



## Toronto Food Strategy: 2017 Update Report

**Date:** October 12, 2017

**To:** Board of Health

**From:** Medical Officer of Health

**Wards:** All

### SUMMARY

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Ensuring a healthy, sustainable food system to promote food security, health and community resilience is a complex global problem, and one that requires innovative and strategic solutions. Municipalities such as Toronto – with robust economies, high levels of industrial innovation and diverse networks of academics, entrepreneurs, community practitioners and social enterprises – are well-placed to lead the way in developing healthy, sustainable, affordable and equitable food systems. Municipal governments have a duty to ensure that all residents have geographic, financial and physical access to culturally appropriate, safe and healthy food. In 2008, the City launched the Toronto Food Strategy, led by Toronto Public Health, to champion and support a healthier, more sustainable food system for all. In October 2017, the Chair of the Board of Health and the Medical Officer of Health had the honour of accepting the international Milan Urban Food Policy Pact Award for Toronto Food Strategy's "Community Food Works for Newcomer Settlement" on behalf of the City of Toronto.

A healthy food system is one that promotes good health while addressing the interrelated threats of climate change, poverty, chronic disease and food insecurity. The Toronto Food Strategy works toward this vision by taking an "action" research approach to incubating and prototyping projects that have the potential to reach scalable impact. Toronto Public Health (TPH) staff work with a range of not-for-profit, private sector and government partners, and build upon the work of TPH and other City Divisions to find innovative ways for achieving multiple objectives through food. This report provides an update on the Toronto Food Strategy and situates the work in the context of global, regional and local food system initiatives. The attached documents (*see Appendix 1: Toronto Food Strategy: Strategic Overview; and Appendix 2: Toronto Food Strategy 2017 Update Report*) provide a more in-depth overview of current work and the Toronto Food Strategy's collaborative approach to achieving healthy food system change.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

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The Medical Officer of Health recommends that:

1. The Board of Health receive this report for information.

## FINANCIAL IMPACT

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There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.

## DECISION HISTORY

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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”.

Updates to the Board of Health on the Toronto Food Strategy 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>  
<http://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2016/hl/bgrd/backgroundfile-97432.pdf>

## COMMENTS

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Toronto began its reputation as a global food leader in 1991 by establishing the Toronto Food Policy Council<sup>1</sup> as a subcommittee of the Board of Health to advise the City of Toronto on food policy issues. In 1999, the Food and Hunger Action Committee was launched with a mandate to improve access to nutritious food and reduce hunger in Toronto. This led to the creation of the Toronto Food Charter<sup>2</sup> in 2001. In 2008, the City initiated the Toronto Food Strategy<sup>3</sup>, led by Toronto Public Health<sup>4</sup>, to champion and support a healthier, more sustainable food system for all. The City also has a history of fostering urban agriculture through the 2012 GrowTO and 2013 Toronto Agriculture Plan. 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>5</sup>, and member of the C40 Food System Network<sup>6</sup>. Work is also underway to collaborate with the CITYFOOD Network<sup>7</sup> and identify a process for formal membership. These commitments make the City well-placed within the global and regional communities cooperating in the fields of sustainable and resilient food system development.

Since 2008, the Toronto Food Strategy has been championing a healthy and sustainable food system through action research, partnership building and implementing tangible projects. Consistent with this, TPH's 2015-2019 Strategic Plan notes the importance of promoting "healthy food system change, including food access, food retail environments and food literacy". The Toronto Food Strategy works closely with the Toronto Food Policy Council (TFPC) which serves as the Community Reference Group for the Strategy, providing ongoing strategic advice and connecting staff to its rich network of partners and expertise.

Feeding into the global, regional and municipal food activities, the Toronto Food Strategy incubates and implements initiatives across six underlying themes: healthy food access; supply chain; culture shift; community building and engagement; land and property; and local economic development (see *Appendix 1: Toronto Food Strategy: Strategic Overview*). The past year has seen several achievements and growth in some key initiatives, including Community Food Works for Newcomer Settlement, FoodReach, Grab Some Good markets and research on food retail environments. Below is a summary of Toronto Food Strategy 2017 activities, outlined in more detail in Appendix 2: Toronto Food Strategy 2017 Update report.

### **Community Food Works for Newcomer Settlement**

In October 2017, the Chair of the Board of Health and the Medical Officer of Health had the honour of accepting the international Milan Urban Food Policy Pact Award for Toronto Food Strategy's "Community Food Works for Newcomer Settlement" on behalf of the City of Toronto. Community Food Works (CFW) is a program that has been running since 2014 for low-income residents that integrates food handler training and certification, nutrition education, and employment support through a learner-centred approach to food and employment skills development. Community Food Works for Newcomer Settlement (CFWN) adapts the CFW curriculum and training process to meet the unique needs of newcomers, including translation and a Peer-to-Peer model of delivery. A preliminary evaluation for the first three pilot groups in 2016/2017, showed that of the 52 participants trained, 90% obtained their food handler certificates, 82% reported increased knowledge in food skills and nutrition, and 25% obtained employment after graduating. Through this initiative, we are recognizing food as a vehicle for newcomer settlement, and food and employment skills as a determinants of health through promotion of social integration and employability. The program is currently being delivered in partnership with North York Harvest and Working Women Community Centre with funding support from the Ontario Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration.

### **Grab Some Good – TTC and Mobile Markets**

Many Toronto residents face economic and geographic barriers to accessing healthy and culturally appropriate food on a regular basis. While low income is the most significant barrier, many individuals and families also live in neighbourhoods that have few quality and affordable food outlets within easy walking distance. In response, as part of the Toronto Food Strategy, TPH has partnered with FoodShare to make good food more accessible through the Grab Some Good mobile markets and TTC pop-up markets.

In 2012, a TTC Wheel-Trans vehicle was transformed into Toronto's first not-for-profit market on wheels travelling across the City providing a variety of fresh and affordable produce to communities underserved by healthy food outlets. As the market operator, FoodShare visits neighbourhoods where many people are on fixed or low incomes and struggle to afford the cost of buying vegetables and fruit for their families.<sup>8</sup> In 2016, the Mobile Good Food Market held 394 markets, serving 72,926 pounds of produce to thousands of residents.<sup>9</sup>

Since the spring of 2016, TTC passengers have been enjoying the Grab Some Good market during the afternoon rush hour inside of three subway stations – Kipling, Victoria Park and Sheppard West. Since residents make approximately 1.8 million trips per day on public transit, the subway system is a key venue for bringing fresh, healthy and culturally diverse foods to Toronto commuters. This summer, TPH and FoodShare surveyed 103 repeat customers – most of whom had been shopping at the market for more than three months. The results showed that 100% of respondents believe that the market made buying fresh produce more accessible and 90% said that the market plays a role in "sparking" their interest and knowledge about healthy eating. Overall, transit riders are extremely satisfied with the quality, convenience and affordability of these colourful market kiosks.

## **FoodReach**

In Toronto, millions of meals a year are provided to low-income adults, children, and families through homeless shelters, drop-ins, community health centres, supportive housing, multiservice agencies and Student Nutrition programs. However, many of these organizations face barriers to accessing healthy food, including an insufficient budget for food, limited storage or cooking space, little nutritional guidance, and ad-hoc purchasing from nearby stores. TPH worked with community partners and Student Nutrition Toronto to develop FoodReach<sup>10</sup> - an on-line food portal to respond to these challenges. FoodReach offers community organizations an on-line platform for ordering fresh and healthy food at wholesale prices, with free next day delivery.

The past year has seen many successes for FoodReach, including a growing membership base, a richer e-platform and expansion into food buyer's clubs. FoodReach, through the community partner PARC (Parkdale Activity Recreation Centre) and Student Nutrition Toronto, with funding from the Ontario Trillium Foundation, have scaled up operations to expand the basket of foods available and are securing better wholesale pricing for members. FoodReach has doubled the 2016 sales with 260 members currently registered. The web-site continues to be updated with improved content and social media engagement, including a discussion forum, tested recipes for large groups, a bi-weekly newsletter, and diabetes and food safety resources. A food buyer's club was also piloted with tenants of Toronto Community Housing using FoodReach as the food supply source. Over the next year, FoodReach will be updating its ordering software, with an aim to increase the items offered to members, including grains, canned and frozen foods, meat and fish.

## **Research and Incubation: Toronto's Food Retail Environment and Social Supermarket**

Torontonians have abundant access to processed foods high in sugar, salt and fat. Toronto Public Health's 2015 food retail analysis found that, in the lowest income neighbourhoods in Toronto, there are more than four times as many "less healthy" food stores (selling primarily calorie dense, nutrient poor products) versus healthier food outlets.<sup>11</sup> More recent research by TPH assessed the in-store environment of 257 of Toronto's mid- to large-sized supermarkets and found that the physical environment is set up to promote less healthy foods. Sugary and salty processed foods take up as much shelf space as fresh produce, and sweetened cereals are marketed to children by placing them at their eye height. TPH is identifying opportunities to improve the supermarket nutrition environment, and will work with Torontonians to be more informed shoppers<sup>12</sup>.

An emerging project of the Toronto Food Strategy is to develop a social supermarket pilot to enhance food access for lower income Torontonians. A social supermarket is a membership-based non-stigmatizing food retail outlet targeted to lower income households. They are common in several European countries but are rare in North America. A promising model that could be adapted to the Toronto context, is the UK's Community Shop. Members can shop for healthier food and household items that are less expensive than in traditional supermarkets. A portion of the food sold would be accessed from surplus in the food manufacturing sector. Toronto Public Health has applied for external funding to launch a 2018 pilot in partnership with several stakeholders, including North York Harvest Food Bank, the Learning Enrichment Foundation, FoodReach, community hubs and multiple City divisions including Social Development Finance & Administration and Toronto Employment and Social Services.

### **Looking Ahead**

Toronto Public Health, through the Toronto Food Strategy, will continue to play a leadership role in facilitating a healthy and sustainable food system for Toronto. Taking an "action research" approach to catalyzing food system change, the Toronto Food Strategy will continue to move forward with building partnerships and collaboration across multiple city divisions, institutions and community organizations that address the interrelated food challenges of our time. With the rapid rate of climate change and extreme weather events across the globe and the implications for food security, we will continue to work toward embedding a food system lens into the City's resilience strategy, climate action plan and extreme weather emergency protocol. Prototyping innovations that open up access to healthy food will remain a priority.

As the Toronto Food Strategy evolves, Toronto Public Health strengthens its collaborations across City divisions, linking more closely with initiatives such as the TO Prosperity<sup>13</sup>, the Toronto Strong Neighbourhood Strategy 2020<sup>14</sup>, and Transform TO<sup>15</sup>. Our leadership role in local, regional, national and global food networks continues to grow as the work of the Toronto Food Strategy is recognized within the realm of healthy food system change.

## **CONTACT**

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## **SIGNATURE**

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Medical Officer of Health

## **ATTACHMENTS**

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Appendix 1: Toronto Food Strategy: Strategic Overview  
Appendix 2: Toronto Food Strategy 2017 Update

## REFERENCES

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- <sup>1</sup> Toronto Food Policy Council. Available at: <http://tfpc.to>
- <sup>2</sup> Toronto Food Charter. Available at: [http://www.foodsecuritynews.com/presentations/Toroto\\_Food\\_Charter.pdf](http://www.foodsecuritynews.com/presentations/Toroto_Food_Charter.pdf)
- <sup>3</sup> Toronto Food Strategy. Available at: <https://www1.toronto.ca/wps/portal/contentonly?vgnextoid=75ab044e17e32410VgnVCM10000071d60f89RCRD>
- <sup>4</sup> Toronto Public Health. Available at: <https://www1.toronto.ca/wps/portal/contentonly?vgnextoid=4cc64485d1210410VgnVCM10000071d60f89RCRD>
- <sup>5</sup> Milan Urban Food Policy Pact, Expo 2015. Available at: <http://www.foodpolicymilano.org/en/urban-food-policy-pact-2/>
- <sup>6</sup> C40 Food Systems Network, 2016. Available at: [http://www.c40.org/networks/food\\_systems](http://www.c40.org/networks/food_systems)
- <sup>7</sup> ICLEI-RUAF CITYFOOD Network. Available at: <http://www.iclei.org/index.php?id=1348>
- <sup>8</sup> Foodshare, 2015. Improving Food Access: Stories from the Mobile Good Food Market.
- <sup>9</sup> September 15, 2017 correspondence with Good Food Market Senior Coordinator. FoodShare Toronto.
- <sup>10</sup> FoodReach. Available at: <https://foodreach.ca/>
- <sup>11</sup> Toronto Public Health, 2015. Toronto Food Strategy: 2015 Update (appendix 3). Available at: <http://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2015/hl/bgrd/backgroundfile-80219.pdf>
- <sup>12</sup> September 29, 2107 communication with Research Specialist. Toronto Public Health, Healthy Public Policy.
- <sup>13</sup> TO Prosperity – Toronto Poverty Reduction Strategy. Available at: <https://www1.toronto.ca/wps/portal/contentonly?vgnextoid=a67aa457bc09a510VgnVCM10000071d60f89RCRD>
- <sup>14</sup> Toronto Strong Neighbourhood Strategy. Available at: <https://www1.toronto.ca/wps/portal/contentonly?vgnextoid=42653745ba9a9410VgnVCM10000071d60f89RCRD>
- <sup>15</sup> Transform TO: Climate action for a healthy, equitable, prosperous Toronto. Available at: <https://www1.toronto.ca/wps/portal/contentonly?vgnextoid=ba07f60f4adaf410VgnVCM10000071d60f89RCRD>