

Local Food Infrastructure

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What we mean by this priority and why the Roundtable thinks it's a priority for moving towards a healthy food system.

[from www.wrfoodsystem.ca/localfoodinfrastructure]

Local Food Infrastructure

Increase local processing, distribution, and retailing opportunities for small and medium-sized businesses

The majority of our food comes through a globalized distribution network which is efficient and cheap, but which negatively affects farmer incomes, the environment, local communities, and our health. A more localized or regionalized food system would reduce the concentration of ownership in the food chain and provide more opportunities for small and medium-sized food businesses.

Farm-Institution Programs

Encourage public institutions to buy local and sustainable food

Public institutions like municipalities, universities, colleges, schools, and hospitals should establish policies that require a minimum percentage of their foods to be local and sustainable. This would build up a predictable base of demand that local producers and distributors could meet and would help rebuild a local food infrastructure.

- Examining how food is purchased and where it comes from is a new issue for many institutions. While many of them are supportive of supporting healthy food systems, there are many hurdles: one major issue is food safety (where institutions have policies that require food from HACCP and Federally inspected facilities); food service companies occupy food services in many public/private institutions; and Broader Public Sector procurement legislation makes it difficult for small/medium sized businesses to obtain food contracts.
- For the facilities we work with, distribution is a major barrier because facilities do not want any more deliveries than they currently receive. Currently, this means food must be distributed by the major players (ie: Sysco, GFS, Summiit).
- It is also very true that institutions can and should act as anchors for the demand of local sustainable foods. In the Ontario health care sector alone, there are over 115,000,000 meals served every year! That translates into approximately annual volumes of 268,000,000 fruits/veg; 200,000,000 cups of cereal; 29,000,000 litres of milk; and 38,000,000 8oz steaks, or 230,000,000 eggs!
 - With those volumes, even small changes can have profound impacts.

A run-down of what work has been done in this priority area in Waterloo Region (and possibly beyond), and who is doing that work now:

- We are helping 27 hospitals in Ontario increase their procurement of local foods by 5-10% over baseline values. Some of these facilities are in the Waterloo region (ie: St. Mary's Hospital, Grand River Hospital, Cambridge) and the remainder are in

Southern Ontario. Our focus is on 5 categories where fresh food is purchased: cheese, eggs, dairy, meat, and produce.

- We also hosted a workshop on April 20th at the Royal Botanical Gardens for stakeholders throughout the food value chain to discuss the opportunities and challenges in increasing the provision and procurement of local food in the public sector. The event was attended by 60 people from various sectors, such as: institutional end users (hospitals), food producers/manufacturers (Maple Leaf Foods, Rowe Farms, etc...), Industry associations (DFO, Pork Council Ontario, Tender Fruit, etc...), Distributors (GFS, Sysco, Summit), and special interest groups (Dr. Koc, Ryerson University; Sustain Ontario, ec...).
- Gordon Food Services has set a precedent as the first major food distributor in Ontario to have local food listings (over 1000 Ontario items available).
- Various other public institutions have local food procurement policies:
 - City of Markham and University of Toronto have worked with Local Food Plus to procure 10% local and sustainable food. Both groups are now at 25% local and sustainable procurement
 - City of Toronto is aiming for 50% procurement of local food in its municipal facilities, including day cares, schools, and 2 long term care homes.
 - Grey Bruce County conducted a study to determine how much it would cost to buy beef from local Grey Bruce abattoir. Determined for its 2 long term care homes that it would cost \$2000 per year. They provided each home a one time subsidy to buy local beef from the Grey Bruce abattoir.
 - Niagara and Halton regions are also examining the possibility of having local/sustainable policies for all their municipal facilities.

My assessment of what still needs to happen in this area: what are the gaps, where could new people help out, etc.

- Many people get hung up on definitions: what is local? What is sustainable? For the former, Foodland Ontario has provided some definition, but they are broad and only a starting point.
- Availability of local and sustainable foods beyond produce is an issue. Marketing boards complicate things, but we need to have local options across the board. However, baby steps are important and buying local and sustainable produce is a great first step.
- Issue with produce is seasonality. In this respect, non-seasonal local foods such as meats, dairy and cheese should be available.
- Access to local foods is increasing for institutions, with distributors like 100 mile market, Don's Produce, and even GFS offering these foods.
 - However, for the consumer I think access is more limited. Would produce consolidators like the Elmira produce auction be a model to follow? If grocers carried a higher % of local options I think it would be of benefit to consumers.