



## STAFF REPORT INFORMATION ONLY

### Toronto Food Strategy: 2015 Update

<b>Date:</b>	May 15, 2015
<b>To:</b>	Board of Health
<b>From:</b>	Medical Officer of Health
<b>Wards:</b>	All
<b>Reference Number:</b>	

#### SUMMARY

Food has always played a critical role in the success of cities. Along with providing essential nutrition for good health, the food system is an important part of the local economy and many family and community interactions centre on meals. The Toronto Food Strategy, the first of its kind in Canada, builds upon the work already undertaken by Toronto Public Health (TPH) and other City Divisions. The vision of the Toronto Food Strategy is to champion and support a healthier, more sustainable food system for all. Consistent with this, TPH's new Strategic Plan (2015 – 2019) explicitly notes the importance of promoting “healthy food system changes including: food access, food retail environments and food literacy”.

The food system is made up of numerous interrelated individuals, organizations and activities. TPH works to build and strengthen networks across sectors that focus on implementing solutions, initially on a small scale, and evaluate them with the overall intent of food system change. In the last year, TPH has led or partnered on several initiatives with funding support from the Public Health Agency of Canada, Health Canada, the McConnell Foundation, the Metcalf Foundation, the Local Food Fund (Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs) and the Healthy Communities Fund (Ministry of Health & Long-Term Care). Private sector partners have contributed to some initiatives as well thereby helping to meet matching funding requirements.

This report provides an update on the Toronto Food Strategy and an overview of some current initiatives to support a healthier, most sustainable food system for all Torontonians.

#### 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 “Cultivating Food Connections: Toward a Healthy and Sustainable Food System for Toronto” report.

<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>

## **ISSUE BACKGROUND**

Food has always played a critical role in the success of cities. Along with providing essential nutrition for good health, many family and community interactions centre on meals. The food sector is a major part of the local economy and a vibrant food culture is an asset in attracting tourism and business investment. Until recently, local governments generally viewed food policies as something under the purview of provincial and federal governments. Over the last decade, many cities (including New York, London, Vancouver and Philadelphia) have realized the importance of addressing urban food issues, and recognize the potential of food initiatives to contribute to their city’s existing social, economic, environmental and health objectives.

The Toronto Food Strategy, the first of its kind in Canada, builds upon the work already undertaken by TPH and other City Divisions. Toronto 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 (2000). The vision of the Toronto Food Strategy is to champion and support a healthier, more sustainable food system for all. TPH collaborates with numerous partners, including a number of City divisions, and the community and private sector, to research, facilitate, coordinate and implement food initiatives and to promote enabling policies that help make Toronto a healthy, vibrant place for everyone to live. TPH staff work with the TFPC, which serves as the Community Reference Group for the Strategy. Many TFPC members play active roles as advisors, connectors and collaborators. Staff provide regular updates to the TFPC and participate in the TFPC’s strategic planning process.

## **COMMENTS**

The Toronto Food Strategy supports TPH’s new Strategic Plan (2015 – 2019), which calls for healthy food system change including: food access, food retail environments and food literacy.

Over the last year, TPH has continued to collaborate with numerous partners on initiatives that reflect the vision of a healthier, more sustainable food system. Given that many government departments and agencies at all levels play a role in food, implementation of food solutions requires building connections and developing ongoing and effective partnerships. TPH works to build and strengthen networks across sectors that focus on implementing solutions, initially on a small scale, and evaluate them with the overall intent of food system change. In the last year, TPH has led or partnered on several initiatives with funding support from the Public Health Agency of Canada, Health

Canada, the McConnell Foundation, the Metcalf Foundation, the Local Food Fund (Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs) and the Healthy Communities Fund (Ministry of Health & Long-Term Care). Private sector partners have contributed to some initiatives as well thereby helping to meet matching funding requirements.

## **Food System Overview and Trends**

In 2014, TPH's Nutritious Food Basket survey reported a 5.4% increase in the cost of food compared to the 2013 results. The main contributors to the increase were meat and alternatives and fresh fruits and vegetables<sup>1</sup>. Statistics Canada found a similar increase in Ontario's food prices (4.9%) over the period January 2014 – January 2015<sup>2</sup>. No long-term data collection system exists at the Toronto level to directly monitor the prevalence of hunger and food insecurity. However, food bank statistics from 2014, collected by the Daily Bread Food Bank, showed a sixth straight year of over one million visits to GTA emergency food programs. Food banks in Toronto's inner suburbs showed the sharpest rise in visits, up 38% since 2008<sup>3</sup>.

Toronto continues to be home to one of the most competitive food retail sectors on the continent. The top three retailers (Loblaw, Sobeys and Metro) control more than 60% of the food retail market locally, and across Canada<sup>4</sup>. The recession of 2008 added to the popularity of discount stores. Some research suggests that shopping habits have not readjusted as the economy improved. Between 2007-2013, the percentage of grocery purchases that were sale items rose from 27% to 37%<sup>5</sup>. Discount grocers such as No Frills, Food Basics and FreshCo have seen the biggest growth in recent years but several large retailers are focusing now on renovating their conventional and premium stores to attract a bigger share of shoppers with disposable income. Loblaw recently announced a \$1.2 billion renovation plan and Sobeys has been rolling out its new Sobeys Extra premium stores following its purchase of Safeway in 2014.

Employment in Toronto's food and beverage sector remained relatively stable between 2011-2014. Over half of the jobs listed by industry are found in the food services sector. Broken down further, roughly one quarter of all food-related jobs are located in full-service restaurants (24%) and another fifth (20%) are in limited-service restaurants (fast food restaurants)<sup>6</sup>.

Almost a third of all jobs in the food sector do not require any formal education prerequisite, a far higher proportion than is found among all jobs in Toronto. In fact, while the food sector industries make up around 9% of all jobs in Toronto, the sector accounts for 36% of all jobs that have no education requirement. In short, this is a sector that has a high proportion of relatively low-skilled jobs<sup>6</sup>.

Jobs in the food sector, broadly defined, represent a sizeable portion of all employment in Toronto. Many of these jobs, however, have very low requirements and consequently provide very limited employment earnings. Some of these jobs have a higher proportion of part-time positions than the average (cashiers, food and beverage servers). Many employ high proportions of women, visible minorities and/or newcomers, oftentimes in what have come to be termed precarious employment<sup>6</sup>.

Understanding food systems trends is important when designing programs and interventions that support health equity and community engagement across the city. Since the last Food Strategy report to the Board of Health, City Council adopted several policies that will directly or indirectly influence food access. For example, the Toronto Strong Neighbourhoods Strategy 2020 used healthy food access as one criterion in their selection of the new Neighbourhood Improvement Areas. In 2013, City Council approved the new Residential Apartment Commercial zoning category that will permit a wide range of non-residential uses in or near apartment towers, including food retail, gardens and markets. City Planning is in the final stages of implementing the new zoning that will apply to hundreds of apartment tower sites in the first phase. In 2014, City Council approved the development of a City of Toronto Poverty Reduction Strategy. Food insecurity, nutrition and geographic access to food retail figured prominently in the community engagement phase that was completed in early 2015. Promoting a healthy food system is also a key direction in the TPH Strategic Plan.

### **Focus and Approach for the Food Strategy**

The food system is made up of numerous interrelated individuals, organizations and activities. Although often referred to in a linear way (farm to table, production to consumption), each part of the system can interact with any other, and in different ways. Therefore, the food system is described more accurately as a complex web of interactions and networks. A continuous analysis of objective data and gathering subjective insights from a diverse range of stakeholders is critical. TPH's focus on building diverse partnerships is a core strategy for uncovering these insights and it also opens up opportunities to leverage funding and resources to support the Strategy's overarching vision. Each of the Food Strategy's major initiatives originated out of this "nimble" multi-sectoral partnership approach.

Examining the dynamics found at the margins of the system also provides important insights and reveals opportunities for innovation<sup>7</sup>. For example, the last decade has seen a dramatic rise in local community efforts across North America to incubate alternative food retail models (mobile markets, healthy corner stores, urban market gardens). These efforts each met with different levels of success and impact, but collectively have led to large retailers themselves experimenting with smaller store sizes and alternative food delivery services.

Another feature of complex systems is that measures of success are always changing. For this reason, it is important for TPH to reassess the priorities of the Food Strategy at regular intervals. In early 2015, TPH conducted a portfolio analysis of TPH's food initiatives (see Appendix 1). The food portfolio analysis was intended to recognize the wide range of food-related activities in which the Division engages, to reflect on the broader food environment, to foster connectivity and collaboration across TPH and to learn new ways to assess projects now and in the future. This will assist TPH to effectively invest in the programs/strategies to address growing and critical need.

Based on this Portfolio Analysis process TPH identified six underlying themes to promote healthy food systems change within TPH:

1. Healthy Food Access
2. Community Building and Inclusion
3. Food Literacy
4. Community Economic Development
5. Renewed Infrastructure/Supply Chain
6. Improving the Food Environment

The above themes represent an evolution of the Food Strategy's 2010 *Cultivating Food Connections'* priority areas of action (i.e. Support Food Friendly Neighbourhoods; Make Food a Centerpiece of Toronto's New Green Economy; Eliminate Hunger in Toronto; Connect City and Countryside through Food; Empower Residents with Food Skills and Information and Urge Federal and Provincial Governments to Establish Health-focused Food Policies).

### **Overview of Collaborations within TPH, and with City Staff, Businesses and the Community**

TPH is leading many new food initiatives. For example, TPH is researching the dynamics of Toronto's supermarket sector and opportunities to work with large food retailers to improve the availability of healthy food. Enhanced funding for Student Nutrition Toronto, has enabled the implementation of 27 new student nutrition programs in higher need communities in 2015. A Home Food Safety program has been developed to make information on safe food handling more widely available to residents.

A core component of the Food Strategy is the integration of activities within TPH and across City divisions. TPH operates numerous food and nutrition programs and services. These initiatives include food safety, food and nutrition skills training and education, nutrition support for pregnant women, student nutrition programming and research related to food and environment (see Appendix 2).

The Food Strategy is engaged in a number of specific, but interconnected, initiatives designed to maximize its impact in enabling a healthier and more sustainable food system for all Torontonians. The attached Toronto Food Strategy Update report provides more detailed updates on the following projects:

- Healthy Corner Stores – helping independent small food retailers in lower-income neighbourhoods sell healthier foods in profitable ways.
- Food Reach: One Stop Healthy Food Ordering for Community Agencies and Schools. An e-commerce platform enabling aggregated food purchasing to expand the availability of healthy, affordable, and diverse food while improving nutritional quality and reducing cost.
- Toronto Agriculture Program – supporting the expansion of urban food growing.

- Community Food Works – unique integrated training for low income residents that combines food handler training and certification, food literacy and nutrition education and employment training.
- Expanding the Mobile Good Food Market project with FoodShare Toronto – a retrofitted Wheel-Trans vehicle that serves as a mobile market selling fresh, affordable fruits and vegetables in lower income areas that are underserved by traditional food retail. Planning is underway to add a second vehicle which will expand its reach and serve as part of the emerging Poverty Reduction Strategy.

## **NEXT STEPS**

Over the next year, TPH will further its collaborations with a broad range of partners on activities that reflect the vision of Promoting Healthy Food System change laid out in the TPH Strategic Plan. The Food Strategy work is inspired and informed by ongoing engagement with residents, community organizations, the private sector and City staff. TPH will continue to work with partners to access external project-specific funding. The Medical Officer of Health will continue to report back to the BOH annually on the progress of the Food Strategy.

## **CONTACTS**

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## **SIGNATURE**

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Dr. David McKeown  
Medical Officer of Health

## **ATTACHMENTS**

Appendix 1: Toronto Food Strategy – Promoting Healthy Food System Change  
Appendix 2: Toronto Food Strategy – Promoting Healthy Food System Change  
Appendix 3: Toronto Food Strategy – 2015 Update

## REFERENCES

- <sup>1</sup> Toronto Public Health (2014). Cost of Nutritious Food Basket – Toronto 2014. Report to the Board of Health. October 31, 2014.
- <sup>2</sup> Statistics Canada, CANSIM, table 326-0020 and Catalogue nos. 62-001-X and 62-010-X. Last modified: 2015-02-26.
- <sup>3</sup> Daily Bread Food Bank (2014). Hunger Snapshot: 2014 Profile of Hunger in the GTA. Available from <http://www.dailybread.ca/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/2014-HungerSnapshot.pdf>.
- <sup>4</sup> “Canada Copes With Foreign Invasion” (Apr 1, 2013). Supermarket News.
- <sup>5</sup> Blouin, P-A. (2014). Retail owners at the heart of local and regional networks. Journées annuelles de santé publique (Annual Public Health Days). November 26, 2014. Quebec City, QC.
- <sup>6</sup> Zizys, T (2015). GOOD FOOD, GOOD JOBS: SEEKING BETTER EMPLOYMENT OUTCOMES IN THE FOOD SECTOR IN TORONTO. Prepared for Toronto Public Health and Toronto Food Policy Council.
- <sup>7</sup> Meter, K. (2010). Letting food systems emerge: How do we measure progress in an emergent system? *Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Community Development*. Vol. 1(1): pp. 23–26.