

YRFN Has a New Kitchen!

When we moved in February to our new office space in Aurora, we envisioned having a kitchen space for our programming. The small staff kitchen that existed when we arrived would not be enough to host community kitchens, a breakfast drop-in or other in-house programs. It was clear we needed to renovate. So, a plan was made, a contractor was hired, approvals were sought and, through a generous grant from the federal Homelessness Partnering Strategy program administered by United Way of York Region, we got to work.

Once the contractor began, the kitchen came together quickly. Most of the materials were custom built to satisfy our program requirements and to fit the irregular shape of the room. It wasn't long before we could see our vision come to life: a commercial kitchen that boasts four sinks, lots of counter space, open shelving, a dishwasher, cupboards and a seating area. Best of all, we now have an 8 burner gas stove and griddle combination, with two ovens and a large venting system. It is a kitchen space that provides endless possibilities for programming.

We've made ample use of the new kitchen in the short time we've had it. We started our breakfast

drop-in program, which runs every Tuesday morning from 9:30-11am. It is a welcoming space for people in the community to meet, socialize, share a hot meal and relax. Additionally, we ran a Kids' Cooking Series on Wednesdays in partnership with Big Brothers Big Sisters of York. Every week, kids aged 10-15 learned to cook a healthy meal from start to finish. This series was a great chance for kids to learn new skills and meet other kids in the area. So far, the space is turning into a great place for us to increase access to good food and promote healthy eating.



We have exciting plans for the kitchen in the new year. Watch our website (www.yrfn.ca) or follow us on Facebook (York Region Food Network) or Twitter (@YRFoodNetwork) for updates.

Bronwen Fitzsimons, Program Coordinator

A Year On: the York Region Food Charter

In just over a year since the first food charter event on November 9, 2011 at the Aurora Cultural Centre, the conversation on building a sustainable and just food system in York Region has moved full steam ahead!



With a wave of consultation complete and a warm reception from York Region's communities, the first draft of the York Region Food Charter launched September 28, 2012 at the Agri-Food Tent at the Markham Fair. This launch event unveiled our Food Charter logo, and allowed us to share with the community what we learned from our consultations during Summer 2012 – that food is important to York Region socially, environmentally and economically, and community residents want to see community food programming expanded in York Region. The development of the food charter and consultations with the community has

been made possible through funding from United Way York Region's Strength Investment initiative.

Winter 2013 is an exciting time for the York Region Food Charter as we move our work forward. Watch out for:

- Our annual *Food For Change* event in March 2013
- We're transitioning community's demands for healthy local foods into action with the development of a demonstration aquaponics system. With tremendous support from Steven Looi, Urban Produce Inc., York University Knowledge Mobilization Unit, Pathways for Children, Youth and Families of York Region, and Ontario Centre for Excellence, we will be bringing together the techniques of aquaculture and hydroponics to raise fish and cultivate fresh produce organically in a highly productive, environmentally-sustainable system. Watch out for details – this project is launching soon!

To see the first draft of the York Region Food Charter and to offer feedback on it, visit <http://yrfn.ca/issues/york-region-food-charter/> or contact Kate at kateg@yrfn.ca or 905-841-3101 ext. 206. **Kate Greavette, Food Charter Coordinator**

Community Kitchens

Health is the theme. Food is the vehicle. Community Kitchens are but one road we take. We get a lot of calls at York Region Food Network inquiring about the how, who and what's involved when hosting a Community Kitchen. My answers could not be more diverse. The bottom line is that Community Kitchens can be formatted to meet the needs of the specific group involved. Some people want to come together and share the wealth and knowledge they already possess in the kitchen. Others are interested in gaining some basic food skills. Many are looking for access to a healthy meal. The only constant is that everyone is interested in sharing something special with their community. We have facilitated many kitchens throughout York Region: at Co-operative Housing complexes, drop-ins and counselling centres. If you are interested in sharing the wonders of food and health with a group in your neighbourhood, please give us a call.

Gleaning

As old as the practice of farming, gleaning provides an opportunity for participants to gather vegetables and fruits from the farmers' fields at the end of the season. York Region Food Network partners with York Region Health Services and local farms to plan and facilitate these trips.

The 2012 gleaning season was a great success. We had seven trips out to 4 different farms this year with a total of 185 participants and an approximate retail value of almost \$7000.00 gleaned in fruits and vegetables.

There is nothing like a day on the farm; breathing in the air, digging in the dirt and harvesting the bounty of Ontario. Meeting the farmers is also an educational treat. Everyone brings home so much more than a bushel of food. **Tricia Richens, Fresh! Coordinator**

Food for Thought

Food drives are everywhere at this time of year. It is heartening to see the spirit of giving that abounds in our communities and the efforts undertaken by individuals and groups to provide support. As we watch the need for food banks continue to rise and the accompanying necessity for more food to distribute, it highlights the need to move beyond this simple act of good will to deal with the complex issues that have given rise to increasing hunger.

We know that people are forced to use food banks in York Region because of lack of income. In October, the final report of the Commission for Review of Social Assistance Rates recognized the inadequacy of current assistance rates in Ontario and recommended an immediate \$100 per month increase as a first step

in addressing the deep poverty that exists among recipients. Nationally, Food Secure Canada is recommending the creation of a national school nutrition program as the first step towards building a national food policy. Health Canada has reported that one in four Canadian children and youth is overweight or obese and increasingly diagnosed with related health issues such as diabetes. We need to ensure that our young people have the best start possible.

How do we marry the good will we see everywhere in the community with solutions that will have a lasting impact? Policy makers need to know that the public supports expenditures that benefit our most vulnerable citizens. We need to take a longer term view about the health of our children.

The wonderful thing about food is that it creates warmth, health, pleasure, opportunities to meet, discuss, reflect and act. The spirit of caring that generates donations to food banks can be the start of a 'Good Food Movement' in York Region. We can take the time to cook healthy food from scratch with seasonal nutritious ingredients. Then we can sit down with our family and friends to share a meal, have conversations and enjoy!

As we move into 2013, let's talk about the kind of food system we want to see - a system that supports our health, environment and economy. The fundamental need we all have for good food can be used as a catalyst toward building healthy communities.

Joan Stonehocker
Executive Director

The Big Orange Splot



One of my favourite books to read to my two children when they were young was *The Big Orange Splot* by Daniel Pinkwater. It is the story of how a man challenged the norm, making his home "look like all his dreams". His neighbours were appalled that his home no longer looked like the other homes and urged him to restore it to its original appearance. But he didn't give in to the pressure, and instead, several others followed his lead and transformed their homes into their dreams.

This past weekend a big orange splot appeared in Aurora. One of our community gardeners teamed up with a local artist and together they have created a magnificent display of art on the exterior of his fence for all to enjoy. His daring expression of individualism challenges onlookers to pause and reflect about ways in which they could express their own dreams for others to experience.

Perhaps breaking tradition by establishing a vegetable garden in your front yard* might resonate with those of you who have a passion for gardening. What an opportunity this would be to share your harvest with your neighbours and engage them in conversation around the pleasure and benefits of growing their own food. Who knows maybe you could be the example that inspires other folks on your street to transform their green lawns into vibrant vegetable gardens.

If you do decide to create a new vegetable garden, no matter where it is, front yard, backyard, balcony or deck, be sure to register your garden with Seeds for Change, one of our partner organizations that is looking to encourage York Region residents to accept the challenge of creating 2015 new food gardens before the 2015 Pan Am Games. If you are up to the challenge please visit their website at www.seedsforchange.org

Catherine Cook, Program Coordinator

*it may be a good idea to check your local bylaws before proceeding

Freedom 90

Are you interested in fighting for social justice and ending reliance on a costly, labour intensive, and unsustainable emergency food system? Have you heard about the newest Union in town?

'Freedom 90' is a collective of individuals, concerned about the food security of thousands of people across Ontario who are forced to rely on food banks. Freedom 90 or F-90 is also concerned about the volunteers, largely seniors who have been doing this work for years and don't see an end in sight. York Region Food Network is a partner in this province-wide campaign to dispel the widely held belief that food banks are adequately able to meet the needs of low-income

people. The Union metaphor is a consciousness raising tool to bring attention to the state of affairs in Ontario and across Canada.

Freedom 90 is advocating to make food banks obsolete – not closing them - by advocating for fair wages and adequate amounts of assistance that allow people to purchase their own food and preserve their dignity. Food Security is not found in a can.

Please consider standing in solidarity with the food program volunteers of Freedom 90. Visit: www.freedom90.ca



1st Annual WinterFresh – Trivia Challenge

with Trivia Master Fil Martino

Wednesday, February 6th 2013 at 6:30 p.m.
Aurora Cultural Centre

*What is WinterFresh? It's an evening of dinner, trivia, team building, fun and laughter.
There will be prizes, a fantastic dinner and silent auction. Tickets are \$40*

Watch for more details on our website at www.yrfn.ca

Join York Region Food Network's Fundraising Campaign

I support YRFN's work to improve access to affordable, nutritious food for all people of York Region.

I have enclosed my donation of: \$20 \$50 \$100 Other

Please make cheques payable to York Region Food Network.

YRFN will issue a charitable tax receipt for all donations over \$20. Registration 87044 7315 RR0001

Name: _____

Address: _____

To donate by credit card, visit our website at www.yrfn.ca and click on the link to CanadaHelps.org, a secure website where you can make a tax deductible credit card donation to YRFN.

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