



## STAFF REPORT INFORMATION ONLY

### Toronto Food Strategy: 2016 Update

<b>Date:</b>	October 13, 2016
<b>To:</b>	Board of Health
<b>From:</b>	Acting Medical Officer of Health
<b>Wards:</b>	All
<b>Reference Number:</b>	

#### **SUMMARY**

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Toronto, along with cities all over the world, faces numerous health, social and environmental problems related to food. Over the last half-century, there has been a global upsurge in the consumption of meat and processed foods rich in saturated fats, sugars and salts. Meanwhile there has been a steady decline in the consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables, pulses and whole-grain products. The result is a rise in chronic diseases such as diabetes, heart disease, osteoporosis, certain types of cancer and obesity. Addressing food systems security and a degraded food system is a complex global problem, and a problem that requires innovative and strategic solutions. Municipal Government has a key role to play.

The goal of the Toronto Food Strategy is to champion and support a healthier, more sustainable food system for all Torontonians. The Food Strategy builds upon the work already undertaken by Toronto Public Health (TPH) and other City Divisions and takes an “action research” approach to develop and prototype projects that concentrate on addressing complex, interconnected elements of the food system, preventing chronic disease and promoting good health. This report provides an update on the Toronto Food Strategy and situates the work in the context of global municipal food systems initiatives including the Milan Urban Food Policy Pact to which Toronto is a signatory. The attached report also provides an overview of current food strategy initiatives to build a healthy, sustainable food system.

#### **Financial Impact**

There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.

## **DECISION HISTORY**

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

Toronto Food Strategy Board of Health updates can be found at:

<http://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2008/hl/decisions/2008-06-16-hl15-dd.pdf>

<http://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2010/hl/decisions/2010-06-01-hl31-dd.htm>

<http://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2013/hl/bgrd/backgroundfile-62765.pdf>

<http://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2015/hl/bgrd/backgroundfile-80280.pdf>

## **ISSUE BACKGROUND**

The global food system is intricately linked to many of the greatest problems facing the world today, from the rise of non-communicable diseases and food insecurity to species loss and climate change.<sup>i</sup> In total, one billion people do not have access to enough good food to lead healthy active lives while two billion people are either overweight or obese.<sup>ii</sup> This is not just a case of too much food in developed nations and not enough food in developing nations. In reality, food insecurity, hunger and malnutrition often coincide with over consumption of processed foods and obesity within the same country, city or even household.<sup>i</sup>

Food insecurity is often found hand-in-hand with other social problems such as poverty, unemployment and lower levels of education. It is also associated with a range of chronic health conditions including diabetes, heart disease, osteoporosis and obesity.<sup>iii,iv,v</sup> The cost of food insecurity is not just felt by individuals and households but also by neighbourhoods, the city and country as a whole, through increased medical costs, lost productivity, premature death, illness, disability and lower professional and educational achievement.

Attempts to address food insecurity have been offset by rising food prices, wage stagnation, cuts in social assistance rates and increasing cost of living. Consequently, more people are coming to rely on food banks, with a 13% rise in the number of people using food banks in Toronto since 2008.<sup>vi</sup> Meanwhile, the minimum cost for a household in Toronto to eat a healthy diet increased by 20.1% between 2009 and 2016 (the estimated weekly cost of the Nutritious Food Basket for a family of four is \$858.81 per month).<sup>vii</sup> The cost of fruits and vegetables increased by 11% over the 12 months ending in April 2016<sup>viii</sup>, propelled by adverse weather conditions and a weak Canadian dollar.

## **COMMENTS**

Addressing food systems security and a degraded food system is a complex global problem, and a problem that requires innovative and strategic solutions. Municipalities such as Toronto – with robust economies, high levels of industrial innovation and diverse network of academics, entrepreneurs and social enterprises – are well-placed to lead the way in developing healthy, sustainable, affordable and equitable food systems.

Toronto is already gaining a global reputation as a food leader. It has a long history of a formal food policy mandate, starting with the establishment of the [Toronto Food Policy Council](#) (TFPC) in 1991 and the [Toronto Food Charter](#) in 2000. Internationally, the City of Toronto is working to promote healthy and sustainable food system change as a signatory to the [Milan Urban Food Policy Pact](#)<sup>ix</sup> and participating in the [C40 Food System Network](#). Canada has also committed to ending poverty, inequality and injustice and tackling climate change by working towards the [UN Sustainable Development Goals](#).

In 2008, the City of Toronto launched the Toronto Food Strategy - the vision of which is to champion and support a healthy and sustainable food system for all through research, facilitation, partnership building and, incubating and implementing specific, tangible projects.

The activities of the Toronto Food Strategy are closely aligned with those of the TFPC. Members of the TFPC act as advisors and collaborators on numerous Food Strategy projects, while Food Strategy staff provide regular updates to the TFPC. Addressing the interrelated challenges of poverty, food insecurity, obesity, malnutrition and poor-diet requires a holistic food systems approach that considers all aspects of the food system. This is reflected by the six key objectives of the Toronto Food Strategy, which in turn support the strategic goals of the Milan Urban Food Policy Pact (see Appendix 1-Toronto Food Strategy 2016 Update):

- Healthy Food Access
- Community Building and Inclusion
- Food Literacy
- Community Economic Engagement
- Infrastructure and Supply Chain
- Improving the Food Environment

The work of the Toronto Food Strategy and its partners is based on a “food systems perspective”: an approach of seeing the food system as a complex web of interactions and networks, with each part of the system interacting with other parts in a range of different ways. As such, many of the Food Strategy’s initiatives are influenced by, and have an impact upon, a mix of food system elements including nutrition, disease prevention, food supply chains, social justice, food literacy, environmental protection, climate change mitigation and economic development.

The attached report, Toronto Food Strategy 2016 Update, provides more detailed updates on the following projects:

## **1. Grab Some Good**

Grab Some Good is a Toronto Food Strategy brand with a number of key initiatives, operated in collaboration with FoodShare, Toronto Transit Commission and other community partners, to bring healthy food into underserved neighbourhoods across the City. Grab Some Good engages residents in a wide range of food-related activities,

helping build strong and vibrant communities around food activities. Grab Some Good emerged as three discrete projects:

1. **Healthy Corner Stores** – involves working closely with convenience store owners in three Neighbourhood Improvement Areas to incorporate sales of produce and other healthier food options into their existing business model.
2. **Mobile Good Food Markets** - ‘produce stores on wheels’ bringing low cost, high quality fresh fruits and vegetables into low income communities underserved by traditional food retail.
3. **TTC Pop-up markets** - pop-up markets at three ends of Toronto’s TTC lines (Downsview, Victoria Park and Kipling), bringing fresh, healthy and culturally diverse foods to busy commuters as they travel through their day.

## **2. FoodReach**

Over 1,000 community agencies, 750 school-based Student Nutrition Programs and 900 child care centres across Toronto serve millions of meals per year to children, families, low-income adults, newcomers and other vulnerable groups. Yet, food supply often relies on unpredictable donations or purchasing food from supermarkets and grocery stores. Consequently, it is a constant challenge to provide enough good food to those who need it most.

FoodReach was created as a systemic response to this problem. It is a collaboration between TPH, Parkdale Activity-Recreation Centre, Student Nutrition Toronto, Metcalf Foundation and private sector consolidators with funding from Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC). Through an online portal, members place orders for fresh fruit, vegetables, dairy, eggs and bread for next day delivery across the city. The minimum order requirement is only \$50 and there is no delivery fee. Hence the threshold for access is low, thereby enabling groups across the city to obtain good food at wholesale prices.

Since being launched in May 2015, FoodReach has attracted over 80 registered users, of which 45 place regular monthly orders. FoodReach is in the process of emerging as a not for profit organization and dedicated staff have recently been hired to scale up operations in order to increase the volume of sales and thereby leverage better wholesale pricing. Negotiations are also underway to work with city divisions to use FoodReach as a supplier of food for smaller contracts thereby leveraging the City’s purchasing power to facilitate a viable food procurement solution for the whole community. Looking to the future, FoodReach is working to supply food to food buying clubs and faith communities.

## **3. Community Food Works**

Community Food Works (CFW) is a Toronto Food Strategy initiative that integrates food handler training and certification, food literacy, and employment support by applying a learner centred, adult education approach to food and employment skills development. The program is delivered in partnership with community agencies and other City

divisions to support low-income residents in accessing employment in the food sector, while improving basic food and nutrition skills.

In 2016, the Toronto Food Strategy created a CFW pilot initiative to meet the specific needs of Arabic speaking newcomers. The pilot incorporates a peer-to-peer training model and has been adapted to meet the cultural and linguistic needs of Arabic speaking newcomers and thereby operate as a practical, health promoting settlement program. This project is a collaboration with the [Working Women Community Centre at Victoria Park Hub](#) and [Canadian Centre for Victims of Torture](#). The pilot is currently underway until January 2017. If successful the partners will seek external funding and hopefully will replicate this model across the city.

### **Next Steps**

The Food Strategy will continue to champion and support a healthy and sustainable food system for all by working in partnership with other levels of government, public and private sector organisations and multiple stakeholders. The Food Strategy will build on integrating food into current City wide initiatives including:

[The Official Plan  
TO Prosperity  
City of Toronto Strategic Actions 2013 - 2018  
Toronto Strong Neighbourhoods Strategy 2020  
Long Term Waste Strategy](#)

The Food Strategy will also continue to build on the momentum of international initiatives such as the Milan Urban Food Policy Pact, the C40 Food Systems Network and UN sustainable development goals.

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### **SIGNATURE**

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### **ATTACHMENTS**

Appendix 1: Toronto Food Strategy – 2016 Update

## REFERENCES

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- <sup>ix</sup> Milan Urban Food Policy Pact, Expo 2015. Available at: <http://www.foodpolicymilano.org/en/urban-food-policy-pact-2/>