

# MUNICIPAL FOOD POLICY ENTREPRENEURS:

A preliminary analysis of how Canadian cities and regional districts are involved in food system change



Municipal food policy entrepreneurs: a preliminary analysis of how  
Canadian cities and regional districts are involved in food system change

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Municipalities and regional districts are key players in the Canadian food system. In a cross-Canada survey, we found that 64 local and regional municipalities are working to improve the food system, using a mix of municipal policies, programs and civil-society interventions.

Still more Canadian municipalities are engaged in food systems work, but operate without the benefit of the types of organizational arrangements identified in this research.

The diversity of the 64 food policy initiatives appears to be a function of local political and organizational conditions, including the scale and geography of the region and the current realities of poverty and food system function. Given that municipalities do not have a long history of this work, we believe it can be characterized as “food policy entrepreneurship.”<sup>2</sup>

*“Municipalities have not undertaken food policy work to feed themselves. Such opportunities are limited (see MacRae et al., 2010). Rather, they are trying to shift the dynamics amongst food system actors to improve environmental sustainability, health promotion, and economic development.”*

Much of this work applies food system thinking in the municipal and regional context. By “food system,” we mean the activities of commercial and non-commercial actors who grow, process, distribute, acquire, and dispose of food. “Food systems thinking” reflects an awareness of how actions by one group in the system affect other

groups, as well as affecting the environment, the economy, the fabric of society, and the health of the population, and ultimately consumers.

Municipalities have limited jurisdictional authority over the food system, yet they are faced with the consequences of the loss of agricultural land, the local effects of pollution and climate change, farmers’ financial struggles, residents’ uneven access to food, food affordability, public health problems associated with inadequate or poor quality diets, shrinking local food infrastructure, and reduced employment and tax revenues from food-related businesses. Municipalities intervene to address these consequences, sometimes intentionally, sometimes not, often employing food systems thinking.

Municipalities are promoting diverse improvements to the food system. They are convening local food system actors to discuss their problems and collaborate on solutions.

Bringing these diverse people together can be difficult work, since many of those involved are either confined by organizational silos or working in competition with each other. However, these participatory spaces generate creative solutions.

Fundamentally important for effective municipal food policy development is a strong attachment to the municipal government, active support from municipal staff, partnership between elected and unelected officials around a common purpose and mission, and food systems thinking. We have placed the 64 food policy initiatives documented into six categories according to their levels of public-sector involvement. In some cases, municipal staff and politicians are the driving forces; in others, a multi-stakeholder operating unit is attached to the municipality, with municipal staff support and a budget. Many initiatives have a common path – starting with either a community food assessment, building the food system network, identifying projects and educational events, and then creating a food charter or a municipal food strategy and action plan.

Food policy initiatives help leverage resources across their networks to support municipal projects such as community gardens, community kitchens, food box distribution schemes for low-income neighbourhoods, local and sustainable food procurement programs that support regional farmers, food hubs, and

farmers' markets. Food policy initiatives have also worked with planning departments on official plans, zoning by-laws, and local economic development initiatives, and with public health units to expand food security programs.

Despite their many successes, the 64 food policy initiatives face challenges in staffing and resources, capacity building, implementation of food system thinking, and mobilizing effective participation in their work.

Three broad recommendations emerge from this scan of municipal and regional food policy initiatives across Canada.

1. There is a need for actors and organizations working in municipal food policy across Canada to create a network to share information and best practices and build capacity for food policy work.<sup>3</sup>
2. Municipal food initiatives would benefit from identifying a range of ways to document and evaluate their work in order to demonstrate successful processes for social change as well as food system and other municipal/regional impacts.
3. Policy makers at various government levels should clarify jurisdictional food policy connections and define the linkages between municipal food policy efforts and provincial and federal food, agriculture, public health, and other policy domains.

## INTRODUCTION

How and why are municipalities acting to change the food system? Food is not a traditional municipal responsibility; most food systems issues are usually interpreted to be provincial and federal matters under the Canadian Constitution.

Yet, to varying degrees, 64 local and regional municipalities across Canada have taken on the challenge of improving health, environmental performance, food access, and local economic development, using food systems thinking and changes in the food system to drive improvements. They are part of a network of more than 200 cities in North America with food policy initiatives (Community Food Security Coalition, 2011). Even more Canadian municipalities than identified in this research are engaged in food systems work, but without benefit of these types of organizational arrangements. A 2010 survey by the Federation of Canadian Municipalities received 115 responses from Canadian municipalities and 60% indicated they had food champions working in their municipality. Most had integrated sustainable food systems initiatives into their plans and activities<sup>4</sup>.

“Food systems” are the chains of commercial and non-commercial actors – from suppliers to consumers, regulators to advocates for system change – who collectively determine how we grow, process, distribute, acquire, and dispose of food. Food systems thinking reflects an awareness of how actions by one group in the system affects other groups, as well as the environment, the economy, the fabric of society,

and the health of the population, and ultimately, consumers. (see Figure 1).

Not only are municipalities embracing food priorities, but many employ food systems thinking to design their structures, policies, and activities. For example, the City of Vancouver’s new food strategy calls for the use of a food systems checklist when planning staff review development applications, rezoning proposals, and community plans. In this way, food systems thinking can reshape private and public spaces in cities.

Food is central to a well functioning municipality. Food is not only about health, nutrition, and food safety, but also food security, affordability, and access. Food and its production, supply, and consumption affect water use, waste management, and carbon footprints. Food is a big part of the economy: the food sector (supply, distribution, processing, retailing, and food service) employs one person in eight in Canada, either full-time or seasonally. Food is related to culture and tourism. Public institutions, including educational institutions, procure, promote, and share knowledge about food as part of their core mandates. Food policy has implications for transportation, planning, economic development, and health promotion.

**FIGURE 1**  
**FOOD SYSTEMS THINKING**

**1. “Systems thinking” recognizes that:**

- Complex issues are linked.
- There are multiple actors in the system and they are connected.
- Integrated solutions are required.

**2. “Systems thinking” is a means to:**

- Express and act on strategy.
- Engage and align diverse actors.
- Link health, environment and justice concerns with economic success.

**3. A “food system approach” is about recognizing the connections between:**

- Supply chain players and other sectors, and among players within other sectors;
- Connections between these diverse players and consumers; and
- Ensuring reliable food production and supply and the sustainable use of natural capital.

**4. “Operationalizing a food system approach” requires:**

- Supporting highly-collaborative supply chains.
- Collaborating with non-traditional actors beyond the supply chain.
- Understanding consumer food needs and health/well-being considerations.
- Understanding evolving societal expectations for how food is produced/supplied.
- Understanding how sustainability, equity, health and social expectations are managed at every stage in food production/supply.
- Deploying common objectives and metrics – this can include setting a bold target or destination.
- Aligning and creating supportive government policy and regulations.
- Working in multiple venues and on multiple topics

**Understanding the connections can be used to create the necessary dialogue to apply systems thinking to specific issues.**

Adapted from CAPI (2011)

Given the diverse, complex, and interconnected ways in which food affects our lives, municipalities increasingly need integrated ways to meet economic, social, and environmental objectives. The question is: how can food systems thinking help municipalities achieve their goals?

Food policy and program development are the keys. Food policy is “any decision made by a government agency, business, or organization which affects how food is produced, processed, distributed, purchased and protected” (Hamilton, 2002, p. 423). Food policy work can take place at any scale. It can be legislative, regulatory, or visionary.

But food policy is also about what is *not* said or done (Scherb et al., 2012): i.e., the social

norms and assumptions embedded in our food systems over time. In the current dominant food system, many things are assumed - for example, that farms only produce high quality food and that everyone can acquire enough food for a healthy diet if they make the “right” choices - and these assumptions often remain unquestioned. This has resulted in a food supply chain that is based heavily on shaping consumer demand, for example, rather than taking population health, a just society, or sustainability as core drivers. Applying “systems thinking” to food policy involves making common assumptions visible and explicit in order to understand what needs to be changed. This is typically achieved by bringing together diverse experts or by conducting formal food system assessments.

Municipal food policy initiatives are at the forefront in this work. Our survey and work by Scherb et al. (2012), show that Canadian food policy initiatives are involved in:

- *identifying problems that could be addressed through policy*
- *creating visions and overarching policy directions for food systems*
- *educating a broader public about food policy issues*
- *developing policy proposals for government units and other organizations*
- *lobbying for funding or implementation of specific proposals*
- *participating in the regulatory process, as advocates, drafters, or consultants*
- *endorsing other organizations' or institutions' policies or programs*
- *general food system advocacy, formation of coalitions, and acting as a nexus for food system analysis and interventions*
- *provision or organization of expert testimony to decision makers program design*

This activity may be structured through Food Policy Councils, which generally have four functions (Harper et al., 2009):

- *to discuss food issues – balancing the interests of different actors (government, business, non-profits), and ultimately the mechanisms of regulatory pluralism*
- *to create opportunities for sectors in the food system to collaborate across the full range of sectors (silos) and rural/urban divides*
- *to analyze, influence, and create policy*
- *to create or support existing programs and services that address local needs, including helping with fundraising, program design and execution, and advocacy*

To date, however, relatively few studies have analyzed the work of these initiatives (e.g., Borron, 2003; Clancy et al., 2007; Dahlberg, 1994; Harper et al., 2009; Hatfield, 2012; Scherb et al., 2012; Schiff, 2007). Most have focused on the United States and cost-benefit analyses are rare (Harper et al., 2009). The multidimensional work carried out by food policy initiatives is admittedly difficult to assess, given the limited authority and jurisdiction of municipalities, in which much of the strategy is indirect.

Food policy initiatives themselves may be collecting data on their own effectiveness, but at this point have done limited analysis of it. The Community Food Assessment Initiative (CFAI) in British Columbia evaluated provincial funding of local initiatives (Millar, 2008); the results are positive, but the study focused more on health and food access impacts associated with projects, rather than the impacts of food policy initiatives on food system change.

This preliminary report is largely descriptive.

We identify the diverse ways in which food policy work is unfolding, what the key activities are, and what numerous actors believe is their value to municipalities and the food chain. It is not an assessment of their efficacy, nor an attempt to undertake a quantitative impact analysis. We do, though, provide some preliminary ideas on what makes food policy initiatives successful and close with some questions and recommendations for municipal governments, the food system actors, and NGOs.

# THE CITY/REGIONAL FOOD SYSTEM

The city/regional food system is embedded within the wider municipal, provincial and federal policy context. This diagram illustrates the links between core municipal activities and a wide variety of food system actions and people, reflecting how actions by one group in the system affect other groups, as well as affecting the environment, the economy, the fabric of society, the health of the population, and ultimately, consumers.



## SIX FORMS OF MUNICIPAL FOOD POLICY ACTIVITY

The level of municipal food policy activity across the country surpassed our expectations. The diversity of initiatives is exceptional. Using academic literature, website reviews, surveys of organizational leaders, and phone interviews, we have categorized this diverse activity in the following six ways<sup>5</sup> (Figure 2). Table 1 summarizes our findings and we have posted

a full analysis at [www.tfpc.to/canadian-food-policy-initiatives](http://www.tfpc.to/canadian-food-policy-initiatives). Our categorization is primarily organized around the differences, often nuanced, in the structural and resourcing arrangements food policy groups have with local and regional governments. The nuances, however, appear to have an impact on successes and challenges, as we explain later in the report.

### ■ CATEGORY 1 MUNICIPALITY-DRIVEN FOOD POLICY INITIATIVES

**These food policy initiatives are financed by the municipality and directed by municipal staff with advice from external groups. The municipal government sets the mandate and provides financing and staff resources. They are housed within existing municipal government units and external organizations advise and interact with municipal officials.**

We found three projects in this category: two in Alberta (Edmonton and Calgary) and one in Metro Vancouver. These are relatively new initiatives, and when we were conducting our survey, they were still

#### **EXAMPLE: EDMONTON FRESH- LOCAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

The City of Edmonton's Food and Urban Agriculture Strategy (called fresh) focuses on building local food supply, infrastructure, and demand. The goal is a stronger, more vibrant local economy, with food policy and food programs designed to support that goal ([www.edmonton.ca/city\\_government/urban\\_planning\\_and\\_design/food-and-agriculture-project.aspx](http://www.edmonton.ca/city_government/urban_planning_and_design/food-and-agriculture-project.aspx)). It proposes a mix of regulatory policies and food programs, including planning initiatives to protect food-producing lands; the creation of food hubs that include commercial kitchens; improved market, warehouse and storage infrastructure; a local food purchasing policy; a local food festival; a local labelling scheme; and new mobile food, retail and restaurant infrastructure.

rolling out their implementation mechanisms, including food system assessments, charters, action plans, and formal entities to oversee execution of the agenda.

They were created by municipal governments, but influenced by multi-stakeholder groups. The initiatives all reflect a broad food systems approach, driven by concerns about sustainability. Funding and staffing are largely provided by the municipal or regional governments. Although it is too early to know what their impacts will be, they already have some political champions and resources, with the engagement of many units within their jurisdictions.

## ■ CATEGORY 2

### HYBRID MODEL WITH DIRECT LINKS TO GOVERNMENT

These food policy initiatives are a hybrid of civil society organizations and government with a conduit to decision makers through municipal council, and with municipal financing, political champions, and supportive staff. They are characterized by formal municipal endorsements, structural links, and accountability to a government body, including a conduit into the municipal government structure.

In this category are three initiatives in the cities of Toronto, Vancouver, and Markham, Ontario. The Toronto Food Policy Council is more than 20 years old, and was recently instrumental in shaping the Toronto Food Strategy which facilitates food systems connections across city departments, and between municipal government and community. Markham created its food policy in 2011, with a focus on institutional food procurement.

#### **EXAMPLE: CITY OF VANCOUVER FOOD STRATEGY**

Crafted by city staff and the Vancouver Food Policy Council, the City of Vancouver's Food Strategy was adopted by City Council at the end of January 2013. Rooted in other municipal strategies and policy frameworks, but displaying a strong food system lens, the strategy focuses on neighbourhood-based initiatives to increase "food assets." Importantly, the strategy serves as a backbone for a comprehensive food systems program that is fully integrated into multiple City programs and managed by City staff today. Equally notable and unique, the strategy is intended to enhance the regional foodshed, extending beyond the City's boundary, and strongly advocates food system change at the provincial and federal levels. The strategy recognizes that effective governance of the food system involves government, civil society, and individual citizens. At the same time, Metro Vancouver (the regional level of government) has developed and adopted a food strategy and is reviewing regulations to make sure they support local food production and procurement. Vancouver's food strategy is intended to complement and build upon the regional strategy, but still be specific to the City of Vancouver.

Typically, these initiatives were intended to address issues of access to affordable food for low-income residents; sustainability concerns (including reducing climate change impacts); and the economic viability of regional agriculture. Their main challenges include fluctuating support from municipal councils, problems with resourcing, and lack of time to implement their agendas. The older initiatives appeared to have the most significant impact,<sup>6</sup> because food policy agendas take time to develop. Based on the breadth of their memberships and agendas, and from comments we heard in our interviews, we have concluded that they have a food systems focus.

Many of these initiatives have been described in the academic literature and are widely viewed as a preferred structure for a food policy organization because of the way they blend municipal and civil society organization resources and expertise (e.g., Harper et al., 2009; Schiff, 2007; Scherb et al., 2012).

### ■ CATEGORY 3 HYBRID MODEL WITH INDIRECT LINKS TO GOVERNMENT

Like Category 2, these food policy initiatives are a hybrid of civil society organizations and government, but with fewer formal attachments and lower levels of financing and government staffing arrangements. The conduit to council is less direct, via departments and government staff. The linkages with government are still significant, but less so than for Category 2. Public health structures and staffing are particularly important, with financial support from a mix of sources, including provincial grants.

In this category, we found 14 projects in British Columbia and Ontario, including ones in Kamloops, B.C., and Waterloo Region and Hamilton, Ontario. Most had a regional scope and were created by civil society organizations, sometimes in partnership with local or regional public health units. The motives for their creation were broad, but usually related to social development or health. Several projects had led to the development of food charters.

Links to government were less direct, and depended largely on participating municipal staff or councillors. Staff support was more likely to be the formal or informal assignment of the time of a municipal employee

than the direct financing of dedicated staff positions. Half had some dedicated municipal funding, while others survive on a mix of provincial governmental and external grants and volunteer time.

#### **EXAMPLE: HAMILTON, ONTARIO, COMMUNITY GARDEN COORDINATOR**

Excerpt from a report submitted by the Medical Officer of Health to City Council on December 12, 2011: "Hiring a Community Garden Coordinator helped community gardens flourish in Hamilton in 2011. There are now over 30 community gardens - 20 of which sit on Hamilton Housing properties." According to Sarah Wakefield, University of Toronto researcher and past Chair of the Hamilton Community Food Security Stakeholder Advisory Committee, the City of Hamilton is starting to realize how many resources it can leverage through the community garden position. "For \$15,000 you can get donations from Home Depot and hundreds of hours of donations in time. You can beautify derelict spaces. You can engage community members in their communities in ways you couldn't do before. You can reduce the cost of existing community gardens to the city, because now they don't operate allotment-style. These are some of the things the Community Garden Coordinator does for this very small investment. We need to move away from the mindset that this is an unwarranted expense to recognizing all the resources this position can leverage. It's a bargain."

As with the initiatives in Category 2, membership in these groups was diverse and frequently included government representatives. The challenges these groups faced were more pronounced, however, especially securing funding and maintaining staff and continuity. Impacts were often more project-specific, such as the creation of farmers' markets, the development of food box projects, or the establishment of community gardens. Compared to Categories 1 and 2, food systems approaches were still common, but more limited<sup>7</sup>.

## ■ CATEGORY 4

### FOOD POLICY ORGANIZATION LINKED TO GOVERNMENT THROUGH A SECONDARY AGENCY

These food policy initiatives are not formally connected to government, but linked through secondary agencies. They may have important ties to government (such as a municipally endorsed food charter) or receive some government grants.

In this category, we found 15 projects in British Columbia, Saskatchewan, Ontario, and Quebec, including ones based in Victoria, Saskatoon, Ottawa, and Montreal. Most have regional responsibilities and were largely started by civil society organizations, sometimes with the engagement of government staff.

#### **EXAMPLE: OTTAWA, ONTARIO, JUST FOOD**

Just Food was started in 2000 and has taken various forms since then. It is largely driven by civil society organizations and has operated structurally for much of its life through the city's Social Planning Council. Just Food has proven its value to the municipality by delivering programs that the municipality supports but cannot implement, and a more formal relationship with the City of Ottawa is consequently emerging. Just Food has developed an action plan and is now working to establish a multidimensional Community Food and Urban Agriculture Hub on a National Capital Commission farm property. To achieve its progressive environmental and social agenda, Just Food sees its role as negotiating amongst governmental, corporate, and private actors.

The motive for their creation is typically quite specific: addressing hunger, overcoming barriers to food access, or promoting healthy eating, although a few have wider food system concerns. Some have created municipal food charters, although these charters may not be endorsed by the municipal government.

Their connections to government are largely through committees, agencies such as social planning councils, or provincially mandated organizations. Many did not have staff or had only some part-time staffing support, sometimes through another agency. Staff and money are clear limiting constraints on their growth and effectiveness.

## ■ CATEGORY 5

### CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATION WITH LIMITED GOVERNMENT FUNDING AND PARTICIPATION

This type of food policy organization consists of a civil society organization roundtable or project committee, on which government officials may participate. The organization may receive some government grants.

In this category, we found 16 initiatives<sup>8</sup> primarily in British Columbia, Ontario, and Quebec, including those based in Kaslo, B.C., Sudbury, Ontario, and the Outaouais region of Quebec.

Despite limited resources and staffing, they have local visibility and have managed to enact some projects with some success. Several have created food charters, and secured municipal endorsement for these charters.

The motives for their creation are diverse, but usually focused on specific goals, such as maintaining the viability of local farms or ensuring food security for low-income populations. A wide range of

#### **EXAMPLE: KASLO, BRITISH COLUMBIA, FOOD SECURITY PROJECT**

Kaslo has a food hub, which offers nine programs. The organization developed a food charter that has been endorsed by the municipal government. The project conducts community food assessments, and has created policies and procedures for operating food hubs, community gardening guidelines, and a food directory. It is currently writing a guide on community food security for rural communities, working on waste recovery, and creating a community greenhouse with a local arena. The organization is also trying to help the local farming sector by, for example, working on crown land acquisition, drawing up lease agreements, and writing a farm plan for a local farm organization.

organizations were involved in their creation, but typically with less government involvement than Categories 1 to 4.

In general, these initiatives are having difficulty making inroads with local governments, although many participants have connections to elected and unelected officials. There is some evidence of food systems thinking, but resource limitations suggest some difficulties with executing projects with system-wide scope. Some are trying to establish a Food Policy Council structured within the municipality.

## ■ CATEGORY 6

### CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS WITH NO DIRECT GOVERNMENT INVOLVEMENT

These food policy initiatives are not formally connected to government and do not seem to partner with government or receive funding. The initiatives, however, are developing a clearer structure and the ability to engage regional government in food system change.

In this category, we found 13 projects, in British Columbia, Alberta, Ontario, New Brunswick and Newfoundland and Labrador. These initiatives have had some successes, although they are largely

#### EXAMPLE: CENTRAL OKANAGAN FOOD POLICY COUNCIL/SOCIETY

With roots in the region dating back to 2006, this organization has created a food charter for the region and implemented numerous successful community-based projects. At present, the organization operates without government involvement. It has begun making presentations to municipal councils in the region. A former Councillor for the City of Kelowna is a member of the group and helped the group ensure that food security considerations were included in the city's Official Community Plan. Applications to both government and non-governmental funders have been unsuccessful to date.

unrecognized by local governments. Some have constructed charters and action plans, but these efforts have not substantially affected the work of government bodies. In British Columbia, however, provincial health authorities have often been significant supporters. Their resources are so limited that we had difficulty obtaining information on the projects.

TABLE 1 - CHARACTERIZING MUNICIPAL FOOD POLICY INITIATIVES

Note that these are soft boundaries between the categories; in the transition from one category to the next are initiatives that display characteristics of both.

	Characteristics	Number	Examples
STRONG MUNICIPAL SUPPORT	Cat. 1 - Initiative financed by municipality & directed by municipal staff with external groups advising	3	Edmonton, Calgary, Metro Vancouver
	Cat. 2 - CSO / government hybrid with conduit through municipal council & municipal financing, political champions and dedicated or supportive staff to implement strategies	3	City of Toronto, City of Vancouver, Markham (ON)
	Cat. 3 - Like Cat. 2, but without govt staff and financing; or conduit through departments and govt staff with in-kind financing	14	Huntsville (ON), Waterloo Region (ON), Kamloops (BC)
	Cat. 4 - Conduit to decision makers through "secondary" agencies and their staff, some grant financing from governments	15	Montreal, GTA Agricultural Action Committee (ON), Saskatoon
	Cat. 5 - Government officials sit on CSO roundtable or project committee, limited government funding and participation in implementation	16	Kaslo (BC), Sudbury (ON), Gatineau (QC)
WEAK SUPPORT	Cat. 6 - No direct government involvement	13	Okanagan (BC), Winnipeg, St. John's (NL)

## FINDINGS FROM THE SURVEY

Municipal and regional food policy work is gaining momentum across Canada. In summary, the diversity of the 64 food policy initiatives captured in this assessment appears to be a function of local political and organizational conditions, including the scale and geography of the region and the current realities of poverty and food system function.

These initiatives began to appear in the early 1990s (see timeline page 16) and now cover most regions of the country (see map page 17). As in the United States (Harper et al., 2009), most of the initiatives have appeared since 2000, but especially in the first three categories, many mature initiatives date back to the 1990s.

### The municipal food system

Municipalities have not undertaken food policy work to feed themselves. Such opportunities are limited (see MacRae et al., 2010). Rather, they are trying to shift the dynamics amongst food system actors to improve environmental sustainability, health promotion, and economic development. Some of these efforts shift realities within the municipality, many help municipalities realize their multiple goals, and others have wider regional effects.

A municipal food system has many of the dimensions of a larger area (e.g., province or nation) but the proportions of actors, activities and processes are different. Although the municipalities studied here are highly diverse, typically, food producers are involved, but

relatively few of them and mostly small-scale. Most farm input suppliers are small-town or rural. Canada's large food processors and distributors usually locate in large urban areas, although small and medium-sized processing firms are dispersed across a range of locations. Many municipalities actively work to retain their food processors and distributors because of the important economic development activity they bring.

Restaurants, work places, health care facilities, schools and institutes of higher learning are a large part of urban food systems and often equally significant for economic activity. Government agents and policy makers tend to be centralized in mid-sized and large communities, a change from the days in which they were based in smaller communities. Food system change activists also are largely urban.

Given population shifts, consumers are now primarily urban and suburban, so municipalities need to provide many food system functions, such as planning, social development, economic development, environment, parks and recreation, and public health services that focus on food

safety and nutritional health. Municipalities are also engaged in the direct provision of food to students and to children in daycare, as well as to residents in shelters of long-term care.

### **What were the municipal drivers?**

For initiatives in Categories 1 to 3, there appears to have been at least one politically pressing local food problem (such as an increased reliance on food banks, health problems, or the loss of farmland) that stimulated initial interest. But given the kind of discussions that flow from multi-sectoral representation, the initiatives or groups came to recognize that one issue was connected to others in the food system.

It may not matter whether the initiative is driven by economic or social/health/community objectives, although public health units have been the most important supporters of these efforts, followed by planning, social, and economic development units within municipal governments. What is more important is whether the impetus created by one unit attracts support from other government units. This requires at least one strong champion.

Equally important appears to be how the food agenda can be tied to other municipal mandates. Categories 1 to 3 in particular, food activity is directly correlated to provincial or municipal government mandates. These include British Columbia's focus on healthy food; Vancouver's commitment to sustainability, Toronto's commitment to strong neighbourhoods, and commitments by other governments to address food insecurity. These commitments open up opportunities for civil society organizations to show governments how their action on food can help fulfil those other mandates.

In Categories 4 to 6, food policy initiatives are linked to municipal policies that are sometimes

less directly pertinent to food system change, although supportive municipal officials from public health, social development, and economic development may serve as members. In some cases, especially in British Columbia and Ontario, public health staff have been essential to what has emerged.

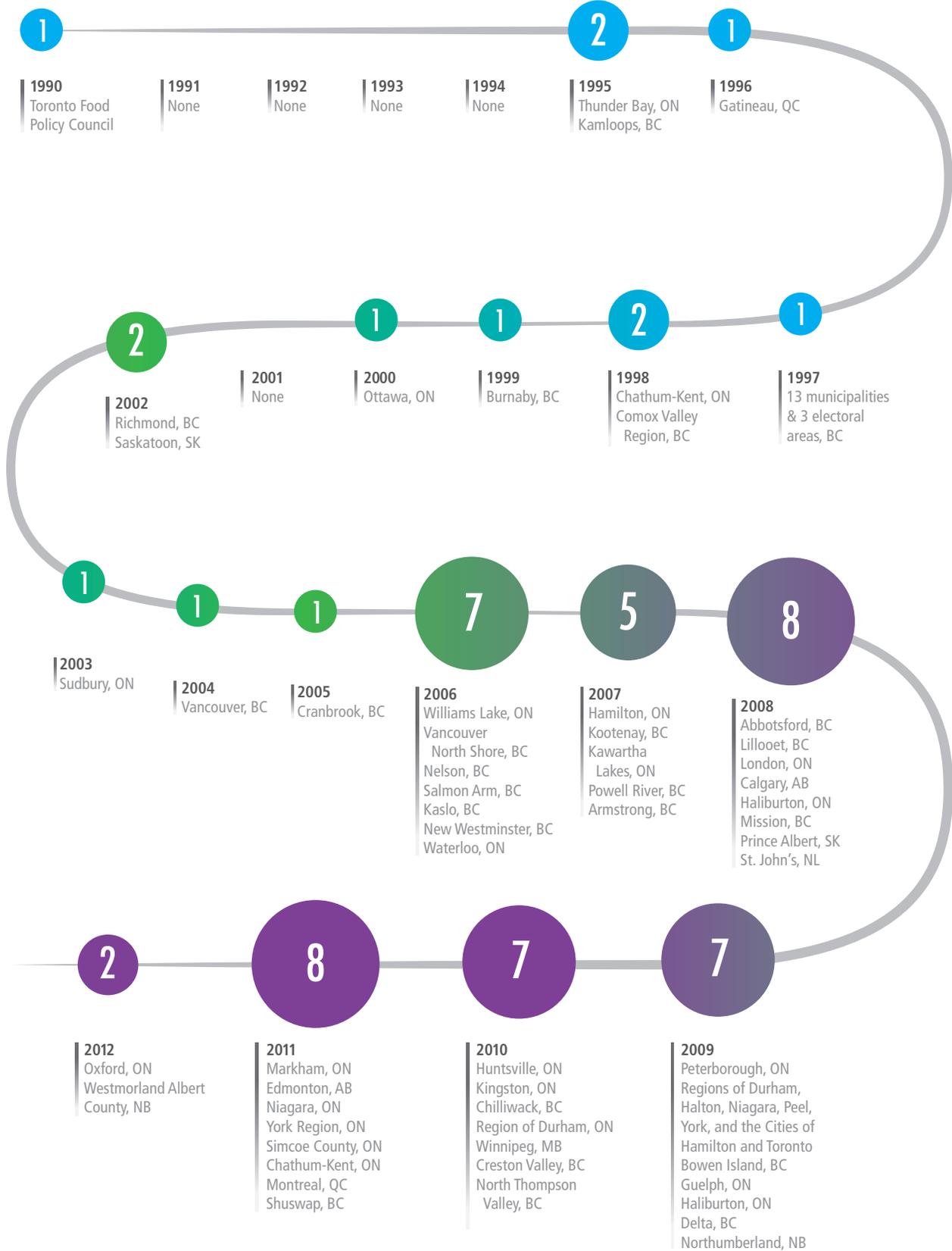
### **How do funding and budgets affect food initiatives?**

Budget security can affect an organization's ability to implement a range of initiatives. Initiatives that are not funded by government face the dilemma of how to finance their own core function at the same time that their wider network of actors and their projects are also precariously financed.

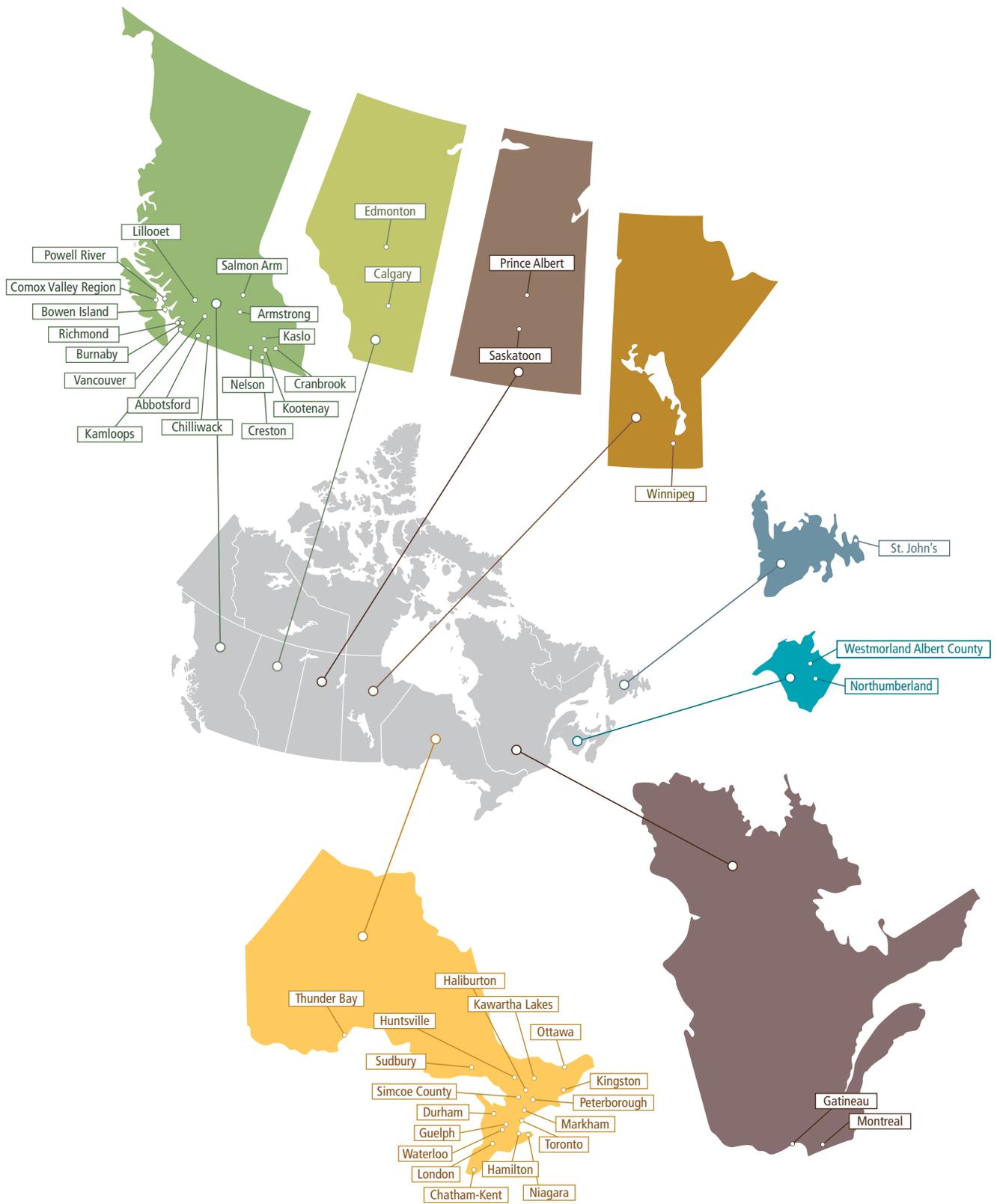
Governments can spur the multiplier effect that comes from core financing of food initiatives. For example, between 1991 and 1998, the Toronto Food Policy Council, funded by the city at the rate of approximately \$220,000 a year, helped raise more than \$7 million dollars from other sources for community food projects. Since 2010, the Toronto Food Strategy has been able to attract funding from charitable foundations and the provincial government for multiple initiatives. The City of Vancouver has recently brokered a deal with the Vancouver Foundation to fund green initiatives, including projects that increase the supply of local food, in part inspired by the work of the Vancouver Food Policy Council. The City pays for one half of each new initiative and the foundation pays for the other half.

Food projects can be complex, with many partners involved, and progress can be slow. In general, the longer an organization has been in existence, the greater its impact. Initiatives with fewer direct links to municipal government and more tenuous funding struggle more with effectiveness than those with more direct links and supports.

# A CHRONOLOGY OF FOOD POLICY DEVELOPMENT IN CANADA



# MUNICIPAL/REGIONAL FOOD POLICY ACTIVITY ACROSS CANADA



More mature initiatives, with greater skills and connections, are sometimes better able to surmount these budget difficulties than younger initiatives.

Tenuous funding typically means the focus is on project implementation whenever grants can be obtained to support the effort. This project-based approach does not necessarily support change at the food systems level.

### **What is the role of champions?**

Most successful units appear to have institutional or individual champions. The real value of such champions may be the tactical advice and skills they provide, rather than their direct influence. Champions are skilled at navigating institutional structures and arrangements and know how to work with the full political spectrum.

How important is the mayor or head of the guiding government body? Given the limited authorities of mayors in many Canadian municipalities, having the mayor on board may not necessarily be critical, although mayors are welcome participants, as is currently the case in Vancouver.

It may be more important to have council supporters who know how to broker deals across the political spectrum. The Toronto Food Policy Council, for example, benefited enormously from the interventions of then-City Councillor Jack Layton, who helped frame the initiative, ensure that the votes to create it were organized, and guided many of its early initiatives.

In Thunder Bay, a City Councillor has been involved informally with the city's Food Action Network for several years. Because of her support and advice, the Food Action Network's food charter was endorsed by City Council in 2008. A city planner has also been a champion internally for several years.

In many municipalities, the champion has been a middle- to senior-level municipal civil servant, usually in the public health unit, but sometimes in planning or social development. In Kaslo, British Columbia, the biggest political champion was a federal MP for the West Kootenays, suggesting that this type of work may be raised to the federal level from the local constituencies in which important food policy activity is taking place.

### **What structural arrangements do food policy initiatives have?**

The 64 projects represent tremendous structural diversity – some have intimate and deeply attached linkages to municipal government, others have virtually no connections to government, relying almost exclusively on community agencies and volunteers.

The data strongly suggest that well-structured access to municipal councils, with some level of staff support and financing, leads to greater effectiveness, and that a more intimate attachment to government appears to generate greater access to resources (Borron, 2003; Harper et al., 2009). These conditions help ensure longevity, which is essential to this kind of work.

In some cases, such as Kaslo, the agency and staff person have had some success compensating for the absence of formal linkages to the municipality and the lack of a roundtable structure. It would appear that high levels of skill and particularly promising local conditions account for this effectiveness.

There appears to be a trend amongst the groups created primarily by civil society organizations to demonstrate value to municipal governments that, in turn, creates opportunities for new kinds of structural arrangements and financing. In some cases, community-based groups have recognized the limitations of their existing

arrangements and are working to establish a formal Food Policy Council. This finding is consistent with that of MacRae and Abergel (2012): many government units are actively seeking non-governmental assistance in program delivery and policy development. Lacking sufficient internal resources and expertise to solve pressing municipal problems, such units engage with civil society in the hope of finding mutually acceptable solutions to such problems.

### **What is critical about the nature of the membership?**

Most initiatives in Categories 1 to 4 have diverse memberships, representing the main food system sectors, and with significant participation from non-traditional food system actors. Most of those who represent the food chain, however, do not fall into “mainstream” categories. In other words, most municipal initiatives (with some exceptions, such as the Greater Toronto Area Agricultural Action Committee and associated Golden Horseshoe Food and Farming Alliance) have limited representation from the mainstream farm sector, food processing, distribution, or retailing. Instead, “alternative” companies are over-represented relative to their significance within food chains.<sup>9</sup>

Although the major food players may not be among the primary membership of these bodies, there is evidence that secondary linkages are robust. Members in food policy groups may also have memberships in groups working on local food procurement in schools (Farm to Cafeteria), regional economic development projects, or food processing retention strategies. Although there are some exceptions, there may also be underrepresentation from the food waste management and processing sectors, as Harper et al. (2009) found in the United States.

Given the roundtable format of most initiatives, their success is often determined by the skill with which they are facilitated (by chairs and staff), and the level of skill and engagement of the members and the resources they can bring through their initiatives. This ability to engage other initiatives is often critical where resources are limited and structural connections lacking, as they are for most groups in Categories 4 to 6.

Members represent a range of commitment to the process – typically, about a third of the members are effective and skilled contributors, a third are effective on occasion, and the remaining third consists of individual who are there more to learn than to contribute.

Groups often struggle to determine the most appropriate mix of members – their backgrounds, diversity, skills, representations, influence, and links to other critical actors. As well, groups navigate with varying degrees of success the tension between identifying like-minded members and recruiting potential allies from more unexpected sources. Unusual alliances are difficult to negotiate, but can generate significant benefits and many initiatives consider them key to the success of their efforts. Successful initiatives also say that good relations with a wide range of internal and external actors is essential, and the membership can be a big part of success in these relationships.

### **To whom do staff report?**

In initiatives in which staff are municipal employees reporting to a Food Policy Council, a key question is where and to whom in the municipal structure they report. Public health and social development units are the most common attachments. The nature of the attachment can affect the organization’s effectiveness.

For example, the Vancouver Food Policy Council suffered from a lack of internal support earlier in the 2000s, despite a strong structural attachment to the municipality. The Toronto Food Policy Council, in contrast, had very supportive managers in the 1990s, but less so in the early 2000s, and its agenda had to be shifted as a result. Today, Toronto Public Health leads the Toronto Food Strategy with strong links to the Food Policy Council. Food Strategy and Food Policy Council staff are part of the same team, and thus able to facilitate multiple linkages across the municipal government. Likewise, the City of Vancouver now has an integrated food systems program lead by the Director of Social Planning.

Advancing food policy in municipalities can be tricky when municipal or agency staff are essentially seconded to the Food Policy Council, but ultimately have divided loyalties. Certainly, in such cases, the time pressures on seconded staff are significant. A lack of staff support was probably the most cited impediment to effectiveness for initiatives in Categories 3 to 6.

### **How important are strategies, action plans, and charters?**

The most fundamental contribution of food policy initiatives is the creation of opportunities for discussions and action that would not typically occur. These initiatives often go on to develop feasible instruments of food system thinking – strategies, action plans, and food charters.

Our survey found 15 municipalities that have created food charters and five more where charters are in development. Some of these municipalities have also developed food strategies and action plans to help implement activities that flow from the principles of the charters in ways that are reshaping municipal regulations, policies, and programs. Several (including Calgary) have used food charter

language in a food strategy or action plan, but do not have formal charters. At least three others have prepared charters that have not yet been endorsed by the municipality.

Working to have strategies, action plans and charters adopted appears to be a relatively common approach to food policy work, particularly for initiatives in Categories 1 to 4 and appears to help enable action. In some cases, for initiatives in Categories 4 to 6, the action plan or charter becomes the motive for organizing.

These policy instruments help foster organizational motivation, cross-sectoral understanding, and the introduction of food systems approaches to municipalities. Food strategies and action plans galvanize diverse actors, set a vision for their actions, and help leverage additional resources. Both can be endorsed by city council, committees of council, or municipal departments. Both address policy and programming, as many groups appear to understand (Harper et al., 2009).

In many cases, however, the instruments exist, but implementation has been a struggle. Progress may be impeded by a combination of weak structural linkages to the places where decisions are made, insufficient staff or volunteer time or capacity, and lack of funding to develop and execute new proposals. In other cases, programming occurs without a policy framework to support it, which makes it harder to take a comprehensive approach to food systems change.

Unfortunately, many civil society organizations do not have the expertise to work with bureaucratic hierarchies, and at the same time, government units are not well structured to take advantage of the expertise represented by civil society organizations.

## THE BROADER CANADIAN POLICY CONTEXT

Canada, like most industrial countries, has never had a coherent and integrated national food policy. Rather, agricultural production has been the primary driver of food-related policy in Canada.

Agricultural policy in the 19th century dealt primarily with Canada's obligations as a British colony and government efforts to establish national boundaries, which included securing the Prairies by attracting new farmers. As agricultural historian Vernon Fowke put it in 1946, "Government assistance has been typically extended to agriculture because of what agriculture was expected to do for other dominant economic interests in return for assistance, rather than for what such assistance might do for agriculture" (p.272).

The political power of the grain and livestock sectors to influence eating patterns and nutrition recommendations dates from this period, when governments began providing significant supports to them. Unfortunately, most Canadian food regulations remain rooted in a traditional focus on food safety and fraud prevention.

Hedley (2006) argues that this approach reflects the idea that governments should confine their activities to these areas and to matters of food supply and leave individuals to make their own choices. In other words, governments are very reluctant to intervene in food consumption (or demand) issues, a major

impediment to creating a coherent food policy. Public health officials, however, have long been sensitive to food issues, although their earlier interpretation of food policy work focused largely on sanitation and nutrition (see Ostry, 2006). The current levels of support for food policy initiatives within public health departments may reflect this history.

There have been periods in Canada, including now, when a broader national approach has been considered. Many non-governmental groups have recently proposed a national food strategy. However, the federal and provincial governments have yet to propose such policy.

Clearly there is a federal and provincial void in this area, but that does not necessarily explain why municipalities – which have the weakest jurisdictional authority for food systems – would choose to directly or indirectly engage in food policy work. What may account for their actions is the fact that municipalities have historically been more responsive to the needs of their citizenry, despite their limited ability to finance and support desired changes. They are also the level of government closest to the community.

The recent pattern of downloading formerly federal or provincial functions onto municipalities has limited their ability to respond to local needs, but at the same time made it clear that senior levels of government are not going to act on many local problems. Now that 80% of the Canadian population lives in urban and suburban areas, the demand-side deficiencies of current approaches to food policy are increasingly apparent. These include hunger and food poverty, food-related health problems, and the loss of economic development associated with food supply chain changes.

Some municipalities have now recognized that food is an essential urban issue. This municipal movement into food can also be seen as part of a reaction to the loss of national powers to global processes. "Local (and regional) spaces are now increasingly being viewed as key institutional arenas for a wide range of policy experiments and political strategies. These include new entrepreneurial approaches to local economic development as well as diverse programs of institutional restructuring" (Brenner and Theodore, 2002:1).

Our research reveals a high concentration of food policy initiatives in British Columbia and Ontario. In British Columbia, they began to proliferate rapidly when the province made "community food security" a core public health function. The pace accelerated when the British Columbia Ministry of Health earmarked and began to deliver funds for health authorities to support community food action initiatives and food policy groups as part of its food security agenda.

The Olympics also helped propel food policy activity forward in British Columbia. The Ministry of Health convinced the Premier to create an inter-ministerial Act Now committee

tasked with the responsibility of ensuring British Columbia was the healthiest province to host an Olympic Games. Each ministry was required to report back on its progress towards reducing risk factors contributing to chronic disease. Healthy eating and food security were part of those risk factors. Furthermore, the Premier allocated significant funding for non-profit chronic disease prevention groups to fund programs and policy to improve healthy eating/food security.

A third factor in the proliferation of food policy initiatives in British Columbia was the introduction of a carbon tax and a mandate from the Premier's office that all public institutions should reduce their carbon footprint. The involvement of the agricultural sector remained relatively weak in these food initiatives, which were largely led by the health and education sectors.

In contrast, the situation in Ontario has been driven less by provincial initiatives and more from networking across interested Ontario municipalities. The Toronto Food Policy Council participated in provincial networks from early on its existence. These included the Association of Local Health Agencies (ALPHA), meetings of provincial medical officers of health, the Ontario Public Health Association, and community nutritionist meetings, most focused on food security, poverty alleviation, health equity and health promotion.

Although certain food security elements started appearing in provincial mandatory public health program requirements in the late 1980s, the dominance, until recently, of the nutrition profession within food-related mandatory programming may have limited the scope of the changes. Public health standards since 2008 appear to have taken a wider view and have been named as a driver by a few Ontario bodies.

Along with numerous reports on local agriculture's contributions to the economies of various regions and districts in Ontario (see, for example, the work of Harry Cummings and Associates and Planscape), the Toronto Food Policy Council played a critical role in encouraging municipal involvement in agricultural issues. This work helped inspire numerous agricultural advisory committees attached to regional jurisdictions and more recently the work of the Greater Toronto Area Agricultural Action Committee. But the lack of commitment to food policy work at a provincial level may lead to insufficient coordination across the province. The adoption of a provincial Food and Nutrition Strategy, as advocated by a wide-reaching coalition of health and agricultural organizations, could improve the situation, as might the recent reintroduction of a local food bill to the provincial legislature. The provincial network, Sustain Ontario, is also facilitating communication among municipal FPCs.

It is not entirely clear why other regions have been slower to embrace food policy initiatives. In some cases, municipal efforts to engage provincial governments in discussions about these themes have not borne fruit. Civil society organizations and some municipal officials in the

Prairie provinces have championed provincial food policy initiatives, although these efforts have raised limited interest at the provincial government level.

The provincial government in Quebec has a stronger tradition of state intervention in social development, poverty reduction, and agricultural development than most other provinces. The report of the Commission sur l'avenir de l'agriculture et de l'agroalimentaire québécois has been a significant impetus for food system thinking, both provincially and regionally. For example, the Plan de développement d'un système alimentaire durable et équitable de la collectivité montréalaise that the Conférence régionale des élus de Montréal is undertaking has a mandate to define this food system thinking for that region<sup>10</sup>.

The Atlantic provinces have recently embarked on some food policy initiatives, including a provincial Food Policy Council in Nova Scotia and food security networks in New Brunswick and Newfoundland and Labrador. It appears that local and regional municipalities in the Atlantic are on the verge of significant activity given the number of recent visioning workshops in which food system change has been a significant component.

## VALUE, BENEFITS, AND IMPACTS

Although levels of participation in a diverse array of activities are often high (see Table 2), it is harder to demonstrate the direct benefits of these efforts. Anecdotal evidence, however, suggests that many food policy initiatives have had significant influence on how their municipality engages with the food system and in some cases are effectively acting as food units for the municipal government.

TABLE 2: COMMON AREAS OF ACTIVITY FOR FOOD POLICY INITIATIVES

Area	Examples
Access and Equity	Community engagement in decision-making Healthy food access and food retail initiatives Food desert mapping Senior food assistance programs Access to culturally appropriate food
Economic Development	Small business marketing assistance/financing Food hubs Food employment training programs Food trucks Farmers' markets
Environmental Sustainability	Sustainable food sourcing Environmental footprint Climate change planning
Food Education	Food skills and food literacy programs Healthy cooking demonstrations School gardens
Local and Regional Food	Farm-to-table programs Institutional purchasing programs Legislation
Mobile Vending	Enabling mobile food carts Licensing fee reductions
Nutrition and Public Health	Electronic benefit transfer (EBT) at farmers' markets Menu labeling Healthy eating programs Early childhood nutrition programs
Policy Advocacy	Provincial and federal advocacy Municipal food charters
Urban Agriculture	Zoning by-law revisions Community garden programs Greenhouses
Waste Management	Food composting programs Curbside food waste collection Provincial waste hauler rules

*Adapted from Hatfield (2012)*

The financial sustainability of food policy initiatives is a higher test of success, and most initiatives struggle to survive, except some of those in Categories 1 and 2. Many initiatives have leveraged private- and public-sector resources to create food projects such as community gardens, food box distribution schemes focusing on low-income neighbourhoods, local and sustainable food procurement programs that support regional farmers, and real or virtual food hubs. Others have established new relations with planning departments that influence official plans, zoning by-laws, and local economic development initiatives. Public health units across the country have expanded their food security programming.

Few initiatives have undertaken explicit and specific evaluation of outcomes, costs, and benefits of their actions. We do know that local agriculture increases economic multipliers relative to export-import agriculture (Bendavid-Val, 1991; Hoffer and Kahler, 2000; Leatherman, 1994; Meter, 2009), and many initiatives do local economic development work, particularly attempting to enhance local agriculture and food processing. But we cannot yet determine how this work contributes to the overall net economic value of local and regional food supply chains.<sup>12</sup> Similarly, many initiatives use food as a health promotion and cultural enhancement measure, yet we have limited knowledge of how such efforts contribute to reduced health care costs, greater cultural amenities, and improved social cohesion.

These initiatives exist largely because food policy initiatives are able to do things that individual actors – municipal or regional governments, food supply chain operations,

NGOs – do not do very well. These initiatives promote institutional and community change and direct individuals to engage differently with the food system (Scherb et al., 2012). Their main value lies in their ability to engage diverse actors, look at problems and solutions in new ways, and applying that viewpoint to analyzing food system function, coordinating and facilitating the work of a range of actors, brokering and leveraging new kinds of relationships, sharing resources, networking, education, and advocacy.

When done effectively, this work allows new food policy initiatives to interact with “traditional” food system players. It provides opportunities for those in the food supply chain to interact with, for example, the health sector, university researchers, municipalities, and environmental services. As the initiatives mature, they learn how traditional groups approach questions of sustainability, risk, policy, and regulation, and become more constructive participants in solving problems. This ability may be critical to their long-term success as Scherb et al. (2012) identify that lack of food systems thinking is a key barrier for the success of Food Policy Councils in the United States.

In some places, food system thinking has become embedded, in that the municipalities and institutions make decisions and define their work plans with food systems in mind. This has certainly happened in Toronto with the Official Plan review and the work of Toronto Public Health. Similar effects are evident in Waterloo Region in Ontario. Once the City of Vancouver finalizes its food system checklist to guide municipal decision makers, the use of such a tool will likely spread to other municipalities undertaking food work.

## WHAT ARE THE KEYS TO SUCCESS?

The ideal appears to be a food policy organization whose staff and members have extensive knowledge of and expertise in food systems, a sophisticated approach to food system change, with funding that is stable and sufficient for at least a lean organizational effort.

Staff and members understand the political and practical realities of their host institutions and the needs of the participating members. They scan the horizon for new opportunities and then mobilize the appropriate resources to have an impact when an opportunity arises. They are adept at using policy, program, and project

development to advance food system change, and engage the community effectively in advocacy work.

How do Canadian initiatives get to this mature stage? The general trajectory of these transitions has been set out in several Toronto Food Policy Council reports (e.g., TFPC, 1994; MacRae and TFPC, 1999).

The literature and our survey also suggest some other do's and don'ts for food policy initiatives.

### **EXAMPLE: TORONTO'S FOOD POLICY TRAJECTORY**

The Toronto Food Policy Council (TFPC) was formed in 1990 and helped create and implement the Toronto Declaration on Food and Nutrition in 1991/92. In the late 1990s, TFPC worked with staff, civil society, and municipal council participants on the city's Food and Hunger Action Committee, which led to the development of a Food Charter, endorsed in 2000. In 2010, the Toronto Food Strategy was developed by Public Health, and a small group of Public Health employees was given the explicit mandate of operating as the Food Strategy team under a Healthy Communities focus, including the Coordinator of the TFPC. The Food Strategy team is now working to facilitate a healthy, sustainable food system by cultivating food connections within municipal government and between the municipality and the community. The Strategy has led to concrete initiatives linking City, businesses, and civil society organizations. TFPC has also had input into broad municipal policies, including the City's Environmental Plan, the Official Plan, the Golden Horseshoe Food and Farm Action Plan, and the Urban Agriculture Action Plan.

### **Bring together people who don't normally spend time with each other.**

This may be difficult at the beginning, but this work usually leads to one or more of the following: a community food assessment, a preliminary set of new projects to be undertaken, new networks, a process to create a food charter, or a municipal food strategy or action plan.

### **Conduct a food system assessment or develop a food charter based on an informal assessment.**

These have been common strategies amongst food policy councils in the United States (Harper et al., 2009).

**Spend time getting to know the local food system, but have a first success to build credibility** (Dahlberg, 1994; Schiff, 2007).

According to Scherb et al. (2012), food policy initiatives that have survived for three or more years have a more diverse and robust way of identifying problems and engaging with opportunities for change. It may not matter what the first success is, as long as it helps advance a solution to a pressing problem that might not have otherwise been effectively addressed.

**Understand the needs and priorities of host agencies** (Scherb et al., 2012). Knowledge of the host agency and its realities will help in maintaining their support. Help the host see themselves in the food policy work.

**Gradually strengthen structural connections to municipal government.** Typically, a loose coalition of interested voluntary parties forms in response to a specific need. Then, if the loose coalition secures some resources for action on a few specific problems, it expands both the agenda and the membership. Often, an experienced leader from a food policy council in another jurisdiction will be brought in to share lessons. Frequently, the next step is to look for formal attachments and ongoing funding. Although some food policy councils extol the benefits of independence from government, long-term effectiveness means moving away from an over-reliance on volunteers (see Harper et al., 2009). However, some of the literature recommends avoiding becoming too attached

to the mayor's office (Dahlberg, 1994). The Vancouver Food Policy Council is currently receiving significant and welcome support from the mayor's office, although such support has not always been available from that office, in part confirming Dahlberg's warning.

**Link food to existing reports and policies on related themes.** The food policy agenda has a greater chance of being implemented when it is attached to other agencies and units and when food system change can assist with the execution of their mandates.

**Maintain perceptions of legitimacy, feasibility, and support with all political parties and the general public.** Successful Food Policy Councils get as much policy and structural support in place while they have internal champions, since most have experienced variable levels of support from their municipality. In this sense, governments must buy into the process (Harper et al., 2009).

**Once initiatives have some local success, move on to addressing provincial and federal issues,** especially those that have impacts on the local food scene.

A number of questions for consideration and areas for further research emerge from this scan of municipal and regional food policy initiatives across Canada. We have organized these questions according to their audience.

### Questions for municipal/regional governments

- How should municipalities create and support platforms for a wide variety of stakeholders to come together to identify and address food system priorities? What lessons can be learned from similar public engagement platforms and processes in other domains that can be applied to food system engagement?
- What mechanisms should be used to embed food systems thinking through the municipality? What are the ideal (or most beneficial) types of human, financial, and other resources that municipalities can provide to advance food policy work? How can municipalities engage staff in food policy work and formally endorse or link other municipal functions to food policy?
- How are municipalities facilitating food policy initiatives to leverage resources within and beyond the municipality so that the initiative can raise more money than it costs to finance its core functions?
- What are the most effective staffing arrangements for core functions of food policy initiatives in different sized municipalities? How can municipal governments support food policy initiatives and priorities through full-time-equivalent staff position or through secondments and assignments? How can municipalities develop “food systems thinking” among a range of staff, and how can they support emergence of local champions for food policy?

- How can municipalities help connect food policy initiatives at different levels of maturity with important constituencies and stakeholders?
- How can municipalities enable and support food policy initiatives to better document and evaluate their work, in order to demonstrate successful processes for social change as well as to enhance our collective understanding of food system and other impacts?
- What are the regulatory and policy obstacles to food system change that can be influenced by municipalities and how can municipalities be more explicit in identifying them?

### Questions for municipal/regional food policy initiatives

- What are best practices for documenting and evaluating food policy work, as well as food systems and other impacts, to demonstrate their value for generating effective food systems change?
- How can food policy initiatives ensure members have the right kinds of expertise, analysis, and logistical support to participate in complex, multi-actor partnerships? How can they cultivate engagement with “strange bedfellows,” in order to forge alliances that create possibilities for change?
- How can innovative and feasible solutions to pressing problems be encouraged to emerge, documented, and shared? How can participants be encouraged to implement solutions?

- How can governments support training and capacity-building opportunities for start-up food policy initiatives, organizations, and their members? How can institutions such as the Federation of Canadian Municipalities and universities support these initiatives to better understand how to work with municipal governments and existing policy frameworks?

#### Questions for supply chain players

- How can a broader range of supply chain players participate in a municipal food policy initiative? How can food businesses be encouraged to participate?
- How can supply chain players contribute to dialogue on policy and regulatory barriers that have an impact on local and regional food systems, and that can be acted upon by municipal government?

#### Questions for federal and provincial governments

- What are the connections between provincial and federal food system actors and initiatives and the food policy work taking place at municipal levels? How can the broad range of food policies at multiple levels and across jurisdictions become connected and leveraged to amplify beneficial effects?
- How can inter-jurisdictional, including multi-level collaboration on public health and land use planning (for example) facilitate new advisory processes on food policy issues?
- How can higher levels of government help advise and support municipal counterparts on food policy matters and vice versa? Should municipal food policy initiatives be supported by provincial and federal governments and, if so, how? Could the experience of the British Columbia Community Food Action Initiative and the Ontario Healthy Communities Fund serve as a model for other provinces?

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Cities are food players. More than 64 municipalities are engaged in food policy and practice. This number is only expected to go up and the level of current involvement is expected to deepen. These municipalities are becoming “food policy entrepreneurs” using food to advance progress towards health, social, environmental, and economic objectives.

They are using systems thinking to bring diverse players together to create food system change that offers benefits across many different sectors. This work could be considered an example of adaptive governance, linking actors and issues from communities and cities to broader levels of government, using a systems approach to tackle complex issues.

This paper represents only a preliminary analysis of municipal food policy initiatives. We need to better understand how these initiatives will sustain themselves; what stands in the way of their success; how they will demonstrate food systems impacts; and how they integrate into the provincial/federal policy domain. Much can be gained from sharing information on how they work and what they can achieve.

Three broad recommendations emerge from this scan of municipal and regional food policy initiatives across Canada.

1. There is a need for actors and organizations working in municipal food policy across Canada to create a network to share information and best practices and build capacity for food policy work.<sup>12</sup>
2. Municipal food initiatives would benefit from identifying a range of ways to document and evaluate their work in order to demonstrate successful processes for social change as well as food system and other municipal/regional impacts.
3. Policy makers at various government levels should clarify jurisdictional food policy connections and define the linkages between municipal food policy efforts and provincial and federal food, agriculture, public health, and other policy domains.

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## APPENDIX 1

### COMMONLY USED MEASUREMENTS FOR EVALUATING LOCAL FOOD SYSTEMS

Distance of households from full-service grocery stores

Number of corner stores converted to healthy retail

Number of new or revised institutional procurement policies

Number of new food truck businesses

Number of food manufacturing jobs

Number of alternative food initiatives (farmers markets, community food markets, community kitchens, community and market gardens, community supported agriculture, food box programs, buying clubs, etc.)

Dollars spent at these alternative food initiatives

Dollars spent on fruits and vegetables in the local population

Percent of population eating five servings of fruits and vegetables per day

Rates of school meal participation

Rates of chronic disease and obesity

Number and dollar value of local farms, processors and distributors supplying local buyers

*Adapted from Hatfield (2012)*

## APPENDIX 2

### MUNICIPAL FOOD SYSTEM ADVISORY GROUP

Andree, Peter	Carleton University
Belleau, Josée	Conférence régionale des élus de Montréal
Bertrand, Lise	Santé publique de Montréal
Blay-Palmer, Alison	Wilfrid Laurier University
Buchan, Rob	District of North Saanich
Chahine, Ghalia	Conférence régionale des élus de Montréal
Chorney, Paul	Manitoba Alternative Food Research Alliance
Duynstee, Theresa	Metro Vancouver
Emanuel, Barbara	Toronto Public Health
Epp, Stefan	Food Matters Manitoba
Ferri, Nick	Greater Toronto Agricultural Action Committee
Friedmann, Harriet	University of Toronto
Geggie, Linda	CRFAIR Capital Region and Agriculture
Gibson, Kathleen	GBH Consulting Group
Hughes, Paul	Calgary
Hunter, Beth	J.W. McConnell Family Foundation
Kadwell Rosie	Haliburton, Kawartha, Pine Ridge District Health Unit
LeClerc, Marie	Regroupement des cuisines collectives du Québec
Legault, Anne-Marie	Équiterre
MacPherson, Kathy	The Friends of the Greenbelt Foundation
Mah, Catherine	University of Toronto
McNeice, Jonathan	Edmonton Food Strategy
Moore, Arlene	Alberta Health Services
Quan, Hani	City of Edmonton
Rowan, Ann	Metro Vancouver
Roy, Michèle	Regroupement des cuisines collectives du Québec
Rutherford, Nancy	Policy Planning Branch, Region of Durham
Shopland, Barbara	2gener8 Solutions Inc.
Scott, Steffanie	Waterloo Region Food System Roundtable
Wakefield, Sarah	Hamilton Community Food Security Stakeholder Advisory Committee
Watson, Aimee	Kaslo Food Security Project

#### Steering Committee

Baker, Lauren	Toronto Food Policy Council, Toronto Public Health, City of Toronto
Bays, Joanne	Vancouver Food Policy Council
Donahue, Kendal	Sustain Ontario: The Alliance For Healthy Food And Farming
McInnes, David	Canadian Agri-Food Policy Institute
McRae, Rod	Faculty of Environmental Studies, York University

*Note: Participation may not necessarily imply endorsement.*

## ENDNOTES

1. Rod MacRae and Kendal Donahue are researchers at the Faculty of Environmental Studies at York University; Lauren Baker is the Coordinator of the Toronto Food Policy Council; Joanne Bays is a member of the Vancouver Food Policy Council; and David McInnes is the President & CEO of the Canadian Agri-Food Policy Institute.
2. We use the term food policy entrepreneurship to describe how initiatives and or individuals with limited resources, but often considerable knowledge and social capital, leverage their expertise to effect change in ways that aren't necessarily common to traditional interpretations of food policy work. Such leveraging occurs in multiple domains, beyond economic development, and includes social and health policy change.
3. See Vancouver's food strategy and Appendix 1 for some preliminary observations. Also see Sustain Ontario's municipal food policy working group activities.
4. [www.fcm.ca/home/programs/green-municipal-fund/sustainable-food-systems-survey.htm](http://www.fcm.ca/home/programs/green-municipal-fund/sustainable-food-systems-survey.htm)
5. Note that this is a preliminary analysis, as we were unable to interview all the initiatives identified or verify our interpretation with them. This project is ongoing and we anticipate substantial additions and corrections to our research through the website, [www.tfpc.to/canadian-food-policy-initiatives](http://www.tfpc.to/canadian-food-policy-initiatives).
6. See Table 2 and Appendix 1 for more on categories of impact.
7. To determine this, we assessment survey and phone interview results against our description of food systems thinking (box A)
8. The regional *Table de concertation sur la faim* model in Quebec may be more widespread than we were able to determine in this survey
9. For example, according to estimates by Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, the alternative food distribution system represents no more than 1% of food system activity (AAFC, 2009), yet alternative chain actors - independent retail, urban gardeners, community food distribution projects, farmers' market organizers, are likely overrepresented in these initiatives.
10. Ghalia Chahine, Agente de développement, Conférence régionale des élus de Montréal, personal communication, March 25, 2013.
11. A new study commissioned by three foundations (Friends of the Greenbelt, the Metcalf Foundation, and the McConnell Foundation) in Ontario may shed light on these questions.
12. See Vancouver's food strategy and Appendix 1 for some preliminary observations. Also see Sustain Ontario's municipal food policy working group activities.