



Connecting Food
and Community

Thunder Bay + Area
Food
Strategy



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About This Document

The first part of this document provides an overview of why a Food Strategy is needed for Thunder Bay and Area. The second section describes the process for building the Food Strategy, including the community's involvement in leading this process. The seven pillars of the Food Strategy are then presented in alphabetical order. The recommendations of each working group are given at the start of each chapter, followed by the local and global context that supports the recommendations. Taken together, the recommendations will help Thunder Bay and Area create a healthy, equitable, and sustainable food system. The document concludes with a discussion of how the Food Strategy will be implemented.

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Executive Summary

The Thunder Bay and Area Food Strategy builds on years of community-led efforts to create a healthy and sustainable food system for Thunder Bay and Area. Since the mid-1990s, community leaders have undertaken initiatives to address issues of hunger, farmer financial struggles, loss of basic cooking skills, shrinking processing and distribution infrastructure, and the increasing incidence of diet-related illnesses.

Over the years, awareness about the importance of food has grown among the general public, government, and business. A growing local food scene and strong community support means the time is ripe to take a more coordinated approach to addressing food issues and to designing solutions that protect and nourish the environment, foster local and diverse economic development, build community, improve access to food, and much more.

Vision:

The Thunder Bay and Area Food Strategy is committed to creating a healthy, equitable, and sustainable food system that contributes to the economic, ecological, health, and social well-being of the City of Thunder Bay and Area.

Principles:

The Food Strategy reaffirms the vision and principles already embodied in the Thunder Bay Food Charter.

- Support food-friendly communities
- Recognize access to safe, sufficient, culturally appropriate and nutritious food as a basic human right for all residents
- Encourage personal, business and government food practices that foster local production and protect our natural and human resources
- Foster ongoing dialogue and collaboration between the community, government, and all sectors of the food system
- Empower residents to take action
- Celebrate Northwestern Ontario's food cultures
- Recognize traditional practices on the land

The Food Strategy is built on 7 pillars:



FOOD ACCESS



FOREST & FRESH WATER FOODS



FOOD INFRASTRUCTURE



FOOD PROCUREMENT



FOOD PRODUCTION



SCHOOL FOOD ENVIRONMENTS



URBAN AGRICULTURE

Letter Of Transmittal

The Thunder Bay and Area Food Strategy Steering Committee is pleased to present the **Thunder Bay and Area Food Strategy: "Connecting Food and Community"**.

The development of the strategy is another exciting step toward a sustainable food system for the region. Its vision, goals, and recommendations build upon many years of work that local food activists, area producers, health professionals and municipal planners began prior to the endorsement of the Food Charter in 2008. It reflects the input from numerous organizations and hundreds of citizens through focus groups, surveys, community discussions, and research.

We are already faced with many challenges including climate change and resource depletion, growing inequity, loss of farmland and farmers, and diet-related illnesses. These challenges will become ever more pronounced if we do not address the one thing that connects them all and that is central to human life: food.

This strategy represents significant input, dialogue, and research. After obtaining a three year Ontario Trillium Foundation grant, a community Steering Committee was formed with members from a broad spectrum, including representatives and individuals from health, farming, education, government, and business. Working groups were created to draft recommendations and an Administrative Committee was established to assist with the development and ultimately the implementation of the Food Strategy.

We have been fortunate to have the support of so many individuals and organizations. We would like to take this opportunity to thank each member of the Steering Committee, working groups, and many others who have believed in the potential of this project, and for being generous with their time, energy and ideas. We would also like to recognize the project coordinator, Kendal Donahue, for her efforts in assembling the research and writing this strategy.

The Food Strategy lays out the framework for future actions across the region's food system, and will be a powerful tool for the area to meet its social, environmental, economic, and health goals. By taking a coordinated approach to all that the area can do in relation to food, the Food Strategy provides a platform for integrating different goals and actions and creating new synergies.

We are asking that the **Connecting Food and Community** document be endorsed by the Municipal Councils in Thunder Bay, Shuniah, Oliver Paipoonge, Gillies, Neebing, Conmee, O'Connor and the Fort William First Nation. Taking a regional approach will be an important step forward in building community food security that reaches the whole region.

Our task was to support the creation of a comprehensive local food strategy. With the **Connecting Food and Community** document we hope that local communities will collectively strive for a just and sustainable food system for Thunder Bay and Area.



Councillor Rebecca Johnson,
City of Thunder Bay



Councillor Bernie Kamphof,
Municipality of Oliver Paipoonge

Food Strategy Steering Committee Co-Chairs
On behalf of the Food Strategy Steering Committee

Introduction and Background

In recent years, public awareness of local food issues has blossomed and the number of passionate individuals, government entities, non-profit organizations, and businesses working towards food systems change has increased dramatically. The Food Action Network, established in 1995, was an early pioneer in promoting a local food system in the Thunder Bay Area. Seeded by the Thunder Bay District Health Unit, the Food Action Network worked to improve eating habits and access to food through such efforts as helping to establish the Regional Food Distribution Association, the Good Food Box program, and a gleaning program.

While access to food persists as an issue for many people living on a limited income, our understanding of food issues has also expanded to include areas beyond hunger. Farmer financial struggles, loss of agricultural land, environmental degradation, and the effects of climate change are now seen as having resounding consequences for our ability to feed ourselves over the long-term.¹ The over-availability of foods high in salt, sugar, and fat in and around places of work, schools, and neighbourhoods, compounded by the billions of dollars spent each year on the marketing of unhealthy foods, means that food is now a main contributor to public health crises and rising health care costs.² With so many families ill-equipped to grow, shop for, and cook healthy foods, a whole generation is at risk of lacking basic food skills that will help them succeed in the education system and in the workforce.

Over the past several decades, trends of consolidation and globalization have led to a shrinking local food infrastructure, as well as reduced employment and municipal tax revenues from food related-businesses.³ And with the focus of natural resource policy being primarily on mineral exploration, mining and hydroelectric development, the importance of forest and freshwater food systems as a source of food and cultural heritage has in many cases been overlooked.⁴

It is because of the social, economic, health and environmental dimensions of food that professionals working in various fields—such as sustainable agriculture, economic development, and public health—have pointed to the value of expanding local and regional food systems as a way to simultaneously address agricultural viability, economic growth, and food access.⁵ By working from these different perspectives, we will be able to achieve *community food security*.

Food intersects with our lives in so many ways that it is important to take a *food systems approach* to understanding problems and crafting solutions. A food systems approach considers the many elements in the life cycle of food, from natural resource management and the cultivation of crops and livestock, through processing, packaging and distribution, acquisition and consumption, disposal, and back again. A healthy food system exists when the components are integrated to enhance the environmental, economic, and overall societal well-being of a community.

Now more than ever, people are realizing the many ways that food affects their communities and daily lives, both globally and locally. In response to these issues, people are taking a more active role in seeking solutions. There is a growing consumer demand for local food and for food produced in an ecologically sound manner. Food co-ops, community supported agriculture, and farmers' markets have also begun to flourish as consumers become more interested in knowing where their food comes from, while seeking assurances that farmers are getting a fair price for their product. Food is also being used as an educational, entrepreneurial, and community building tool through initiatives as diverse as community gardens, pollinator projects, community kitchens, and canning workshops. These types of initiatives are central to creating food-friendly communities. Food-friendly communities have healthy and vibrant food scenes and are the basis for building relationship-based food systems. They bring neighbours together through multiple opportunities for engaging with food, such as growing and sharing food, providing access to affordable food stores, and celebrating food through festivals and community activities.

Community Food Security

Community food security is a comprehensive approach that integrates all components of the food system, from producers to consumers. It emphasizes the health of both the environment and local economies and promotes regional food self-reliance.⁶

What is a Food System?

Food systems include the economic, environmental and social factors involved in food production, distribution, processing, retail, consumption, and waste.

Decisions about food tend to be disjointed and do not take into account the role of food in shaping healthy environments and strong communities. A healthy and sustainable food system:

- protects and nourishes the environment
- improves health and access to food
- fosters local and diverse economic development
- encourages community involvement

1 Miller, S. (2013). *Places to farm.*; Deen, B., et al. (2013). *Changing demands on agricultural land.*; Baker, L., et al. (2020). *Menu 2020.*

2 Healthy Kids Panel. (2013). *No time to wait.*

3 Patel, R. (2008). *Stuffed and starved.*

4 Ontario Nature. (forthcoming). *Forest and freshwater food systems.*

5 Hume, G. (2010). *The local food revolution*; Dieticians of Canada. (2007). *Community food security*; Miller, S. (2013). *Places to farm.*

6 Dieticians of Canada. (2007). *Community food security.*

Food is so closely tied to community, economic, and ecological well-being that it is central to a well-functioning municipality. Access to food and the knowledge of how to prepare healthy food is the basis for preventing chronic disease and ensuring healthy growth and development.⁷ Food is related to culture and tourism, and is part of a region's identity and heritage. Food is a key part of the economy. According to one study, the "food sector (supply, distribution, processing, retailing, and food service) employs one person in eight in Canada, either full-time or seasonally".⁸ Public institutions, including schools, day cares, and care facilities buy and share knowledge about food as a part of their core mandates. Purchasing food that is grown locally captures and retains those dollars for continued use within a region, supporting local businesses and jobs. Urban agriculture is also a way to green urban areas and to promote biodiversity. Local food production (e.g. commercial farms, gardens) and retail spaces like farmers' markets contribute to community building and vibrant neighbourhoods.

While food is a critical component of healthy and sustainable communities, decisions relating to food have for decades been driven by commodity markets, global economic trends and fragmented government policy that considers parts instead of the whole. Oftentimes, actors whose interest is based on shaping consumer demand, rather than taking population health, a just society, or sustainability as core drivers, have also had a strong hand in shaping our food system.

More than any other level of government, municipalities feel the effects of food issues most acutely. Yet because of their proximity to citizens and the many planning, policy, and regulatory tools at their disposal, municipalities are also very well positioned to take a leadership role. A recent report found that "to varying degrees, 64 local and regional municipalities across Canada have taken on the challenge of improving health, environmental performance, food access, and local economic development, using food systems thinking and changes in the food system to drive improvements."⁹ These municipalities are part of a growing network of more than 200 cities in North America with food policy initiatives.¹⁰ In recent years San Francisco, Philadelphia, New York, Seattle, Edmonton, Toronto, London (U.K.) and Vancouver have developed food strategies. More locally, the Nishnawbe Aski Nation is developing a food strategy in order to improve access to food through community-based and community-owned solutions.

Connection to municipal areas of responsibility:

- local and regional land-use planning
- procurement policies
- development approvals
- economic development
- public health
- transportation planning
- environmental programs and policies
- crime prevention
- poverty alleviation
- water management
- climate change commitments
- open space management
- infrastructure investment
- waste management

7 Desjardins, E. & Azevedo, E. (2013). *Food literacy for life*.

8 Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada. (2013). *An overview of the Canadian agriculture and agri-food system 2013*.

9 MacRae, R., & Donahue, K. (2013). *Municipal food policy entrepreneurs*.

10 Community Food Security Coalition. (2011). *List of Food Policy Councils*.

Community Involvement

Two decades of networking, collaboration and leadership by the Food Action Network culminated in a Food Charter which, in 2008, was endorsed by the City of Thunder Bay, the District of Thunder Bay Social Services Administration Board, and 33 other municipalities and organizations in the Thunder Bay District.

The Food Charter is the foundation of a comprehensive food security framework for research, planning, policy and program development. The strength of the Food Charter is in its community-based foundation and its conviction to community food security.

At a Regional Food Summit in 2012, community leaders identified developing a Food Strategy as a necessary next step in bringing the Food Charter to life. At the following Food Summit in March 2013, participants put forward seven strategic points of focus that would become the foundation of the Food Strategy.

The Food Charter includes five principles:

- build community economic development
- ensure social justice
- foster population health
- celebrate culture and collaboration
- preserve environmental integrity



SEVEN PILLARS



FOOD
ACCESS



FOREST & FRESH
WATER FOODS



FOOD
INFRASTRUCTURE



FOOD
PROCUREMENT



FOOD
PRODUCTION



SCHOOL FOOD
ENVIRONMENTS



URBAN
AGRICULTURE

Members of the community formed working groups around the seven pillars and met over several months (Sept 2013 – April 2014) to examine the local context, and draft goals, recommendations and actions. Several focus groups were held and a number of surveys were circulated to gain additional community input.

A Steering Committee made up of community representatives met several times to provide an opportunity for sharing information across working groups and to help guide the development of the Food Strategy. The Administrative Committee oversaw the development of the Food Strategy, supported by the Food Strategy Coordinator.

The draft recommendations were presented at an Open House in April 2014. Over 140 people attended the event to learn about the Food Strategy and provide their input into the strategy's development. The public was also invited to submit comments online through the Food Strategy's website (tbfoodstrategy.ca).



Growing Government Support

Over the past several years, the Government of Ontario has taken on a stronger role in supporting local food initiatives through funding and legislative changes.

- The Ontario Trillium Foundation funds many innovative food projects within communities, from urban agriculture initiatives to food networks. The Thunder Bay and Area Food Strategy is one of those projects, with funding for 2013-2016.
- The Greenbelt Fund supports research and infrastructure projects with the intention of building Ontario's agricultural sector. The City of Thunder Bay has been a recipient of two Greenbelt grants (2012 and 2013) aimed at helping public sector institutions buy more local food. Several local businesses have also received Greenbelt grants.
- On November 5, 2013, the Ontario Government passed the Local Food Act, which aims to foster local food economies in Ontario. The Act brought with it \$30 million in funding over three years for local food projects.



Together, the Steering Committee and working groups have included broad representation from the community. Thank you to the Steering Committee and working group members for their involvement during the development of the Food Strategy:

- Municipality of Oliver Paipoonge
- Planning Division, City of Thunder Bay
- Thunder Bay Federation of Agriculture
- Northwestern Ontario Women's Centre
- Food Action Network
- Thunder Bay District Health Unit
- EcoSuperior Environmental Programs
- Lakehead University
- Thunder Bay Regional Health Sciences Centre
- Ontario Nature
- Lakehead University Student Union
- Mile Hill Farm
- Supply Management Division, City of Thunder Bay
- Eat Local Pizza
- Regional Food Distribution Association
- EarthCare, City of Thunder Bay
- Community Economic Development Commission
- Harvest Share
- Ministry of Northern Development and Mines
- Belluz Farm
- The District of Thunder Bay Social Services Administration Board
- North Superior Workforce Planning Board
- Ontario Ministry of Agriculture and Food
- Poverty Free Thunder Bay
- Our Kids Count
- True North Community Co-op
- Ministry of Natural Resources
- Beef Farmers of Thunder Bay
- DeBruin's Greenhouses
- Beanstalk Consulting
- PARO Centre for Women's Enterprise
- Thunder Bay Country Market
- LA Quality Foods
- Lakehead Social Planning Council
- Canadian Red Cross
- Roots to Harvest
- Parks and Recreation, City of Thunder Bay
- Lakehead District School Board
- Tarrymore Farm
- Tourism, City of Thunder Bay
- Anishnawbe Mushkiki
- Food Security Research Network

Administrative Committee members:

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Municipality of Oliver Paipoonge
Food Strategy Co-Chair

Councillor Rebecca Johnson

City of Thunder Bay
Food Strategy Co-Chair

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Nutritionist, Thunder Bay District Health Unit, Food
Action Network Chair

Kendal Donahue

Food Strategy Coordinator, EcoSuperior
Environmental Programs



FOOD
ACCESS

GOAL: Create a food system in Thunder Bay and Area based on the principle that food is more than a commodity—that it is a human right—and in which all community members have regular access to adequate, affordable, nutritious, safe and culturally appropriate food in a way that maintains dignity.





1.0 FOOD ACCESS

Recommendations and Actions:

1. Build individual food security through practices that foster inclusion and are empowering

- A. Support new and existing food security programs and other initiatives, such as the Good Food Box, student nutrition programs, micro markets, gleaning, community kitchens, and community gardening that improve direct access to food and build knowledge and skills.
- B. Involve citizens in local farming, urban agriculture, and food preparation through volunteer and apprenticeship programs.
- C. Establish regular markets in neighbourhoods to improve access to locally produced food for those without transportation.
- D. Provide incentives for those on low income to purchase / access locally grown food.
- E. Encourage skill building, apprenticeship and social enterprise through community programs.
- F. Encourage municipal and community partners to integrate food security activities into programming at community hubs, such as recreation centres, schools, and libraries.

2. Enact municipal policies that facilitate access to food in ways that foster inclusion and maintain dignity

- A. Ensure that factors affecting access to food are considered in municipal policy and planning processes. These factors may include residential proximity to healthy and affordable food stores, income levels, transportation routes, street and transportation accessibility, population density and demographics, and commercial and residential zoning.
- B. Encourage existing retailers to supply healthy, affordable food, and new retailers to locate within walking distance of residential areas.
- C. Review public transportation planning to reflect the reality that many citizens use public transit to obtain and bring home food, and that many of those citizens have mobility concerns, children in tow, or difficulty affording multiple fares. Transit planning should aim to:
 - I. Facilitate travel from residential areas to popular food stores and ensure stops are near the front of stores;
 - II. Increase the amount of time bus transfers are valid for and provide more frequent service on key food shopping routes;
 - III. Look for ways to better accommodate people carrying groceries, or using strollers and carts on buses;
 - IV. Explore the possibility of weekly, dedicated buses to transport people from neighbourhoods / buildings directly to grocery stores and farmers' markets and back.

3. Conduct a comprehensive evaluation of the current state of food security in Thunder Bay and Area

- A. Using a participatory model (such as community food access mapping) identify how citizens would prefer to create more food-friendly neighbourhoods and municipalities.
- B. Develop specific indicators and create a report card to evaluate progress on an ongoing basis for the purpose of informing neighbourhood level and city-wide planning.
- C. Conduct an inventory of food-related assets and infrastructure (such as buildings, land and kitchens) to assess their availability and adequacy for food security programming and to maximize use of existing facilities.
- D. Evaluate existing food programs to improve coordination and impact. Build partnerships between these programs with respect to cooperative food purchasing, storage and distribution, and integrate the use of local food and suppliers wherever possible.

4. Improve food security through systemic change

- A. Promote an understanding among the general public and policy-makers regarding the social determinants of health and the root causes of poverty and food insecurity.
- B. Advocate to appropriate levels of governments and decision-makers to address the root causes of food insecurity.
- C. Improve coordination among funders, stakeholders and various levels of government to ensure reliable and on-going financial support to participatory food security initiatives.
- D. Integrate food access recommendations into related goals of other municipal strategies.

5. Engage the public in food security by teaching food skills

- A. Promote food skills and nutrition education and information via a range of collaborative community events and programs, tailored to the needs of various populations.
- B. Provide accessible, print and online directories of local food initiatives, programs and organizations.
- C. Support programs and curriculum, such as edible schoolyards, after school gardening, and food preparation classes that encourage youth to produce and consume healthy foods.
- D. Partner with public agencies, community-based organizations and economic development programs to promote food-related enterprise development, job creation, and skills development.



1.0 FOOD ACCESS

Where and how we get food and the kinds of food we are able to obtain is directly connected to our personal health and culture. Food security (having enough to eat) and food sovereignty (having control over our food source) are central to personal well-being, as well as the well-being of our families and communities. Yet many people in Thunder Bay and Area have trouble getting enough to eat and/or affording healthy and preferred foods.

A wide range of factors impact access to a nutritious and dignified diet, including poverty, social and geographic isolation, the high cost of fuel, inadequate housing, lack of transportation, lost or fragmented skills, and access to land for traditional hunting and gathering. Because secure access to a healthy and culturally appropriate diet is influenced by so many diverse factors, solutions must be broadly based and grounded in principles of social equity.

According to a national study conducted by Health Canada, household food insecurity is a significant social and public health problem in Canada.¹¹ In 2011, 1.6 million Canadian households, or slightly more than 12%, experienced some level of food insecurity, affecting 1 in every 6 children.¹² The rate of food insecurity is also increasing within both urban and rural areas. For instance, food bank and soup kitchen usage increased 3% between 2012 and 2013 within the region.¹³

A recent study found that households with children under age 18 (16%) were more likely to be food insecure than those without children (11%).¹⁴ Poor nutrition leads to increased risk of chronic and infectious diseases

such as diabetes, cardiovascular disease and cancer, as well as conditions such as low birth weight. In other words, a secure, healthy diet is central to our physical and social well-being, dignity and autonomy. It would therefore be more cost effective and just to prevent these conditions, and the social exclusion that may accompany them, by ensuring that people are economically and logistically able to purchase adequate and nutritious foods.

Thunder Bay has developed many independent initiatives to address food insecurity. The Good Food Box, community kitchens and gardens, and emergency food programs such as food banks and adult meal programs, are some examples of community-based approaches to improving access to food.

Charitable efforts are important and necessary to meet immediate or emergency needs, and opportunities exist for better coordination and expansion. However, emergency food programs do not address the systemic causes of food insecurity, such as economic inequality. Achieving a food secure and food sovereign community requires that all citizens be engaged in the movement towards an equitable distribution of resources, and with the recognition that food security is a basic human right.

Social Determinants of Health

The social determinants of health influence the health of populations. They include income and social status; social support networks; education; employment/working conditions; social environments; physical environments; personal health practices and coping skills; healthy child development; gender; and culture.¹⁵



Gleaning

The Thunder Bay District Health Unit and Food Action Network have been running a Gleaning Program since 2000. The program provides free bus transportation to area farms to pick produce

for people who have difficulty accessing food. Every growing season, after the main harvest, Belluz Farms, Fort William Historical Park and Breukelman's Farm generously welcome 140 gleaners to pick more than 1,000 lbs of fresh produce for their families, feeding over 1,500 people a year who otherwise would not have access to fresh-picked vegetables and fruit.

Skoday Abinojiiwak Obimiwedoan (Thunder Bay)

Skoday is a First Nations organization focused on community-building. Among its initiatives, it undertakes a range of food related programming, including hosting a garden, coordinating a food wagon that serves meals to homeless people, and working with 7 elementary schools to provide healthy meals and snacks to students. Skoday also partners with the Ministry of Natural Resources (MNR) on the Moose on the Loose project. Through this partnership, the MNR makes confiscated moose and deer available to Skoday, which pays the butchering costs for the animals. The meat hampers are then distributed through the Regional Food Distribution Association to community members. In 2012, 8 moose and 1 deer were confiscated, making 2,500 lbs of cut and wrapped meat, which served 100 people.

11 Health Canada. (2004). *Income-related household food security in Canada*.
12 Tarasuk, V., et al. (2013). *Household food insecurity in Canada 2011*.
13 C. Schwartz-Mendez, April 29, 2014, personal communication.
14 Tarasuk, V., et al. (2013). *Household food insecurity in Canada 2011*.
15 Public Health Agency of Canada. (2014). *Social determinants of health*.



The Good Food Box

The Good Food Box is a non-profit, volunteer supported, community-based food security initiative administered by the Northwestern Ontario Women's Centre. Customers can order and pick up a box of fresh fruits and vegetables at an affordable price at a host site in their neighbourhood. Prices remain at \$12 for a single and \$20 for a family sized box. Over 400 boxes are packaged and distributed on one day per month, 12 months of the year, and delivered to 32 host sites. There are over 100 active volunteers. Between 2005 and 2013, the Program packed 32,232 Good Food Boxes.



Regional Food Distribution Association

In any given month, food banks and meal programs in the region will provide for the needs of over 13,000 people with a hamper containing 3-5 days of food. The Regional Food Distribution Association, which distributes food for Thunder Bay's food banks, is increasingly becoming a fixture in the community beyond emergency food services through its community and commercial kitchen, garden, public cooking demonstrations, and safe food handling training.

Food Sovereignty

Food Sovereignty is the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems.

Declaration of the Second International Conference of Via Campesina (1996)

The Nutritious Food Basket survey conducted annually by the Thunder Bay District Health Unit, indicates that people living on low incomes cannot afford to eat a healthy diet in the Thunder Bay District. The survey consists of visiting 5 grocery stores in the city and 1 store in the district to price 67 food items to determine the lowest available price for healthy food at the grocery store. Over the last 10 years in the District of Thunder Bay the results consistently show that people with a low income do not have adequate funds to afford healthy eating after paying for other essentials, such as rent, transportation and childcare. Consider the following: in 2013, the total monthly income for an individual on social assistance was only \$699. After paying the market rate of \$541 rent for a bachelor apartment, only \$158 would remain each month for food and other essentials. The cost of a nutritious food basket per month is \$267.33 for an average individual and \$794.34 for a family of four.

The Food Access Working Group carried out a survey based on many of the questions in the Household Food Security Module of the Canadian Community Health Survey. The survey targeted people living on low income. Although by no means a comprehensive study, the 100 responses showed the following results:



Many people are choosing to buy food from "non-grocery" stores (pharmacies, dollar and convenience stores, department stores, etc).



Although many people rely on discount grocery or department stores for affordable food, discount stores are rarely within walking distance of neighbourhoods.



Where people chose to buy food is influenced by affordability, geographic location, and physical accessibility.



More than 50% reported that lack of access to transportation affects their ability to get food.



Half of respondents reported that they worried about running out of food by month's end. A significant proportion reported skipping or reducing the size of meals to make food last through the month. Only 28% reported always having enough food to get through the month, and almost half indicated that fewer financial resources have resulted in a drop in the quality of food they have been able to purchase in the last year.

Findings from the survey were consistent with results from 3 focus groups that were carried out by the Food Access Working Group, in collaboration with the Thunder Bay District Health Unit.



FOREST & FRESH WATER FOODS

GOAL: Increase our region's knowledge of available forest and freshwater foods and their sustainable harvest, protect and conserve forest and freshwater food ecosystems, and support a diverse and sustainable forest and freshwater foods economy within the region. This economy includes both harvesting for personal consumption and the development of commercial opportunities.



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2.0 FOREST & FRESHWATER FOODS

Recommendations and Actions:

1. Develop Thunder Bay and Area as a model for forest and freshwater food values

- A. Inventory where and when forest and freshwater foods are available by identifying forest and freshwater food zones (i.e. where local residents are likely to find certain foods based on ecosystem type, drainage, soil type, topography, etc.).
- B. Build public knowledge about the kinds of forest and freshwater foods available, their health benefits, and how to access and harvest them sustainably.
- C. Support inter-generational and cross-cultural knowledge-sharing on sustainable harvesting techniques.
- D. Support forest and freshwater foods education in schools by developing educational programs that focus on:
 - I. Species identification;
 - II. Sustainable, respectful harvesting skills;
 - III. Inter-generational and inter-cultural exchanges;
 - IV. The health benefits of forest and freshwater foods; and
 - V. Ensuring that the growth of forest and freshwater food use is framed within the context of ecological responsibility.

2. Incorporate forest and freshwater foods into existing policy frameworks, and develop new policy to fill gaps

- A. Establish designated forest and freshwater food harvesting areas on public lands where access to these resources are not in conflict with conservation priorities.
- B. Develop a policy framework for sustainable use and maintenance of these public forest and freshwater food harvesting areas that will ensure their value is recognized in future land use planning.
- C. Integrate forest food principles into municipal tree planting policy so it is more conducive to forest foods production within municipal areas, with emphasis on trees and shrubs indigenous to the boreal forest that provide edible fruits.
- D. Assess municipal water course management strategies for freshwater food production potential.
- E. Promote opportunities for the propagation of local, edible forest plant species in City parks and other shared public spaces.
- F. Ensure land use planning accounts for ecosystem services and establish baseline data for monitoring the health of forest and freshwater foods.

3. Integrate forest and freshwater foods into the commercial food supply

- A. Develop a more detailed profile of the forest and freshwater sector to better understand the type, amount and value of production associated with these foods in the Thunder Bay Area.
- B. Work in partnership with local stakeholders to identify and implement strategies which stimulate growth in this sector, such as through branding and infrastructure developments.
- C. Identify forest and freshwater food tourism opportunities.
- D. Promote entrepreneurship by developing a network for business resources and training, small business supports, and mentoring.
- E. Identify opportunities for locally and sustainably sourced forest and freshwater foods to be included in public sector purchasing policies.
- F. Review existing health regulations and look for opportunities to create allowances for small volume sales, processing, and consumption of forest and freshwater meat and fish.



2.0 FOREST & FRESHWATER FOODS

Forest and freshwater foods—such as blueberries, mushrooms, tea, wild rice, fiddleheads, medicinal plants and wild fish and game—have been integral to the Northwestern Ontario food system for thousands of years. Aboriginal peoples still possess traditional ecological knowledge that enables them to live off the land. This knowledge of forest and freshwater foods played an essential role in the settlement of European communities when fur traders arrived. Today, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples continue to depend on local forests and freshwater for food; and hunting, fishing and gathering remain an important part of northern culture.

Despite the importance of forest and freshwater foods to our food system, there are a number of challenges to the integrity of this food source. In certain cases, industrial development has negatively impacted fish and wildlife habitats while urban, suburban and rural development encroaches on forests, rivers, and other productive spaces.

Harvesting foods can contribute to a healthy and active lifestyle, foster stronger connection to nature, maintain cultural traditions, and support intergenerational relationships. Practicing personal harvesting of forest and freshwater foods often comes at a lower cost than store bought food, particularly for plant and mushroom foraging. Thunder Bay and Area communities live in an eco-zone that hosts a high diversity of plants and animals, many of which can and are used for food.

Protecting and promoting forest and freshwater food systems can help overall ecosystem health by reducing greenhouse gas emissions and improving resilience in the face of climate change. The health of forest and freshwater foods systems is also a good indicator of the ecological integrity of ecosystems as a whole. For these reasons, it is imperative to protect boreal forests and watersheds, as these ecosystems are the basis for hunting, fishing and gathering activities.

Nationally and provincially there is increased demand for forest and freshwater foods. In part this is because they are thought to be fresher and healthier than store bought foods. Within Thunder Bay and Area, forest and freshwater foods are harvested in parks, green spaces, and other public and private spaces. Forest and freshwater foods can be found for sale at local farmers' markets, grocers, restaurants, and road-side vendors.

Commercially, forest and freshwater foods present opportunities for high value foods and value-added products. The potential of this industry is great, and is evidenced by the success of forest and freshwater foods sectors in other provinces (BC and Quebec most notably). There is likely limited potential for commercial development on lands within Thunder Bay and Area because rural, suburban, and urban development affects the ecology of otherwise productive areas (e.g. forests, lakes, rivers). In terms of commercial opportunities, the Thunder Bay and Area population still presents a significant market for commercial producers of forest and freshwater foods, as well as throughout Northwestern Ontario. Seizing this opportunity will be advantageous to ensuring a more resilient food system within the region.



Fish Shop

Lake Superior is known across North America for its high quality whitefish, with many high end restaurants sourcing thousands of pounds of fish from Lake Superior every year. The Fish Shop is one of the few businesses that sells Lake Superior fish north of the border. The Fish Shop opened in 2004 and sells fresh and smoked fish in traditional Finnish fashion. Lake trout, whitefish, cod, and herring are just some of the varieties available from Lake Superior. Business has continued to grow over the years as local interest in high quality northern fish has increased.



In First Nation cultures, the medicine wheel symbolizes the interconnection of all life, the various cycles of nature, and how life represents a circular journey. The four sacred medicines within this tradition are sweetgrass, tobacco, cedar, and sage. These medicines are used for a range of purposes, such as cleansing, healing, and prayer. All four medicines can be harvested in the Thunder Bay Area.

Personal, Commercial, Recreational Harvesting

Personal harvesting is any harvesting activity primarily intended to benefit individuals or households. Personal harvesting can include economic activity as long as it is more or less limited to the household level (i.e. household food economy, food sharing, etc.). An example of personal harvesting could be the harvest of raspberries or fish for personal consumption.

Commercial harvesting is harvesting activity carried out for the specific purpose of generating economic benefit from the sale or trade of the harvested food. Commercial harvesting often tends to occur in greater quantity than personal harvesting, although not always. An example of this could be the harvest and sale of wild blueberries or various varieties of mushroom.

Recreational harvesting includes harvesting activities that are non-commercial in nature, and for a primary purpose other than consumption. Examples of this might include sport fishing or harvesting for educational purposes.

Boreal Birch Syrup

Boreal Birch Syrup has been produced in Thunder Bay commercially since 2006. It has a rich flavour, with a bold, dark caramel taste; it is used mostly in cooking and baking, and as a glaze or marinade.



Blueberries

There is a thriving summer market for blueberries across Northern Ontario. Pricing normally ranges from \$7.50 - \$10 per litre.

Fiddleheads

Lasting for only 3 to 4 weeks in the spring, the fiddlehead season is short, but it supports a small fiddlehead market in restaurants and grocers.

Mushrooms

The wild mushroom market in Northern Ontario is modest – generally restricted to fine dining restaurants and some specialty grocers – but there is room for growth. Popular varieties are morels, chanterelles and oyster mushrooms. Pine mushrooms can sell for as much as \$25 per pound.¹⁶

¹⁶ Ontario Nature. (forthcoming). *Forest and freshwater food systems*.

“The surrounding forests, lakes, and waterways are an important source of food and tend to be overlooked in conversations about “local and sustainable” food systems. Since harvesting food is often second or third on the list next to natural resource management, like timber and mineral extraction, it’s clear that we need to take a critical look at our priorities.”

Joseph LeBlanc
President, True North Community Cooperative



Boreal Forest Teas

Wild rose hips, blueberries, wild mint, stinging nettle, raspberries and dandelion are just some of the forest foods that can be used to make tea. Boreal Forest Teas uses harvested boreal forest plants and berries as a main ingredient in their teas.



FOOD INFRASTRUCTURE

GOAL: To support the creation of a food supply chain that links local production to processing, distribution and marketing, consumption and waste management in ways that sustain the local economy, minimize environmental impact and improve people's access to healthy food.



Photo courtesy of True North Community Co-op

3.0



3.0 FOOD INFRASTRUCTURE

Recommendations and Actions:

1. Encourage the creation of new facilities that support local food, as well as adapt and better utilize existing facilities

- A. Conduct a feasibility study that would identify current capacity for providing needed and projected food storage, processing and distribution services in Thunder Bay and Area.
- B. Repurpose existing buildings and plan for new facilities based in feasibility study results.

2. Foster cross-sectoral linkages to support the growth and development of local food enterprises

- A. Develop networking opportunities that bring together farmers, processors, and purchasers of locally grown and produced foods.
- B. Promote government and economic development programs and services that can assist local food businesses and expansions for established businesses.
- C. Encourage government, business, and financial sectors to provide programs and services for local food enterprises.

3. Establish land use policy and economic development targets to facilitate local food infrastructure

- A. Introduce Official Plan policies that support a more centralized network of processing plants, distribution sites and open markets, and the zoning regulations and development incentives needed to realize such a network.
- B. Create enterprise zones to attract grocery stores, small-scale food processors, and other businesses to underserved communities.
- C. Establish an online clearing house for funding, policy and regulatory information that supports implementation of the Food Strategy.
- D. Develop policy tools that are responsive to different scales of processing (e.g. policy to encourage home-based businesses, neighbourhood-scale infrastructure like community kitchens, and large-scale ventures).
- E. Encourage municipal capital investment in buildings, facilities and land areas dedicated to processing, distribution and marketing local food.
- F. Link local planning policies to the Provincial Policy Statement (2014) for broader legislative and policy support for infrastructure development.
- G. Develop area-wide and neighborhood plans with appropriate sites for facilities (such as community kitchens) and spaces (such as food growing spaces) that support food-related entrepreneurial development.

4. Support food system activities that minimize food waste

- A. Support the development of food waste diversion initiatives to divert food waste from the municipal garbage stream, such as a source-separated organic waste program and public education for homeowners and businesses.
- B. Include food waste issues in local land use and infrastructure plans.
- C. Explore food waste and compost business opportunities.



3.0 FOOD INFRASTRUCTURE

Developing a sustainable food system depends on a committed producer community, a loyal consumer base and strong and supportive infrastructure in both the public and private realms. Storage buildings and processing plants, roads, rail lines and shipping facilities are integral parts of the infrastructure that move food from farm to plate. A sustainable food system includes all these components in a market area large enough to support the wider economy but situated close enough to agricultural producers to benefit local markets.¹⁷

The history of Thunder Bay's food supply system is one of shifting transportation means, growing consumer demands and changing land use patterns. Only 70 years ago, most food consumed in the cities of Fort William and Port Arthur was grown in backyard gardens or on nearby farms. Farms sold directly at the farm gate, at farmers' markets, or to distributors who supplied independent food stores. The first supermarket opened here in the 1950s and the TransCanada Highway was completed through the area in the 1960s. Then in 1970, the cities of Fort William and Port Arthur amalgamated, which resulted in the single urban centre of Thunder Bay. Today, long-distance truck transportation has become the main means of moving food, as transportation networks, food suppliers and distributors have become more globalized and as consumer buying has favoured big box food stores offering processed and fresh foods mainly from elsewhere.¹⁸

Increasing community interest in a more local food system reflects greater awareness of the environmental, social and economic costs of a globalized food system. Trucking food from far away shifts benefits from the local economy to elsewhere while contributing to

greenhouse gas emissions and a disconnect between urban residents and where their food comes from. Our increasingly industrialized food system has also left Thunder Bay without centralized storage and with very little food processing or agri-business infrastructure.

Building a more robust local food system requires rethinking the infrastructure needed to support a local food supply chain. The majority of the food we consume is shipped in from the Winnipeg or Toronto food terminals. Creating a local food hub (or hubs) in Thunder Bay or the surrounding area (complete with central warehousing, storage and distribution services) would allow the producer community to expand their production capacity, and extend fresh food product availability past the growing season. This would make buying local food an easier choice for businesses, institutions and individuals.

If urban agriculture is to be re-introduced into urban areas on a larger scale, new forms of infrastructure will be needed in this sector as well. For example, year-round greenhouses, aquaponics facilities, re-purposed industrial buildings for storage or distribution, and a permanent farmers' market building will all help increase production and make local food available all year.

Agricultural economic impact studies in Canada and the U.S. have demonstrated many times over the income and employment gains to be made from strengthening local supply chains. Though highly dependent on the locale and commodity in question, buying local food has a multiplier effect of 1.4 to 2.6 throughout the wider economy.¹⁹ The multiplier effect is the amount of local economic activity that is triggered by the purchase



of any one item. Community economics tells us that the more a dollar circulates in a defined region, and the faster it circulates, the more income, wealth and jobs it creates. It is estimated that if every household in Ontario spent \$10 a week on local food, we would have an additional \$2.4 billion in our local economy at the end of the year and create 10,000 new jobs.²⁰

In 2013, a multiplier workforce study found that the food production sector in Thunder Bay District has an average workforce multiplier effect of 1.7. This means that in Northwestern Ontario, every 1,000 jobs at local farms and food processors support 700 additional jobs indirectly among suppliers and retailers. The study also identified a need to address current infrastructure gaps, such as a regional distribution centre, processing facilities and storage in order to enhance the growth of the region's food sector.²¹

“There is a huge need to build up northwestern Ontario's local food infrastructure. As a recipient of a Greenbelt Fund grant, we're focusing on filling some of those gaps so that we can help position northwestern Ontario as a viable source for locally produced, nutritious and delicious foods.”

Cole Snell
General Manager, LA Quality Foods

17 Harry Cummings and Associates Inc. (2009). *Thunder Bay District agricultural economic impact study*.
18 City of Thunder Bay Archives, Thunder Bay Historical Museum, Thunder Bay Public Library. Various photo, map, and other document sources.
19 FSRN., & FNRM. (2013). *The workforce multiplier effect of local farms and food processors in Northwestern Ontario*.
20 McGuinty, D. (2012). *Shifting to local food will create 10,000 Ontario jobs*.
21 FSRN., & FNRM. (2013). *The workforce multiplier effect of local farms and food processors in Northwestern Ontario*.

Food Waste

- The average Canadian household throws away about 275 kilos of food waste each year, which is the equivalent of throwing out \$20 a week
- Over 30% of fruits and vegetables in North America do not even make it onto store shelves for such reasons as being too small, oddly shaped, or having blemishes
- When food is thrown in the garbage, not only are all the resources used to grow, ship, and store food also wasted, but a valuable food resource is discarded as well
- About 20% of Canada's methane emissions (a greenhouse gas) come from landfills²²

Country Market

An average of 6,000 visitors shop at the Thunder Bay Country Market each week for local meats, cheese, eggs, produce, baking and handcrafted items. The Country Market has grown from 11 vendors in 1997 to over 100 seasonal vendors today. The Country Market adds close to \$5 million to the local economy.



What is Food Infrastructure?

The foundation required for the production, processing, storage, distribution, retailing, consumption and waste management of food within the food system in Thunder Bay and Area.

Production

Food production is the process of growing, raising, and harvesting food. Much of our food comes from the farm, and farmers rely on access to land and equipment, inputs such as seed and fertilizers, fiscal supports, training and extension services.

Processing

Food processing is the transformation of raw ingredients into food, or food into other food. Processing can take the form of cooking, baking, drying, mixing, cutting, freezing, or other ways of manufacturing food. Processing happens at food packaging plants, canneries, abattoirs, grading stations, kitchens, and other sites.

Storage

Food storage takes place at different points along the value chain—from on the farm, to processing facilities, to grocery stores. Food storage includes warehouses, terminals, food hubs, grain elevators, freezers, refrigerated containers, root cellars, and other ways to store food.

Distribution

Food distribution is how food moves between different points in the food system, such as farms, warehouses, shipyards, processing facilities, grocery stores, food banks, community centres, and restaurants.

Retail

Food retail includes all the places that food is sold, such as grocery stores, corner stores, restaurants, farmers' markets, and co-ops.

Consumption

Food consumption is the point at which food is consumed. Consumption takes place in a range of settings, including at the household level, within schools and hospitals, and meal programs.

Waste management

Food waste management refers to where and how foods waste is handled by consumers (e.g. households, retailers, restaurants, farmers). Food waste can either be cycled back into the food system as a resource, or disposed of at a landfill.

True North Community Co-op

The True North Community Co-op is a non-profit, community-based co-operative aimed at building community resilience in Northern Ontario through a stronger localized economy.

True North sells products harvested or made in Northern Ontario, including flour and oats, honey, tea, preserves, seasonally fresh fruits and veggies, grass-fed beef, pork, lamb, elk, and cheese. The Co-op sells through its store front, pre-orders, community supported agriculture, and distributes food to several restaurants. Through the North to North Initiative, the co-op also supplies fresh food to remote First Nations communities in the region.



²² David Suzuki Foundation. (2014). *Help end food waste.*



**FOOD
PROCUREMENT**

GOAL: Leverage procurement food spending to develop a public sector food supply chain that contributes to the economic, ecological and social well-being of Thunder Bay and Area through food purchases that foster local production, processing, and distribution.





4.0 FOOD PROCUREMENT

Recommendations and Actions:

1. Increase the amount of local food purchased by the Broader Public Sector

- A. Establish a local food spending benchmark for the Broader Public Sector, incorporate local food language and targets into existing and new policies, and set minimum annual increase targets.
- B. Encourage the Broader Public Sector to add equipment that would create more opportunities for food growing, processing, cooking, and composting within public sector institutions.
- C. Adjust procurement policies and practices where possible to enhance consumption of local foods, such as adopting menu plans and recipes which coincide with the local harvest season.
- D. Recommend procurement policies which adopt environmental and social commitments, such as Fair Trade, food waste reduction and diversion.
- E. Celebrate champions of local food within public sector institutions.

2. Foster local capacity to supply Broader Public Sector institutions

- A. Aggregate and increase local production and distribution to meet demand.
- B. Develop a lean food ordering and distribution chain which minimizes costs but works within established budgets.
- C. Foster conversations and relationship building across the food supply chain—such as through tours and workshops—for the purpose of establishing personal connections and developing common ground and understanding.
- D. Educate local food producers on how to access the institutional food market, such as how to comply with Legislation, Acts and prevailing Laws.
- E. Encourage the Broader Public Sector to share meaningful data to enable local producers to plan growth, consider new products, and enhance value through processing.



The life of two tomatoes

There once were two tomatoes, one grown in Ontario and one grown in California. Both tomatoes were delivered to an Ontario grocer and purchased by consumers for a dollar each. The dollar from the Ontario tomato was used by the grocer to pay the distributor, who paid the Ontario farmer, who paid his farm staff, who bought movie tickets in Ontario, and the movie theatre paid contractors to renovate the building, and so on. The dollar from the California tomato was used by the grocer to pay the distributor, who paid the importer, who paid the wholesaler. Along the first supply chain, the tomato dollar from the locally owned Ontario farm recirculates and exponentially multiplies throughout the local economy. This phenomenon is known as the multiplier effect of buying local. Conversely, part of the tomato dollar from the California farm leaves Ontario when the businesses involved in bringing the tomato to Ontario are paid. Those businesses are often owned by shareholders around the globe, and that portion of the tomato dollar goes into global financial markets. At the same time, Ontario loses out on all of the ways that money could have created growth in Ontario.²³

²³ Jennings, A. (2013). *The multiplier effect of buying local food.*



4.0 FOOD PROCUREMENT

Due to the emergence of centralized distributors, the loss of local food infrastructure, and the dominance of corporate food service companies, food is now sourced from all over the world. This means that within Thunder Bay and Area, the rest of Ontario, and much of Canada, public dollars used for buying food for hospitals, day cares and other public sector institutions are not being spent on food businesses that would benefit the local economy.

This is a serious oversight when we consider that the Broader Public Sector (BPS) plays a significant role in the food economy and has dramatic buying power. The Ontario healthcare system alone serves an estimated 115,000,000 meals to patients every year, with the value of food in all those meals estimated to be over \$285,000,000.²⁴ In 2014, BPS institutions in Thunder Bay and Area will spend approximately \$10 million on food.²⁵ Shifting even 10% of purchases to locally grown and processed foods would create a \$1 million market for farmers and processors. Public institutions have the potential to use their significant purchasing power to invest in local agriculture, while providing opportunities to other local food entrepreneurs along the supply chain.

Throughout Canada and many other countries, the consumption of local foods within the BPS is being promoted as a means to scale-up local food systems and enhance local economic development. Locally, awareness is increasing among the public, BPS, restaurants and businesses that buying local means tangible economic benefits. This increased awareness is generating growing demand, market opportunities, greater capacity—all of which is enhancing the local economic development cycle.

Local food not only has economic benefits, but often also means more nutritious, fresher, and tastier food. The BPS is responsible for the health and well-being of many people, including students, the elderly and ill. Sourcing local food is therefore a way to raise the bar towards offering more nutritionally rich and better tasting food to a range of people who would benefit from eating fresher food. Buying food closer to the source would also mean reducing greenhouse gas emissions that come from shipping food long distances.

In 2012, the City of Thunder Bay commissioned a study to assess the capacity of local institutions to source more local food. The study found that the BPS faces several challenges when it comes to buying local food:

- Reliability in terms of consistent quality, volumes and delivery
- Seasonality of supply
- Price
- Contractual obligations
- Payment
- Ensuring compliance with all Legislation, Acts, Laws, By-laws, and Policies.

However, the 2012 study also showed many encouraging findings. For one, many public sector institutions have fully-equipped kitchens, which are an excellent opportunity for increasing the use of local foods. At the same time, there is a lot of untapped potential for institutions to adopt more flexible menu cycles which would help them take advantage of seasonally available products. The report emphasized the importance of fostering relationships across the supply chain so actors can find synergies and co-create opportunities. Not least of all, the report pointed to needed food infrastructure improvements to make local food buying on a larger scale a reality.²⁶



Little Lions Waldorf Daycare & Kindergarten

Little Lions Waldorf Daycare & Kindergarten is a champion of local food in their 12 daycares. According to CEO Marilyn Grudniski, “We try very hard to minimize the exposure of children to potentially harmful or controversial substances, which includes things like preservatives, pesticides and hormones which may be present in our food. We choose ingredients with great care, often buying organic. We buy local beef from a reputable farmer, veggies and berries grown locally (often right here in our own community gardens), flour and cheese from local producers. We hope that by buying this high quality food and serving it as close to its natural state as possible, we will set this example to hundreds of children daily, encouraging families to become more ecologically conscious while enjoying great food!”

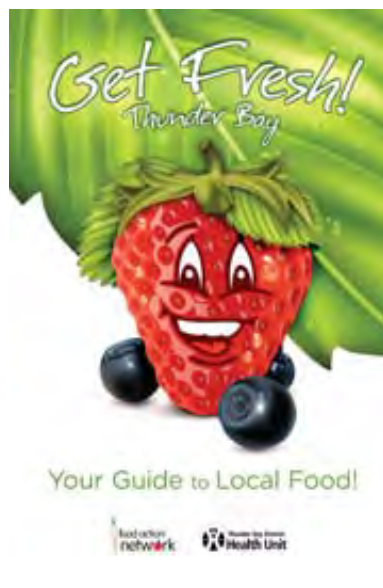
²⁴ Wylie-Toal, B., et al. (2013). *Local food provision in Ontario's hospitals and long-term care facilities*.

²⁵ C. Bevilacqua, City of Thunder Bay Supply Management, March 14, 2014, personal communication.

²⁶ Grey Bruce Centre for Agroecology. (2013). *Making the connections for public sector local food procurement*.

What is the Broader Public Sector?

The Broader Public Sector generally refers to hospitals, school boards, universities, municipalities and other publicly funded agencies.



Get Fresh Guide

The Thunder Bay Get Fresh Guide is published by the Thunder Bay District Health Unit and is the go-to directory for where to buy farm fresh produce and livestock. It also features local food artisans and businesses that incorporate a significant amount of food that is grown or raised locally into their products.



Superior Seasons

Superior Seasons Food Market is an online store that allows customers to purchase from multiple local businesses at once. By creating a virtual storefront, it helps smaller agricultural businesses to get their product to market.

Local Food on Campus

In 2014, Lakehead University hired back Aramark as the food service provider for university cafeterias and catering. An organized effort on the part of the student body to see more local food on campus led Aramark to commit to sourcing 20% of its food from Ontario.

What is Local Food?

There is no single definition of "local food." In some cases "local" refers to 100km from farm to plate. The Government of Ontario employs a definition of local as food sourced from anywhere in Ontario. Since the objective of the Food Strategy is to build a local food system closer to home, local means that the distance from farm to plate is as short as possible.

Institutions Move to Buy more Local

In 2012, institutions within the City of Thunder Bay, such as long-term care facilities and day cares, and City-run events centres increased local food purchases by 2%. Building on this success, the City is undertaking a project to increase purchases of local food by 10% in 2015.



**FOOD
PRODUCTION**

GOAL: Protect and encourage growth in farm-scale production so that a greater proportion of food is grown, raised, prepared, processed, and purchased closer to home.



Walter Schep, Thunder Oak Cheese Farm
Photo courtesy of Tourism Thunder Bay

5.0



5.0 FOOD PRODUCTION

Recommendations and Actions:

1. Build connections, communication, and collaboration

- A. Convene roundtables and networking opportunities to bring together and expand networks of producers, processors, distributors, and institutions to understand each others' needs, identify best practices, create synergies, and take advantage of opportunities.

2. Change the current food culture so a higher value is placed on local food

- A. Promote the social, economic, and environmental benefits of local food so it can be prioritized in government decision-making.
- B. Promote the Food Charter and Food Strategy message to schools, restaurants, media, and the general public to encourage greater awareness about regional issues related to the food system and increase the consumption of locally grown food.
- C. Develop public education tools that teach consumers how to eat locally in this climate (e.g. what is available year round, or in season; ways to store and eat local produce in winter; ways to grow your own food).
- D. Develop skills training programs to teach food service workers how to source and cook with locally produced foods.
- E. Promote a better understanding of farm life and commercial agricultural production for urban dwellers to reduce the urban/rural divide.
- F. Celebrate and promote food grown in the area through various avenues, such as catering, festivals, food tourism, and campaigns.
- G. Develop a local brand so consumers can easily recognize locally grown food.

3. Realize the economic potential of the local agricultural community

- A. Include food in the programs and planning of economic and community development groups, with a particular focus on commercial food production and agriculture as an economic engine and a tool for workforce development.
- B. Support the development of appropriate land use and economic development policies and regulations to promote local and regional markets for foods produced in the region.
- C. Collaborate and coordinate with regional organizations to promote and enact incentives, funding, and regulations to support local food.
- D. Conduct assessments of agricultural areas that could be affected by current and projected development trends and encourage municipalities to enact Official Plan policies that preserve these lands primarily for agricultural and agricultural-related uses.
- E. Improve infrastructure for growing, processing and distribution to increase the number and diversity of food producing enterprises and food choices for consumers.
- F. Analyze factors that support or constrain the viability of agriculture in the region such as access to markets, cost of capital, climate, and land use regulations that may restrict farmers' ability to earn additional income.

4. Support agricultural skills training and new farm enterprises

- A. Encourage farm organizations, educational institutions, non-profits and business development groups to support programs that recruit, train, and provide technical assistance to both new and established farmers and those transitioning to more sustainable practices.
- B. Assist agricultural entrepreneurs with new start-ups and with expansion and diversification of existing businesses.
- C. Promote agricultural practices that rebuild the soil, sequester carbon, protect the region's waters and efficiently use inputs and resources.

“The current lack of knowledge about where the food we eat comes from — who raises it, processes it, makes decisions about it and why — and when it is in season locally is a barrier to creating a healthy and sustainable food system. Education is therefore an enormous opportunity to reconnect individuals to how food is grown and produced, and to make consumers become active participants in decisions about the food system.”

Kevin Belluz, Belluz Farm



5.0 FOOD PRODUCTION

Agriculture is the backbone of our food system. Crops and livestock provide most of our calories and proteins while agriculture and related industries play a crucial role in the life of our economy. Nationally, the food and farming sector accounts for 8% of GDP and 1 in 8 jobs²⁷ and within the province of Ontario, food and farming competes with the auto industry as the largest sector of the economy.

On average, food travels 3,500 km to reach Thunder Bay²⁸ and the storage, refrigeration, packaging and transportation involved generates waste and burns a large amount of fuel. The food system's high energy inputs, such as fossil fuels and fertilizers account for almost a third of greenhouse gas emissions on a global scale.²⁹ Localizing food production would go a long way in reducing greenhouse gas emissions. At the same time, having a stronger farming sector would mean being less vulnerable to rising food costs associated with increasing energy prices, loss of agricultural land due to development and erosion, and the impact of climate change—all of which threaten long-term access to imported food.³⁰

A strong local food system depends on a healthy, thriving community of local food producers. Yet for many farmers it is difficult to make a living from growing food. Between 1996 and 2006, for instance, the number of farmers seeking a second income increased from 33% to 47%.³¹ One reason is the loss of local food infrastructure which means farmers have to incur higher costs to send their products further away to be processed. The rising cost of inputs (e.g. oil, fertilizers) and competition from foreign goods also make it harder to compete.

The viability of farming as a livelihood is particularly concerning if we consider that the farming population is aging (almost 50% of farmers in Canada are 55 or older) and many established farmers are retiring without successors.³²

A high dependence on imported goods results in a loss of food self-sufficiency as well as lost economic opportunities. Many regions in North America and Europe are therefore choosing to promote agriculture and food processing for local consumption as a way to enhance economic viability at the local and regional levels.

Agriculture is already an important industry in Northwestern Ontario. The District Agricultural Impact Study (2009) found that in 2005, farmers in the District reported a total of \$32.3 million in gross farm receipts and directly support 605 on-farm jobs, and many more in related industries. Employment in agriculture between 2001 and 2006 also remained relatively stable compared to other sectors of the economy, such as forestry and manufacturing, which experienced combined losses of over 2,500 jobs.³³ Producing more food in the area for sale in local markets would mean creating jobs, generating tax dollars, and having an impact on the wider economy through connections with other businesses, such as retail, manufacturing, construction, and transportation.

In addition to the economic benefits of agriculture, it is important to recognize the environmental and social benefits of local food systems. On the one hand, local food consumption tends to move consumers toward fresh foods and away from heavily processed foods that contain hidden sugars, salts, and fats. Agricultural landscapes provide a number of essential functions, including air and water purification, wetland and watershed protection, wildlife habitat, recreation, and open space.³⁴



Local Farming Sector Snapshot

The dairy industry represents about two-thirds of the local farming sector. Farmers also raise cattle, sheep, goats, wild boar, pigs and grow field crops (e.g. barley, wheat, oats, corn, soybeans) and vegetables.

Thunder Bay Agricultural Research Station

The Thunder Bay Agricultural Research Station has been a key research facility in the region for over 20 years, conducting research on food and feed varieties (e.g. chickpeas, soy beans, spring and winter cereals, forages, canola and flax seed) suitable for use in our unique climate and growing conditions.

27 Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada. (2013). *An overview of the Canadian agriculture and agri-food system 2012*.
28 C. Schwartz-Mendez, Thunder Bay District Health Unit, February 18, 2014, personal communication.
29 Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research. (2013). *Food emissions fact sheet*.
30 Miller, S. (2013). *Places to farm*.
31 Harry Cummings and Associates Inc. (2009). *Thunder Bay District agricultural economic impact study*.
32 Statistics Canada. (2014). *Demographic changes in Canadian agriculture*.
33 Harry Cummings and Associates Inc. (2009). *Thunder Bay District agricultural economic impact study*.
34 Olson, Richard K. (1999). *Under the blade*.



Arjen and Henriët DeBruin, owners of DeBruin's Greenhouses



Pizza Project: "A Slice of Farming"

For over 20 years, the Pizza Project has been held at the Canadian Lakehead Exhibition. Pizza is used as a means to teach students about farming in their community through various stations, such as "grains & seeds," "dairy," and "vegetables." Ninety volunteers contribute approximately 800 hours to stage the event for the 600 Grade 3 students that participate.



Photo courtesy of Tourism Thunder Bay



The recent increase in farm numbers in the Thunder Bay District is partly attributed to the growing interest in producing agricultural products for the local market.³⁵

A District Agricultural Impact study carried out in 2009 reported that between 2001 and 2006, the area of farmland in the Thunder Bay District increased from 59,383 acres to 61,850 acres, with 48% in crop production. The study also uncovered that 162,723 acres were farmed in 1961, suggesting there is potential for future growth in farming.³⁶

"We need more farmers. Thunder Bay needs to look at its youth and educate its youth about farming. We have a lot of unused farmland in Thunder Bay that could be put into production again. There is a lot of need we have not met currently, the local demand for food; I can't meet all of my customers' demand for locally produced beef, pork, vegetables. They want more eggs. They want more milk. They want more cheese and dairy. We can't, currently, meet just our local customers' demand, not even looking at the institutional."

Renate Thiboutot, Mile Hill Farms
(from April 24, 2013 article in The Chronicle-Journal)

Food Tourism

Food tourism is increasingly recognized as an important alternative farming activity that diversifies the economic base and provides educational opportunities to local residents and tourists. In Ontario, food tourism typically features agricultural products such as pick your own, road side stands, on-farm retail stores, harvest festivals, and farm tours. Food tourism also benefits the wider economy through restaurant visits and hotel stays, rentals and sightseeing.

³⁵ Harry Cummings and Associates Inc. (2009). *Thunder Bay District agricultural economic impact study*.
³⁶ Ibid.



SCHOOL FOOD ENVIRONMENTS

GOAL: Improve the eating habits, food skills and food literacy of children and youth in Thunder Bay and Area through supportive healthy school food environments.



Photo courtesy of Kris Dontas

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6.0 SCHOOL FOOD ENVIRONMENTS

Recommendations and Actions:

1. Integrate food literacy education throughout the curriculum in schools

- A. Work with parent groups, teachers, school boards and the Ministry of Education to weave food literacy broadly into the curriculum (e.g. a school garden can be used to teach mathematics, science, literacy, etc.).
- B. Work with school boards, parent involvement committees and academic institutions to expand food oriented opportunities in a wide range of non-classroom learning environments, such as cooperative placements, internships, independent studies, and service learning.
- C. Advocate that the food and nutrition course at the secondary school level be mandatory.

2. Increase the amount of healthy food served and sold in and around schools

- A. Develop city zoning by-laws and/or incentives to improve access to healthy food near schools and in neighbourhoods and restrict the location and number of fast food outlets in new developments surrounding schools and other youth- and child-focused land uses land uses such as arenas and community centres.
- B. Engage and empower students in improving the food culture of schools.
- C. Encourage child-focused recreational facilities like arenas, sports facilities, and community centres to provide more nutritious food options.

3. Support the development of food skills in the broader community to engage families

- A. Offer education programs that build food skills in students and their families.
- B. Make schools hubs for food skills programming and activities for all ages.
- C. Promote healthy eating by engaging with community partners.





6.0 SCHOOL FOOD ENVIRONMENTS

Fruits, vegetables, and other foods are important for the healthy physical and mental development of children and youth. Yet an overwhelming number of young people—from preschool children to teenagers—are not eating enough nutritious foods needed for building strong bodies and minds. At the same time, consumption of foods high in salt, sugar, and fats is increasing. If nothing is done, the current generation of children will develop chronic illnesses much younger and be more affected as they age.³⁷ Preventable chronic diseases also threaten the sustainability of our health care system. For example, in 2009, the estimated direct and indirect costs associated with obesity cost Ontario \$4.5 billion.³⁸ Since poor diets are a major contributing factor to the problem, creating healthier food environments and teaching children about better food options is one way for local governments and school boards to promote healthy eating that requires little investment.

Children and youth are over-represented among food insecure individuals in Canada.³⁹ Despite efforts already being made to provide better access to food for families, some children continue to suffer from food insecurity and malnourishment. Although there are several good school nutrition programs operating in the country, Canada is the only G7 country without a national school nutrition program.

There is an enormous imperative for improving eating habits among children and youth since students who eat better perform better. Arriving to class on time and ready to learn positively impacts student success, and in turn, impacts the vitality and culture of our communities.⁴⁰ Since food education reconnects

individuals to how food is grown and produced, building healthy school food environments sets students on a path for becoming more active participants in decisions about the food system as consumers, parents, and decision-makers later in life.

Educational institutions are well-positioned in our communities to positively impact the health of our children. Many have land for gardens and kitchen facilities that can be used for preparing food. Schools have an ability to innovate and excel at involving parents and the broader community in activities. Children also spend a significant amount of time at school, which creates ample opportunity to impact student food literacy and skills to improve unhealthy eating trends.

Local schools are already doing a lot to include healthy eating, food skills and local foods in their programs. An increasing number of schools have taken the initiative to develop vegetable gardens and greenhouses to complement their classroom teaching. Many of these initiatives are now supported by school board policies. Students are taking the lead in their schools to promote better eating habits as School Food Ambassadors and the cafeterias have made great strides offering healthier options and incorporating more local foods in their menus. These initiatives can be built upon to ensure system-wide support for healthy school food environments.



“Wild about Worms”
vermicomposting workshop

EcoSuperior offers several classroom presentations each year, including a “Wild about Worms” vermicomposting workshop. In 2014, EcoSuperior gave 17 of these presentations that reached 340 students.

Student Nutrition Programs

In 2009-2010 the Canadian Red Cross funded 60 nutrition programs in the District of Thunder Bay. This number increased to 79 nutrition programs for the 2013-2014 year.

37 Healthy Kids Panel. (2013). *No time to wait*.
38 Ibid.
39 Food Banks Canada. (2014). *HungerCount 2013*.
40 Ibid.



Photo courtesy of Kris Dantas

Farm to Cafeteria

In the fall of 2013, 4 high schools piloted a Farm to Cafeteria project that integrated local foods into cafeteria menus. Meals were \$5 and included a combination of burgers, pulled pork, coleslaw, corn on the cob, squash soup, and roasted and mashed potatoes. Each time the Farm to Cafeteria meals were offered, the cafeteria sold out with 96% of respondents saying they would purchase the meal again.



Photos courtesy of Roots to Harvest

Number of school gardens

The number of school gardens has increased over the past few years, from 2 in 2008 to 16 in 2013. School gardens are a great way to teach children and youth how to grow and cook food. It can also be used as a way to teach math, social studies, and science.



Food Literacy

Involves understanding where food comes from, the impacts of food on health, the environment and the economy, and how to grow and prepare healthy, safe and nutritious food.

Food Skills

Includes the growing, harvesting, purchasing, and cooking knowledge and skills necessary to provide healthy and culturally appropriate meals for oneself and/or family.

Food Culture

The values and habits that influence the food choices we make such as how we grow, sell, purchase, and prepare food.

School Food Environment

The food available in and around a school community as well as the curriculum and policies that influence students' eating habits.



**URBAN
AGRICULTURE**

GOAL: Increase food production in the urban landscape and support the participation of citizens in urban agriculture activities.



Photo courtesy of Tourism Thunder Bay

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7.0 URBAN AGRICULTURE

Recommendations and Actions:

1. Extend the reach and diversity of urban agriculture through education, training, and promotion

- A. Work with organizations, institutions, businesses, and government offices, particularly social services and employment programs, to explore how they can incorporate urban agriculture.
- B. Promote urban agriculture as a strategy to meet a variety of community development goals within other municipal initiatives (e.g. crime prevention, poverty reduction, youth engagement).
- C. Increase the physical presence of urban agriculture through visible demonstration sites, such as pollinator gardens, edible landscaping, rooftop gardens, and community greenhouses.
- D. Offer a variety of educational opportunities such as courses on growing, preservation, storage, and composting.
- E. Increase the number of pollinators by adding pollination spaces within urban limits.
- F. Plant medicinal plants, berries, and other forest foods and protect remaining forested areas within the city limits.
- G. Promote urban agriculture through events, festivals, and other avenues.

2. Support urban agriculture through improved access to suitable land, water, and other resources

- A. Conduct an inventory of available space for growing food, such as structurally appropriate rooftops, municipally owned parks and other public space, and institutional grounds.
- B. Review the City of Thunder Bay's Community Gardens Policy to increase support to community gardens and clarify process and procedures.
- C. Include urban agriculture aims within existing and future policy documents—particularly Official Plans and Urban Design Guidelines.
- D. Develop an urban agriculture guide listing local resources and showcasing effective strategies for urban agriculture in Thunder Bay and Area.
- E. Conduct research and develop policy that is supportive of urban agricultural practices such as backyard chickens, urban beekeeping, and land use arrangements that would facilitate more land being used to grow food.

Superior Seed Producers

Superior Seed Producers is a collective of local Thunder Bay Area growers who promote the saving and distribution of locally adapted, sustainably grown, open-pollinated non-GMO seeds in Northwestern Ontario, while educating and supporting those who want to learn more about saving seeds.



In 2013 there were 12 community gardens in Thunder Bay and Area.



7.0 URBAN AGRICULTURE

The majority of our food grows on farms in rural areas, yet food production can be a thriving part of urban environments as well. Historically, gardens were a prominent feature within cities, with many people relying on gardens to grow some of their own food. Changing urban culture and farming practices throughout the 1980's and 1990's made growing food in the city, and especially raising small livestock, less common.

In recent years, the re-emergence of urban agriculture has taken the world by storm. An increasing number of people are looking for ways to produce more of the food they eat in an effort to be more economical and health conscious, and to foster a deeper connection to food and to nature.

The number of not-for profit organizations, schools, hospitals, and others have also caught the urban agriculture bug and are using growing food for such far ranging purposes as youth engagement and education, to creating therapeutic spaces for patients, to seizing niche business opportunities in urban centres.

The resurgence of urban agriculture has pushed the boundaries of possibility both in terms of where and how food is grown. Gardens now exist on rooftops and herbs are being grown in hydroponics operations at airports. Beekeepers are starting apiaries in backyards and aquaponics operations are getting their start in warehouses. Greenhouses are being built as vertical structures and on industrial sites, and urban farms are being cultivated on university grounds. Pollinator gardens are popping up like never before, and forest foods are being planted in parks.

The benefits of urban agriculture are impressive. Integrating agriculture into the urban realm builds a lively and healthy urban landscape while fostering an understanding of where food comes from. It creates more opportunities for residents to access healthy, affordable food, while providing opportunities for community members to share knowledge about the relationship between nutrition and health. Creating vibrant green space contributes to the mental health and general well-being of urban residents, and activities such as planting and harvesting can provide an important form of regular exercise.

Urban agriculture is a way to engage local residents in the stewardship of their neighborhood's green spaces and their urban environment more broadly. Expanding urban spaces for food production can be used as a tool for turning underutilized spaces into productive ones, and deteriorating lots into interesting community spaces. Physical improvements to the environment improve community safety, decreasing the need for policing and municipal maintenance of blighted properties.

Growing food close to home contributes to a sustainable city. Not only does it shorten the distance that food travels but it can be leveraged for waste water management, soil remediation, and to improve biodiversity and pollinator habitats. People who grow food are more likely to see food as a resource and divert food waste from landfills to composting. Urban agriculture builds climate resiliency by reducing individual reliance on imported foods. And according to an increasing number of urban planners, bringing nature back into cities is essential to fostering sustainable urban ecosystems.⁴¹



Photo courtesy of Brad Doff

Zoning for Animals

Current zoning in the City of Thunder Bay restricts livestock (cattle, goats, sheep, poultry, bees, fish, rabbits, pigeons and others) to rural zoned areas, outside the Urban Area Limit.

Historically, urban livestock were a vital component of urban life. Many cities have begun to incorporate livestock into communities. For instance, several North American cities now allow residents to keep chickens and bees.

41. Erikson, D., (2006). *MetroGreen*. And Beatley, T., (2011). *Biophilic cities*.

Willow Springs Creative Centre

Willow Springs Creative Centre (WSSC) is an innovative, social purpose enterprise serving Thunder Bay and the surrounding region. WSSC provides training in gardening and food service for young adult with disabilities. WSSC also partners with organizations and institutions to provide urban gardening programs for the elderly and individuals with disabilities. At each location, WSSC incorporates native plant species and plants that attract pollinators.



Roots to Harvest

Roots to Harvest provides transformative educational opportunities for youth by engaging them in learning about local agriculture through their urban agriculture sites, greenhouse, aquaponics system, and time spent harvesting, selling, and processing food.



EcoSuperior Environmental Programs

EcoSuperior encourages gardeners to plant species that attract pollinators, through its annual plant sale and through its pollinator garden and workshops held at Central Garden. EcoSuperior also sells 200 composters each year, which helps residents divert food waste from landfills.

Harvest Share

Harvest Share organizes volunteers to make use of locally grown fruit that would otherwise go to waste in people's yards. Through neighbourhood picks, Harvest Share promotes community spirit, as well as skills development through preserving and canning workshops. Some of the preserves and canned goods are donated to food banks, while others are sold at the Country Market or to local businesses.



Looking Forward

The Thunder Bay and Area Food Strategy lays out the general direction that the community can take in order to create a healthy, equitable, and sustainable food system that contributes to the economic, ecological, health, and social well-being of the City of Thunder Bay and Area. Recommendations for achieving this vision are identified in each of the Food Strategy's seven pillars.

Calls for local action in such diverse areas as new land use policies, public education, and infrastructure development underline the collaborative responsibility needed to implement the Food Strategy's vision. Active participation will be required not only by local governments, but equally by individual citizens, community groups, institutions, agencies, businesses, and other stakeholders.

In order to move forward in making the Food Strategy a reality, the next step will be for the Coordinator, in conjunction with the Steering Committee and working group chairs, to develop a detailed implementation plan, and to engage and empower the community to achieve its goals and objectives.

A community food security report card will complement the implementation plan. Baseline measurements will be established along with quantitative and qualitative indicators suitable for measuring impacts.



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