores in their central or low-income areas. Our socio-economic policies have helped preserve intact, mixed-income, liveable downtowns. Chainstores that locate to serve the higher income component of mixed-income neighbourhoods, provide some access to lower-income citizens. Chains also site their inner-city stores to help keep potential competitors from gaining a foothold for expansion to the suburbs. Although it appears that Toronto has a wide range of food retail choices, there are gaps in levels of service in the food retail system. In a 1990 CityPlan survey, 18% of Central Area residents said that access to supermarket service needed to be improved.

Continued economic recession and erosion of supports to mixed income residential areas and to individual citizens threatens the existence of a viable downtown with widespread food retail access. Public policy should continue to provide flexible supports for housing and income mixes in the City of Toronto. The planning process should consider food retail access an essential service in all neighbourhoods.

The paper presents a series of recommendations to enhance the food access of nutritionally vulnerable citizens. Among these are ways to reform the dominant food retail system to make it more responsive to the nutritionally vulnerable and means to strengthen alternative food distribution systems, such as the Field to Table program, and other potential private-public-cooperative partnerships.

¹A state of limited competition between a small number of producers or sellers. The Concise Oxford Dictionary, **Clarendon Press**, Oxford, 1990.

Foreword

Why is the Toronto Food Policy Council distributing a series of discussion papers on food policy matters?

This Working Paper is written with the purpose of engaging the larger community in the debates around food policy issues. In fact, there are few policies in Canada which clearly bear the label of "food policy". There are, however, several policies which bear upon the food system in Canada, and the health and food security of Toronto residents, visitors, and workers. It is this range of policies which form our interests, and around which we frequently engage in debate.

TFPC members are drawn from several different sectors as well as political orientations. While we can readily agree on shared goals such as alleviating hunger, protecting our economic and environmental base, and valuing our communities and citizenry, we often differ on what we see as the problems and solutions. It is usually only after lengthy reflection and debate that a policy position emerges and strategies for implementation become clear.

Our discussion papers are designed to bring forward the less easily available data on the issues we struggle with. Historical information is often cited so that we can understand intentions and processes of change in the past. We frequently propose long-term solutions that some find difficult to imagine, but we believe strongly that a vision of a better society must be supported with the means for its attainment.

For us the questions of food policy, or policy related to food security, tug at both our minds and our heart. It is in the spirit of broadening the debate and listening to more voices that we are sharing these discussion papers.

"A food store is an essential service" - Kim Travers, PhD., Halifax ¹

1.0 Introduction

The City of Toronto, the core of Canada's largest metropolitan region, is home to 650,000 people. Towers of wealth are at the epi-centre of this diverse and dynamic city, where middle-class office workers turn the wheels of Canadian commerce. Not long ago, manufacturing industries hugged the downtown but few heavy industries remain and these areas are now re-surfacing as knowledge economy and entertainment districts. Many citizens live downtown. Commercial retail strips line many Toronto streets with stores, restaurants and bars. These establishments often have an ethno-racial flair that celebrates one of the most multicultural cities on the planet. Leafy inner-city neighbourhoods mix with ethnic enclaves of small houses and gardens and mixed density apartment complexes. Citizen action taken in the 1970's helped preserve Toronto neighbourhoods from overdevelopment. These areas are tied together by an excellent transportation system.

Canadian public policy, especially income support and re-distribution programs, Ontario's centrist governing tradition, Metropolitan Toronto's development and the City of Toronto's intelligent planning interventions have underpinned an intact urban system that has met many economic challenges and supported commercial and community activity in most sections of the city. At the end of the 20th century, Toronto's core holds, even as suburbs continue to sprawl to the horizon. It may not hold forever.

Toronto does have low-income citizens and their plight has grown, through the boom years of the 1980's to the present. The city has some areas that are predominantly lower-income and there may be 20,000 homeless people. Toronto has been hard-hit economically in the 1990's. The recession and the introduction of free trade agreements have hammered Toronto's manufacturing sector. Toronto unemployment levels have fluctuated between 8 and 11.5% since 1990 ², a three-fold increase from that year. Over 150,000 people in Metro Toronto are using food banks on a monthly basis³, yet what the food banks are able to distribute does not meet the need, in either quantity or quality.

The failure of Canadian social and economic systems has resulted in increased hunger and the demand for alternative food distribution projects in Toronto, some charity based (foodbanks) and some based on a community development model. The existence of these alternative food sources is indicative of a failure of public policy and the market to feed people. Is the dominant food retail system concerned about low-income citizens? This discussion paper examines the structure, power and geographical location decisions of the dominant food retail system and its contribution to hunger and poverty. We ask if the structure of the food retail system reduces access to food for nutritionally vulnerable citizens, and if so, what improvements to the system should be made.

2.0 Food Security Requires Access for All to Food Retail Stores

The Food Policy Council is committed to creating food security. We believe that food is a right for all people and that our food system should compensate farmers fairly. Food security in the Canadian context has six components⁴. In this paper we are mainly interested in the second component: *Ready*

access to quality grocery stores, food service operations, or alternate food sources. This component includes the location of food retail outlets, mobility of customers, urban form, planning, and associated urban transportation systems. It also refers to the existence of alternative food sources that are not part of the dominant food distribution system.

We are especially concerned with the access to quality food retail of the citizens identified by the Ontario Public Health Association Food Security Work Group, as the "nutritionally vulnerable". This includes people living in poverty, especially children, people with disabilities or illness, seniors, refugees, first nations citizens, pregnant women, and the homeless⁵. The range of food selection in stores that are accessible to low-income citizens affects what people buy, which in turn affects health related behaviours⁶. It is important that all citizens have access to a full range of nutritious foods for a healthy life.

3.0 The Dominant Food Retail System Structure in Canada

*"As of August 1991, the top three food distributors own or sponsor and control an astounding 59% of all the food stores in Canada! In the USA the top five food distributors accounted for only 24% of food sales in 1987"*⁷. Ralph Ferguson, former Federal Minister of Agriculture

Canada has the most oligopolized food economy of any country in the western world. A small number of powerful players control many sectors of the food economy⁸. This situation has been referred to as "the Agro-Industrial Complex"⁹. This level of control is an "oligopoly", a common definition of which is to have 40% of the market controlled by four or fewer firms¹⁰. The oligopolistic nature of the over-all food system is truly reflected in one of it's sub-sectors, the Canadian food retail system. Consider that:

- ! The top ten Canadian food distributors own or control 85% of the corporate supermarkets and corporate "sponsored" stores. The "national-brand" chainstores (Loblaws, Safeway, Loeb, Provigo, etc.) account for 55% of the food stores in Canada, and "independents" controlled by the same food wholesale companies take another 30%. True independents and co-ops take up the final 15%, only 10% in Ontario¹¹.
- ! Canadian supermarket chains had 30% market share of the food dollar in 1950. This grew to 81% by 1990 (see Table 1 for the revenues of the top 4 food retailers and Table 2 for store names controlled by retail chains). Independent stores fell from 70% market dominance to 12% in the twenty years from 1970 to 1990¹². The top five food distribution companies in Canada account for 70% of the total food store market share¹³. The supermarket chains do compete nationally but different chains dominate in different regions¹⁴.
- ! The giant food distribution companies (owners of supermarket chains) are also the dominant wholesale food distributors in Canada, and there are only 8 food wholesalers in all of Ontario, serving an average of 952 stores each. This is 9.3 times the number of stores that a wholesaler serves in the US East Central Region¹⁵.
- ! The giant Canadian chains control enough real-estate to permit them enormous flexibility to

change their store formats and local marketing approach to match demographic changes in neighbourhoods. This is a barrier to the entry or expansion of competitors¹⁶.

- ! Some analysts argue that in Canadian cities with weak food retail competition, the dominant chains in those cities will operate more stores than the population warrants under retail location theory. This phenomenon serves as a barrier to new competition entering the marketplace. The dominant stores spread out their sales between their own stores and do not allow room for competitors to easily serve any one area. Examples of this exist in Ottawa where two chains, Sobeys and Loblaws, control 90% of the market, and in Edmonton where one firm controls 75% of the market¹⁷.

Table 1
1993 Canadian Corporate Supermarket Revenues (in \$ billions)

STORE	Revenue
#1 Loblaws	\$9, 356,000,000
#2 Provigo	\$6, 272,000,000
#3 Oshawa	\$5, 271,000,000
#4 Safeway	\$4, 465,000,000

Source: Canadian Grocer Magazine, "Executive Report", 1995.

The size of the supermarket chains make them especially powerful if they act in concert. For example, a consortium of Loblaws, Oshawa Group, Sobeys and Pattison Group are working with suppliers to standardize product coding, bulk packing and shipping and invoicing. The idea is to ship goods from factory to stores in a process untouched by human hands. This totally automated environment could cut down on waste if re-usable pallets are employed, but may pose a problem for small-scale farmers and food processors who will likely find they cannot easily adapt to a totally standardized shipping system¹⁸. For an understanding of the barriers to sales that small producers now face, please see TFPC discussion paper #5, *Stories of Micro Food Enterprises and Implications for Economic Development*.

There are other consequences to this degree of corporate concentration. In 1996 a small family-owned supermarket chain in Nova Scotia was so pressured by a 'price-war' between Sobeys and a new Loblaws superstore, that they were forced to sell their chain to these companies. The small chain intends to ask the Canadian Competition Tribunal to investigate the occurrence of predatory pricing, which is the practice of selling below cost until a competitor is forced out¹⁹. Other areas of concern in regard to predatory pricing are in B.C. and Manitoba. There could, however, be more competition on the horizon between the giants of the Canadian food industry. In Ontario, the Weston group of companies is very powerful, controlling between 45-50% of the food market²⁰. Besides expanding in

Atlantic Canada, Loblaws is rumoured to have bought sites for 11 stores in the Greater Montreal region of Quebec. This in turn has prompted Quebec's largest food retailer, Provigo, to target the Ontario market for expansion. Also in Ontario, A&P has dropped the Miracle Mart label and Oshawa Group is reformatting many Food City stores into large scale IGA's. The tussling of the giants, however, does not necessarily mean that conditions are right for more supermarket competition in the City of Toronto, as will be discussed in the remainder of this paper.

**Table 2
Dominant Supermarket Chains In Ontario:**

CHAIN	(OWNERS)	NAMES OF CORPORATE AND AFFILIATED STORES
A & P	(German)	Dominion, Sav-a-Centre, Food Basics
Weston's	(Canadian)	Loblaws, Supercentre, Mr. Grocer, Valu Mart, No Frills
Oshawa Group	(Canadian)	Food City, Garden Mart, Price Chopper, IGA

Compiled from various sources

4.0 The Food Retail System in Toronto

How does this commercial power affect the food retail structure in the City of Toronto? Despite powerful levels of corporate ownership of supermarkets, Toronto is reasonably well served by supermarket chainstores and by independent green grocers and speciality food stores. The City of Toronto has a total of 59 supermarkets, 3 more than the standard planning ratio of population to stores (11,000 to 1) would require (refer to Table 3 for the relative size of these stores). Half of Toronto supermarkets are owned by the following four chains: Weston, A&P, Oshawa Group and Knob Hill Farms²¹.

**Table 3
Estimated Number of Food Retail Stores over 5,000 sq. ft. in Toronto by Size**

Size of Store	Number of Stores
> 75,000 sq. ft.	2
40-75,000 sq. ft.	4
20,00-40,000 sq. ft.	20
5,000-20,000sq. ft.	32
TOTAL	59

Source: City of Toronto, Planning Department

Toronto generally has an extensive food retail mix, and has a competitive retail environment throughout many areas of the city. Toronto also has a more vigorous specialty (e.g. green grocers, butchers, bakeries and ethnic) food store sector than other Canadian centres. City planners generally assume that North Americans spend their food dollars 75% in supermarkets and only 25% in

specialty/convenience stores²². Marketing studies show that in central Toronto, the retail food purchase split is more likely 65% of the food dollar spent in supermarkets and 35% for other food stores²³, similar to Boston or New York City, other centres of dense population, multiculturalism and wealth. Toronto has many different retail food store formats, from large convenience-type grocery stores (chain owned and independents) that are open 24 hours a day, to large warehouse-style emporiums. Mid-scale green grocers dot the Danforth and other commercial shopping areas. Department stores, drugstores, gas-bars and others are increasing their share of the food dollar²⁴. Please refer to the Appendix for food retail location decision factors and trends, including the emergence of membership warehouse clubs (big boxes).

Toronto planners take into account more than just the numbers of supermarkets per person when thinking about food retail access. It is an explicit policy goal of Toronto's Official Plan to protect and enhance vigorous commercial retail streets, that include food shopping, and are accessible by foot or transit "as a major element in Toronto's land use patterns and centres of activity for its residential neighbourhoods"²⁵. Toronto has Market areas that feature independent food stores, such as Kensington Market and Chinatown, attracting many food shoppers. Complimenting these are Italian, Greek, Indian and other ethnic specialty retail strips. In fact, there are no centrally-located chain supermarkets in a large section of West Downtown and the vigour of the markets and retail streets supply the population. East Downtown boasts the St. Lawrence Market, a well supported "festival" market featuring imported produce and specialty foods, that hosts an Ontario Farmers Market on Saturdays. Three new Ontario Farmers' Markets have opened in the 1990's, one at City Hall, one in the Junction District and an organic market on Markham Street.

One reason for the vigour of Toronto's small grocers is the availability of the central wholesale depot, the Ontario Food Terminal, governed by a Board appointed by the Ministry of Agriculture, Food & Rural Affairs. The Terminal is a vast produce wholesaler used by supermarkets for 15% of their purchases, a near exclusive source of supply to green grocers and important supplier to specialty stores. The Terminal is one of the largest North American imported produce wholesalers and has a summer Farmer's Market where Ontario produce is sold wholesale. This facility allows smaller independents to sell produce more cheaply than the supermarkets.

Another reason for our active food retail mix is that Toronto is fortunate that the dominant food retail system, and smaller food stores along with them, spreads into low-income inner-city areas. This has happened in part because Canadian public policy has helped preserve intact, mixed-income, liveable downtowns. Income supports, health insurance, employment policy and Canadian private-public mixed economy system have helped prevent abject poverty and complete ghettoization of neighbourhoods. Other public policy initiatives, such as rent controls and affordable housing initiatives have helped preserve central city retail access in urban redevelopments.

Toronto's St. Lawrence neighbourhood is an example of an important Canadian urban development model that encourages a mix of housing tenures in an area - usually one-third private, one-third co-op, and one-third non-profit. The co-ops and non-profits themselves offer a mix of low, middle and high income units, allowing a diversity of citizens to inhabit the same neighbourhood. This attracts and keeps quality commerce and services, including food retail stores to these areas. This urban development model has been under increasing strain as first the federal and now provincial

governments are reducing supports to affordable private, non-profit and co-op housing²⁶. Rent control in Ontario may be eliminated when tenants leave their units, and this could threaten the mixed-income nature of Toronto neighbourhoods.

This generally positive food retail situation sometimes masks the fact that some areas are severely underserved. We will be discussing these areas and their specific problems throughout this paper.

5.0 Toronto Neighbourhoods at Risk of Limited Food Retail Access: Case Studies of Bathurst Quay, East Downtown, Regent-Moss Park and South Parkdale

Although public policies to maintain mixed-income neighbourhoods throughout the City of Toronto have helped ensure that the dominant supermarkets locate in almost all areas, where these policies have failed, gaps can appear in the food retail system. In a 1990 City of Toronto planning survey, 18% of Central Area residents cited that supermarket service needed to be improved in their locale. An examination of certain neighbourhoods reveals problems for the nutritionally vulnerable.

5.1 Bathurst Quay

The food retail situation in Bathurst Quay, a new neighbourhood in Toronto's Harbourfront, is the worst in the city. Poor planning has produced an over-concentration of social housing here. Services are lacking in the area, including grocery stores. People have used the nearby Daily Bread Food Bank warehouse because of both need and proximity. A Harbourfront survey shows that a grocery store is the most requested new service in the area. The locality has poor transit connections, and 44% of the entire Harbourfront Community has no access to cars, suggesting that the lower-income Bathurst Quay sub-population of this area could have few automobiles. Even residents with cars want a supermarket in the neighbourhood. The neighbourhood has tried to develop their own strategy for obtaining food. The Bathurst Quay Food Committee (a local community group) operated a "food buying club", and investigated setting up a formal food co-op, but the necessary organization and financing did not develop. The area is one of the strongest users in the City of alternative food provisioning services.

Loblaws plans to build a superstore nearby at Bathurst and Lakeshore. A No-Frills store might be appropriate for the income mix of the area, but the Weston corporate decision will be based on regional access by auto, not what the adjoining community might need. Consequently, the construction of a large superstore might put food in the neighbourhood but not give the neighbours food security because it is not a response to local needs. Indeed, Weston's has found another location for a large 50,000 sq. ft. supermarket, east of Harbourfront in the East Bayfront near Queen's Quay and lower Jarvis St. This development may lead to the cancellation of the Lakeshore and Bathurst site. The problems that began with the housing development in Bathurst Quay have never been resolved and there is little indication that City planning or policy will correct the situation.

5.2 East Downtown

Seventy thousand people live in East Downtown Toronto and there are six chain supermarkets here, five owned or controlled by the Weston Group. A new discount grocery store, Food Basics, in St. Jamestown, has replaced a Dominion store, both owned by the A&P chain. East Downtown has the highest population density in the city, and while the City average household income is \$54,250, the average household income in the wards making up East Downtown is \$43,900 in Ward 6 and only \$34,166 in Ward 7. The area contains some of the highest populations of nutritionally vulnerable citizens in the city. People here depend on local food stores.

In the past five years a significant number of multi-unit housing developments have been built in East Downtown. 3,500 more people lived in the area in 1994 than in 1991²⁷. This may be an underestimate given an additional 1,635 students residing in the area, half of whom stay year-round²⁸. With approximately 13% of the total City of Toronto population, East Downtown has 10.5% of supermarkets, 3.2% of green grocers, 12.4% of convenience stores, and 5.25% of specialty stores. Approximately 9% of the entire East Downtown population depends on food banks as a primary source of food²⁹. This is not an area of especially vibrant food retail shopping streets as the green grocer percentage indicates. The area has below average number of supermarkets and an excess of convenience stores.

East Downtown recently lost millions of dollars in provincial welfare payments. Under retail location formulae, the lowering of an area's income, even while it's population is increasing, is perceived by corporate planners to negatively affect local purchasing power. Thus, food retail companies are less likely to be drawn into the area. The proposed Loblaw's store in the East Bayfront near Queen's Quay and lower Jarvis St., is not in East Downtown proper, and is oriented to automobile access, not access by transit or foot traffic from the area of greatest need, Regent-Moss Park.

5.3 Regent-Moss Park and South Parkdale Compared

A comparison of two of Toronto's poorest neighbourhoods is revealing. In the Regent-Moss Park sub-section of East Downtown, 57% of families and single persons live below the poverty line. South Parkdale, in West Toronto, an area with a similarly sized population, is also low-income, having 33% of families and 43% of single persons living below the low-income cut-off benchmark. Comparing store types in the two areas, Regent-Moss Park's mix of food stores is strongly tilted towards convenience outlets. Sixty-two percent of all food stores in the Regent-Moss Park area are of this type, compared with only 33% in South Parkdale³⁰. Regent-Moss Park appears to be under served with quality food retail, relying excessively on higher-priced convenience stores. Only 2% of all Regent-Moss Park food stores are green grocers, compared with 11% in South Parkdale.

South Parkdale has a much more diverse food retail mix, with 45% of stores being the green grocer or ethnic food store type, in contrast with only 10% of this store type near Regent-Moss Park. South Parkdale has a greater population of immigrants (56%) than Regent-Moss Park (33%) and a slightly higher average income³¹. It appears that a greater ethno-racial mix and higher income base encourages a better mix of food retail stores in South Parkdale. Regent-Moss Park is currently designed as public housing and has excluded all retail locations within its boundaries. Residents must walk west or north out of the development to reach the 27 local convenience stores. Although South Parkdale is not an area of exclusive public housing, almost all of the food stores are on Queen Street. Two supermarkets

on King Street, however, provides more choice to the centre of this neighbourhood. The Regent-Moss Park area does not have as strong "Traditional Shopping Streets" accessible to it as South Parkdale does. Expensive, scattered convenience stores are the prevailing, though not the only, food retail options in Regent-Moss Park.

6.0 Food Prices

The neighbourhood profiles of the last section allude to food access problems related to food prices. In Canada, although we still have one of the lowest average food costs in the world, we have created a food distribution system that makes food more expensive at the retail level than it need be. A high level of corporate concentration gives Canadian food distributors the power to force consumer costs up, while paying low prices to farmers³². A USA study using 1975 data found an estimated 6% increase in food prices due to corporate concentration³³. Relevant Canadian studies are lacking but our levels of corporate concentration are much higher than the U.S., so consumer prices may be higher here as a result.

Food consumed at home costs the average Canadian about 14% of his/her disposable income. However, for low-income citizens food consumed at home accounts for more than double this, about 30% of disposable income³⁴. Furthermore, there is some evidence in Canada that low-income households face average higher retail food prices in their neighbourhoods than middle class citizens do³⁵. A 1992 study in Halifax noted a 5% higher price in inner-city supermarkets as compared to suburban ones³⁶.

A June, 1995, City of Toronto food price survey of 25 supermarkets, however, found no statistically significant differences in food pricing within similar chainstore types in different sections of the city. The study compared the cost of Agriculture Canada's Nutritious Food Basket in 25 Toronto chainstores across the city³⁷. Chainstore types fell into three main groupings of premium, regular-brand, and discount stores. The prices in each store type roughly matched their competitors. Interestingly, when prices were averaged across all stores, the poorest neighbourhoods did not fare the best. Wealthy North Toronto had the most expensive food baskets, followed by the poorer downtown area. The mixed income East Toronto area had the least expensive prices³⁸.

As part of the study, average costs of food prices in supermarket and convenience food stores were compared in three smaller neighbourhoods, two lower-income and one mid-to-high income, of approximately 20,000 people. It was found that the wealthiest area, Davisville in North Toronto had the most expensive convenience stores, and the downtown Regent-Moss Park area had the second most expensive convenience store prices, in an area dominated by this high-cost food store format.

Although not as definitive as the Halifax study, the finding of the citywide study that the downtown area had the second highest food prices in all categories of store size, together with the high convenience store prices in Regent-Moss Park, suggests some problems of pricing and access in some

low-income communities and points again to the potential weakness of food retail access in East Downtown.

7.0 Warning Signs: Evaluations of Food Retail Structure in the USA and UK

Most of the evidence presented so far suggests that the City of Toronto is reasonably well served by food retail infrastructure, with some real strengths yet some glaring weaknesses. Developments in the USA and the UK, however, point to emerging major structural problems in food retail access for low-income people that may be indicative of future problems for us. Comparing the characteristics of the food retail structure of Canada with other countries can help us avoid pitfalls associated with their choices in regard to corporate power, urban policy and low-income citizen's food security.

7.1 USA

The USA has a competitive food retail system for the well-off and the suburban population. While food retail market share figures are difficult to confirm, it appears that USA supermarkets in 1990 controlled between 40% and 65% of the retail food market, a strong position, but much less dominant than Canada³⁹. In addition, U.S. food wholesalers can challenge the power of the food retail supermarkets, a situation that does not exist in Canada, where both players are generally owned by the same companies⁴⁰. Furthermore, USA anti-trust legislation has built-in measures to determine unacceptable levels of corporate concentration. Using this official index in the food retail arena, the Canadian food retail market share is 8 times more concentrated than in the USA⁴¹. Anti-trust legislation is more vigorously enforced in the USA than in Canada.

The availability of food retail outlets for the USA inner-city poor, however, is a completely different situation. Because of a lack of public policies and programs to promote multi-class, mixed-use downtown areas, urban form in many USA cities is the "hole in the donut" model, with well-off suburbs surrounding a poorly serviced inner-city core. Studies have shown that poorer sections of many U.S. cities have been completely abandoned by food retail outlets⁴². A 1995 study of 21 USA metropolitan areas compared the presence of supermarkets with the proportion of the population on public assistance in each zip code. Households with the lowest incomes had the fewest stores, 60% less than the most affluent areas. Low-income citizens often must travel to the suburbs to food shop. With notoriously poor transit connections to the suburbs, people without cars are sometimes forced to pay neighbours for rides⁴³. There is considerable evidence that low-income households in USA inner-city areas face higher food prices than do middle income earners in their neighbourhoods. The lack of food retail access in inner-city areas reduces the purchasing power of USA food assistance programs by \$1 billion per year⁴⁴.

USA inner cities have been neglected for so long by quality food retail that community development organizations are starting joint ventures with supermarket chains to open stores, sometimes in state-sponsored enterprise zones⁴⁵. A recent USA report goes further calling for the establishment of "food empowerment zones", that would be eligible for grants, tax breaks, credits and loans in partnership with the private sector, religious groups and pension fund investment⁴⁶. However, the USA is

eliminating social assistance programs "ending welfare as we know it". Reduction of payments to poor areas could put a brake on the food empowerment zone initiatives.

7.2 United Kingdom

The retail character of urban Great Britain is changing. Large British supermarket chains have increased their market share of the food dollar from 20% in 1950 to 76% in 1990. Independent stores fell from 58% market dominance to 14% during this twenty-year period. At the same time, corporate mergers have made large retailers dominant in different regions⁴⁷. Recent studies reported that: "Two-thirds of UK food sales are now in the hands of just five big companies. In some regions of the UK a single retailer enjoys what UK competition law defines as a monopoly - more than 25% of the market. At a local level some supermarket chains control over 50% of sales"⁴⁸. In the London market two retailers control 60% of the sales⁴⁹.

This commercial dominance has allowed companies to site larger, newer stores outside the central city, a change from the traditional central shopping "High Streets". This relocation is believed to reduce food retail access for inner-city citizens⁵⁰. In addition, corporate concentration has erected substantial barriers to the entry of new firms into the marketplace. Investment in information and other technologies is very expensive for new firms. It is difficult for independents to replace the chainstores leaving the British downtowns.

7.3 Summary

Canada and the UK both have weak corporate competition enforcement policy mechanisms relative to the USA. This effectively allows more corporate retail concentration and erects barriers to competition. The USA situation is extremely alarming for nutritionally vulnerable citizens. A worst-case future scenario for Toronto could result from a mix of the weaknesses we share with the UK (weak enforcement of competition law) with the massive public disinvestment and commercial abandonment of the downtowns as seen in the USA. This combination would leave Toronto's poor stranded without food retail stores, while not encouraging food retail competition in the suburbs.

8.0 Barriers to Quality Food Retail Access

8.1 Mobility

Issues of availability of automobiles, transit routes, and the existence of physical barriers are relevant to discussions of food retail access. Studies from the USA and the UK indicate that populations without cars pay more in money, time, and energy for access to quality food retail stores⁵¹. Toronto's inner city has a retail environment less auto dependant than many cities, and is more comparable to older compact eastern cities like Boston, New York, and Montreal. Nevertheless, citizens with cars have much greater choice in food retail access than citizens without cars. Metropolitan Toronto has an average of one vehicle for every 2.5 persons or 0.4 vehicles per person⁵². In downtown Toronto, there are 0.69 cars per dwelling unit in the central area (equivalent to 0.3 cars per person) or 25% less auto ownership in downtown compared to the Metro Toronto average. For the social housing sub-population in central Toronto, however, there are only 0.18 cars per person⁵³ or less than half of the Metro average.

Further data shows that wealthier citizens had much more car access than low-income citizens. In Toronto's Central Area, only 35% of renters had cars in 1991. In contrast, 75% of downtown condominium owners had cars in the same year⁵⁴. Data from housing infill studies identifies sub-

populations living in the smallest housing units as having the very lowest car ownership per unit (room 0.18, bachelorette 0.21, and bachelor 0.26). This is comparable with the low rates of car ownership by social housing occupants. Table 4 compares the number of vehicles owned per building in six different income neighbourhoods in Toronto. As might be expected, the higher income areas had the most cars.

Table 4
Neighbourhood Car Ownership Comparisons

	# Vehicles per Building	# Vehicles by Persons over 65 years of age
Annex	1.82	.25
Rosedale	2.38	1.20
Keele/Dundas W.	1.37	.50
Dufferin/St. Clair	1.55	.67
Beaches	1.82	1.00
Broadview/Danforth	1.20	.75

Source: Adapted from "Neighbours: Parking and accessory apartment intensification study". Marshall, Macklin, Monaghan, Inc. Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, Toronto, June 1987.

Certain other Toronto sub-populations have mobility problems. Recent Toronto Department of Public Health studies found that almost 60% of Toronto seniors were at risk of poor nutrition and that mobility was a contributing factor. Thirty-eight percent of Toronto seniors lived under the poverty line in 1991, and fifteen percent of seniors reported not being able to shop easily at all times⁵⁵. This scenario was also true for the number of cars per building owned by seniors, with the exception of Broadview-Danforth and the Annex. We have seen in Table 4 that seniors in poorer areas generally have less automobile access than their wealthier counterparts. Additional evidence from Toronto food focus groups point to concerns with physical access to supermarkets for seniors and disabled citizens. Moss Park has 25% of all Toronto residents on social assistance because of disability and illness. It can be difficult for the elderly to get one kilometre from Moss Park to the No Frills at Parliament and Gerrard. The Valu Mart at Shuter and Sherbourne is more accessible, but is in the most expensive supermarket category⁵⁶. The elderly and disabled citizens may consequently be "captive" markets there.

While Toronto has a good transit system, it is one of the most expensive in North America, and it is difficult to transport large amounts of food on. Provincial cutbacks to the transit system adversely affect the most nutritionally vulnerable populations. Toronto taxis are expensive for the 'stock-up' trip at the supermarket. Food delivery to home is not yet an easy or inexpensive process. The large Toronto supermarket chains have no central policy on home deliveries. These are set by the stores themselves. In East Downtown, for example, only one of eleven large and small chainstores delivers

to homes, and they had a \$7.50 minimum order charge⁵⁷. A four year old for-profit grocery home delivery service, Food for You, charges \$7.00 per delivery, but delivers free for seniors on orders over \$40.00, and \$60.00 for non-seniors.

Our studies of Toronto's food retail structure using neighbourhood comparisons of chainstore locations in lower-income East Downtown and well-off North Toronto lead us to believe that car ownership could be a significant factor in food retail access. There are degrees of being a "captive" market and it is the nutritionally vulnerable that have the fewest transportation options. Certain sub-populations of citizens that live downtown, in social housing or in the smallest rental housing units, who are single parents, seniors or disabled are the most vulnerable to having the lowest levels of car ownership. These same characteristics are found in areas with poor food retail activity. As FoodShare Metro Toronto's Executive Director, Debbie Field has stated "It's important to make the point that the people with the least access to a car live where it's hardest to get food"⁵⁸. Areas that fit the profile of having reduced access to automobiles are Bathurst Quay, South Parkdale, Regent-Moss Park and the Junction District.

8.2 Invisible Barriers to Quality Food Retail Access

We believe there is more to food access than the number of stores in an area. There are invisible barriers in food retail access, including certain psychosocial barriers. Analysts describe psychosocial factors as being determined by a 'distress inheritance', a condition of manipulative social oppression, not necessarily intentional, which has been passed down to us because of past psychological unhealed hurts preventing full thinking. Confusion, low self-esteem, and inappropriate behaviour for optimal human functioning can result. The mechanisms for healing these hurts are only now becoming better understood and are not yet easily available to citizens suffering the highest levels of oppression⁵⁹.

Low-income citizens can have a lot to cope with. Illiteracy, confusion due to stress, oppression by society, the humiliation and disempowerment of depending on a nutritionally inadequate foodbank diet, and the erosion of basic food skills are some of the challenges for low-income citizens. Still, these citizens are generally acknowledged by nutritionists to be good shoppers and budgeters⁶⁰. Immigrant Canadians often retain food shopping, storage, and preparation skills but long-term low-income families are at risk of losing a strong food culture⁶¹.

The giant food retail companies produce endless marketing studies giving psychological profiles of food store customers. They do not, however, spend market research dollar on low-income communities. Customers who earn less than \$25,000 per year are not invited to focus groups⁶². When what is produced, displayed and advertised in our culture is overwhelmingly reflective of the lifestyle of families with disposable spending of \$75,000 per year⁶³, the needs of many are ignored and devalued. Supermarket presentation and selling strategies do not present welcoming images to low-income shoppers and this can be alienating and confusing for some. Optimal nutrition and health information runs up against very confusing images of conspicuous consumption from the dominant food retail system. For example, low-income mothers may be intimidated in the supermarket by the degree of variety and choice, having little money to obtain this abundance. Shopping with children where snack food choices are limitless can be difficult. As a result, a convenience store can simplify a mothers' choices. It may not be in a lone parents' budgeting interests, but provides a way of coping⁶⁴.

The dominant food retail system is about providing the illusion of choice and making a profit. Optimal nutrition for the population is not their mission. Dominant chains appear to count on low-income confusion about food (e.g. advertising for highly processed food as healthy) to increase sales. Citizens believe that chains increase prices when welfare cheques come in and drop prices at the end of the month when money is scarce⁶⁵. Dependent on social assistance, lower-income citizens may face living in an area like East Downtown with very few banks and financial institutions in which to cash cheques⁶⁶. Credit advances and convenience in paying for food may encourage low-income citizens to cash government cheques in supermarket chainstores and convenience stores and buy there.

It is not particularly easy to consider invisible barriers to food retail faced by lower-income citizens but it is important to understand that it is not only "bricks and mortar" that provide food retail access. Alternative food distribution efforts do run up against these invisible barriers and perhaps their experience of provisioning people will build a better base of knowledge on how to make these barriers more visible. In the meantime we should realize that the dominant system is not designed in the interests of the nutritionally vulnerable.

9.0 Reform of the Food Retail System

The Food Policy Council believes that citizens have a right to eat nutritious accessible food. We need strategies and actions that will contribute to better food retail access for low-income citizens as part of an over-all food security strategy. Reform of the dominant food retail system and promotion of alternative food distribution systems can help meet the needs of nutritionally vulnerable citizens. We will discuss reform of the existing system first.

9.1 Canadian Corporate Competition Policy Reform

Is it possible to have more competition in the dominant food retail system? Is corporate concentration simply going to continue in this sector? Reconsideration of the roles and responsibilities of corporations themselves offers opportunities for aiding lower-income citizens. Recent political discussion has begun to include references to "stakeholder" (workers, suppliers, community) interests beyond those of corporate shareholders and management. This wider view of corporate responsibility harkens back to some of the original purpose of corporations. "The modern corporation bears little resemblance to its original form or purpose...originally conceived as an instrument of public good, legal modifications to the chartering and rules governing corporations have changed the corporation into a vehicle for the maximization of private profit and power⁶⁷."

A return to original corporate purpose could be legislated by senior governments. In the beginning, corporations were formed for a single purpose and had time-limited (renewable) charters. Limitations were placed on different corporate variables (size, activity, geographic scope, and levels of debt). In a reformed system, corporate directors and shareholders could be totally liable for financial, environmental, political, health and social activities. Corporations could be required to distribute all annual profits to the shareholders. Non-voting shares could be abolished and employees and other stakeholders could have designated seats on the Board. The Board function would clearly be separate from management. These changes could make firms more responsive to local concerns⁶⁸.

What about competition between corporations? Canada has a notoriously weak anti-combine, pro-competition corporate regulatory environment. "Whereas USA state and federal governments have historically used several laws to restrict certain kinds of mergers and acquisitions, Canada has only one significant legal instrument in place, The Competition Act (and the associated Competition Tribunal Act) of 1986⁶⁹". This legislation is oriented to the behaviour of the firm in the marketplace as opposed to size of market share and is consequently seen as ineffective by some critics. The USA, in contrast, has very specific measures on which to base anti-trust judicial and regulatory decisions, such as the Herfindahl-Hirschmann Index (HHI) of corporate market concentration. This stringent measure helps prevent tight oligopolies from arising in the food retail sector⁷⁰. Cross-ownership of firms that own both retail and wholesale food distribution companies is much less prevalent in the USA than in Canada. The Food Policy Council would like to see food retail corporate concentration challenged by the federal government to ensure better levels of competition.

Recommendation

1. The Federal Ministries of Attorney-General and Trade and Commerce should strengthen corporate competition policy to ensure a wider holding of ownership in the food distribution and retail system. This reform of corporate concentration requires stronger anti-combine measurements, such as the Herfindahl-Hirschmann Index (HHI). When there is too much concentration in any aspect of the food economy, an automatic federal review of the corporate market share should be undertaken.

9.2 Planning for Food Security

The Food Policy Council is pleased that Toronto's planners are concerned about food retail access and maintaining local commercial streets and market areas that bring service and vitality to the City. We heartily endorse the street retail preservation strategies contained in the Official Plan. Toronto's commercial streets help deliver food to our diverse population, adding great vitality to the City as they do so. Many jobs and much commerce are involved in supplying these green grocers and ethno-racial specialty foodstores. The City's planning priorities are to support these areas as "Traditional Shopping Streets". This support includes help with urban design to ensure attractive public amenities (e.g. street furniture, landscaping and parking) on these streets and co-ordinating partnerships with the local Business Improvement Associations to publicize the services of their respective areas. We support "the objective of Council that Traditional Shopping Streets be retained as active and economically viable shopping streets"⁷¹.

The Planning and Development Department, not wishing to see another Bathurst Quay situation develop, was actively pursuing quality food retail outlets for the proposed Ataratiri neighbourhood, until that project was cancelled. We believe, however that we must go beyond the stage of supporting retail development to that of ensuring local food security. During Toronto's CityPlan '91 process the FPC strongly suggested including quality food retail outlets as a basic planning criterion for any new neighbourhood. We also requested that if neighbourhood development proceeded without quality food retail stores, then community services planning should include making food accessible through City-controlled spaces. These suggestions were not incorporated into the Official Plan.

Unfortunately, the planning system considers that food retail planning and store location is now generally provided by "the market". Planners only intervene if it can be proved that new retail stores would kill presently located food retail stores. Planners have been wary of more intervention, due to Ontario Municipal Board (OMB) direction to not interfere in the retail market. The OMB has stated, "Cautiously, careful always to avoid becoming involved in the apportionment of market share or the regulation of commerce, this panel is assiduously conscious that these are not the objectives of the Planning Act"⁷². As a result, the Toronto Official Plan makes no mention of guaranteed food retail access to all neighbourhoods.

However, new decisions by the OMB may give planners more leeway in defending the need for quality food retail for the nutritionally vulnerable. The OMB still believes its role in food retail location disputes is to concentrate on the soundness of the planning issues and design of projects. But it will consider two categories of retail impacts. One is when commercial concentration will cause blighting of existing commercial areas, jeopardizing the properly planned function of land use and commercial structure. In the second category, the Board acknowledges the plight of citizens who do not have food retail facilities.

"For many - such as the elderly, single parents, the poor, or those in one-car families - proximity to a shopping facility is not simply a question of convenience... When a shopping facility closes, it can be distressing for many who rely on that nearby store... When battles over market share result in the large scale closure of community grocery stores within walking distance of, say, an elderly couple's apartment... then what benefit has competition been to them? Multiply this by hundreds and perhaps thousands of people affected by such closures and it becomes clear that **there is an important public interest that warrants protection**. It has therefore become an accepted practice to protect a certain level of service offered by commercial facilities and to ensure a convenient distribution of facilities throughout the existing community as well as the community that is being planned and developed"⁷³.

A reevaluation of current OMB thinking is important to ensure all citizens have access to quality food retail. An even greater challenge to planners would be *to consider food provisioning as an essential service*. Good quality, competitively priced food retail outlets (i.e, supermarkets not convenience stores) should be included in all neighbourhood area plans before any development approval is granted. In the event that no quality food retail outlets can be attracted to a new or existing community, a civic food provisioning strategy should be mandatory. A civic food provisioning would include a diverse variety of community food projects, some directly supported by the City, to allow citizens constant access to food. This action should be considered a community service and be sited in city-controlled facilities.

The wording of the community services section of the City of Toronto's Official Plan, might allow for an expanded view of what constitutes a need that community space could meet. The Official Plan states, under section 7.1, that "*It is the policy of Council to encourage the timely provision of an appropriate range of community services and facilities in the City, particularly during the planning approval of development, to meet the needs of present and future residents and workers on a local area basis*. Continuing in section 7.2... *It is the policy of Council that a Community Services and Facilities*

Strategic Plan will be developed with the participation of local residents and service agencies, for geographic neighbourhoods of the City such as those areas undergoing Part II Plans". These strategic plans will consider, but not be limited to, needs assessments, community service standards, appropriate delivery models, preferred locations, City resources, governance, and the area of need.

We propose that if a needs assessment determines that the community lacks quality food retail, there is no reason that food provisioning should not be considered in a strategic plan for community services and facilities. A way to implement these plans might be to establish programs making food provisioning a public or quasi-public service in areas of greatest need.

Recommendation

2. The policy goal of Toronto's Official Plan to protect and enhance commercial retail strips should continue to be strongly supported. Public investment decisions in providing public facilities should continue to be made with a preference for supporting Traditional Shopping Streets.
3. The Ontario Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing should amend the Planning Act, and related Acts, to consider quality food retail as an absolute essential service in every neighbourhood. The Comprehensive Provincial Policy Statement should state that food stores or mandated alternative food provisioning programs be required for all areas. This means that if there is no food retail spaces planned in a neighbourhood, or no hope of attracting quality food retail outlets to a neighbourhood, community spaces could be allocated for food provisioning purposes. The Ontario Municipal Board should make decisions according to these policy goals.

9.3 Planning Initiatives in Food Provisioning

In the late 1980's, Toronto community activists and politicians discussed a possible role for the City in distributing food in a store-based CityFood program, but the proposal never reached the feasibility stage. Perhaps it is time to reconsider innovative civic partnership initiatives for food provisioning. Toronto planners conduct economic development operations in Business Improvement Areas (B.I.A's) and lessons from successes of other retail areas might be applied to promote more competition in food retail outlets in areas such as East Downtown. Perhaps an intermediate model of food retail stores, somewhere between the large supermarket and the small greengrocer, comparable to the mid-size markets on the Danforth, would be a goal. Feasibility planning would need to be undertaken for each proposed idea to evaluate their viability. There are, however, examples of innovative civic partnership initiatives for comparison:

- ! After the energy crisis in 1973, oil dependent Boston, Mass. found it difficult to get affordable heat to low-income residents. An innovative private company, with wide public partnerships, called Citizen's Energy Inc., bought bulk oil and insulated the residences of low-income citizens.

- ! Sao Paulo, Brazil faces great difficulty feeding its low-income citizens. As a creative measure to aid both urban low-income dwellers and the farm sector, "Big Bag Stores" were set-up by the municipality and private entrepreneurs acting collaboratively to market produce in bulk in the poorest areas of the city. Farmers sell their excess production to the stores, and in turn customers fill their bags by the kilo for very low prices. The stores have been a great success.
- ! Izmir, Turkey faced a situation somewhat parallel to Toronto in the sense that their major food store chains dominated the food market. In order to encourage competition, the civic government created their own "Staple Stores" to market bulk basics, such as olives and oil, spice, grains, bread, rice and pasta. This was successful in bringing down the prices for the staples in the dominant chain stores.

If our present policies encouraging viable commercial streets throughout the City do not work well everywhere for the reasons we have discussed in this paper, and if we are serious about considering food retail access as an essential service, then we will have to creatively design food provisioning projects to ensure food security.

Recommendation

4. The City of Toronto Department of Planning and Development should assess options to increase food access of the lowest-income Torontonians in the areas most at risk of poor food retail service. Models from other cities, including "Bulk", "Big Bag", "Staples Stores", should be considered. Business plans for these models should be undertaken. Options for operation by the City, by management agreement with a non-governmental organization, or any other partnership models should be considered.

10.0 Development of Alternative Food Distribution Systems

The Food Policy Council believes that another strategic direction to enhance food security, alongside the reform of the existing system discussed above, is the promotion of alternative food distribution systems that can help meet the needs of nutritionally vulnerable citizens.

10.1 Existing Community-Based Alternative Food Distribution Programs

In addition to the charitable foodbanks and soup kitchens, there are alternatives to the dominant food retail system in Toronto. Food action projects, as they are often called, include bulk buying clubs, community food markets, community kitchens, school and breakfast clubs, congregate dining and community gardens. These community development projects depend to some degree on the substitution of participant's time and energy for money. Community organizations in Toronto have long supported food access projects, but in the past few years activity has risen dramatically. Many of these projects have deep roots (buying clubs, community gardens). Other are more recent developments (community markets, collective kitchens, micro-markets). These projects are often

successful, but there are not enough of them to address the need. They often lack adequate resources and the right kinds of partnerships to be widespread.

Municipal government has supported many of these projects in the past through grant programs, staff time, and in-kind contributions of space and services. This support has tended to be provided on a case by case basis. Building on this experience, the City of Toronto recently created a Food Access Program which has funded hardware purchases (refrigerators, stoves, kitchen renovations) for 77 large and small food action projects in schools, faith centres and social agencies.

Many of these grants were for community kitchens upgrades. A community kitchen allows groups of people to purchase food in bulk, use large pots to prepare it and preserve it in meal-sized containers, saving money for all. Other grants have some entrepreneurial aspects. A commercial kitchen incubator was financed. Small-scale food processed products can be made, tested, and distributed from this site. They can perhaps be marketed at new micro-markets springing up in South Riverdale, Regent Park and elsewhere. In these micro-markets, situated in church auditoriums or in health centre parking lots, food is sold along with other local products.

The Food Access Program strengthens the City's partnerships with communities to create a network of food access initiatives. The linkages between the alternative programs hold out the promise of new synergies of effort. For example, St. Michael's Hospital is allowing a bulk-buying club and a teen snack bar from Central Neighbourhood House to purchase food at the hospital's rates. Distribution of food products from community economic development initiatives is being incorporated into alternative delivery systems such as the Local Exchange Trading System (LETS), a barter network with a large low-income membership. An alternative food provisioning network exists because the dominant food system does not meet everyone's needs. The success of these alternative projects can be precarious and great creativity is needed to keep them operating. The Food Policy Council would like to see more Ontario foods processed and sold in Toronto. For a discussion on our ideas on innovative food processing partnerships, please see our publication *Toronto Food Fair: Developing the Stockyards Industrial District*.

In the next section we highlight the most independent and effective community based program in Toronto, an example of the synergy that private-government-community-farm partnerships can create.

10.2 Field to Table

An alternative to the dominant food retail system is Field to Table, a not-for-profit business conceived by the Food Policy Council in 1992. It presently operates as a City project under contract with FoodShare Metro Toronto, a non-profit anti-hunger organization. The project delivers fresh fruits, vegetables and some other foodstuffs to various food action projects and supplies weekly markets set up in the lobbies of social housing complexes. They also deliver a twice monthly Good Food Box to low-income customers who pay \$10-20 in advance for boxes of basic fresh fruits and vegetables delivered at the end of the month.

To fill the boxes with low-cost, local food, bulk purchases are made from wholesalers and direct from Ontario farmers and are packed for delivery by volunteers at the Field to Table warehouse. The Good Food Boxes reach out to different markets with special boxes called, Caribbean, Organic and Seniors\Singles. Delivery goes to sites with at least 10 customers, often at churches and community centres. Two thousand, five hundred Good Food Boxes are sold per month, reaching over 7000 people, and the program is being replicated in other areas of Ontario. Recent additional grants by the City of Toronto should help this program double in 2 years. A “Basic Box” with dry foods will be marketed in early 1997.

Field to Table was set-up to empower low-income citizens. The fact that people pay for Field to Table produce means they are customers. Although the program began with grants from government and charitable donations, Field to Table's business plan envisions the distribution service becoming more self-supporting. They have already changed their product and delivery mix to meet the needs of their low-income customer base. They continue to seek out overlooked markets such as seniors who have difficulty transporting food home. Never-the-less, marketing to the lowest income citizens means that FoodShare's charitable donations will have to assist Field to Table for some time to come.

Field to Table customers visit foodbanks less⁷⁴. Some 11% of the Daily Bread Food Bank clients use the Good Food Box and Field to Table estimates that this could potentially rise to 30%. Indications from Field to Table surveys are that 80% of customers with fair to poor perceived health and having incomes under \$15,000, have difficulty obtaining healthy food due to lack of income, transportation or proximity to foodstores⁷⁵. The program's focus groups also show that customers are not used to obtaining fresh produce at the end of the month, instead purchasing small amounts in convenience stores. The program is helping them improve their diets⁷⁶.

The Good Food Box seems to have provoked some imitators. Green grocers in the Portuguese community have begun to offer monthly food boxes at a good price⁷⁷. The program is a window into the lives and food needs of those low-income citizens poorly served by the dominant system. Hopefully, these insights will lead to further food security strategies that meet real needs. In this sense the program is an action-research effort for exploring creative partnership solutions to hunger.

Recommendation

5. The Province of Ontario, Metro Toronto, the City of Toronto, FoodShare and all other partners should continue their support of alternative food access programs. These programs develop community capacity to deliver food to citizens who need it in ways that they can use it, for low cost. The Field to Table program is an outstanding example of this model. All of its partners, which include community, government, business and labour allies, should continue their strong support of the program.

10.3 Local Business-Government-Community Partnerships

Toronto has reason to celebrate the fact that it has a thriving food retail sector and an intact downtown

core. In contrast, many USA cities are having to expend much effort to attract food retail back to the urban core, with precarious success. We do not have to end up on this path if we prevent our vital and efficient downtown from deteriorating. Strategic decisions made now can help maintain a thriving food retail economy in Toronto, a good situation for citizens and companies alike. The Toronto Food Policy Council would like to see a partnership established between urban citizens and the food retail sector to improve our food security. As a beginning, the food retail sector could voice their support for public policies that maintain a mixed-income central city. This means advocating to government that a liveable city is important for everyone. Along with continued public and private investment in the core, this protects the companies future customer base. Hollowing out downtown Toronto's retail sector is a losing proposition for everyone. Having just been nominated by Fortune magazine as the best international city for work and family, why would we wish to dismantle our success?

There can be increased business costs for food retail operations in the central city⁷⁸. The cost of urban land, particularly in the downtown core, is an important dimension of this equation. We believe that municipal and senior governments should examine taxation strategies that might lower urban land costs for specific activities such as provision of food retail to disadvantaged areas. In return, chain stores could undertake to guarantee their presence in an area for a specified period of time. In the USA "food empowerment zones" involving partnerships between food businesses, community enterprise, planners and political structures, have designed special policies for food retail stores to locate in specific areas. Toronto should investigate these programs to see if any policies might be lessons in helping quality food retail stay or re-locate in our at-risk areas. We should also consider if the success of some of Toronto's "Traditional Shopping Streets" has caused the unintentional displacement of local food retail stores. If this has occurred, the partnership should investigate policies and actions that could keep a diverse food retail mix on commercial retail strips that already serve their local neighbourhoods.

Recommendation

6. Facilitated by the Mayor's Office, the City of Toronto and the food retail sector should initiate a strategic partnership to promote food access for all. The partnership could include the Chamber of Commerce, FoodShare, Canadian Council of Grocery Distributors, the Canadian Federation of Independent Grocers, the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food & Rural Affairs, the Business Development unit of the City of Toronto Urban Development Services cluster, Business Improvement Associations, and ethno-racial business associations. The partnership would:
 - 1) Advocate to senior governments public policies that maintain Toronto's mixed income neighbourhoods and traditional shopping streets.
 - 2) Dialogue to consider other ways and means that quality food retail might be retained and attracted to the central core, including issues of land assembly, store size, customer access, zoning and regulatory approval and innovative private public food retailing partnerships, concentrating on areas of highest need.

11.0 Conclusion

It appears that qualified *Access to quality grocery stores, food service operations, or alternate food sources* exists in Toronto. The city's vigorous commercial shopping streets and market areas, along with community development food access projects, intertwine with the substantial presence of the dominant supermarket system. However, there are rips in the food retail fabric that could lead to a weakening of food security in important areas of the City, especially in the East Downtown. There are citizens in Toronto who are nutritionally vulnerable, especially single parent families, seniors and young singles living downtown in small and/or social housing units. Their numbers are increasing. They have the least income and mobility. These people are dependent on local food retail outlets. It follows that maintaining quality food retail in central Toronto is very important to the health and well-being of our most "at-risk" citizens.

We must pay attention to the high levels of corporate concentration in food retail in Canada and be vigilant about their power in Toronto. The City of Toronto is in danger of facing a tighter food retail oligopoly if more concentration is allowed. Warning signs of food retail access problems are apparent in countries comparable to Canada. Examples, in the UK, of corporate chainstore relocation out of inner cities is a cause for concern, for we are similarly dependent on a highly centralized corporate controlled food retail structure. If trends in Toronto's economic disparity continue, the powerful Canadian food retailers might decide to leave central-city locations, which they could do very quickly. It is not guaranteed that their locations would be easily replaced with independent grocery stores. There is clear evidence in the urban core areas of many USA cities that without public policies supporting a multi-class central city, retail food stores will not locate to serve low-income citizens. The Food Policy Council does not wish Toronto's central city food retail environment to be weakened. We are calling attention to these distant warning signs now so that we are not caught unawares by events that could suddenly reduce our food retail access. We have proposed a civic partnership to develop a strategy to defend Toronto's diverse and dynamic downtown food retail access. As a first step we should increase our monitoring of the availability of food retail access to the nutritionally vulnerable.

Another important step would see urban planning legislation and policy enacted that considers a local food store an essential service. Food security for all citizens means that there must be the availability of retail food outlets or alternative food provisioning programs in all neighbourhoods. There is no one way to attract vigorous food retail competition into areas at risk, but analysis of the problem by planners with community input could form part of a strategy to increase competition and food retail access. Ideally partnerships with community and small business food initiatives could result. More importance should be given to planning for food retail access, especially for nutritionally vulnerable citizens. We must be bold in designing and building and alternative food distribution initiatives as part of food security planning.

List of Recommendations

1. The Federal Ministries of Attorney-General and Trade and Commerce should strengthen corporate competition policy to ensure a wider holding of ownership in the food distribution and retail system. This reform of corporate concentration requires stronger anti-combine measurements, such as the Herfindahl-Hirschmann Index (HHI). When there is too much concentration in any aspect of the food economy, an automatic federal review of the corporate market share should be undertaken.
2. The policy goal of Toronto's Official Plan to protect and enhance commercial retail strips should continue to be strongly supported. Public investment decisions in providing public facilities should continue to be made with a preference for supporting Traditional Shopping Streets.
3. The Ontario Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing should amend the Planning Act, and related Acts, to consider quality food retail as an absolute essential service in every neighbourhood. The Comprehensive Provincial Policy Statement should state that food stores or mandated alternative food provisioning programs be required for all areas. This means that if there is no food retail spaces planned in a neighbourhood, or no hope of attracting quality food retail outlets to a neighbourhood, community spaces could be allocated for food provisioning purposes. The Ontario Municipal Board should make decisions according to these policy goals.
4. The City of Toronto Department of Planning and Development should assess options to increase food access of the lowest-income Torontonians in the areas most at risk of poor food retail service. Models from other cities, including "Bulk", "Big Bag", "Staples Stores", should be considered. Business plans for these models should be undertaken. Options for operation by the City, by management agreement with a non-governmental organization, or any other partnership models should be considered.
5. The Province of Ontario, Metro Toronto, the City of Toronto, FoodShare and all other partners should continue their support of alternative food access programs. These programs develop community capacity to deliver food to citizens who need it in ways that they can use it, for low cost. The Field to Table program is an outstanding example of this model. All of its partners, which include community, government, business and labour allies, should continue their strong support of the program.
6. Facilitated by the Mayor's Office, the City of Toronto and the food retail sector should initiate a strategic partnership to promote food access for all. The partnership could include the Chamber of Commerce, FoodShare, Canadian Council of Grocery Distributors, the Canadian Federation of Independent Grocers, the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food & Rural Affairs, the Business Development unit of the City of Toronto Urban Development Services cluster, Business Improvement Associations, and ethno-racial business associations. The partnership would:
 - 1) Advocate to senior governments public policies that maintain Toronto's mixed income neighbourhoods and traditional shopping streets.
 - 2) Dialogue to consider other ways and means that quality food retail might be retained and attracted to the central core, including issues of land assembly, store size, customer access, zoning and regulatory approval and innovative private public food retailing partnerships,

Appendix: Basic Food Retail Planning and Site Location Assumptions

In planning where to site stores, retailers traditionally use a theory of land value which assumes that "bidders will pay the most for the site most accessible for the customer."⁷⁹ Accessibility was historically influenced by patterns of pedestrian traffic and major transit stops. Today, car access and parking plays a large role in the amount of bidding on different retail locations. It is the income levels, and numbers of high income families that plays the major role in corporate decisions about where to locate stores, because high income is given the greatest consideration in the complex location decision models used by retail planners⁸⁰. In addition there is usually a correlation between higher levels of wealth and automobile ownership⁸¹. Food retailers assume there are two basic types of food buying trips and design their systems accordingly: 1) Stock-up trips, generally supermarket trips, generally planned by stores for customers with cars; and 2) Speciality store\Convenience store trips, which are often local trips and can be by foot or transit⁸². The Canadian food retail industry recognizes a galaxy of retail formats with stores from small to large size with various price structures and numbers of product choice. The traditional supermarket was around 20,000 sq. ft. until the 1970's⁸³. The present trend is to build larger stores, of around 50,000 sq. ft. size as the industry standard preference for new store locations. This can be a rigid standard for the inner-city to meet.

A conventional retail planning ratio for supermarkets is one per 11,000 people⁸⁴. Chains count on 30% of sales coming from within a 1 mile radius, and a secondary catchment area with a two 2 miles radius to capture a further 60% of sales. Supermarkets, even those larger than 50,000 sq. ft., are assumed to rarely draw customers from a distance greater than 2 miles⁸⁵. The food retail universe is being affected by the advent of Membership Warehouse Clubs (MWCs), also called "big boxes". These are stores larger than 100,000 sq. ft. with food items making up to 27% of their sales⁸⁶. Studies from Vancouver, San Francisco, and Montreal suggest that there is room for one MWC per 250-350,000 people⁸⁷. The U.S. Food Institute claims that grocery stores and supermarkets have lost 6% of market share to MWCs in the past decade and that this could rise to 12-20% in the next one. The Canadian Council of Grocery Distributors (CCGD) is anticipating the entry of larger super stores that will carry more of their own brands. The CCGD believes that higher income citizens who can put the money up front, transport and store the goods, make more use of MWCs' than low-income citizens do⁸⁸. The Toronto Planning and Development Department has studied the potential impacts of MWCs on the City's retail structure⁸⁹. They conclude that the density of sales of MWC tapers off outside of a 4 mile radius and picks up again outside a 10 mile radius with a total of 37% of customers travelling farther than 10 miles. Big box retail located in the suburbs could draw 2-3% of the food business from a typical Toronto city neighbourhood. This contrasts with an MWC perhaps capturing 12-13% of food dollars from a near-by suburban store.

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