

NETWORK NEWS

What's happening at York Region Food Network



FOOD FOR THOUGHT

by Kate Greavette, Executive Director

What a year 2020 is turning out to be. In January we said goodbye to Joan Stonehocker, York Region Food Network's Executive Director for the past twelve years. It was under Joan's leadership that YRFN expanded dramatically – developing robust community kitchen and community garden programs, becoming active players in food policy and advocating for the right to food for all. It was also under Joan's leadership that our staff team grew from three to eleven, and where a culture was built on equity, inclusion, fairness and zero-waste.

York Region's growth and expansion over the past twelve years has put us in a very unique position during COVID-19. We have had the staff, resources and infrastructure in place to rapidly respond to the increased need for healthy food access, while also not losing sight of the fact that food is a fundamental human right and food insecurity is a public health crisis that is as serious as COVID-19.

In Canada, over four million people are food insecure (and this is an understatement). That equates to over 25,000 food insecure households in York Region.

Food insecurity fuels mental and physical illnesses and chronic diseases such as diabetes, hypertension and mood and anxiety disorders. It is an extremely serious public health crisis that has short-term and long-term impacts on individuals, households and communities. And food insecurity disproportionately impacts Indigenous and Black households and this is a direct result of colonialism and structural racism.

This year has not been easy for anyone. Since mid-March we have been working non-stop. We have never before experienced this volume of inquiries looking for support. Community members have confided in us intimate details about their struggles for adequate food access during COVID-19.

While it would be easy for us all to lose hope, this year is teaching us that we can no longer accept the status quo – the status quo wasn't working before COVID-19 and it's not going to work after COVID-19. We need to do better than going 'back to normal.'

We truly believe we need to be working as individuals, as an organization and as communities to critically analyze what we do, why we do it and how we do it. We need to dismantle our current systems and effectively rebuild equitable, diverse and inclusive systems that foster healthy food access for all.

IN THE KITCHEN

by David Lightwood, Good Food Hub Coordinator

Back to my Roots

Not too long ago, I was in a quiet, remote cottage in Scotland. I didn't want to go all the way into town to buy groceries because of the plague and decided to make the most out of what was already in the pantry.

Turns out it was a number of cans and some root vegetables. At first glance not so inspiring. However with a little YRFN methodology I was able to produce more than a week's worth of tasty nutritious meals from them.

Ingredients:

- big turnip (= rutabaga)
- carrots
- parsnip

Method:

- Peel and chop all items to similar-sized chunks. I made them quite small, like dice.
- Place in cold water, bring to boil.
- Cook to al dente, not fully cooked!
- When done strain and save the water.

Some of the sugars and vitamins in the vegetables are now in the water, it makes a surprisingly tasty drink on its own. When you try this you will find out yourself. I also used it to make smoothies and to put right on my breakfast oats.

The cooked veg can be used in many ways,

- In a tray bake with other items.
- In a stir fry.
- Mashed as a side.
- Pureed into soup (I added some cream).
- Mixed with oats and molasses to make a cake similar to carrot cake

One of the cans in my store contained haggis, a traditional Scottish dish made from the 'difficult to use' parts of a sheep. They are minced, mixed with oatmeal and spices and cooked. The stomach of the sheep is used as a big 'sausage skin'. It is delicious, health and shows the Scottish talent for getting the most out of your ingredients.

Haggis is traditionally eaten with mashed turnip and carrots - they are enhanced with butter and freshly ground black pepper. Believe it or not you can buy the same product here in Canada! I heartily recommend that you do, and if so you will have made your day in isolation so much better you will start planning your next vacation in Scotland!



DID YOU KNOW CALLALOO REFERS TO A DISH AS WELL AS A PLANT?

Callaloo refers to the leaves of both the Dasheesn and Amaranth plants. Callaloo is also a dish made of stewed greens. Many different variations with different names of this dish are found throughout the Caribbean, West Africa and in the southern United States.



IN THE GARDEN

by Jessica Tong, Urban Agriculture Coordinator

Whether you're a farmer, an avid gardener or growing your own food for the first time this year, you may have noticed that the demand for seeds has skyrocketed during the COVID-19 pandemic. More people are seeking out seeds in order to support personal and community food production. Many seed companies have been working at maximum capacity to meet demands and have had month-long delays in filling orders. With the new interest in seeds, a look into our seed systems and the stories behind our seeds is more important than ever.

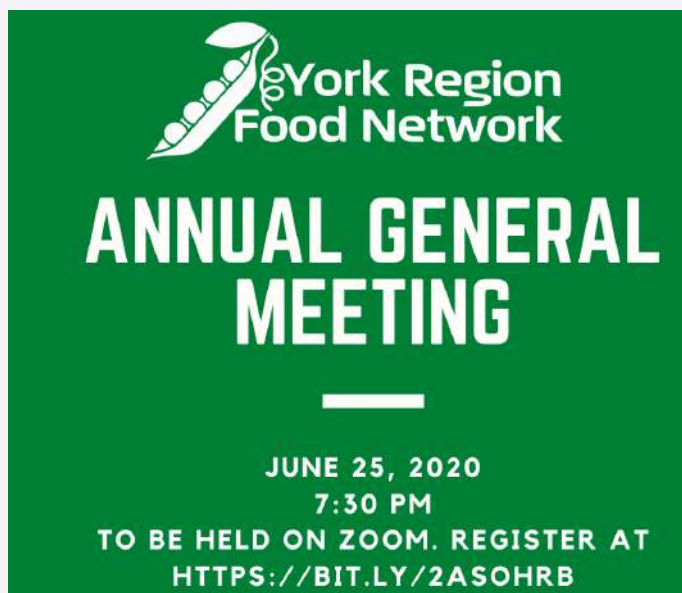
Seed saving is something that many people can participate in. Our communities have always taken on the role of seed keepers for various reasons: survival, maintaining genetic diversity, supporting food sovereignty, adapting plants to climate change or fine tuning taste and nutrition. Seed varieties also help to hold very specific cultural memories and histories, giving seed stories the ability to transcend processes of colonization, war and migration.

Seed Libraries are a community-based way to support access to seeds. Did you know that York Region Food Network has our very own Seed Library that community members can use? Anyone within York Region is welcome to take 3 different types of seeds for planting.

To give back to the seed library, we ask gardeners try their hand at seed saving and to share some of these seeds with our seed library at the end of the season. We also gladly take donations of seeds anytime.

During Covid-19, we have set up a virtual system in order to keep our Seed Library open and accessible to as many people as possible!

Visit our website (below) for more information and to access our seed library:
<https://yrfn.ca/programs/community-gardens/yrfn-seed-library/>



YRFN IN THE COMMUNITY

At a glance – this is what York Region Food Network has been up to since the start of the pandemic on March 16, 2020:

- **3608** healthy, ready-to-go meals have been prepared and distributed to folks who have not been able to leave their homes due to COVID-19.
- **701** Tuesday takeaway breakfasts have been served (and we have made 611 eggwiches!)
- **\$16,500** of grocery cards have been distributed to folks who have been able to do their own grocery shopping but struggling with inadequate food access due to limited funds.
- **1756** Good Food Boxes have been packed and distributed (with all food being sourced from local farmers and suppliers).
- **156** gardeners have been registered and they are currently growing food in our allotment gardens
- + online engagements + hundreds and hundreds of slices of cheesecake and muffins have been made

So much of this has been made possible by our generous funders, amazing community partners and individual donors like you!

SPECIAL THANKS TO OUR FUNDERS



United Way
Greater Toronto



Ontario
Trillium Foundation



Fondation Trillium
de l'Ontario

An agency of the Government of Ontario
Un organisme du gouvernement de l'Ontario

Canada



If you'd like to contribute to our efforts ...

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: \$50 \$100 \$250 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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