



SUMMARY NOTES
FOOD CHARTER THINK TANK
DECEMBER 5TH, 2013

Submitted by:

DU B FIT Consulting

12 Finlay St., Scotland, ON N0E 1R0

519 446 3636 / dubfit@rogers.com

Du·B·Fit
CONSULTING

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SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this session was two-fold:

- To identify the priorities for the York Region Food Charter Working Group (YRFCWG) as well as inform the development of a York Region Food Strategy.
- To work towards engaging new stakeholders in the partnership.

Thirty (30) people (a list of which can be found in Appendix A) participated in a three and a half hour session on December 5th, 2013 at the Kingbridge Conference Centre in King City. These stakeholders had come together for a full day session sponsored by Healthyork and the York Region Food Charter. The following notes capture the discussion of the day, which was based on the Detailed Design for the session, which can be found in Appendix B. The flow of the discussion was guided by a PowerPoint deck (Appendix C) that Facilitator Nancy Dubois used.

The flow of the discussion was planned to be an overview of a typical food system followed by more specific look at the York Region situation with respect to the current situation, emerging priorities, and the opportunity for the future involvement of participants in moving the ideas forward.

The session began with a few definitions of what a Food System is, in both text and diagrammatic format. One¹ is presented here.



¹ <http://www.lfn.org/about-2/food-systems/>

Next, an overview of a typical group that would develop and oversee the implementation of food system changes was provided. These groups are often known as a Food Council, Food Policy Council, Food Roundtable, Coalition or Network. They bring together stakeholders from diverse food-related sectors to examine how the food system is operating and to develop ideas, actions and policy recommendations on how to improve it. They can take many forms, but are typically either commissioned by governments, or are predominately a grassroots effort and may be a reincarnation or evolution of another existing group. In other communities, groups such as these have been successful at educating officials and the public, shaping public policy, improving coordination between existing programs, and starting new initiatives. These groups typically have principles that guide their work. Some samples of these were provided:

- Pursue long-term strategies
- Offer tangible solutions
- Are place-based with a strong local component
- Advocate on behalf of the larger community
- Seek government buy-in
- Establish formal membership
- Operate with little or no funding
- Take a comprehensive approach

- Farmers
- Emergency food providers
- Food manufacturers
- Urban agriculture advocates
- Food distributors
- Academics/researchers specializing in food system issues
- Educators/teachers
- Food retailers
- Land use planners
- Restaurants
- Institutional purchasers
- Low income consumers
- Ethnic food retailers/consumers
- Organic food advocates
- Economic development organizations/ professionals
- Health professionals
- Food justice advocates
- Food marketing organizations
- Neighbourhood-based food programs
- Public Health staff

Recommended Resource:

Food Policy Council Briefing Paper -

http://www.ncchpp.ca/148/publications.ccnpps?id_article=664

Next, an outline of a typical process used to develop a plan across a community food system was shared as an example, a "jumping off point" for discussion later in the day. Very often some sort of Situational Assessment or Environmental Scan is a starting point to get a sense of what already exists

for each of the elements of the food system. This can include things such as a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) Analysis, a review of the evidence from the literature, and/or gathering examples of similar work undertaken in other communities. This input is then used to set priorities from which an action plan evolves with short and long-term outcomes. Samples of activities that could be undertaken can be found in the PowerPoint deck in Appendix C. Based on what strategies have been identified, work is then typically undertaken to recruit the players needed to support the determined direction, samples of which are in the highlighted text box (on page 4).

SECTION 2: Building a York Region Food Strategy

The group was asked to consider the long-term strategic statements that would guide their work. Because the YRFCWG has existed for a few years, there was a strong basis from which to start.

2.1 Vision

The purpose of a Vision statement is to describe a "preferred future" - an aspirational description of what an organization would like to achieve or accomplish in the future. The current Vision Statement was felt to meet the needs for today's purpose:

*"Thriving communities across York Region
where residents, businesses and governments are supported by
a sustainable and socially equitable food system
that provides access to local, affordable and nutritious food
which benefits the health and well-being of the people, the economy and the environment."*

2.2 Values

These guiding principles were also already in existence and acceptable to the group.

- **Health.** We believe that healthy food is an essential building block for the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual wellbeing of a community. We believe that every resident and community member of York Region has the right to healthy food that's affordable, local and nutritious.
- **"The Golden Rule".** We believe in the principle that 'you reap what you sow' applies to our relationships with people, the economy, and the environment. We believe that if we want to be treated with honesty, trust, and respect, and if we want others to be courageous and stand up for what they believe in, then we must embody that first.

- **Joy.** We believe that though we are championing very real and important issues, everything we do should celebrate life, bring joy into the community, and be grounded in creativity and optimism.
- **Resourcefulness.** We believe that by working together, with all age groups, backgrounds and ethnicities, we can enrich one another's lives through the sharing of good food experiences and leveraging our resources for shared goals.
- **Responsibility.** We believe that each of us, through our conscious choices, have a role to play in York Region's present and future health and wellbeing of its communities, economy and environment.
- **Innovation.** We believe that new ideas, new ways of thinking, and initiative are critical to the development of thriving and resilient communities.

2.3 Local Mapping of Existing Initiatives

Participants were asked to identify what was already underway for the various elements of a Food System.

Production

- Community Gardens (York Region Food Network - Newmarket/Aurora/Markham; Seeds For Change)
- School Gardens
- Local farms that grow for Province and communities
- Backyard/institutional fruit and nut trees
- El Sembrador & Agricultural Workers Alliance who provide support for our migrant agricultural workers
- Interior home garden
- Schomberg Community Farm
- UpStream Aquaponics
- Homesteading, hobby farms, backyard hens etc.
- Foothills Greenhouses- Hydroponic Cucumbers 4 million Holland Marsh Specialty Group
- Edible Paths
- Curb production
- Local businesses to produce on unused land

Processing

- Cottage style fruit preservation- King Cole Ducks
- Abattoirs in King-Doug's Meats/J & J Meats, freestanding meat processing- Harold Folmeg

- Locally produces preserves available at Farmers Markets- using local ingredients
- Newmarket Meats (Abattoirs); Willies' Pickles
- GTA is #2 in food processing in North America
- Food incubators
- Homestead Farms- egg grading
- Low – moderate including individuals / families to get involved in processing- possible job initiatives/placement

Distribution

- (Almost) 100% of vegetables comes from Food Terminal
- Community Shared Agriculture (CSAs)
 - Coopers
 - Elmgrove
- Local growers, packers, shippers
- Gordon Food Service- local food stream
- Produce distribution
- Gleaning through YFRN
- Farmers Markets
- 100 km food distributor
- Farm stands
- Private local food distributors
- Urban/Community fruit/vegetable/dairy stands
- Small, local food stores/markets

Access

- We are the world leaders in Big Box Stores and Strip Malls
- Routes Connecting Community
 - Volunteer driver service to Food Banks
- Farmers Markets
 - King & Schomberg
 - Aurora
 - Newmarket
 - Sharon
 - Unionville
 - Woodbridge
 - Georgetown
 - Stouffville
 - Markham
 - R.H.
- School Gardens
- CSAs

- Food provided in schools
- Fresh Food Partners- Farm Gleaning Program
- Neighbourhood gardens
- Food Banks and Good Food Boxes
- Pick-your-own Farms
- Seed libraries
- Local restaurants

Consumption

- YRFN Common Stock Lunches (Wednesday 11:00 – 2:00)
- Community Kitchens at churches- Kettleby/Pottageville
- Food Banks- King Township
- Supper Works
- Inn from the Cold- Skills building/catering enterprise
- Monthly lunch for seniors- Richmond Hill U.C. (CHATS)
- Breakfast/Snack programs- schools
- Cooking lunch demos at the fair
- Petit Chefs Academy (kids, youth & families cooking school)
- You're the Chef (within school)
- Hospitality programs at high schools

Resource / Waste Recovery

- Get a waste recovery service implemented for businesses in YR (i.e., restaurants etc.)
- YR Green Bin program
- Composter sales & workshops
- YR SM4RT Living Plan
 - Food waste strategy
- Composting at community composters (vermi composting)
 - School programs
- "Zero waste" program in municipal facilities (Markham)
- Gleaning (Guerilla)
- Food donations (from restaurants etc.)
- Second Harvest (at retailers)
- Life Corps- food recovery
- Safe Food donations guide
- Food Safety
- Second Harvest Community Kitchens Model
- DOES OUR GREEN WASTE ACTUALLY GET RECYCLED?

2.4 Gaps in Local Existing Initiatives

Reflecting on the flipcharts with the current initiatives as listed above, participants were asked to identify gaps and opportunities that could inform the setting of future priorities. The ideas generated have been grouped into typical health promotion categories.

EDUCATION	POLICY
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Healthy food educational materials (such as Canada's Food Guide) in other languages (e.g., South Asian); • Outreach/workshops for new Canadians about nutrition labeling and portions • One stop shopping for information • Food skills / food literacy for all children • Education around the value of small vs. large-scale farm operations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Food trucks / mobile markets - What are the rules? • By-laws to support backyard chickens • Procurement policies in institutions such as municipal governments and long-term care facilities • Government (local) support for businesses to come together on collaborative project
ENVIRONMENTAL SUPPORTS	OTHER
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support for migrant agricultural workers <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Policies regarding Employment, Rights, Access to information • Productive landscaping (home & municipal) • System to harvest fruit (not far from tree) • Value proposition for small-scale farming-incentives • Directory of fruit / nut trees; harvest these from public trees (e.g., Not Far From the Tree); Productive landscaping (at level of both homeowners and municipality) • Enabling environment for farmers (e.g. education for new Canadians/new farmers about optimal crops for our soil) • Food distribution hub • To stay local, we need to educate residents about the employment opportunities available locally in the agriculture and food sectors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Asset mapping of food system in all York Region communities • Programs for students to encourage production / farming • Research / knowledge exchange space system-wide (more formalized) • Collaboration for funding <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Levels of government and other sources

2.5 Priorities for Action

- a) From the list of gaps and opportunities, ten specific initiatives were identified which were then ranked. Presented in no particular order, the ten items were:

- **Education** - for children, adults and seniors; for business and government sectors; and for young moms. Practical skills are needed to empower people. Lack of education and training for children and youth to get into farming. The local food system will only be sustained if we continue to farm and produce food.
- **Messaging** - These need to be defined, consistently used, and promoted widely. One example was "Buy from your neighbour".
- **Mapping the food system by community** - It was identified as important to link this to education and messaging. The map needs to address the big picture and result in a product and process that is engaging.
- **Connections / hubs** - These could be virtual or physical hubs. Grocery stores could be a centre for building a culture of community through food. It will be important to reach people where they are, secure government buy-in to help promote the concept and improve the communication between farmer and community.
- **School-based strategy** - to address such things as universally available healthy lunches, teach healthy eating and food system concepts early in the curriculum and improving access to food
- **Policies** - procurement policies in particular were named as important as well as a better understanding of policies that are currently in place; chickens allowed in backyards were also of interest to many
- **Reducing food waste** - supporting the SM4RT Living Plan (also known as York Region's Integrated Waste Management Master Plan) and reducing the waste in restaurants were described as priorities in this area.
- **Food access** - Innovative approaches are needed to reach those living in low income situations that go beyond food banks. This could include providing coupons for Farmers' Markets.
- **Protecting the local food system** - through the management of development properties and farmland; understand where our local farms are and ensure policies are current to support actors in the food system
- **Urban landscaping** - create a directory of what is currently available and increase this.

b) Participants were asked to consider four factors² in identifying priorities:

- What is the **Need**?
- How can we have the greatest **Impact**?
- What do we have the **Capacity** to do?
- Where is the **Opportunity for Partnerships & Collaboration**?

With these in mind, participants were asked to select up to five of the ten ideas posted which they felt should be priorities for active in the next 12-18 months in York Region. The results are presented in rank order below beginning with those with the greatest support.

² These originate from the Ontario Public Health Standards:
http://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/pro/programs/publichealth/oph_standards/principles.aspx

POTENTIAL PRIORITY FOR ACTION	# OF CHECKMARKS RECEIVED
Mapping the Food System <ul style="list-style-type: none"> to generate information on which to educate create opportunities to buy from neighbours 	24
Education <ul style="list-style-type: none"> for children, youth, adults and older adults, pregnant women; businesses and governments Online hub, workshops, event 	23
Improve Connections across the Food System	14
Messaging	13
Food Waste	12
Policies	12
Protecting local food system	8
Improving Food Access	4
Urban Agriculture	3
School Based Strategy	1

There were two clear priorities that emerged followed by a cluster five other ideas with some support and lastly three ideas receiving very limited support.

Participants were also asked to identify any options that they felt should NOT proceed. One person expressed concern about the priority of Food Access, with the *"Fear that this priority is only about how to get food to 'poor' people. Insufficient income for food is not a problem of the food system, it is a problem of politics and the conversation at the provincial and federal levels need to change to improve food security."*

When asked to reflect on the results of the prioritization exercise in general, participants were surprised over the lack of support for school-based strategies. Conversation around this indicated that many who supported the theme of Education intended it to include food system thinking with skills at schools and at home.

SECTION 3: Engaging Stakeholders

a) Level of Involvement

With an idea of where the strategy was headed, participants were asked to indicate how, if at all, they would be interested in staying involved. A Stakeholder Wheel tool (Appendix D) was distributed giving the option for people to select from one of four levels of involvement:

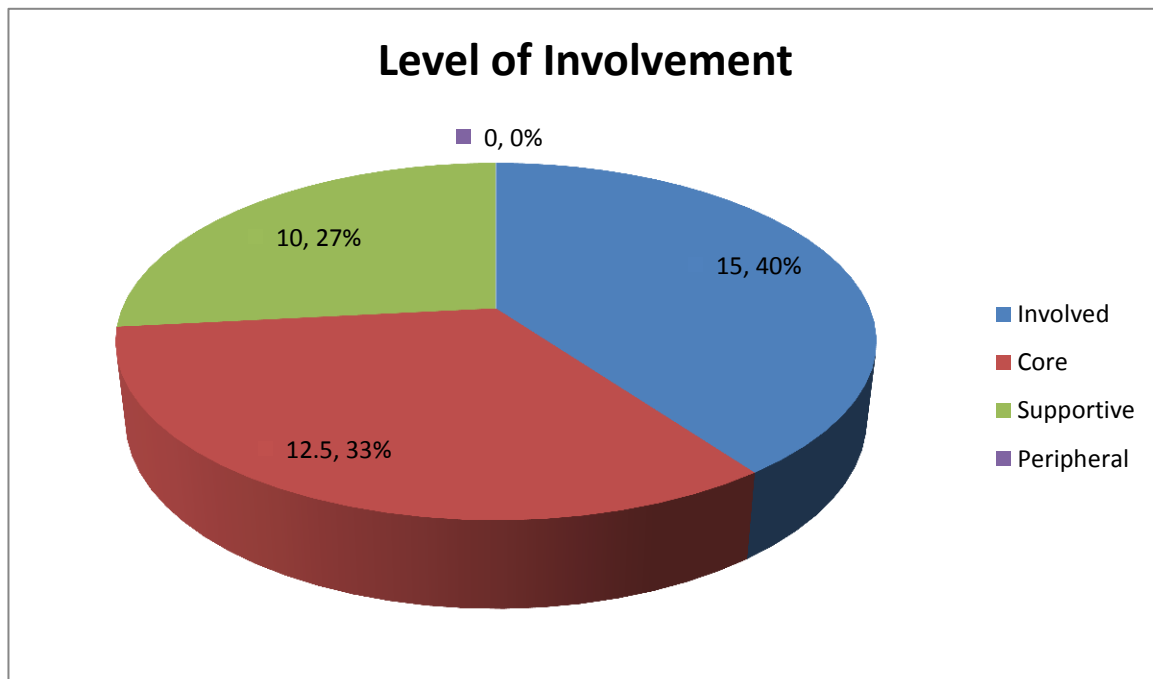
Core: part of the "Steering Committee"; attending meetings regularly; actively involved in decision-making; some accountability

Involved: frequently consulted or part of process in a specific manner; occasionally attend meetings. Involved in a specific aspect of the project

Supportive: providing some form of support (in-kind products or services, letter); keep informed (receiving newsletters, minutes)

Peripheral: not at all involved – may be resistant, not ready (yet).

In addition to the level of involvement, people were asked which of the projects they were interested in being engaged with. The detailed responses can be found in Appendix F. Overall, 20 people indicated an interest in being involved in some way. Of these 20, the most common type of involvement Involved (with 15 responses at this level). Responses can be seen in the graph below:



Further, only one person did not select a particular level. Three people selected one level, and eight selected two levels and eight also chose three levels on involvement. On average, each person selected two levels.

b) Interest in Specific Projects

In terms of the projects in which people expressed an interest, only two did not select at least one activity. The overwhelming majority (n=15 of 20 responses) selected five activities in which they wanted to be involved. One person selected one activity, one person selected four activities and one

person selected six activities. The numbers selecting each activity and at what level is summarized below.

ACTIVITY	TOTAL RESPONSES	CORE	INVOLVED	SUPPORTIVE
Education	15	7	5	3
Connections	15	2	9	4
Mapping	14	2	7	5
Policies	14	2	7	5
Messaging	9	2	5	2
Food Waste	7	0	6	1
Protect Local Food System	3	0	1	2
Urban Agriculture	2	1	1	0
Food Access	2	1	1	0
School-based Strategy	1	0	0	1

Of particular note are the two activities of Food Waste and Protecting the Local Food System where there is some interest in people being involved but no one indicating Core level involvement. This will prove difficult to move forward without cultivating leadership. Consistent with the prioritization exercise, Education was strongly supported by participants in terms of involvement, with the greatest number (n=7) indicating interest in being at the Core.

c) Suggestions of Others to Engage

Several people provided suggestions for people and organizations to approach regarding possible involvement in some part of what moves forward. Some were recommended based on segments of the Food System that were not well represented at this meeting (e.g., food processors) while other suggestions related to a particular activity (e.g., Web development). The verbatim suggestions are organized in themes where appropriate.

- **Government**

- Economic Development Offices (EDO) from each of the 9 municipalities in York Region
- Planners
- Municipalities / Council
- YR geomatics
- Ontario Ministry of Agriculture and Food (OMAF) economic development staff
- Sustainability Offices in all municipalities
- Municipal representatives

- **Schools**

- School Trustee
- York Region District School Board and York Catholic District School Board

- University/College students: Horticultural & Food Programs
- Education representatives- school boards, Ministry of Education
- **Food System Representatives**
 - Food Processors
 - Restaurants
 - Distributors
 - Grocery Stores
 - More producer groups (farmers)
 - Get restaurants & cafes involved in reducing food waste
 - Accountability
 - Address the “ethics” of consumers who eat out
 - Restaurant Association
 - Food Bank
 - Grocery Stores
 - Nature’s Emporium, Whole Foods
 - Conservation authorities
 - Urban agriculture
 - Community gardens
- **Other**
 - Social Media Marketing Companies or marketing organizations in general- maybe Artez Interactive
 - Software developers - people who can create beautiful, engaging online spaces for us to really draw people in; leveraging their talents for our causes

SECTION 4: Session Evaluation

Sixteen people took the opportunity to complete an evaluation form for the session. The full results can be found in Appendix E. General results are presented here.

- 86% had a greater understanding of the role of policy in improving our food system
- 81% had a greater understanding of the connections between the local food system and their work or organization
- Nine specific follow-up actions for after the event were identified. The most common comment (n=6) was to connect with others.

SECTION 5: Consultant Recommendations

The Consultant, Nancy Dubois, of DU B FIT Consulting, and author of this report, was asked to make recommendations for next steps based on the results of the Think Tank and her experience in doing similar work in many other Ontario communities. The Recommendations are presented here in no particular order of priority.

1. Identify a Food System model/diagram/schematic that best represents the local reality in York Region.
 - At the Think Tank, "Education" was identified as a separate component to the Food System diagram used for the day. As the cycle typically follows the chronological flow of food through the system, education would relate to many of the components. Education might be better positioned as more of a fundamental principle or overarching strategy.
2. Education was identified as a priority for future action with several target audiences. It is recommended that:
 - In terms of communication and messaging related to education, the role of a partnership is best suited to coordinated planning and key message development rather than the implementation of such, which is better done by each organization individually. An exception to this would be a community-wide campaign that many organization or the overall partnership would implement simultaneously.
 - Many potential audiences were identified for educational efforts. It is recommended that any educational efforts undertaken be tailored to specific audiences, which might result in several different educational efforts.
3. With respect to engaging stakeholders:
 - Follow-up as soon as possible with those at the Think Tank who indicated an interest in being involved in some way. Let them know the anticipated next steps and when engagement steps would be forthcoming.
 - Confirm the group that will provide leadership to the development of a food strategy for York Region. This will likely be an extension of an existing group given the strong history of food related work in York Region. Consider all components of the Food System in the composition of the group as well as those who indicated an interest in "CORE" level involvement at the Think Tank.
 - Several suggestions were made at the Think Tank, on the evaluation form, for additional people to be contacted for potential involvement. It is recommended that these people be strategically approached based on the priority activities established. Develop a tailored approach to each person or organization being recruited to enlist their support for the specific roles in mind for them. This should include an outline of what the benefits are to the organization.

4. Confirm that the existing Vision and Values as presented at the Think Tank do in fact represent the strategic direction for the organizational work towards a York Region food strategy.
5. It is recommended that it be determined early on in this strategic planning process for the overall Food System strategy as to where the Food Charter, and other key documents fit.
6. One of the high priorities for action at the Think Tank was "Mapping Existing Initiatives". It is recommended that the British Columbia "Community Food Assessment Guide"³ be used to inform this process.
7. With respect to the priority for action regarding "improving connections across the Food System", it is recommended that a dedicated and strategic approach be taken to this, and not just one reliant on the emerging connections that might occur through meetings and collective projects. Deliberate and facilitated approaches are needed that could include such things as time in meetings dedicated to understanding what partners do and proactively looking for projects to work on multi-laterally.
8. There was support shown at the Think Tank for developing supportive policies with respect to the Food System. It is recommended that the resources of The Health Communication Unit (many of which are now available through Public Health Ontario) on Policy Development be used to identify the most viable policy options to pursue, a major component of which is the assessment of readiness for action from several aspects. Further, it is recommended that one, or maybe two, policy options be selected for early action.
9. As was suggested in the evaluation comments from the Think Tank, it is recommended that examples from other communities be used to inform the York Region process. Waterloo, Toronto and Vancouver were recommended as "front runners" in this field.

³ [http://www.healbc.ca/files/Community_food_assessment_guide_final_\(2\).pdf](http://www.healbc.ca/files/Community_food_assessment_guide_final_(2).pdf)