

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

What's happening at York Region Food Network



2020...THAT'S A WRAP

by Kate Greavette, Executive Director

York Region Food Network started this year with 2020 vision - we had big ambitions for our urban agriculture and food skill classes, slow and steady changes we wanted to make to our Good Food Box program, and lot of plans for food systems training and education.

In March, we were thrown for a loop. We had class sets of cutting boards and knives and more stainless-steel mixing bowls than one would ever need, but we didn't have a single organizational laptop or computer with a camera or microphone. We adapted. Without missing a single day of service delivery, every moment has been guided by the question: How do we contribute to a food secure York Region for all?

This question guides everything we do and pushes us to constantly evolve our programs to be more accessible, more inclusive and think of health from a holistic perspective. We've been listening to what our community wants and needs from us, and over the past eight months, we've responded.

We've done a lot this year, but there's still a long way to go before we see a York Region that's food secure for all. York Region Food Network has big plans for 2021 that will challenge our current ways of thinking, while

A taste of what we've been up to this year:

- Distributed over 4,800 Good Food Boxes
- Served over 3,500 breakfasts
- Prepared and shared over 11,000 healthy, ready to eat meals
- Distributed over \$36,500 of grocery gift cards
- Transitioned our food, nutrition and cooking classes online to offer virtual cook-along experiences
- Offered 175 gardeners the opportunity to grow their own food
- Hosted virtual events on income security, a youth food panel and local agriculture
- Created and maintained a list of COVID19 Emergency Food Supports in York Region
- Collected data to better understand our regional food insecurity situation
- Worked with countless individuals, organizations and government to develop coordinated approaches to food security
- Worked in partnership with Social Planning Council of York Region on advocating for a Just Recovery
- Educated and advocated about the Right to Food and income responses to food insecurity

building inclusivity and community. This newsletter gives you a sneak peak at what to expect in 2021. If you find our 2020 or 2021 activities inspiring, consider offering a financial gift to support this work. All funds go towards building a food secure York Region for all.



IN THE KITCHEN

Food and History.... Through a BIPOC lens

Through our work at YRFN it is abundantly clear that racism extends into every facet of our food system, from how it is produced to how it gets to our table and what food traditions are talked about and celebrated. As a community food organization, we know that YRFN needs to play a bigger role in making sure all food histories have the space to shine in our kitchen programming.

We are thrilled to announce that we'll be taking a fresh approach to our kitchen programming in 2021 by giving a voice to the stories and histories that we may not usually hear. This initiative, headed by Chef Maxine Knight, is one step we're taking as an organization to better educate our participants, partners and ourselves about who holds power and privilege in the food system, and to start to change the conversation.

Here are some examples of what you can look forward to:

- The BIPOC (Black Indigenous, People of Color) Cookbook Club will be the foundation of our programming. Bi-monthly, a cookbook will be selected that highlights history, culture, personal stories and, of course, food! We will unpack the contents of the book through cook-along workshops.
- At YRFN's Lunch Table, community members will engage in a dynamic biweekly discussion as we look at culture through food, ingredients and traditions. Here we'll share favourite family recipes and celebrate the baking, cooking and preserving knowledge passed down through the generations.
- If listening and learning is more your thing, YRFN's Food and History Podcast will offer exciting panel discussions from different voices throughout the Region. YRFN's Food Stories webinar series will look at the roots of food, through sharing experiences and personal memories.

2021 is shaping up to be a stellar programming year in the kitchen. There will be something for everyone to get engaged and involved in, and all programming will be held virtually. Can't wait to see you there!

IN THE GARDEN

Our garden season got off to a rocky start this year. During the March and April lockdown, the Province of Ontario recognized community food gardens as a recreational activity rather than an essential food source. After a lot of community groups did a lot of advocating to the province, and despite a few hiccups and delays along the way, we were thrilled to be granted permission to open three of our five gardens this year. These three gardens were used by over 170 gardeners (in safe ways that respected physical distancing) and we were able to engage many more people in virtual workshops.

COVID19 has meant that we've needed to critique our urban agriculture program. As we take a look ahead at 2021, our direction takes us on a path of reflection and alignment. We reflect on the role of Urban Agriculture within Food Justice. We work to better align our programming with land-based teachings and these key principles of respect for the environment:

- Since humans, animals, plants, water, soil and all others are equally a part of the environment, it is our responsibility to work in solidarity with these communities.
- For our human communities, we know that food insecurity affects marginalized groups disproportionately.
- For our water, soil and other living communities, we know that extractive practices and disconnection from the land have expedited climate change and deteriorated the health of our planet.

With these understandings, we shape our 2021 programming.

In Winter of 2021, we will be offering bi-weekly virtual soil and composting workshops and by Spring, we will be launching a Compost Learning Hub. The Hub will be a physical and virtual space where we gather to build a respectful relationship with the soil and explore what our individual, organizational and systemic responsibilities are to our communities.

Whether it is at The Hub, in one of our Community Gardens or online, we look forward to building healthier and more just communities together with you!



YORK REGION FOOD NETWORK IN 2020



4901

Good Food Boxes have been purchased from York Region farmers and suppliers and distributed

11,245

Healthy meals have been prepared with love and shared with community members and organizations



3359

Hot and delicious takeaway breakfasts have been served (we've really mastered egg sandwiches)

\$36,500

Worth of grocery gift cards have been distributed to community members



YRFN IN THE COMMUNITY

Phone calls, zoom calls, group calls. At YRFN we have been on all sorts of calls for the past eight months. On these calls we've been building new partnerships, responding to food needs in our communities and collecting data for Food Stories. Food Stories is a study designed to better understand food insecurity in our community and the incredible responses that have emerged during Covid 19.

In our Food Stories study, the key message that has emerged is food matters.

As we speak to pop-up food pantries in faith-based organizations, neighbourhood initiatives and formal non-profit organizations, we are hearing tired voices and resource concerns mixed with stories of resilience and communities pulling together during a time of need. We have been hearing how organizations have pivoted their operations to offer food hampers and culturally appropriate foods to their clients who are at a heightened risk of food insecurity. We have also been hearing how income (or lack thereof) is impacting people. Again and again, we are hearing that our communities care deeply about one another. Though we need to provide immediate support, we need to think beyond emergency food supports to a just recovery that accepts nothing less than the Right to Food for all.

Through all these efforts, YRFN has had a chance to work with new partners to support families, seniors and newcomers with free Good Food Boxes, access to grocery gift cards and healthy prepared meals.

SPECIAL THANKS TO OUR FUNDERS



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Canada



community food centres
CANADA good food is just the beginning

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