



STAFF REPORT INFORMATION ONLY

Toronto Food Policy Council 2008 Annual Report: Thinking Globally, Eating Locally

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SUMMARY

This annual report from the Toronto Food Policy Council (TFPC) updates the Board of Health on public health and related implications of the rising popularity of locally-grown food. The report identifies six important areas where healthy public policy needs to address the many complications of moving toward a more local food system. These six areas are: the definition of local; the ranking of local food environmental benefits; the centrality of government-funded infrastructure; the uplifting role of public markets; urban agriculture and community gardening; and local job creation. This report shows that the integrated perspectives of healthy public policy and community food security provide common ground for developing relevant programs, advocacy and communication materials.

This report also updates the Board of Health on the activities of the TFPC in fulfilling its Terms of Reference, which are set by the Board of Health. Members and staff of the Toronto Food Policy Council have been actively working in most areas related to the developing local food movement.

Financial Impact

There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.

DECISION HISTORY

The Terms of Reference for the Toronto Food Policy Council were adopted by the Toronto Board of Health in 2008. The Terms of Reference specify the Toronto Food Policy Council's mandate to assist the City in moving toward implementation of the Toronto Food Charter. This Charter, adopted unanimously by City Council in 2001, enjoins the City to engage in a range of activities pertaining to local food – including community gardening, government purchasing policies, culturally-acceptable foods and food security. This TFPC annual report reviews progress made in advancing these issues during 2008.

ISSUE BACKGROUND

In the distant past, most people were limited to foods produced very close to where they lived; it was more common for nomadic peoples to follow the food than for food to come to the people. In the recent past, the national and multinational corporations responsible for processing and distributing most foods in North America have taken to sourcing their foods from all over the world, even when selling to areas where such foods are abundant. This system of globalized food sourcing has troubled many people including those concerned about farmland preservation and the hollowing out of rural populations, the nutrient content of foods, the impact of transportation and transport-ready packaging on pollution and global warming, and the impact of “anonymous foods” on vibrant food cultures.

Toronto is a city with a lively and varied food sector and a dynamic mix of community agencies working on issues related to community food security. Many of these organizations have championed a movement to promote local food, and in so doing have identified a range of issues that are sometimes referred to as “new food policy” issues. Old food policy, it is said, dealt with issues related to food adequacy (stirred by unforgettable memories of desperate hunger and famine during the 1930 and '40s), food safety and basic nutrition. The new food policy, it is said, deals with issues such as corporate concentration in the food sector, environmental impacts of highly productive but industrialized food systems, the growing incidence of hunger in Canada and around the world, the increasing influence of fast and junk foods, and the decline of family and community food rituals. The Toronto Food Policy Council works to link both old and new food policy issues.

COMMENTS

This report chronicles the Toronto Food Policy Council's engagement with local food issues, and provides context for areas of future policy development that will be influenced by the rising local food movement.

Developing a comprehensive programme for issues related to a local and sustainable food system is a continuing work-in-progress across several fronts. In 2009, the Toronto Food Policy Council will be working with and contributing to the development of a Toronto Food Strategy, including measures to foster a local and sustainable food system for Toronto.

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ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1: Toronto Food Policy Council 2008 Annual Report:
Thinking Globally, Eating Locally

Attachment 1

Toronto Food Policy Council 2008 Annual Report: Thinking Globally, Eating Locally

The Oxford Dictionary proclaimed “locavore” the word of the year in 2007. Rising sales and public opinion polls have confirmed local food as the trend of the times ever since. Part fashion, part market niche, part social movement, the excitement for local food wells up from many sources. It doubtless builds on the directive to “think globally, act locally,” coined by Scottish city planner Patrick Geddes in 1905, and reborn during Earth Day celebrations of the 1970s. It also descends from the rise of ethical consumerism – think fair trade, free-range chickens, sweatshop-free clothes – that developed during the 1990s. As well, it grows out of the development of conscious eating – not simply taking anonymous food ingredients for granted, but savouring the stories, personal connections and tastes attached to food, marked by the rise of farmers markets, and by such magazines as *Edible Toronto*. Moreover, world-weary and globalization-weary consumers are searching out new and unique products in every category that are more personal, authentic and closer to their values and identity. Last, but not least, the global recession has directed people’s and governments’ attention to spending money locally to create local jobs, and several global food scares have directed public attention to food that comes from a known and safe place. All the ingredients are there for the mainstreaming of local food in retail outlets and public policy.

The interest, dialogue and debate around local food are part and parcel of what is sometimes called “the new food policy,” which began during the 1970s as a new generation of food analysts started to add some “heart and soul” to the “old food policy” – which focused on abundant food production, reliable food safety and sound nutrition. The new food policy broadened the concern of public policy and healthy public policy to include all the factors that intersect with food – such wide-ranging issues as global corporate concentration, sustainability, bio-diversity, export subsidies, food labelling, food marketing, seed patenting, animal welfare, provenance, terroir, farmland protection, pollution, global warming, urban agriculture, food engagement, gardening, community development, mealtime sociability and commensality, cultural heritage, ethical diets (vegetarianism, for example), food skills, food deserts and hunger. Ryerson University’s Mustafa Koc, founding chair of Food Secure Canada, calls this whole food scene “Grassroots Nation,” the lifeforce of the local food movement.

Toronto Public Health and the Toronto Board of Health have had a front row seat on these developments since at least 1991, when the Toronto Food Policy Council (TFPC) was launched to work with and support citizens working on innovative approaches to community food security. As part of its accountability to the Toronto Board of Health, which appoints the TFPC members, this annual report of the Toronto Food Policy Council reviews the TFPC’s work in the fields of local and sustainable food. The report also identifies areas where healthy public policy needs to be cultivated as food enthusiasts begin to “think locally, act municipally.”

To get a grip on healthy public policy as it relates to local food, six ways of thinking about local food need to be put in context as public health issues.

1. What is Local?

First, the meaning of local is all over the map. When most people talk about local food, they are using the word “local” as a figure of speech, not a literal and precise description. It is the same with other words that describe food. Few people, for example, think “cooking from scratch” or “home cooked” means starting with the flour to make pasta, starting with the tomato to prepare the sauce, and hauling out a side of beef to make the meatballs. At this time, there is little benefit to getting academic about the exact definition, and the consensus seems to be that regional political boundaries are about right – Ontario in Ontario, Massachusetts in Massachusetts. At a time when the average food consumed by anyone in North America travels about 2,000 kilometers from farm to fork, there is not much point quibbling about local food coming from all of 300, rather than only 100 kilometers away.

This easy-going, generous and welcoming approach to foods that come from a relatively local political boundary has several advantages. The bigger the area that is defined as local, the easier it is to find farmers who can supply the varied needs of a major food service organization – a City cafeteria or sizeable grocer, for example. For a trend that is just getting underway, that is a major advantage.

As well, an expansive approach to defining local in terms of political boundaries, rather than more confined watersheds or historical and cultural traditions, encourages social inclusion. Given Toronto’s stature as the most varied multicultural city in the world, and given the commitment in the Toronto Food Charter to culturally appropriate foods, it is fitting that the soil of Ontario welcomes as many domesticated plants as possible from around the world. “You belong here”, Toronto’s slogan goes, and that works for foods that can adapt to a moderate climate. Indeed, the development of season extension techniques, as well as programs to encourage immigrants to start farming careers, are essential to any strategy to localize food production.

Local food strategies can use the easy-going approach to defining local as a way to promote innovation as well as inclusion. In Europe and other areas of the world, foods and beverages are defined as local if they have a long and proud association with an area that identifies the food with the local soil, climate and craft or artisanal traditions – the complexity of which produces “terroir.” This is the heritage of French champagne, Italy’s parmesan ham, English Stilton cheese, Korean kimchee, Assam tea, Turkish delights, Brazilian pork and bean stew, Jamaican cod and akee, and Yiddish brisket. Royal Roads environmental management professor Lenore Newman calls such delicacies “foods of locality.” Many of them were originally concocted because of the scarcity and lack of options in earlier days, and the necessity to rely on strictly local and low-cost ingredients. The Slow Food movement has brought attention to many of the more homely of these foods of locality by calling them country or peasant foods and protecting their future by

promoting them as part of the “Ark (as in Noah’s Ark, which persevered bio-diversity before the biblical flood) of Taste. Perhaps public health advocates might champion a Canadian Ark that expresses the First Nations foods that have been largely forgotten. Perhaps encouragement could be given to innovate with a broader range of foods of locality than presently found in maple sugar, Timbits and poutine. Local foods, in other words, can become an invitation to innovate and adapt, not just preserve, and certainly not, as critics of “defensive localism” have charged, a strategy for upholding the primacy of long-established elites.

There is one exception to the benefits of sticking with a “loose” approach to defining local. Many people assume that local automatically equates with a number of other features they like – a set of words such as “local, fresh safe and nutritious food from small family farms that take care of the land and do not cause pollution from long-distance trucks.” These characteristics do not always go together in the real world. In order for local food to be fresh, for example, it has to be managed from the moment it is picked with intensive, expensive and complicated methods of “post-harvest handling,” or it will lose the nutrients, taste and look that go with fresh. Likewise, the pollution from transporting food depends as much on the type and size of vehicle used as it does on the miles separating food producers from customers; a unit of food coming by train from Vancouver to Toronto or by tractor trailer from California to Ontario may require less fuel than the same unit of food destined for a hundred mile diet that has come in on a small pick-up truck. Likewise, long-distance coffee may well come from a family farm, while local tomatoes come from a corporate farm hiring migrant labourers. When it comes to public policy, no stereotypes need apply. The stereotypes, expectations, romance and color of local have to be distinguished from the reality, or there will be no public policy gain. This is why many people and organizations, such as the TFPC, pair the words “local and sustainable,” so both sets of expected benefits are explicitly identified and managed for.

2. The Complexity of Local Flavours

The second contextual and background issue relates to how complicated local food can become. Local only looks easy when it is viewed from afar through a narrow telescope. After a year feeding her family in Kentucky on food raised in her own garden and farms close by, novelist Barbara Kingsolver, author of the best-selling *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle: A Year of Food Life*, argued that “the more we know about our food system, the more we are called into complex choices.”

Many of the issues surrounding local food production are deceptively simple. Local farms are closer and so there is less pollution moving their goods to market, right? But foods grown on nearby farms may well use fertilizers, pesticides, tractors, tractor fuel and food packages that come from all corners of the world. Some of the waste from local foods will be land-filled or recycled in different corners of the world. That does not necessarily save the planet from much wear and tear. A telescope view of one factor – such as the fossil fuels burned up in the trip from farm to fork – can lead people trying to reduce global warming emissions in the wrong direction. If fuel used taking food from

farm to fork is the only factor measured, then the greenhouse gas savings are quite staggering – substituting local foods for imports of 58 standard foods would have the same climate benefit as taking 16,191 cars off the road, claims one report. But energy is used during all phases of food production, and different savings are available from different methods at each phase. Although the miles travelled by food seem overwhelming, food transportation burns less energy than food production. Fertilizers, for example, take a lot of energy to manufacture and then to transport to farms, and then off-gas nitrous oxides that are almost 300 times more potent than carbon dioxide. Refrigeration is commonly the biggest culprit in energy use, as anyone who looks at the open-air freezers in supermarkets can quickly understand. The energy to make convenient and disposable packages and then haul them to faraway landfills or recycling operations is another immense challenge. From the standpoint of the global warming emergency, it is the “embodied energy” of the entire food cycle, not simply the distance travelled from food to table, that gives rise to dangerous levels of emissions.¹

Cities wishing to reduce global warming emissions need to look at menus that offer a wide range of mixed options, instead of assuming that changes to one factor will be effective. As part of a series of motions to reduce global warming, the City of Toronto’s Management Committee proposed that certain City agencies buy more local foods during the summer of 2008. The Committee unanimously rejected a proposal supported by deputants from the TFPC who proposed the Town of Markham model which committed to percentage increases in their purchase of local and sustainable foods, thereby reducing emissions across the board. The TFPC learned from this temporary setback that the investment in local and sustainable food should not be presented as a panacea or “magic bullet” for any one problem, but should be advanced as one among a set of measures that combine a comprehensive series of benefits.

The complexity of food often means that happy mediums are better than perfect extremes. Take the case of everyday staples, such as wheat and bread. Ontario does not have access to local bread. Ontario-grown wheat can produce good crackers and flatbreads, but the dryness of the prairies is ideal for wheat kernels with the right combination of gluten and protein to be baked into leaven breads. A happy medium is to grow fruits and vegetables on southern Ontario’s warm, moist and fertile soils, thereby putting them to their highest use, and to import flour from the prairies by trains or ships that require a minimum of fuel per unit of food carried. In the food sector, zeal is essential, but zealotry is counter-productive.

3. Infrastructure Matters

In keeping with the complexity of food and food systems, the moving and shaking of food is beyond the ability of the untrained eye to see. Like icebergs, food systems are built on a base that is nine-tenths below the surface. This reality frustrates people when they first learn that local stores import apples and strawberries from thousands of miles away, even though excellent apple and strawberry farms in their own backyard are going bankrupt. Complain to the local store manager, the typical suggestion goes, implying that a store manager had the authority to change that.

This raises the third background issue and context that help us think productively about local food. Local food is not unplugged. All foods are processed in some way. Even strawberries or lettuce from the backyard need to be washed, cooled and then immediately kept at a certain temperature before being served a few hours later. Deterioration starts the moment death takes grip. Infrastructure is indispensable, either to slow the pace of decay, or speed the pace of delivery, or both. No food goes very far without infrastructure, and local food needs as much, albeit different, infrastructure as food from far away. Managers of internet-based stores that ship goods over long distances sometimes say that it is the “last mile,” the actual connection with the shopper, where things can go wrong and extra resources are required. As much as some “middlemen” may be cut out when producer and buyer live close to one another, the last mile is no shorter for local companies than faraway ones. Going the distance with the connections, materials, design knowledge and sales techniques at a farmstand in a farmers market is at least as demanding of time and resources as a shelf at Walmart. That is why local food is rarely cheaper than imports, especially when the imports are grown with subsidized irrigation water and transported on subsidized highways.

Local food infrastructure inevitably raises the question of who will pay. Most farmers, the key players in a local food system, have invested heavily in their farms, and have few resources to spare on infrastructure that deals with processing, distribution and sales. Corporations will usually only invest in infrastructure if there are exports that will keep production lines busy on as close to a 24/7/365 basis as possible; that is the only way to pay the freight. Consequently, there is a lack of local food infrastructure – the whole gamut of research into best seeds and breeds, education of farmers, wholesalers and sales staff, chillers for post-harvest handling, year-round storage warehouses for apples, and so on. Given the “market failure” that accounts for lack of corporate investment in local infrastructure, money for local infrastructure is unlikely unless governments (or co-ops assisted by governments, as is common in the U.S.) step up to the plate. That is why the World Trade Organization’s and International Monetary Fund’s prohibition of government intervention in food infrastructure during the 1990s resulted in a quick collapse of local food systems and speedy victory for multinational food corporations around the world.

That is why Toronto-born McMaster University student Zsuzso Fodor argues that “the first step” toward local food “is not a reduction of food miles, but of decision-making miles.”² Local food is more about overcoming the distance of decision-making miles (what is globally referred to as “food sovereignty”) than about the difficulties of responding to the dictates from geographically-determined growing conditions or the challenges of responding to consumer needs.

The provincially-owned Ontario Food Terminal is an example of how infrastructure can serve or fail to serve the food access, health, employment and income needs of all people involved in a local food system. It was first established during the 1940s as a means to allow small, local farms to pool their produce in one place and thereby meet the needs of the new supermarkets that wanted to buy in bulk at one time and place. The publicly-

owned Food Terminal is exemplary in its ability to support neighbourhood “mom and pop” grocers, who can stock up with high-quality, reasonably-priced produce simply by going to the Terminal early each morning; this is why Toronto has fewer food deserts and more main street grocers than other major cities in North America. Notwithstanding its success in food access, the Food Terminal does not support local farmers by identifying or featuring Ontario produce. Ontario wines are highlighted at Ontario Liquor Control Board outlets, Ontario beers are featured at Brewers’ Retail, and Ontario lottery tickets are featured everywhere. But when it comes to fruits and vegetables, the cornerstones of a healthy diet and prosperous peri-urban agricultural community, knowledge about product placement has gone missing. Nor do Ontario universities or research centres provide a fraction of the resources routinely available to U.S. food producers through land grant colleges and universities across the United States. Support of local food is the infrastructure path not taken in Ontario, and it has made all the difference.

Lack of public infrastructure is the main obstacle to local food becoming more widely available. Foodlands are saddled with the infrastructure based on the mechanized production of undifferentiated, low-cost commodities grown for the export market. Marketing boards pool undifferentiated products (milk or eggs, for instance) across vast geographic areas, thereby making it almost impossible to produce niche local and artisanal foods unique to a geographic place. Federally inspected abattoirs, providing the federal seal of approval demanded by most supermarkets and restaurants, serve farmers geared to export markets, not local markets. As a result, local outlets usually serve imports that carry the federal stamp of another nation, a stamp, unlike that of provincial regulators, that is automatically accepted as the equal to federal Canadian inspection. Marketing may well be needed if local foods are to be sold to local eaters, but the marketing is needed to convince governments, not consumers or producers, of the value of local foods. The “buy local” jingles by Foodland Ontario do not substitute for infrastructure that carries local foods from fields to stores.

4. Local Variations

Local food is at its most local when it helps create a local community between consumers and producers, and then among food buyers themselves; that is a seeming paradox that provides the fourth bit of context for understanding the workings of local food. The pleasure and enthusiasm many producers and consumers feel for local food hits much closer to home than freeways not taken and gases not emitted. Food is an intimate commodity, one classic Canadian food text argues. Food is as up-close and personal as the relationship between humans and nature ever gets. In a physical sense, it is swallowed and taken deep inside the body. Food also brings people closer to each other. In an emotional sense, it is often enjoyed in a deeply personal way and associated with shared memories. Words such as companion – which comes from the Latin roots for “with” and “bread” – indicate that food has long been about relationships, not just tummy filler and nutrient delivery.

Just as with other personalized services – from doctors, lawyers and accountants, for example – many people crave a personal relationship with their food service provider.

They want to get to know their farmer in person, find out about where their food comes from, and hear the stories behind it. And like many other personalized activities – marriage ceremonies, religious worship and yoga practice are examples – individuals enjoy celebrating their personal experiences with food in fellowship with others. So it is with local food, which explains why farmers markets are more popular than private home delivery services or isolated farm stands. To this point – and that may change soon – farmers markets have been the major place where people come to deliberately buy local foods. More often than not, they come away with other experiences of local colour – meeting local residents, listening to local buskers and signing on for local volunteering, etc. This combination of personal and commercial activity helps make farmers markets the fastest-rising food retail trend on the continent. Growing at a compound rate of 7.3 per cent a year since 1998, according to a Farmers' Market Ontario annual report in 2009, estimated sales at Ontario's 154 farmers markets are in the range of \$427 to 641 million.³

With continuing encouragement from the TFPC, the City of Toronto supports the sale and celebration of local food in the public realm by offering City space at nominal rates to farmers market organizers. The historic St. Lawrence Market is complemented by weekly markets during the prime season at most of the former city halls that became part of an amalgamated Toronto. The TFPC has also encouraged community groups to establish local farmers markets as vehicles of community engagement; these are often held weekly in local parks or community and recreation centres within walking distance of neighbourhoods.

It has been shown that particular kinds of farmers markets can bring neighbourhoods into being. Thanks to City funding from Community Food Security Grants, initially championed by the TFPC and Food and Hunger Action Committee, an inspired group of Animators seconded from FoodShare, Afri-Can FoodBasket and The Stop Community Food Centre have been organizing people in at-risk and priority neighbourhoods around common food needs and interests for the past four years. With TFPC encouragement (a TFPC representative serves on their Board of Directors), the Animators have adapted neighbourhood-based farmers markets to make them more inclusive by responding to the needs of people on low incomes and from diverse ethno-cultural backgrounds. It takes a village to raise a child, the African proverb goes, but Toronto's experience shows that it takes food to raise a village.

Animators have organized 18 community-based Good Food Markets, mostly in areas of the city where farmers cannot make enough sales to warrant establishing a conventional farmers market that only permits farmer sales of farm-grown food. The Good Food Markets provide low-income and multicultural communities an equal opportunity to enjoy the sociability of a market while partnering with FoodShare to offer food bought at bulk prices from FoodShare's Good Food Box program, which is usually over half-sourced from local farmers. Such local variations help make food markets an accessible experience in all parts of the city, while also serving the function of providing a quality food outlet in an area that otherwise might become a food desert. This made-in-Toronto invention expresses the NGO sector's fresh and flexible approach to using public space to combine opportunities for local farmers with access to favourite country foods of various

ethno-cultural communities, and to combine that with price points increasing household food security, and mix it all up with the pleasure of re-localizing the once-vital food shopping experience back in the community.

5. How Does Your Garden Grow?

Growing your own food is a way to implement the 100 yard diet, about as close as local food gets. But the context for appreciating and valuing this may be that growing food is the most productive way for people to get to know themselves and their own untapped skills and powers, as well as the easiest way to grow their community.

As with community markets, community gardens allow the personal production of local food to be enjoyed in fellowship with others. As with community-based farmers markets, community gardens began as an adaptation – in this case to allotment gardens, the traditional way for tenants to be granted access to land in Europe. The first Toronto allotments in the 1970s made public space available to people who did not have their own backyard to garden in. It was assumed that allotment gardeners should pay for their plot, and that allotment gardeners wanted to commune with their plants, not their fellow growers or neighbours. At the urging of the TFPC, the City of Toronto agreed during the 1990s to offer free plots for community groups that wanted to garden in a way that provided a healthy and community-building experience – an opportunity for elderly immigrants to grow their favourite country foods while making friends and overcoming social isolation, for example. In this way, the direct production of local foods contributed to the direct production of local community capacity – enough value to warrant the City dispense with the fee charged to allotment gardeners. As a result, community gardens became the norm in priority neighbourhoods.

The Animators are responsible for the major expansion of community gardening sites in this century, in large part because Toronto Community Housing Corporation has provided them with funding and opportunities to work across the city. These gardens have succeeded at many levels: they create a greenspace that can absorb compost and rainwater that would otherwise be wasted; they increase access to fruits and vegetables; they increase access to local foods that offset global warming; they increase the capacity of neighbours to work together on an attractive gathering place they can all be proud of, a symbol for the transition of their neighbourhood.

When City funding of some \$500,000 for urban agriculture projects that offset global warming wends its way into the community, it will likely become the largest investment Toronto has made in local food production. The successes of the Animators may well be duplicated and extended by groups across the city, confirming that local food helps create a city of urban villages.

6. Look Before You Leak

Perhaps the greatest appeal of local food during this time of global economic downturn is the opportunity to create local employment. Food is generally considered a recession-

proof industry because people need to eat regularly, and try not to postpone eating, as they might postpone the purchase of clothing or entertainment. Food has long been the second largest employer of workers in Ontario, just after the auto industry. Given the reversals suffered by the auto industry, food and agriculture may soon take the lead. A case could be made that local, sustainable, healthy, diverse and accessible foods could become the driver for overcoming recession in Toronto, in Ontario and elsewhere. This is the sixth context for evaluating local food from a healthy public policy perspective: local food advocates become local champions of a basic social determinant of health – good work that provides sufficient dignity and income to support healthy eating and living.

Local jobs come with the territory of local food in at least three ways. Indeed, the three-way job creation action of food accounts for why governments have long subsidized food and agriculture as pivots of economic development. First, food is rich in “backward linkages” – the labour, equipment and materials required to produce food. Second, food is rich in “forward linkages” – the post-harvest handling, processing, delivery and preparation of food that is often estimated to create five city jobs for every farm-based job. Third, food is rich in its “multiplier effect” – the jobs created when the farmer pays for a haircut, the barber then pays for a restaurant meal, the restaurant owner pays school taxes, and on and on.

Because food has such powerful three-way impacts, a relatively modest shift toward local food purchases can have a dramatic effect on employment levels. Britain’s New Economics Foundation, supported by the federal government’s Countryside Agency, argues that if every person in Cornwall County diverted one per cent of their spending to local items, it would inject up to \$135 million pounds a year into the local economy and create some 5,000 jobs. The authors of a study on Sustainable Seattle claim that a 20 per cent increase in local food purchasing (which presently accounts for a paltry half of one per cent of food spending in the area) would generate \$500 million worth of economic activity, enough to stimulate 10,000 new jobs. One economist consulted by Niagara wine industry leader Donald Ziraldo calculated that if all Greenbelt households in Ontario increased their purchase of local foods by ten dollars a week, it would put \$121.5 million a week of new money into the economy, enough to generate 2,500 jobs. All these jobs can be created without a cent of taxpayer subsidies, leaving governments free to match these gains by their own purchasing policies.

This is a project with momentum. As servicing of local customers, including tourists, becomes the mainstay of food production, areas of Ontario may, for the first time, produce their own genuine foods of locality. Icewine – a product that takes advantage of, rather than tries to overcome, our unique climate – led the pack in this regard, and may soon be followed by cheeses. A wide range of healthy multicultural cuisines in Toronto, already a comfort and joy for many local communities, could also become a mainstay of the tourism experience, including tourists from across the city. The local food employment momentum can lead to continuous improvement in food skills of all kinds, including food and health literacy, which feed back to encourage conscious and high-esteem eating of healthy, sustainable and diverse food choices.

TFPC ACTIVITIES DURING 2008

The TFPC and several partners (GTA Agricultural Action Committee, Sustain Ontario, Caledon Countryside Alliance, Toronto Economic Development, Sodexo, Green Fuse Communications, and others) sponsored a April 30-May 1, 2009 conference on infrastructure to help stakeholders in the emerging local food system network and develop common, thoughtful and cohesive policies for their own and government adoption. The conference represented a turning point in the TFPC's five years of working to support local, sustainable, safe, healthy, diverse and accessible foods.

The TFPC held its first local food conference in 2003 at Toronto's historic Montgomery's Inn. It brought together about 100 farmers, chefs, processors, environmentalists and health advocates to talk about ways country farmers and city eaters – the two solitudes of Canadian life and the Canadian food system – could work together. Following that, TFPC members Janice Etter and John O'Gorman helped establish the Greater Toronto Area Agricultural Action Committee – which hired prominent farm leader and TFPC member Elbert van Donkersgoed as its first executive director. The GTA Agricultural Action Committee is one of the leading groups in North America to bring together farmers, planners and public health advocates to promote new opportunities for production and sale of local foods. The success of the 2009 conference shows that the agenda has been broadened beyond collaboration between local farmers and local eaters. The new challenge is to include local city-based businesses and promoters of “incubators” alongside local farmers, eaters and public health advocates. A working group from the conference will produce a discussion paper and action plan, which will be reviewed by follow-up meetings during the fall of 2009. The Greater Toronto Area is far ahead of the pack on this set of issues, well on the way to linking the many different groups needed to work on common areas of public interest. According to Harvard University business analyst Rosabeth Moss Kanter, author of *World Class: Thriving Locally in the Global Economy*, the ability to nurture such collaboration is the pivotal advantage associated with successful cities.

THE HUNDRED YARD DIET AND BEYOND

During the 1990s, the TFPC encouraged development of the Metro Toronto's own “back 40” by cultivating backyards, rooftops, community gardens, several hundred acres of vacant spaces and large tracts of land designated agricultural. The TFPC also partnered with FoodShare to find ways of bringing in more farm-fresh healthy food from the Greater Toronto Area to sell at a discount to people on low incomes. FoodShare's Good Food Box was one of the first ventures in the city to actively seek out food grown by local farmers. In the new century, the TFPC encouraged government purchasing of local and sustainable food. That vision was adopted by the Food and Hunger Action Committee and written into the Toronto Food Charter of 2001, both projects in which the TFPC played a leading role. Likewise, the TFPC worked closely with City planners to

ensure adequate profile for local food issues in the Official Plan, tabled in 2002. In the same period, the TFPC was one of the only organizations to actively promote a Greenbelt that protected the working landscape of farmland and farmers – the baseline for future food security in an era of peak oil and depleted resources. Once the Greenbelt was established, the TFPC stimulated the development of Local Food Plus, a Non Government Organization that facilitates the purchase of local and sustainable foods by local public agencies.

The NGO sector has been indispensable to the local food movement, which came out of civil society long before industry, government or academia twigged to the issues. As a result, much of the TFPC's early work was with the community sector. The TFPC supported many initiatives to establish community farmers markets and community gardens. Through its program, launched in 2003, of giving awards to "local food heroes" who "go the extra distance to bring local and healthy food closer to us," the TFPC has identified and encouraged a new generation of food entrepreneurs. To link community groups and government agencies with farmers and food entrepreneurs, the TFPC helped with the creation of the Greater Toronto Area Agricultural Action Committee, as well as Sustain Ontario, the Alliance for Better Food and Farming. The TFPC's daily e-mail service links more than 1,500 people active in the local food scene, and provides information on the latest trends and events in local, sustainable and accessible food.

In the past year, the TFPC has been engaged with many initiatives that highlighted community food security and local food systems. The TFPC partnered with Equity Studies and Meal Exchange at the University of Toronto to host a World Food Day series of events about "Food on Fire," the impact of global warming on food security. The TFPC also organized presentation of Laura Berman's evocative photographs of Greenbelt farming in the foyer of City Hall during the week of World Food Day. TFPC member James Kuhns became one of three senior leaders of MetroAg: the North American Alliance for Urban and Peri-Urban Agriculture. At the beginning of this year, TFPC member June Komisar played a lead role in organizing the highly-acclaimed Carrot City exhibit on urban agriculture at The Design Exchange. TFPC members and staff also supported FoodCycles, a youthful grouping that signed on in the spring of 2009 to develop a next-generation greenhouse for urban food production on the federal Downsview lands. TFPC members or staff serve on the steering committees of major food organizations, including GTA Agricultural Action Committee, Sustain Ontario and Food Secure Canada. Thanks to a new addition to staff complement in 2009, the TFPC is increasingly able to educate the health community on local and sustainable food trends through a Facebook and Wise Earth site and, very shortly, with a rejuvenated website that takes full advantage of the high traffic to the site.

An organization such as the TFPC is indispensable for a public health unit hoping to reach out and touch the energy behind the youthful social movements dealing with new food issues. The TFPC is mandated to engage 30 citizens with as many fields of expertise in the work of policy development through ongoing relationships with policy and planning staff at Toronto Public Health and other units across the City. It is a meeting place, from which many people go on to serve in other bodies, such as the

Medical Officer of Health's Food Strategy Steering Group. The TFPC is also structured to deal holistically with a wide range of food topics, especially ones that cross conventional boundaries of professional or departmental specialization, and to work with other City staff on economic development or social exclusion issues, for example. The TFPC is also allowed to have two members who directly represent rural and farming communities based outside Toronto's city limits, another mechanism to ensure the TFPC plays an animating role in bringing communities together to work on community food security.

Problem-seeing is the first stage of problem-solving, and a food policy council is well-positioned to be a problem-seer on matters that exist at the boundaries of intersecting issues. "Food is a prism through which we can explore the scope and complexity of many of our most pressing economic, social and ecological issues," says Welsh food scholar Kevin Morgan, and food policy councils see the world through that kind of prism. The TFPC also provides what might be called a "policy tunnel" of a win-win-win approach to projects that are good for public health, good for the economy, good for community development and good for the environment. Storm Cunningham, author of *reWealth*, and frequent collaborator with Toronto's Seneca College on green infrastructure projects, says "renewal engines" are the key to new green economies in any city. Renewal engines are safe and neutral spaces for brainstorming and exploring new ideas and relationships. The TFPC provides that space within Toronto Public Health and the City at large.

It is unclear at this point where the local food movement is heading or where it will take public health thinking and action. Food is definitely a passion of what is called the "creative class," a group of out-of-the-box entrepreneurs that finds Toronto very congenial. The movement may support a full range of agricultural products, fuel, fiber and fabric, as well as food, as we enter into an era of biological materials that replace synthetic fossil fuel products. In a city as diverse and multicultural as Toronto, local food will need to become what Michael Sacco, of the fair trade organization ChocoSol, calls "trans-local," able to incorporate and adapt ingredients from many cultures and lands in special partnerships with people from those base cultures. In a city as vulnerable as Toronto to external shocks, local food will also need to address "resilience," the ability to bounce back from a traumatic event, thanks to high levels of skill and capacity in self-reliant food production and preparation. Indeed, local food is a form of life insurance against external shocks.

Environmental management of food production areas may well be slated for improvement, since the eco-services of food production – the clean air, water, beautiful scenery, recreational green space, and habitat for endangered species that come from vibrant local farms – only come to life and become available to nearby cities if food production is localized. The TFPC's role in highlighting this range of healthy environment and healthy public policy benefits from a positive food system helped earn the TFPC a major Toronto Green Award for its work during 2008 and earlier. An environmental management agenda for local food will include protection of agricultural lands, an urgent priority in a country where the majority of first class foodland is close to

cities. The agenda would also likely include the restoration of the Great Lakes and 250,000 smaller ones so they can sustain, as before, both sports and commercial fisheries. The TFPC supports that vision through its membership in Alternative Land Use Services, an innovative farmer-based organization born out of the ashes of the old tobacco economy of Norfolk County, which advocates for fees for farm-based ecological services. As Dr. Viki Sonntag, a Seattle-area planner dealing with local food system issues put it: “what we are witnessing in the emergence of the local food economy is a fundamental shift of what makes for healthy economics – from growth based on commoditizing resources to community stewardship of resource flows.”⁴

¹ [http://www.facebook.com/1/http://chd.region.waterloo.on.ca/web/health.nsf/0/54ED787F44ACA44C852571410056AEB0/\\$file/FOOD_MILES_REPORT.pdf?openelement](http://www.facebook.com/1/http://chd.region.waterloo.on.ca/web/health.nsf/0/54ED787F44ACA44C852571410056AEB0/$file/FOOD_MILES_REPORT.pdf?openelement) ; for a review of energy-consumption, see Sarah DeWeerd, “Is Local Food Better?” www.worldwatch.org/node/6064?emc=el&m=227941&l=4&v=1a7fb49ec. See also Holly Hills, *Food Miles: Background and Marketing*, National Center for Appropriate Technology, USDA, 2008.

² Zsuzso Fodor, *To Feed A City: Painting a Landscape of Alternative Food Systems in Hamilton and their Potential for Achieving Community Food Security*, Honours thesis, McMaster University, p 55

³ *Farmers Markets of Ontario Impact Study 2009 Report*, January, 2009

⁴ Viki Sonntag, *Why Local Linkages Matter: Findings from the Local Food Economy*, Sustainable Seattle, 2008, p 99