



**STAFF REPORT
ACTION REQUIRED
With Confidential Attachment**

**Toronto Food Policy Council 2006 Annual Report and
Membership Update**

Date:	June 19, 2007
To:	Board of Health
From:	Medical Officer of Health
Wards:	All
Reason for Confidential Information:	This report deals with personal information about identifiable people
Reference Number:	

SUMMARY

This report outlines Toronto Food Policy Council (TFPC) activities during 2006 and early 2007 with special attention to efforts intended to increase availability and access to locally and sustainably-produced food in the Greater Toronto Area (Attachment 1). Local and sustainable food is an emerging issue for public health across North America.

Current members of the Toronto Food Policy Council were appointed by the Board of Health in 2005 for three-year terms. Five members have resigned from the TFPC during their terms, and it is recommended that eight new members be appointed as mid-term members. With the additional eight members, the TFPC will still have less than 30 members permitted in its Terms of Reference.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Medical Officer of Health recommends that:

1. the Toronto Food Policy Council 2006 Annual Report be received as information (Attachment 1); and
2. the eight individuals named in confidential Attachment 2 be appointed to the Toronto Food Policy Council until December 31, 2008.

Financial Impact

There are no financial implications, beyond what has already been approved in this current year's budget, arising from the adoption of this report.

DECISION HISTORY

This is the fifth annual report to the Board of Health from the Toronto Food Policy Council. Annual reports were established on the recommendation of the Medical Officer of Health following amalgamation and following City Council's adoption of a Food and Hunger Action Plan and the Toronto Food Charter in 2001. The Annual Report served to introduce the TFPC, established within the former municipality of Toronto since 1991, to Board members from municipalities that did not have a food policy council. As well, to make its governance transparent, the annual report confirms the TFPC's reporting relationship to the Board of Health, which appoints TFPC members and sets out the TFPC Terms of Reference.

ISSUE BACKGROUND

The Toronto Food Policy Council is celebrating its sixteenth anniversary working with Toronto Public Health and the Toronto Board of Health to identify and develop innovative community food security policies and projects. In the last year, concentrated attention was devoted to development of a local and sustainable food system.

Local and sustainably-produced food can be considered an important public health issue from many vantage points. Local food is a priority requirement in the event of emergencies or disasters requiring the closure of borders and/or major highways. It supports the local agricultural economy. Local food produces less air pollution from transportation, and provides several "eco-system benefits," including a "working landscape" that preserves green space and wildlife habitat. Local food also helps create a culture that promotes healthy choices and lifestyles.

The TFPC has sponsored public education, coalition-building and networking to facilitate the collaboration of farmers, processors, retailers, and environmental and public health advocates.

COMMENTS

In 1991, Toronto became one of the first cities to embrace the World Health Organization's Healthy Cities declaration, and to sponsor a food policy council to address comprehensive food policy, with particular emphasis on access to healthy food for people on limited incomes. Today, the TFPC's views, experiences and publications are followed internationally, and Toronto's leadership role in municipal food policy is widely acknowledged. The TFPC's report on its activities during 2006 confirms its important contribution to making progress in addressing the challenges of the Toronto Food

Charter, Toronto Public Health (TPH) Strategic Plan and Toronto's climate and air quality initiatives.

Since amalgamation, the TFPC has contributed significantly to the Toronto Environmental Plan, Toronto Food Charter, the Official Plan and the Toronto Food and Hunger Action Plan. During 2006, it also contributed significantly to the development of possible strategic orientations to increase access to local and sustainable foods while improving access to farm and food opportunities for Toronto's ethno-cultural communities.

The TFPC engages community members in the development of comprehensive approaches to community food security. In so doing, the TFPC enhances TPH's capacity to implement its Strategic Plan by responding to diversity, advocating healthy public policy, anticipating emergencies, adapting to change and encouraging team work at TPH.

The TFPC's report for 2006 provides an overview of TFPC activities and documents the range of initiatives that can be undertaken when a food policy council makes its unique contribution to the health of a city (Attachment 1).

In 2005, the Toronto Board of Health approved the Toronto Food Policy Council's Terms of Reference, providing for a maximum of 30 members, and appointed 24. These appointments expire in 2008.

In the period since 2005, five members have left the TFPC. Yusuf Alam, Regina Borges, Obaidul Islam, Sonja Nerad and Jennifer Reynolds were all very valuable members, but needed to leave the TFPC to take up other opportunities.

This report requests the Board of Health to appoint eight new members to replace vacancies and resignations. The names and qualifications of the proposed members are listed in confidential attachment 2. This will provide the TFPC with a total membership of 27. The proposed new members enrich the ethno-cultural diversity of the TFPC and add to its expertise in the programs promoting culturally-appropriate foods. Their names are proposed following a search by the TFPC Project Coordinator and TFPC Steering Committee; TFPC members have voted to endorse the individuals recommended for membership.

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SIGNATURE

Dr. David McKeown
Medical Officer of Health

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1: Toronto Food Policy Council Annual Report for 2006
Attachment 2: Toronto Food Policy Council Membership Update (Confidential)

Attachment 1

Toronto Food Policy Council Annual Report for 2006

Local food seems to be on everyone's lips these days, though rarely in anyone's mouth. Reliable statistics are hard to find, but there seems to be a consensus that less than five per cent of the food eaten in Toronto comes from the Greater Toronto Area. It is commonly estimated that the average distance which food travels to our tables is somewhere between two and four thousand kilometers. Surprisingly, many well-traveled foods can be bought fresh near Toronto – California strawberries in June, or Chinese apples in September, for example.

New Interest in Local Food:

Much of the recent media coverage about local food features “foodies,” a relatively new, but very diverse grouping of enthusiasts for the culture – the stories, character, “terroir” (unique local flavour), ethics, stewardship, grace, relationships and fellowship – as much as the nutrients and price point of food. Foodies are behind the rise of farmers markets, the fastest-growing food retail trend across North America. They are the customers at a range of new restaurants featuring chefs who specialize in authentic and regional cuisine. They are the target group for the surge in culinary tourism. They are also the gardeners, oftentimes recent immigrants on modest incomes, who have quadrupled the numbers of Toronto's community gardeners over the past five years. They are the students and staff at the University of Toronto who have just signed on for the biggest institutional contract for local and sustainably-produced food in the world. They are some of the people featured at Toronto's annual green awards, and celebrated in a recent special issue of Toronto Life. They are the people worried about potential harm from imported food from countries with few limits on pesticide use or less safe agricultural practices. The new consumers do not think of food as an anonymous commodity, so many worry about the ethics of people in a rich country such as Canada buying up fish that could meet the protein needs of poor people in developing countries, and about the ethics of importing low-priced foods grown in developing countries by people who are going hungry. Many of these food enthusiasts also worry that Torontonians on low and fixed incomes are highly vulnerable to price shocks caused by rising fuel costs, and will be most vulnerable to being left in the lurch if the global supply chain is disrupted once the Greater Toronto Area has lost its food production capacity.

The new food consumers are a mixed group. Many are environmentalists who champion local food as a way of supporting GTA, greenbelt and Ontario farmers and farmland, and a way of reducing the fuel and air pollution required to move food longer distances. Many healthy eating advocates relish the idea of using local foods to introduce youth to where real food comes from, and what it looks and tastes like when it is fresh-picked. Likewise, a growing number of public health experts identify distance in the food system as a barrier to community food security, especially during times of emergencies that can

disrupt the long and delicate supply chain of today's food system. As well, most surveys indicate, many people who go out of their way to buy local foods are choosing to support their neighbors and a strong local economy.

Many leaders of local and sustainable food projects are participants in meetings and activities initiated by the Toronto Food Policy Council (TFPC), members of which are appointed by the Board of Health. This annual accountability report of the TFPC to the Board of Health recounts recent activities related to the development of a local and sustainable food system, a central aspect of the TFPC's mandate to assist the City as it strives to implement the Toronto Food Charter.

Public Health Benefits of a Local Food System:

Over five years of emphasizing the public health benefits of a local food system, the TFPC has learned that local and sustainable (socially, economically and environmentally) are words that need to go together, much like research and development, policy and planning, parks and recreation, health and safety, or access and equity. So this report will also draw attention to ways in which the TFPC has tried to link local food with full spectrum (social, economic and environmental) sustainability.

Since food can be taken for granted, it needs to be emphasized that building and rebuilding a local food system is a complex system change that requires time for planning, cooperation and coordination among many people and institutions that aren't usually linked. Indeed, overcoming the lack of coordination in Ontario's food infrastructure (sometimes referred to as "soft infrastructure") presents more difficulties than overcoming the physical challenges of producing foods for Ontario's sophisticated and multicultural population. To be sure, there are serious technical complications to making a range of fruits and vegetables available all year round, but preserving methods, season extension and greenhouse methods are developing quickly. Ontario farmers have long been able to grow and store or preserve a wide range of dairy, poultry, grain, bean and meat staples. But farmers, along with agricultural, health and economic development experts, are just learning the challenges of marketing, as distinct from growing, products locally. Much of the infrastructure and know-how for the local system that flourished before the 1970s has disappeared.

Increasing the availability of local food can foster changes at many levels. Public education is a must, of course, since people need to know why local food is so important for the environment, and so irreplaceable in the event of disruptions to the long-distance food supply chain. Public education could also encourage a cultural shift toward appreciation of what goes into the growing and processing of food. Cooks and chefs need to learn how to cook with local ingredients. Government incentives, subsidies and supports for agricultural production also need to change if we are to shift farmers away from export markets and toward local ones, away from corn and soybeans toward market fruits and vegetables, away from the staples of the global food traders and toward the favorite foods of Toronto's diverse communities. Ways must be found to support succession planning for local farms, mostly managed by people in their 50s whose

children do not choose to become farmers, and ways need to be found to tap into the expertise and passion of multicultural communities, which include many people who wish to take up food and agriculture careers but lack the funds to buy a farm. Entrepreneurs and investors need to be encouraged to invest in these new niche processing and tourism possibilities and – as has been modeled most successfully in northern Italy – to cooperate in training and exposure projects that help everyone. Capacity has to be built and rebuilt in a variety of people and organizations – from community agencies that want to try their hand at social entrepreneurship or farmers market organizing to chefs who want to link up with farmers rather than buy from wholesalers. It is a very long to-do list that we have only begun to develop.

How Food Policy Councils Help:

Fortunately, Toronto has a long-established food policy council, and food policy councils are ideal institutions to start the ball rolling on a new and complex set of issues by serving as researchers, educators, connectors, facilitators, advocates and catalysts. Because of their citizen members and semi-autonomous advisory role, food policy councils can serve as a research and development unit with the free-thinking and brainstorming this innovation function requires. Notwithstanding this autonomy, food policy councils are not free-standing think tanks. The TFPC is mandated to develop policy and action plans that can be followed up by the City, via the Board of Health, as it moves to address the Toronto Food and Hunger Action Plan and Toronto Food Charter. This balance in mandate and structure gives this food policy council the rare opportunity to think fresh thoughts that are also practical for city governments to act on.

Almost by nature, food policy councils work to develop innovative and creative solutions by bringing together people who are usually kept apart by the logistics of the food system, the healthcare system and government specialization. The food system, for example, normally keeps producers and consumers apart, in two separate categories, as if they have no common needs or advantage in working together. Likewise, government departments are often organized in ways that keep issues fragmented and discourage synergies – people responsible for compost might see compost as a resource for soil regeneration rather than as a garbage problem, for example, or people dealing with community safety issues might see food as a tool of community animation, not just a nutrient. Food policy councils are designed to bring diverse people together to solve common problems: immigrants and ethno-cultural groups who want more culturally-appropriate food can meet here with farmers, for instance, or people looking to safeguard their neighbourhoods with community gardens and community kitchens can meet with City-funded animators. Many of the distances in the food system are not measured by miles, but are simply created by solitudes of fragmented institutions. By connecting the dots and connecting the dotters – the TFPC is sometimes referred to as a “linktank” – food policy councils can treat an issue such as local food as a set of dynamic opportunities rather than a series of separate and intractable problems.

Research:

The TFPC produced a torrent of original research in its first decade. As one of the first and best-resourced food councils in the world, it used these publications to define the landscape for the emerging field of food policy. Half way through its second decade, original research publications at the TFPC have slowed to a trickle, more due to the lay-off of one TFPC employee in 2002 than to lack of imagination about problems that need research and analysis.

The TFPC started to correct this trend in two ways during 2006-7. First, the Project Coordinator agreed to supervise a few senior university students doing research projects, both as a way to initiate some research projects and as a way to encourage the next generation of food policy specialists. One research project by a U of T graduate student in Planning looked into the “food desert” (lack of affordable, quality food retail outlets) developing in the Warden/St. Clair and Morningside/Kingston Road areas of Scarborough. In another project, a York University undergraduate student surveyed workers at the Toronto-Dominion Centre to find if they were interested in an on-site farmers market that would feature ready-to-cook offerings for homebound workers. (Few wanted the service because they saw farmers markets as places to meet farmers and buy whole ingredients, not a place to solve a meal preparation problem in a hurry.) In a third project, which the TFPC is hoping to publish, a medical student met with community gardeners at Regent Park to identify the specific and unique health benefits of participating in a community garden.

Two TFPC members produced action-research papers for presentations to 2006 meetings of the TFPC and other food and farm organizations. Wally Seccombe, a TFPC member who also chairs the Board of Directors of Everdale Environmental Learning Centre, has drafted a paper outlining the common ground shared by Ontario farmers, immigrants, people on low income and public health and environment advocates, who could work together to reconfigure a new win-win relationship. Several drafts of Seccombe’s work have been widely circulated as a “work in progress” and people were invited to contribute suggestions. A similar effort to connect “new consumers” and “new farmers” has been developed by Elbert van Donkersgoed, a TFPC member who served many years as policy director of the Christian Farmers Federation of Ontario, and who is presently Executive Director of the GTA Agricultural Action Committee. The TFPC plans to publish both these research reports during 2007.

Public Education:

As reviewed in the annual report on TFPC activities during 2004, the TFPC approach to issue management and public education follows a path outlined by Malcolm Gladwell’s “The Tipping Point”: proceeding from innovators to connectors to early adopters to partnering in early pilots to early majorities. Once an issue is taken up by early majorities, it is time for the TFPC to pass the baton, and return to what it does best – nurturing a new issue until it is ready for the take-off stage. This approach to issue management reflects the TFPC’s mandate, organizational structure and capability, all

designed for innovation rather than implementation and management. Consequently, public education is a major tool of a food policy council.

As it has for several years, the TFPC produced a daily e-mail information service designed to connect about 1200 people from many walks of life involved with food issues during 2006. The staples of the service, which goes by the name of Eaters Digest, are meeting announcements, job postings, and success stories from local and municipal food projects around the world that might be adaptable to Toronto. The TFPC, in partnership with the Centre for Urban Health Initiatives at University of Toronto, co-sponsors another e-mail service called FoodNews, which features global food issues. The twice-weekly service, which also has its own website (<http://foodnews.ca>), is commonly re-posted on various sites to reach about 10,000 global food experts. Carrying stories that provide a big picture for local food advocates, FoodNews is gaining a reputation as the leading electronic dialogue centre on international food system issues. Managing editor for most of the past year is James Kuhns, President of the American Community Gardening Association and member of the TFPC.

To contribute to an “eat locally, cook globally” or internationalist perspective within Toronto’s emerging food culture, the TFPC partners with TPH dietitians and a wide variety of community groups to sponsor a (hopefully) annual celebration of World Food Day, which marks the founding of the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization in Quebec City at the end of World War II. The worldwide theme for the October 2006 celebration was “Investing in Agriculture for Food Security,” which TPH adapted to “Growing, Greening, Engaging Food; Harvesting Connections.” The day was marked by a proclamation by the Mayor, and the week included a display of the work of two leading Toronto food photographers, Vince Pietropaolo and Laura Berman, in the City Hall rotunda. At the celebration itself, over 200 people came to hear speakers give short and snappy summaries about a range of Toronto food projects, and to view a long line of displays sponsored by various community-based entrepreneurs and social agencies. A DVD of the presentations is on file with the TFPC.

The TFPC also partners with a variety of organizations (Caledon Countryside Alliance, Local Flavour Plus, GTA Agricultural Action Committee) to hold two annual events promoting local food. This year’s presentation at the Royal Agricultural Winter Fair, the world’s largest indoor agricultural fair, featured Jeanette Longfield, head of Sustain U.K., who spoke about the campaign they led for a children’s food bill in England and food strategy for London. The event was chaired by Metro Morning radio host, Andy Barrie. In recognition of her work, Longfield has since been named to the Order of the British Empire. The TFPC also produced a map of Toronto farmers markets sites for distribution at the Royal, and this proved to be a popular piece.

In November, the same partners held their fourth annual event, a day-long conference at the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority at Black Creek Pioneer Village. Lead speaker was Mike Hamm, a distinguished professor of food studies at Michigan State University in Lansing, who presented on the economic and job creation opportunities associated with local food purchasing. Attended by over 100 people, the conference

brought together farmers, champions of a farm start program for immigrants and racialized minorities, supporters of culinary tourism, local economic development and public sector purchasing of local and sustainably-produced foods. The highly regarded polling company, Ipsos Reid, conducted a pro bono poll on local opinions about local food that was distributed to members of the TFPC and its partners at this conference.

Last but not least, formal meetings of the TFPC, held on alternate months, are becoming opportunities for education and networking. The TFPC borrows from Board of Health meeting procedures, and circulates an advance notice of proposed consensus motions prior to meetings so that meeting time can be freed for at least one hour of public education and discussion on emerging issues. It is not uncommon for TFPC meetings to attract 40 to 50 guests, as well as members.

Networking and Capacity Building:

The TFPC links networking and capacity-building as two self-reinforcing activities. In the absence of leadership from senior levels of government to link local food-based economic development and community food security, (Toronto's economic development unit is a notable exception) hundreds of non-government organizations have arisen to respond to these issues over the past 15 years. The TFPC can play a role assisting them to develop leadership capacity and effectiveness by partnering with, rather than competing with or ignoring, other organizations with similar goals.

To honour the special role of entrepreneurs and to encourage community-based businesses and community agencies to see each other as partners, the TFPC has carried on with its Local Food Hero award launched in 2005. The award honours companies that "go the extra mile to bring healthy and local food into Toronto." For about half an hour prior to each TFPC meeting, the designated business provides samples of its wares and meets with members and guests.

The TFPC also helps with the formation of new organizations when that is appropriate. The TFPC was an early member of the Greater Toronto Area Agricultural Action Committee, which brings together farmers and planners from across the GTA. The Committee contributes to improved dialogue among urban and countryside people, a precondition for progress toward a local food system. The TFPC has its own seat on the Committee, and is working to secure formal representation from the City.

The TFPC helped bring together the people (many of them current or former members of the TFPC) who formed the staff and Board leadership for Local Flavour Plus, the first organization in the world to certify producers and processors for local and sustainable food. Local Flavour Plus (LFP) introduced local and sustainable food to the University of Toronto, the largest university campus in North America, in 2006. LFP formally recognizes the TFPC's mentoring role.

The TFPC has also been bringing together the individuals and groups to bring leaders of immigrant and ethno-cultural communities into contact with farm start initiatives so that

farmers and agricultural experts from all backgrounds have an opportunity to access culturally-appropriate food while enhancing agriculture at the local level. Several proposed new members of the TFPC have a special passion for this cause, which is becoming a signature campaign for the TFPC – appropriately so in the most multicultural city in the world at the doorstep of the most fertile and adaptable soil in Canada.

On behalf of the TFPC, the TFPC Project Coordinator sits on the advisory board of two fledgling groups that will have a positive impact on the Toronto food scene. One group, dealing with “food animation,” arose from the \$300,000 a year grants program which Community Services administers (with TFPC support) for community food security projects. A portion of that money goes to “food animation” which helps people in areas with little sense of community develop their sense of neighbourhood by working on something everyone shares a need and love for – good food. Animation is a 1960s term that comes from the French for “breathe life into,” and it refers to a crucial trust-and-pride-building stage that must precede formal community organizing or community development. The Animators, as they are known, have enjoyed great success with projects sponsoring farmers markets, community kitchens and community gardens in a range of disadvantaged communities across Toronto. Their work came to the attention of leading staff at Toronto Community Housing Corporation (TCHC), who have sponsored an animator to develop food projects in TCHC communities.

The second advisory committee where the TFPC is represented oversees an initiative to develop farmers markets in neighbourhood parks across Toronto. Here, the TFPC staff can assist colleagues working for Toronto Parks to work more effectively with citizen and community stakeholders.

To link Toronto organizations with national and international counterparts and to stay on the cutting edge of food policy innovation, the TFPC has long been involved in the leadership of national and international food security organizations. During 2006, the TFPC assisted with the first bi-national joint conference of the U.S.-based Community Food Security Coalition and Food Secure Canada. Held in Vancouver during October, the conference was the biggest ever held by either group. Several TFPC members led workshops, and the TFPC Project Coordinator chaired the final plenary session.

The TFPC has also worked with several foundations to encourage funding of food-based organizations, a relatively recent and challenging field for the foundation world. At the request of the TFPC, the Laidlaw Foundation organized a special youth dinner to meet with Jeanette Longfield, who came to Toronto to speak about the successful campaign for an English children’s bill of food rights. With assistance from the TFPC and others, the Metcalf Foundation brought Will and Erika Allen, of Growing Power, to talk with a variety of foundations and urban policy experts about their work inspiring and promoting community gardens and greenhouses in disadvantaged neighbourhoods in Chicago and Milwaukee. As foundations learn more about the ability of community-based food organizations to stimulate community safety, popular art and employment readiness, it is hoped that funding for food security work will increase.

Policy:

Policy is and should be a strong suit of any food policy council. The development of policy, and the implementation of policy are two distinct phases of policy work.

When it comes to local and sustainable food, it appears that policy implementation is still some distance away.

Many of the groups that need to work closely together to advance local and sustainable food have yet to establish working relationships. As a result, the TFPC is committing itself to the development of a working consensus among key stakeholders. The TFPC is trying to foster collaboration among local conventional, local sustainable and local organic farmers, for example, since they all share common local ground and should be able to manage their differences from that framework. Likewise, the TFPC is working with others to bring together several communities that have often been either at odds with one another or unaware of the other's problems – farmers, environmentalists, recent immigrants, people on low income and public health advocates, for example – with the hope that this new coalition can help establish a fresh base for a local and sustainable food system. Popular and governmental awareness that local and sustainable food can help address crucial global warming and air quality issues is only at the beginning stages. So at this time, policy proposals are premature and even counter-productive relative to relationship-and consensus-building. However, when the time comes, it will be useful for the TFPC to propose policy ideas and language for comprehensive policy in such arenas as community gardening, farmers markets in parks and other City properties, food packaging, food “waste,” and public purchasing.

Toronto Leadership:

Toronto's Food Policy Council (founded in 1991) and the City's international leadership in adopting a food charter have contributed to our leadership role in food issues. As a result, speaking invitations are regularly tendered to staff and members of the TFPC. During 2006 and early 2007, TFPC staff spoke on topics such as food councils, food charters or local food systems at conferences and meetings across Canada and Internationally as well. The TFPC is privileged to have the opportunity to play some role in this development, one of the few hopeful trends of the modern era.