



STAFF REPORT INFORMATION ONLY

Toronto Food Strategy: 2011 Update

Date:	April 19, 2011
To:	Board of Health
From:	Medical Officer of Health
Wards:	All
Reference Number:	

SUMMARY

This report provides an update on the Toronto Food Strategy and an overview of some of the key initiatives emerging from the work. Since the release of the June 2010 "Cultivating Food Connections" report, staff have been leading, facilitating and supporting the implementation of numerous food initiatives. The report's six priority areas and proposed actions have served as important guidance for priority setting. Much of the effort has focused on mapping access to healthy food across Toronto and a community food skills and employability pilot. The Food Strategy will continue to pursue activities based on the vision laid out in the "Cultivating Food Connections" report, but also those inspired and informed by ongoing engagement with residents, community organizations and City staff.

The governance of the Food Strategy is through the Board of Health (BOH). Alongside it, the Toronto Food Policy Council is well placed to serve as the Strategy's Community Reference Group, acting as a hub for community input into the overall evolution and implementation of the strategy. A Board of Health working group could provide support and advice during the year. The Medical Officer of Health will report back to the Board annually on the progress of the Food Strategy.

Financial Impact

There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.

DECISION HISTORY

At its meeting of June 16, 2008, the Board of Health approved a recommendation from the Medical Officer of Health to spearhead a Toronto Food Strategy. At its meeting of February 16, 2010, the Board of Health approved a report from the Medical Officer of Health as a basis for broad community stakeholder consultation and engagement on the Food Strategy. On June 1, 2010, the Board received an update, including the results of consultation and engagement and endorsed the actions proposed in the “Cultivating Food Connections: Toward a Healthy and Sustainable Food System for Toronto” report.

In August 2010, the City Manager distributed a letter to all City of Toronto Divisions, Agencies, Boards and Commissions requesting that all identify and implement initiatives that support a healthy and sustainable food system, including, but not limited to, the activities identified in the Cultivating Food Connections report. The report outlined six priority areas for action:

- Support food friendly neighbourhoods;
- Make food a centerpiece of Toronto’s new green economy;
- Eliminate hunger in Toronto;
- Connect city and countryside through food;
- Empower residents with food skills and information, and
- Urge federal and provincial governments to establish health-focused food policies.

ISSUE BACKGROUND

The goal of the Toronto Food Strategy is to promote and implement a new vision that connects food, health and city building. Food issues continue to be strongly connected to the City’s social, economic, health and environmental objectives. The need for improvements to the food system is clear. The Toronto area, along with the rest of the industrialized world, faces numerous problems related to food, including hunger, obesity, chronic disease, disappearing farmland and environmental pollution.

At the global level, rising oil prices and droughts have caused food prices to reach record levels, according to the Food and Agriculture Organization. Toronto's Nutritious Food Basket Survey found only a small increase in the city's food prices earlier in 2010 but the impact of rising commodity prices is now beginning to hit developed countries such as Canada. While food prices in Canada have historically been relatively low, the lagging job recovery from the recession and ever rising GTA housing costs led to a 15 percent increase in food bank use in 2010. According to the Daily Bread Food Bank, GTA food banks in 2010 experienced the largest increase in client visits since social assistance rates were cut by 21.6 per cent in 1995 (Daily Bread Food Bank, 2010).

In the last year there has been some good news for Ontario farmers. In its 2011 budget, the Provincial Government announced an expanded Business Risk Management Program for Ontario farmers to help offset the losses caused by market volatility and rising input

costs across more farm products. The Ontario Federation of Agriculture applauded the government for the announcement but called on the Federal Government to contribute as well. A scan of food-related media stories over the last year shows that consumer interest in reconnecting with their food continues to build momentum. Many observers see this now as much more than a trend. It appears to be a cultural shift toward people becoming more engaged with food issues, becoming more informed consumers, and stronger advocates for food system renewal.

Toronto Public Health's broad and inclusive consultation and engagement process in 2010 highlighted many priority food issues for Torontonians. In particular, residents told us they were concerned about:

- Access to affordable healthy food;
- Needs of newcomers;
- Concern about the lack of basic food skills among children;
- Supporting communities in implementing their own food solutions, and
- Need for clearer information on City policies related to food.

Cities do not have all of the necessary powers or resources to remake a health-focused food system. However, cities have more influence over how food systems operate than many suppose. In particular, Toronto serves food in shelters, seniors' homes, recreation centres and childcare centres, carries out food safety inspections, promotes healthy eating, offers breastfeeding support, funds school nutrition programs, provides business licenses for food sales, supports community gardens and provides allotment garden spaces, supports incubators to foster food entrepreneurs, applies zoning rules, and coordinates and promotes food festivals and events.

The City could have even more influence if it started to identify, name and intentionally leverage what local government already does in order to support a healthy and sustainable food system. This could include initiatives such as the removal of barriers to entrepreneurs wanting to sell fresh produce from trucks, more enabling policies on fresh food (community) markets, and easier access to City facilities and land for community food programming and events.

COMMENTS

Since the release of the June 2010 "Cultivating Food Connections" report, staff have been leading, facilitating and supporting the implementation of numerous food initiatives that reflect the strategy's six priority areas for action.

- Support food friendly neighbourhoods
- Make food a centerpiece of Toronto's new green economy
- Eliminate hunger in Toronto
- Connect city and countryside through food
- Empower residents with food skills and information
- Urge federal and provincial governments to establish health-focused food policies

Although the six areas have served as important guidance for priority setting, the Food Strategy implementation must constantly evolve in order to respond to new and emerging opportunities and connections. Over the last year, the work of staff has been guided by a number of key principles and objectives, such as:

- Leveraging existing resources, building on successes;
- Focusing efforts on activities that can have the biggest impact in the short-term and build toward long-term food system change;
- Promoting new partnerships among City divisions and between municipal government and community as well as strengthening existing ones;
- Helping to build community capacity around food;
- Listening and wherever possible responding to residents about food solutions they want implemented;
- Promoting the value of the City of Toronto focusing on food in an intentional and strategic way; and,
- Focusing on those initiatives that have the potential to grow, facilitate new partnerships and bring in new resources within existing municipal approved budgets.

Over the last year much of the effort has focused on two initiatives that meet the above criteria – food access mapping and the community food skills and employability pilots. These two projects are summarized below, followed by an overview of other significant Food Strategy activities, organized around the "Cultivating Food Connections" six priority areas for action.

Food Access Mapping

Staff have been coordinating a project to map access to healthy food across Toronto. Partners have included City Planning, Social Development, Finance & Administration, TPH Dietitians and Health Inspectors, the Centre for Research on Inner City Health, the Martin Prosperity Institute and the **Into**health Partnership (a coalition of 80 partners, funded through the Ministry of Health Promotion and Sport's Healthy Communities Fund). The objectives are to build a better understanding of barriers and opportunities related to healthy food access, to uncover specific City of Toronto levers that can enable solutions, and to use this information to inform ongoing discussions and strategies for action with staff from appropriate city divisions including Planning, Transportation Services, Municipal Licensing and Standards. The maps will also be useful for communities and food researchers. The areas of focus are:

- citywide mapping of geographic access to supermarkets overlaid by income;
- surveys of healthy food availability and quality in food retail outlets in selected neighbourhoods; and,
- facilitated community food mapping sessions.

Using TPH's Toronto Healthy Environment Inspection System (THEIS) database and with the assistance of the **Into**health Partnership research team, the project has produced a number of food retail maps. Attachment One to this report is an example of food retail mapping which highlights areas of high poverty that are also 1500m or more (walking or

driving distance, not as the crow flies) from a medium or large supermarket. Other maps currently in process focus on:

- an analysis of supermarket openings and closings citywide 2001-2011,
- access to smaller food stores that sell healthy food options, and
- outlining possible areas of the city according to demand for locally-grown world/ethnocultural foods.

The citywide maps highlight areas for further exploration. However, they often don't differentiate the needs of different residents (e.g. those with a car have easier access to stores compared to car-less seniors with physical limitations, or single mothers with young children, etc.). To dig deeper, TPH accessed provincial funding from the Intohealth Partnership to pilot a process enabling residents from three neighbourhoods (Rexdale, Thorncliffe/Flemingdon Park and Scarborough Village/ Cliffcrest) to survey food quality and availability in all small and large food outlets. The neighbourhood survey project was a collaboration among staff working on Food Strategy, TPH Dietitians and Nurses, the Intohealth Partnership, FoodShare, the Thorncliffe Neighbourhood Office and the Scarborough Centre for Healthy Communities. The surveys found that the demand for ethnocultural foods exceeds the supply in many areas. Further analyses of the results are underway and staff will be presenting the findings to community partners later this spring.

In addition to collecting citywide and neighbourhood-level data, the project also coordinated community food mapping sessions. Residents were led through a process to create their own personal food maps. This process helped spur discussion about food issues, uncovered residents' views on how the neighbourhood food environment does or does not meet their needs, and facilitated identification of specific food solutions that communities want. The mapping sessions pointed to several ideas for change, such as removing barriers to enable truck-based produce vending, locating more food markets at/near apartment towers, improved access to City facilities for food projects (e.g. recreation/community centre kitchens, other community space to meet, turning unused land into community gardens), and flexibility with TTC transfers to allow time for food shopping at route intersections to enable people to shop on their way home without having to pay additional fares.

The next step in the project is for staff to report back to residents on all aspects of the food mapping and actions being taken, and further collaboration between residents and City staff to improve access to safe, healthy and culturally appropriate foods. These maps will be made available publicly as a useful tool in planning and decision making for communities, City staff, funders and others. Preliminary findings have also been shared with colleagues in other jurisdictions. Several have expressed interest in ongoing collaborations on food mapping, including food policy analysts from the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), from South Africa and France.

Community Food Skills and Employability Pilot

This pilot is a collaboration between TPH and Toronto Employment and Social Services (TESS) to reduce barriers to food handler training and certification, while integrating food skills and employment supports for those who need it. Social Development, Finance and Administration and Economic Development and Culture are also very much involved. Community partners have brought resources and expertise to the table. TPH's Food Handler Training program requires every owner/operator of an eating or drinking establishment to have at least one certified food handler working in a supervisory capacity at all times. TPH offers training and examination as part of the program on a cost recovery basis. This means that TPH is required to charge for training and certification.

Many residents have expressed great interest in obtaining certification. Staff have also heard of significant demand for the program, particularly in lower income communities. Anecdotal evidence suggests that residents who are looking for work, or who hope to launch a food enterprise, have a much better chance of success if they obtain Food Handler Certification. The majority of participants in the recent pilot programs identified the fees as a barrier (\$79.10 for course and examination, \$33.90 for examination only).

TPH recently received 100% provincial funding (until March 31st 2011) that enabled a Public Health Inspector to deliver food handler training in 12 sites. The training occurred in community settings across the city, rather than a centralized location. TPH Dietitians worked with the Inspector to integrate food skills, such as the ability to prepare healthy meals. Toronto Employment and Social Services will begin to integrate employment skills into five additional pilots as of April 2011. Participants are eligible for the program if they have low incomes or are in receipt of Ontario Works, have an interest in careers in the food services/hospitality industry or related fields, and/or the program will assist them with employment activities.

The project is being evaluated in a variety of ways. Program staff will track outcomes to determine the number of participants who benefit from the program by:

- passing the Food Handler Certification examination;
- finding employment after the training;
- developing a stronger connection to community food programs, as demonstrated by the number of participants who report participating in community food programs such as community cooking programs, community gardens, food-related social enterprise, and others; and,
- improving their food skills, such as learning ways to cook healthier meals.

As of March 31, 2011, the program was offered in 12 sites, to 16 groups with a total of 228 participants. Preliminary evaluation of the initial phase indicates that participants found that the expanded program and a more adult-oriented educational approach made it easier to learn and retain information. Participants said that they would use the training in their community food programs, as support in looking for food sector employment, as

well as use the food safety advice at home. The majority of respondents also indicated that the fee for Food Handler Training would have been a barrier to participation.

Other Toronto Food Strategy Activities

Supporting Food Friendly Neighbourhoods

Many Torontonians told us that they want their neighbourhoods to become living models of a food-friendly city. People understand that food and strong neighbourhoods belong together. Safe and friendly neighbourhoods offer healthy and vibrant food scenes, and lively food environments bring neighbours together.

There is widespread recognition that the built environment directly and indirectly influences population health. The Food Strategy is supporting TPH's work on built environment initiatives funded by CLASP (Coalitions Linking Action and Science for Prevention). TPH is coordinating the development of a software tool which will identify project health outcomes related to changes in neighbourhood developments. Staff also helped integrate food scenarios into a residential preferences survey which will gauge public demand for various neighbourhoods including more walkable versus more vehicle oriented ones, while contrasting the results with the current supply.

Food and the Green Economy

The "Cultivating Food Connections" report cited the Martin Prosperity Institute's suggestion that Ontario's food sector could one day rival the once dominant auto industry as a pillar of economic strength and a generator of employment opportunities in the manufacturing, service and creative sectors. In fact, the GTA's food sector has now eclipsed the area's automotive industry in employment. Average wages in the food and beverage sector are now \$20.59 per hour (Ajayi et al., 2010).

The community food skills pilot described above is one way the Food Strategy is tapping into the economic potential of using food to create jobs. The food handler certification and employment training will lay the groundwork to support more social enterprises, micro-businesses and community-based businesses and the partnership with existing employers interested in hiring program graduates will result in actual jobs or pathways to employment for participants.

Staff are also collaborating with the Vineland Research and Innovation Centre and the Toronto Food Policy Council to connect locally grown world (ethnocultural) foods with programs and retailers in underserved neighbourhoods across the city. Ethnoracial groups in the GTA spend at least \$61 million per month on fresh produce, much of which is imported but could be grown locally (Filson et al., 2010). Vineland is currently testing crops such as tomatillo, red carrots, maca, round eggplant and bottle gourd, and has local farms growing other crops commercially (Indian kaddu and Chinese hot red peppers). The collaboration between the Food Strategy and Vineland is intended to facilitate connections among local growers, urban consumers and retailers, while meeting the needs of local and newcomer farmers and diverse Torontonians. A second phase of this partnership will explore opportunities for commercialization of these foods.

Eliminating Hunger

TPH continues to advocate for a comprehensive income security system, for social assistance benefits and minimum wage to be sufficient to enable all residents to purchase sufficient nutritious food to enable a healthy life and for access to affordable housing; all key systemic routes to eliminating hunger in the city. TPH staff have also focused on identifying City levers that can enable access to affordable, healthy food. The food mapping project, described above, has shed light on many levers, such as the need to remove restrictions on truck-based produce vending, more enabling policies on fresh food markets and community gardens, easier access to City facilities for community food programming and events, and allowing greater flexibility in the use of TTC transfers to allow time for food shopping.

TPH collaborated with the United Way on its 2011 "Vertical Poverty" report which highlighted that Toronto's inner suburban neighbourhoods are falling further behind and that poverty is becoming increasingly concentrated in high-rise buildings. Staff are also supporting North York Harvest's neighbourhood food plan projects to help residents access community food programs and advocate improved access to affordable, healthy food.

Connecting City and Countryside through Food

The Food Strategy and the Toronto Food Policy Council continue to participate in the development of the GTA Agricultural Action Committee's "Food and Farming Strategy and Action Plan". This plan is intended to identify key strategies and actions that will support and grow the GTA farm and food sector in the Greater Golden Horseshoe. The action plan, scheduled to be released this spring, will recommend land use policies and regulations that support agricultural activities in the region; promote and support the regions agri-food cluster; stimulate innovation across the value chain; and, encourage the integration of agri-food, health and community planning policies. The Food Strategy and TFPC are participating on Sustain Ontario's advisory council of farm and food leaders from across the province to identify mechanisms that promote economic viability for Ontario farmers.

Staff continue to collaborate with the Toronto Environment Office on local food policy initiatives including local food procurement for City operations and increasing opportunities for urban agricultural activities.

Empowering Residents with Food Skills and Information

Local government can empower Torontonians to make healthier food choices and to create a healthier food system in many ways. The Food Strategy has focused on skill building initiatives, as well as broad community engagement. Staff have also supported the development of an Urban Gardening Soil Assessment Protocol to assess new community and allotment gardens. This work is the subject of a separate Board of Health report.

The Food Strategy collaborated with United Way to create Toronto Food Stories, digital stories featuring creative food solutions happening across the city, as told by community members themselves. In April 2011, with funding support from United Way and the FoodShed Project, staff organized a day long event on digital storytelling, with additional workshops on aquaponics, vermicomposting, container gardening and growing world crops in Toronto. Attendees to the event included those involved in the Toronto Food Stories project, community food leaders, TPH and City staff, and residents who were a part of the Food Strategy's 2010 community engagement process.

Staff supported students enrolled in a University of Toronto graduate nutrition course to research healthy food access in Flemingdon Park and Lawrence Heights. The course itself was a result of a connection made with Prof. Ann Fox who served on the Toronto Food Strategy Steering Group. She saw an opportunity to integrate broader food system components into the curriculum. ATPH Dietitian, led the course and Food Strategy staff also presented to students.

Advocating Health-Focused Food Policies to Other Orders of Government

As Toronto continues to identify the proactive roles it can play in championing a healthy, sustainable food system, it still needs other orders of government to do their part by establishing enabling health promoting food policies. TPH, through the Food Strategy, have advised, supported or led advocacy efforts on a number of food issues in the last year.

For example, the Board of Health has called for a ban on commercial advertising targeted to children. TPH staff participated in a Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) Task Group on Reducing Unhealthy Food Marketing to Children, presented to the Federal Minister of Health policy advisors in June 2010 and gave a keynote presentation on food marketing at the October 2010 Toronto District School Board (TDSB) My Health, My Choice student conference. Youth members of the TPH's Youth Health Action Network recently spoke at the launch of MP Rosario Marchese's private member's bill to prohibit unhealthy food advertising to children in Ontario.

Staff have connected with Federal and Provincial agencies throughout the year on a variety of food issues, including discussions and collaboration with PHAC, the Ministry of Environment, Ministry of Health Promotion and Sport, and the Ministry of Agriculture Food and Rural Affairs. TPH staff have shared the work of the Food Strategy at the global level as well. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the U.N. and agencies in Africa have shown increasing interest in the food retail mapping and urban gardening advice initiatives.

Building and Strengthening Food Connections

The work described above reflects an ongoing effort of the Food Strategy to build and strengthen food connections. This has happened within TPH, across City Divisions, with other levels of government, within the community and with the private sector. The focus

has also been to develop intersectoral partnerships among community, government and private sector stakeholders. Time and again, staff have seen that making these types of connections results in multiple dividends which, unlike implementing a specific program, are often not easy to evaluate or measure. Below is a list of some other connections that the Food Strategy has made in the last year.

- Developed new connections with City of Toronto Transportation Services to develop more enabling rules about front yard food gardens.
- Facilitated a connection between FoodShare and the Investing in Neighbourhoods program. FoodShare has since hired four Community Animators through the program's funding.
- Presented to the Youth Health Action Network, coordinated by TPH staff, on food system issues and are supporting the youth in their food advocacy activities.
- Staff have connected students participating in the FoodShed Project with community food groups where the students will be working and gaining an experiential learning opportunity while supporting these communities.
- Partnered with the Daily Bread Food Bank on a project to train drop-in program food preparers how to cook healthy meals.
- Strengthened links with the Intohealth Partnership by serving on its Advisory Committee and supporting the identification of policy priorities for future provincial funding. In the end, one of the top priorities, as identified through broad community consultation, was “access to affordable healthy food”.
- Connected with the Association of Ontario Community Health Centers and will continue to develop collaborative partnerships including the Food Skills and Employability Pilot.
- Investing in Families, a collaborative initiative among TPH, TESS and Parks, Forestry & Recreation and Toronto Public Library, is using food as an intentional means to bring people together through the Let's Talk project.
- Built connections with Action for Neighbourhood Change projects as part of the digital storytelling project and community engagement process.
- Collaborated with Schools Without Borders in establishing their Seed to Table program that promotes youth engagement through food.
- Facilitated a collaborative partnership with the Learning Enrichment Foundation (based in Weston-Mount Dennis) to integrate more food initiatives into their programming. LEF will be starting a year round good food market to serve the local community and program participants beginning Spring 2011
- Made numerous invited presentations on the Food Strategy to groups locally and across Canada, including to the Canadian Partnership Against Cancer (Ottawa), the Championing Public Health Nutrition conference (Ottawa), Healthy Canada by Design (Vancouver), the Keystone Agricultural Producers annual meeting (Winnipeg), the Growing Local 2011 Conference (Winnipeg), the Promoting Health Equity conference (Toronto), the Ontario Public Health Convention (Toronto), the Toronto Food Policy Council, the Centre for the Environment (University of Toronto) and others.

Monitoring and Evaluation

Staff are currently developing an evaluation framework for the Food Strategy and are evaluating some individual activities. Evaluating the overall Food Strategy is complex. There are few examples of similar strategies and/or evaluation frameworks. TPH will be working with the Toronto Food Policy Council and Wilfred Laurier University to develop community food system indicators. Staff have also begun the process of documenting the many food connections developed. Both qualitative and quantitative evaluation components are being built into individual Food Strategy activities. For example, TESS and TPH are working together to evaluate the community food skills and employability pilot. Staff also held a debriefing session with residents who conducted the neighbourhood food retail surveys to evaluate the process. Monitoring and evaluation of the Food Strategy will continue using both quantitative and qualitative research methods including documenting participant experience, connections made and numbers of people reached.

Next Steps

Staff will continue to pursue activities based on the vision laid out in the "Cultivating Food Connections" report, but also inspired and informed by ongoing engagement with residents, community organizations and City staff on food systems issues. TPH will continue to provide the basic staff resources for the Strategy. It is hoped that the support provided from across TPH Directorates and from other City Divisions will expand as partners see the value of intersectoral collaboration on food solutions and the potential for food initiatives to serve many City priorities. Staff will seek external funding on a project-specific basis wherever possible as well as collaborative partnerships with academic institutions, foundations and community organizations. The Strategy has already been successful in leveraging funds from United Way and the Intohealth Partnership to undertake some activities. External funding is being sought to further the collaboration with Vineland Research and Innovation Centre to expand the sales of locally grown ethnocultural vegetables to meet the needs of Toronto's diverse population and facilitate more opportunities for farmers.

The governance of the Food Strategy will be through the BOH. A Board of Health working group could provide support and advice during the year. The TFPC is well placed to serve as the Strategy's Community Reference Group, acting as a hub for community input into the overall evolution and implementation of the strategy. The Food Strategy will be a standing agenda item at all TFPC meetings and members will lend their expertise to provide strategic advice and input on issues as they arise. Staff will also connect with individual Councillors on food issues in their ward and interdivisional working groups will be formed on a project-specific basis, as needed. The Medical Officer of Health will report back to the BOH annually on the progress of the Food Strategy.

CONTACTS:

Jann Houston
Director, Healthy Communities
Toronto Public Health
Tel: 416-338-2074
Email: jhouston@toronto.ca

Barbara Emanuel
Manager, Toronto Food Strategy
Toronto Public Health
Tel: 416-392-7464
Email: bemanuel@toronto.ca

SIGNATURE

Dr. David McKeown
Medical Officer of Health

ATTACHMENT

Cultivating Food Connections: Toward a Healthy and Sustainable Food System for Toronto Report

REFERENCES

Ajayi, J., Denson, C., Heath, B. & Wilmot, K. (2010). *2010 Toronto Food Sector Update*. Prepared for Michael Wolfson, City of Toronto Economic Development & Culture.

Daily Bread Food Bank (2010). *Fighting Hunger: Who's Hungry. 2010 Profile of Hunger in the GTA*.

Filson, G., Adekunle, B. & Sethuratnam, S. (2010). *Growing International: Exploring the Demand for Culturally Appropriate Foods*. A FarmStart Publication.

Attachment One: Example of Food Retail Mapping (2010)

The red areas of the map indicate high poverty areas of Toronto that are 1500m or more from a medium or large supermarket.

