



## REPORT FOR ACTION

# Toronto Food Policy Council 2019 Annual Report

**Date:** October 8, 2019

**To:** Board of Health

**From:** Co-Chairs, Toronto Food Policy Council

**Wards:** All

## SUMMARY

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The Toronto Food Policy Council (TFPC) was the first food policy council in a major city, and is widely regarded as one of the leading councils in the world. It was approved in 1990 as a subcommittee of the Board of Health to address growing food insecurity and food bank use in Toronto that accompanied globalization and the loss of industrial jobs. The TFPC established as a formal food policy council in 1991.

The TFPC promotes the concept that food should be regarded as a public good, much like education, health care or public transit, and that the City should be encouraged to use food policy as a lever to create healthier, more equitable, and more sustainable communities. The TFPC has long advocated for a broad definition of food security that includes health, social, economic and environmental determinants, and acknowledges that we are all food insecure when we face a crisis of the proportions of climate change. The TFPC has been at the forefront of this expansion of the definition of food security and continues to provide critical food guidance to the Board of Health for integrated policies that take a food system perspective and recognize the connection between public health and the health of the planet.

This report provides an overview of the work undertaken by the TFPC since its last annual report to the Board of Health in July 2018.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

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The Co-Chairs, Toronto Food Policy Council recommend that:

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

## FINANCIAL IMPACT

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There is no financial impact resulting from the adoption of the recommendation in this report.

## DECISION HISTORY

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At its meeting on July 16, 2018, the Board of Health received the Toronto Food Policy Council's 2018 Annual Report.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2018.HL28.1>

## COMMENTS

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The TFPC was the first food policy council in a major city when it was established in 1990 and is widely regarded as one of the leading food policy councils in the world. The TFPC is a subcommittee of the Board of Health, created as a policy response to growing food insecurity and food bank use in Toronto that accompanied globalization and the loss of industrial jobs.

The TFPC promotes the concept that food should be regarded as a public good, much like education, healthcare or public transit, and that the City should be encouraged to use food policy as a lever to create healthier, more equitable, and more sustainable communities. The TFPC has long advocated for a broad definition of food security that includes health, social, economic and environmental determinants, and acknowledges that we are all food insecure when we face a crisis of the proportions of climate change. The TFPC has been at the forefront of this expansion of the definition of food security and continues to provide critical food guidance to the Board of Health for integrated policies that take a food system perspective and recognize the connection between public health and the health of the planet.

Toronto Food Policy Council members are appointed by the Board of Health. The TFPC is composed of 30 citizen-experts and two City Councillors. The TFPC meets monthly at Toronto City Hall. Meetings are open to the public.

The TFPC, working with the Toronto Food Strategy team, brings food system thinking and a social determinants of health perspective to the City of Toronto. The Toronto Food Strategy of 2010 states that "food system thinking is a way of seeing the bigger picture, of developing solutions to food problems by seeing and leveraging their connection to other issues"<sup>1</sup>. The TFPC taps into citizen expertise from civil society and business, as well as from community-based grassroots organizations and engaged citizens to use food as a lever to help solve multiple problems at the City of Toronto.

The work of the TFPC is encapsulated in the following five thematic areas that put this food system perspective into action:

1. Identifies emerging issues and facilitates linkages and partnerships between community-based experts and advocates and staff with Toronto Public Health (TPH) and the City of Toronto.
2. Advises and supports TPH and the City on the development of leading-edge policies and best practices that enhance the food security of all residents.

3. Works with youth and post-secondary institutions to prepare the next generation of food professionals and advocates.
4. Conducts public education and advocacy on food system issues.
5. Fosters knowledge exchange, community capacity-building and collaboration between the City and civil society organizations, nearby regions, other cities facing similar challenges, and relevant international bodies.

### **Working Group Activities in 2018-2019**

The TFPC works in two ways: it responds to current food-related issues, and it contributes to the public agenda on emerging issues. These issues are reflected in the TFPC's working groups. The TFPC has six working groups: food justice, urban agriculture, food waste, food and climate change, food procurement, public markets, and city-region food systems. The major activities of the TFPC Staff and the working groups over the past year are outlined below.

#### **Food Justice Working Group**

Racialized and Indigenous communities in Toronto experience the highest percentage of people living with food insecurity. Children in racialized families are more than twice as likely to be living in poverty as children from non-racialized families. Indigenous families with children experience the highest poverty rate at 84%.<sup>2</sup>

The TFPC brings an equity and diversity lens to all food-related matters. This year, the TFPC increased Indigenous representation and representation from Toronto's diverse communities. In order to increase community capacity and understanding on matters related to equity, TFPC members met with the Managers of the City's Confronting Anti-Black Racism (CABR) Unit and the Indigenous Affairs Unit. These meetings have led to collaborations for food justice training.

In April 2019, the CABR Unit developed a three-hour training session for TFPC and Toronto Youth Food Policy Council (TYFPC) members. The CABR Unit is now working with the TFPC and members of the Black Community on the establishment of a Black Food Sovereignty Network. The TFPC is also collaborating on the development of Indigenous Cultural Competency Training specifically for TFPC and TYFPC members.

In addition to these initiatives, the TFPC devoted its November 2018 meeting to food justice with a presentation by staff and participants from the Hospitality Workers Training Centre (HWTC), which provides training and job placements in the food sector for people facing multiple barriers to employment. The presentation seeded partnerships between the HWTC and food security organizations.

#### **Urban Agriculture Working Group**

Urban agriculture events and activities have grown enormously in Toronto since 2012, when City Council unanimously adopted the GrowTO Urban Agriculture Action Plan, spearheaded by the TFPC. In September 2017, Mayor Tory proclaimed the first official

Urban Agriculture Day in Toronto. In September 2018 and 2019, Toronto held Urban Agriculture Weeks, organized by Toronto Urban Growers, with support from the TFPC staff and TFPC members. By September 2019, there were 14 events across the city to celebrate Urban Agriculture Week.

The TFPC staff and TFPC members worked with Social Development Finance and Administration staff and Toronto Urban Growers to prepare a report on challenges and opportunities for urban agriculture in Toronto, entitled "Getting to Green." This report is informing advocacy efforts to reduce barriers to community-based urban agriculture projects across the city.

In July 2019, the TFPC and Toronto Urban Growers, organized an urban agriculture tour for a delegation from Nerima, Japan. Nerima will be hosting the Urban Agriculture World Summit in November 2019 and has invited Toronto to participate.

The TFPC staff is also supporting the Toronto Agricultural Program, a cross-divisional and community committee which explores ways to advance urban agriculture in Toronto.

### **Food Waste Working Group**

Reducing food waste and converting food waste into resources are key perspectives that the TFPC brings to its work with the City's Solid Waste Management Services (SWMS) and the SWMS Circular Economy Unit. The TFPC staff is part of the Cross-Divisional Circular Economy Working Group, which is developing a food waste reduction strategy for Toronto.

The TFPC also contributed to consultations on Ontario's Proposed Food and Organic Waste Framework, and Ontario's Reducing Litter and Waste in Our Communities Discussion Paper.

### **Food and Climate Change Working Group**

The TFPC staff contributed to the development of the TPH report "Resilient Food Systems, Resilient Cities: High-Level Vulnerability Assessment of Toronto's Food System," which addressed community resilience in climate emergencies. This report has formed the basis for supporting the development of community food resilience strategies in several Neighbourhood Improvement Areas.

At the May 2019 TFPC meeting, staff from Energy and Environment Division (EED) asked the TFPC for initial input into the 2021-2023 TransformTO Implementation Plan. As a result of the valuable ideas generated at this initial consultation, EED is scheduling an official consultation with TFPC members. The TFPC staff also contributed to development of the City's Resilience Strategy, ensuring that food was included in the strategy.

## **Food Procurement Working Group**

In 2019, the TFPC formed a Food Procurement Working Group, which is interested in helping the City use its purchasing power to support a healthy, just and sustainable food system. The City currently serves millions of meals each year at long-term care facilities, children's services and shelters. The TFPC is collaborating with the Long-Term Care division and EED on increasing procurement of local food. The TFPC staff also reviewed a recipe book and resource guide that EED produced as part of the local food procurement initiative.

## **Public Markets Working Group**

Toronto Food Policy Council members have been working with the City's Economic Development Division and City Councillors for several years on developing a public markets strategy for Toronto. In June 2019, several TFPC members were invited to present at the international Public Markets Conference in London, England. Upon their return, they reported to the TFPC about developing practices in this area. They are now working on a plan to help Toronto become a "market city", where residents can enjoy the benefits of public spaces that provide healthy, regionally produced food.

## **City-Region Food Systems Working Group**

The TFPC staff represents the City of Toronto on the Golden Horseshoe Food and Farming Alliance. The Alliance works on food system issues affecting Toronto, neighbouring communities, and agricultural lands in southern Ontario.

A city-region food system perspective is crucial to Toronto's food security because peri-urban agricultural lands are a safeguard as climate change affects growing patterns around the world. As well, a multicultural city needs to work actively with regional farmers to ensure diverse foods are grown and processed for all the people of Toronto.

## **Other TFPC Activities in 2018-2019**

In addition to the work outlined above, the TFPC has been involved in several other food-related initiatives in the past year:

The TFPC provided letters of support to the Coalition for Healthy School Food's campaign advocating for a universal student nutrition program and to Food Secure Canada's successful campaign advocating for a national food policy.

The TFPC staff was frequently called upon to mentor other cities in developing food policy councils. Since July 2018, the TFPC staff has responded to inquiries from Basel, Bordeaux, Dortmund, Lisbon, Manchester, Munich, Paris, Seoul, Thunder Bay and Winnipeg. The TFPC staff also participated in an official presentation by the City of Toronto to the Deputy Mayor and other delegates from the City of Frankfurt, Germany.

The TFPC staff was invited to speak about the work of the TFPC on several occasions. In the last year, presentations were made to the International Sociological Association in Toronto, the World Bank in Washington, D.C., Women Investing in Sustainability Everywhere (WISE) in Toronto, the Frankfurt Congress of Food Councils and the Kyoto University International Symposium on Food and Sustainability -- all at the invitation of these organizations and at no cost to the City of Toronto.

The TFPC staff collaborated in knowledge exchange with national and international food security and food policy networks. This included working with Food Secure Canada, helping to develop a national Municipal Network on Food Policy which will enable municipalities across Canada to share information about best practices in food policy, working with the Centre for a Livable Future at Johns Hopkins' Bloomberg School of Public Health on its annual survey of food policy councils across North America, and collaborating with international researchers on food policy through the FLEdGE (Food Locally Embedded Globally Engaged) Research Network, funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council.

The TFPC staff and TFPC members were actively involved in the Toronto Food Strategy's three-day event entitled "Food, Planet Health: The City of Toronto's Response to the EAT-Lancet Commission's Global Call to Action". The Commission's report links what we eat with the climate crisis and other forms of environmental destruction, while suggesting that widespread shifts to a plant-forward diet can improve population health while living within the planet's environmental boundaries. The TFPC staff moderated the public event.

The TFPC maintains a website, is active on social media, and publishes a monthly newsletter -- all part of its public education and capacity-building mandate. The TFPC staff also published articles in several academic journals about the work of the TFPC and contributed to the academic literature on institutional food procurement. These activities, as well as the TFPC's public meetings, bring people from diverse communities and backgrounds together to address food insecurity and propose food policy solutions.

An important TFPC initiative of the last few years has been the Food By Ward project, designed to showcase Toronto's community food assets across all City wards, and to call for greater attention to food as a key element of the urban landscape. This project was initiated, developed and led by the TFPC staff and TFPC members, and continues to be maintained by the TFPC. Food By Ward was designed to inspire and support food champions to advocate on food issues with their City Councillors, and to make it easier for City staff and community-based agencies to use food assets strategically. In June 2018, the Food By Ward online interactive map was launched. Since that time, the map has been accessed more than 5000 times. Community partners report that they regularly use it to help clients access services. It has also become an important advocacy tool within City government to ensure that food is included in all major policies and strategies, including Toronto's Poverty Reduction Strategy and Climate Change Action Plan. The Food By Ward map can be accessed through the TFPC's website.

In May 2019, a full house of TFPC members and members of the public attended a TFPC meeting where Medical Officer of Health and the Board of Health Chair presented on the proposed provincial budget cuts to public health, and their implications for

Toronto. The TFPC was established to help develop and promote policy and program solutions to address food insecurity and inequity in Toronto. As such, TFPC members are unanimous in their belief that advocating against these budget cuts is a primary obligation.

As the TFPC approaches its 30th anniversary in 2020, TFPC members are dedicated to continuing to contribute their critical food guidance to the Board of Health on how food can be a lever for helping Toronto thrive as a healthy, just and sustainable city.

## **CONTACT**

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## **SIGNATURE**

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Rachel Gray,  
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Joe Cressy  
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## **REFERENCES**

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1 Toronto Public Health. (2010). Cultivating Food Connections: Toward a Healthy and Sustainable Food System for Toronto.

2 Children's Aid Society of Toronto. (2017). Unequal City: The Hidden Divide Among Toronto's Children and Youth.