

CITY FOOD POLICIES



The Toronto experience: when food is about relationships and no more about commodities.

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City	Toronto
Country	Canada
Population: city area	2,6 millions
Population: metropolitan area	5,6 millions
Surface area	630 sq. km
Green areas	80 sq. km
Toronto green belt agricultural area	7.300 sq. km

When you understand that food is about relationships, not commodities, then the old dogma about "if you can't measure it, you can't manage it" loses some sheen. (Wayne Roberts). The main lever of Toronto Food Policy is the Toronto Food Policy Council (TFPC), a committee embedded in the Board of Health. Over the years, it has been building a Food Strategy based on the following philosophy "food cuts across the silos of government activity and therefore has the power to address multiple problems at once".

TFPC is not in charge of the implementation of policy but rather is asked to create a culture of change within government and support the capacity of local initiatives. It remains "behind the scenes", for instance performing surveys and mapping, to measure progress and identify new frontiers of action and overview food challenges and achievements.

Among lessons learnt from TFPC experience and from "the convening power of food" : It has been instrumental in working with communities, policymakers, and city councillors to identify opportunities where policy change is needed and to provide advice. [...] The TFPC must also continue to balance its deliberations on a broad and growing range of potential food system issues with the strategic identification of specific opportunities for action.

Public food procurement is certainly a new horizon for the TFPC. Indeed the city has not put the same determination in developing ambitious targets for Public Procurement as it has done within the Foodshare project. It still has to exploit the potential of such lever to transform grassroots and communities-oriented programs into larger scale food systems, thus maintaining similar objectives and values such as providing healthy food and food education to all citizens" (C.L. Mah and L. Baker in "Citizen engagement in Health Casebook").

A modern metropolis located in an agricultural province

Toronto, located in Southern Ontario on the northwestern shore of Lake Ontario, is the most populous city in Canada. This commercial capital is placed among the Global Leaders in the Global Financial Centres Index. Leading economic sectors in the city include finance, business services, telecommunications, aerospace, transportation, media, arts, publishing, software production, medical research, education, tourism, and engineering. Toronto also was the first Canadian city to get a food policy council, designed to improve food security as a basic need.

It is consistently rated as one of the world's most livable cities by the Economist Intelligence Unit and the Mercer Quality of Living Survey.

It is at the heart of the Greater Toronto Area and of the densely populated region in Southern Ontario known as the Golden Horseshoe. Since 1954, it occasionally expanded its borders through amalgamation with surrounding municipalities, most recently occurring in 1998. In 2011 it had 2.6 million residents, whereas the metropolitan area (CMA) had a population of 5.583.064 and the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) had a population of 6.054.191. Its cosmopolitan and international population reflects its role as an important destination for immigrants to Canada. Toronto is one of the world's most diverse cities by percentage of non-native-born residents, with about 49% of the population born outside Canada.

The city is surrounded by rural areas encompassing farmland and forests, hamlets and booming towns, with rural communities either close to cities or remote. They rely on tourism, manufacturing, natural resources etc. (6). The Ontario province is one of the major agricultural regions of Canada; it possesses just over half of the country's best agricultural land, almost all of it in the southern part of the province. Between 1971 and 2001, before a law to regulate urbanization was promulgated by the Ontario government, the proportion of good farmland into urban areas increased from 5,5 to 11,2%. Ontario's agri-food sector currently generates \$34 billion in gross domestic product and sustains 740.000 jobs – which is about one in every nine jobs across the province. Many farms produce dairy or livestock and forage. Southwestern Ontario is the chief corn- and

soybean-producing area. Winter wheat, barley, and beans also are grown. The Niagara Peninsula and the Holland Marsh, north of Toronto, produces fruit and vegetable due to a relative mild climate. Although forestry in Ontario does not rank with agriculture in terms of value of production, it is still one of the most important branches of the national forest-products industry.

Bibliography:

(6) Rural Roadmap: The Path Forward for Ontario, (2014), from Ministry of Rural Affairs, April 2014 <http://www.omafra.gov.on.ca/english/rural/roadmap-2014.pdf>

(7) Rod MacRae, Joe Nasr, James Kuhns, Lauren Baker, Russ Christianson, Martin Danyluk, Abra Snider, Eric Gallant, Penny Kail-Vinish, Marc Michalak, Janet Oswald, Sima Patel, and Gerda Wekerle, (2012), Could Toronto Provide 10% of its fresh vegetable requirements from within its own boundaries? Part II, Policy Supports and Program Design, "Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems and Community Development", Feb. 2012, pp. 147-169.

To go further:

Golden Horseshoe : Food and Farming Action Plan 2021, [http:// www.gtaa.ca](http://www.gtaa.ca) (Golden Horseshoe Food and Farming Action Plan, and Implementation Strategy and Background Report)

Rural Roadmap: The Path Forward for Ontario, from Ministry of Rural Affairs, April 2014 [http:// www.omafra.gov.on.ca/english/rural/roadmap-2014.pdf](http://www.omafra.gov.on.ca/english/rural/roadmap-2014.pdf)

Toronto food Charter: [http:// www.foodsecuritynews.com/presentations/Toronto_Food_Charter.pdf](http://www.foodsecuritynews.com/presentations/Toronto_Food_Charter.pdf)

Toronto Food Policy Council: <http://tfpc.to/>

The Toronto Food Policy Council: the backbone of the project

Good food to promote health

Food policy councils were founded in the North American context about three decades ago. Since then, their applicability and popularity has spread worldwide. They generally operate at the sub-national (local, regional, or province/state) level and include citizen members from diverse perspectives across the food system, from food production to waste management. Food policy councils have embodied and promoted ideas about the benefits of participatory democracy, namely that citizens can play a meaningful role in policy deliberation on large and complex issues, even when much of the expertise, power, and authority in food systems are all concentrated in higher levels of government and the private sector. Food policy councils have often sought to establish a long-term role in advising decision makers on food issues and advocating for food system reform under different forms and functions: in particular they can either be formally embedded in government structures, or operate outside government.

Formed in 1991, Toronto Food Policy Council (TFPC) supports scores of programs with the shared goal of ensuring equitable access to food, nutrition, community development and environmental health, acting as professional lobbyist for the people on food and related issues. Since the beginning, TFPC has been largely based upon the idea that food and health are intimately intertwined.

The project “Foodshare Toronto”

The gestation of the TFPC began during the 1960s and carried on through the mid-1980s until the concept of “Foodshare Toronto” was introduced in 1985 by the Mayor Arthur Eggleton, to help fight hunger in the city. According to a report on poor nutrition among low-income people in Toronto made a year before by the board of Health, he addressed a letter to the City Executive Committee in which he outlined the philosophy of action that has then become TFPC’s backbone: to use voluntary energy and goodwill, to be welcome and officially sponsored by the City, to receive a contained financial support, to be under the umbrella of the Health Department. In the following box, an extract of this letter:

“ Across metro [metropolitan area], one in six people live in poverty. Because rent, transportation, heat and electricity remain essential priorities that often cannot be reduced, it is the food budget that is trimmed by low income families. Consequently, thousands of people in Toronto, either on welfare, unemployment or with incomes too low to support a number of dependents, are quite simply going hungry. At the same time, a high percentage of food produced is wasted. Thus I am introducing, with those already involved in fighting the problem, a concept called Foodshare Toronto. It will be an information service and clearing house designed to direct people in need, as well as coordinate offers of donations and service for the community.”

The project “Foodshare Toronto” started with space allocated into the City Hall, a telephone hotline provided by the City and a 20.000 dollars grant for a three month project soon extended to six month with an extra 20.000 dollars grant in order to run during the whole winter season. Over the next decades, the Toronto Food Policy Council was then able to raise millions of dollars of private and public funding for community-based food system activities. Bellow is a description of the Toronto Food Policy Council from an extract of the Toronto Food Policy Council 2011 Membership Update, Attachment 3 – Made Public by the Board of Health on May 9, 2011.

“The Toronto Food Policy Council (TFPC) is a now a citizen body of food activists and experts responsible for generating food policy for the City of Toronto. It has up to 30 members covering a wide range of expertises, all related to food. A member belongs to the Toronto Board of Health, two are members of Toronto City Council, three are members of rural and farm communities near the Greater Toronto Area, two are members of the Toronto Youth Food Policy Council, and up to 24 are residents of Toronto who bring knowledge and experience from a range of communities within the city. Council members are appointed for three year terms. The TFPC is free to make its own decisions on food policy issues.

Staff working with the TFPC are employed by, and responsible to, The Toronto Department of Public Health.”.

The early work of the TFPC was focused on issues of food security, social justice, and hunger. For example, the TFPC was influential in identifying key food and health issues requiring program and policy attention. Through the work of the Food and Hunger Action Committee and a related series of policy papers, municipal grants became available for implementing community food projects. The TFPC currently works on policy initiatives beyond the municipal jurisdiction.

In 2001, as a result of this policy work, the Toronto Food Charter was endorsed by City Council, as a support to the national commitment to food security providing a well-rounded roadmap in which Toronto not only acknowledge the importance food plays at personal and community level, but also in many core urban issues such as: health, education, well-being, standard of living, cultural pluralism, business and employment, environment and traffic pollution.

In 2008, the Board of Health approved the Toronto Food Strategy to guide the City towards a vision for a new food system that focuses on health. Indeed the city shifted the paradigm of food vision focussed on mass production of processed “convenience” foods that tend to be high in calories and low in nutrients towards healthy food that become attractive because culturally appropriate, affordable and accessible to all citizens, independently of their purchasing power. The Toronto Food Policy Council which was a key player in developing such strategy still continues to provide guidance and support on numerous Food Strategy projects.

In 2009, Toronto Youth Food Policy Council was launched to mobilize and engage youth to make change by building a just food system. The TYFPC envisions a Toronto where youth are informed, empowered, and mobilized to build a just food system. Indeed TYFPC acts to provide youth with an open space to network, learn from one another and share food related opportunities and to become an influencing voice in municipal food policy change.

GrowTO: an action Plan, to promote urban agriculture

Ontario province requires all municipalities to have an Official Plan, a legal document approved by Council that describes policies and objectives for land uses and how and where the community should grow. Such document, prepared in consultation with residents, reflects a community vision for future change and development and is one of the most important strategic documents that for instance define the general location for new housing, employment, office and retail areas, community services, parks and other land uses. Toronto’s official plan adopted in 2006, presents the vision to guide the process of development in the city over the next decades

To contrast the risk of urban sprawling, the city relies on “re-urbanization”. For instance, preserving high quality agricultural lands to protect Toronto’s food security is one of the key points identified in the Plan.

“By improving and making better use of existing urban infrastructure and services before introducing new ones on the urban fringe, reurbanization helps to reduce our demands on nature and improve the livability on the urban region.” Source: Toronto Official Plan, in chapter 2, Shaping the city.

MacRae et al. (7) showed that scaling up urban agricultural activities in the City of Toronto could supply ten per cent of the city’s commercial demand for fresh vegetables and create jobs. Both the province of Ontario and the city of Toronto adopted the same year, respectively, the action plan “Golden Horseshoe Agriculture & Agri-Food Strategy”, to develop food and farming in an area considered as one of the largest food and farming clusters in North America, and the GrowTO Action Plan, to promote urban agriculture.

The city immediately identified a series of short-term activities, aligned with GrowTO priority areas and already implemented within existing resources; in parallel it has been working on the definition of longer-term opportunities and potential for extending existing partnerships. Indeed, the city of Toronto clearly admits that to scale up urban agriculture, “no one organization or level of government can do it all”.

As community interest and expectation grows and new opportunities emerge, significant pressure is placed on limited resources to make the most of emerging opportunities and challenges, thus stimulating spontaneous bonding and research of win-win solutions among stakeholders, therefore producing heightened social, economic and health impacts for investments.

The Toronto Agricultural Program also aligns city-wide urban agriculture activity and outcomes with other key City strategies, including:

- Parks Plan 2013-2017,
- Toronto Strong Neighbourhoods 2020,
- Working as One: Workforce Development Strategic Plan for Toronto,
- Economic Development's Collaborating for Competitiveness,
- Climate Change, Clean Air and Sustainable Energy Action Plan,
- Toronto Public Health Strategic Plan.

It is expected that such alignment yields benefits such as the support of new social enterprises linked to urban agriculture, the development or enhancement of skills training for employment in agricultural related occupations or food production, the expansion of learning programs for youth or grant-making for agency-led urban agricultural initiatives.

When civil society is called into action...

Foodshare “armed wing” of TFPC

Most of food programs are run by the non-profit organization FoodShare born according to the will of the City's Executive Committee. FoodShare has first started to gather grassroots initiatives from community based groups in Toronto (Daily Bread Food Bank, Sole Support Women's Community Garden, Kitchen in Regent Park etc.). Then, it has pioneered innovative programs aiming to improve the way people eat and grow food across Toronto every day by fighting food deserts in the city.

Operated by trained, knowledgeable, and friendly volunteers, a Hotline has been operating since 1985. In 1997, it became FoodLink, to reflect an expanded mandate of referral to all types of food programs. In partnership with Community Information Toronto, the system was computerized and expanded to include everything from congregate dining for seniors to nutrition

counselling, pre-natal programs, Good Food Box drop-offs and community gardens. Today the program continues to operate in partnership with 211 Toronto, Daily Bread Food Bank and North York Harvest Food Bank.

FoodShare's Bulk Produce Program for Schools and Community Groups offers locally grown and seasonal produce when available which is delivered directly to student nutrition program sites on a weekly basis. Approximately 260 schools, 20 non-profit child care centres, 75 parenting centres, and 15 non-profit agencies participate across Toronto.

FoodShare works in partnership with Toronto Public Health, Toronto District School Board, Toronto Catholic District School Board, The Toronto Foundation for Student Success, The Angel Foundation for Learning and other community agencies to support student nutrition programs through the Toronto Partners for Student Nutrition (TPSN) which provides intensive on-site support for 682 programs, in 463 schools across the City of Toronto serving approximately 144,000 healthy, nutritious meals and snacks to children and youth in schools and community sites each school day.

Good Food Box. This non-profit fresh fruit and vegetable distribution system is running like a large buying club with centralized buying and coordination. Individuals place orders for boxes with volunteer coordinators in their neighbourhood and receive it on a weekly, bi-weekly or monthly cycle. Customers benefit from the cost savings of bulk buying and time saved by this distribution method. Good Food Box contents match the following criteria: quality, value, culturally appropriate food, local and seasonal, sustainable growing practices, reduced packaging, and fair trade. Established in February 1994 with just 47 boxes, the FoodShare's Good Food Box program now distributes approximately 4,000 Good Food Boxes each month through about 200 neighbourhood drops.

Good Food Markets sell high quality, affordable fruits and vegetables, bringing healthy produce to neighbourhoods where it might not otherwise be available, and where farmers' markets are not viable because sales are too low to cover costs.

Over time, many markets add other features such as children's activities, information about social issues, bake ovens, freshly prepared foods, jewellery and clothing vendors, and harvest celebrations. 79% of Good Food Market customers come back for each and every market.

Good Food Café proposes a universal and healthy school cafeteria, serving attractive, delicious and nutritious food that students choose to eat and that is simple to prepare, proving that "good for you" can be easy for schools to prepare, and tasty too. Good Food Café currently operates in two French high Schools, serving fresh, homemade food daily to over 100 students (in a school of 340). The Good Food Café is also providing a daily hot lunch to a Public School, serving 150 students from Junior Kindergarten to Grade 6.

Baby and Toddler Nutrition Program offers free food basics workshops to communities throughout the Greater Toronto area. The workshops are hands-on and give participants the skills and confidence to make simple healthy baby and toddler food from fresh and whole foods. The workshops specifically target priority neighbourhoods or communities facing food insecurity or lack of agency support.

Community Kitchens, to break down barriers.

A Community Kitchen is a public space where groups of people cook on a regular basis offering the opportunity for participants to share skills, socialize and reduce meal costs by cooking collectively. In 2013, there were over 100 workshops delivered in the community, serving over 1,500 parents and care givers. Community Kitchens are as diverse in their purpose and organization as the people who participate in them, either only prepare food to sit down and eat or preparing several meals in large portions to take home to their families. Community Kitchens can also help to establish a sense of well-being through the healthy cooking lesson itself.

- **Power soups:** every winter, thousands of cups of tasty and nutrient-dense soup are prepared in the FoodShare's kitchens, and are provided at a subsidized price or free of charge to local shelters. This allows shelters without the equipment or capacity to serve hot food to do so. Where drop-ins or shelters may only have been able to serve coffee and donuts before, they can

now serve a hearty lentil soup, homemade and packed with vegetables.

- **Food Youth Project** equips youth marginalized by systemic inequalities with skills that will aid them in navigating the employment and community sector. The program employs 10 youth interns to work in either our Kitchen or Good Food Warehouse full-time for six months. It offers an opportunity for interns to build skills through on the job learning, mentoring, workshops and trainings.
- from 2006-2011, the **Toronto Community Food Animators**, a partnership between FoodShare, Afri-Can FoodBasket, and The Stop Community Food Centre, encouraged and advocated on behalf of gardeners throughout Toronto, and started over 15 community gardens. In 2010 the Toronto Community Food Animators also partnered with Toronto Community Housing Corporation to conduct city-wide consultations to create a strategy for expanding and better supporting community gardens in social housing across Toronto. A grant from the Toronto Atmospheric Fund allowed to develop a Guide to Mid-sized Composting operations to share our experience with others interested in mid-scale composting. The "Turning Trash Into Treasure" Compost Leadership program, launched in 2012, was funded by Earth Day Canada.
- **Sunshine Garden and Market** is run as a recreational and therapeutic gardening program which is open to Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH)'s in-patients and out-patients on a volunteer basis. During the winter, participants work once a week in the onsite greenhouse where they plant and raise seedlings and participate in a variety of workshops on organic gardening and growing food. The workshops are designed to empower participants by teaching them the core skills to grow their own food from seed to harvest. In 2013, participants harvested over 530 pounds of produce, canned 50 pounds of green tomatoes which they made into green tomato chutney in FoodShare's kitchen and canned over 40 pounds of tomatillos to make salsa.