



Community Lifestyle



Wild blueberries (Vaccinium angustifolium) found in rural areas of the city and beyond.

“ We need more farmers. Thunder Bay needs to look at its youth and educate its youth about farming. We have a lot of unused farmland in Thunder Bay that could be put into production again. There is a lot of need we have not met currently. ”

Renate Thiboutot, Mile Hill Farms
(Chronicle Journal, Apr. 24 2013)

Food

5.0



Community Lifestyle Food

GOAL:

To build a more just and sustainable local food system in Thunder Bay that promotes social justice and supports local production, storage, processing, sale and distribution of food.

WHY IT MATTERS:

Through the simple act of eating, we interact with the earth's natural systems on a daily basis. The way food is grown, processed, transported, consumed, and disposed of is central to the sustainability of communities and the well-being of local economies, families, and individuals.

Farming and food production in the local area has declined over the past 30 years, with the majority of food now imported from great distances. On average, food travels 3,500 km to reach Thunder Bay, and the storage, refrigeration, packaging and transportation involved generates waste and burns a large amount of fuel. The food system's high energy inputs, such as fossil fuels and fertilizers, account for as much as a third of GHG emissions on a global scale. Worldwide, agro-industrial practices are having negative environmental effects, impacting soil health, water quality, and biodiversity. The Ontario Farmland Trust estimates that Ontario loses approximately 100 acres of farmland every day, with the best, most productive soils going the fastest. Developing a stronger food system closer to home will help reduce the size of our ecological footprint by cutting down on energy use, as well as protecting food-producing space and related biodiversity for generations to come.

Access to safe, nutritious and affordable food affects the health and well-being of individuals and communities. Individuals living in poverty commonly have a difficult time accessing healthy food and the cost of food is only one reason. Often, a lack of grocery store options and more fast food restaurants exist in areas where low-income individuals and families live. Access to public transit, school and workplace eating environments, and food skills also affect people's ability to choose a nutritious diet. By making conscious decisions to build healthy and accessible food environments, food can be a powerful tool to improve quality of life.

The food and agriculture sector represents one of the largest employers in Ontario, making it a linchpin in moving towards greener and more resilient local economies. Many studies across Canada and the US have demonstrated the power of food in creating jobs and sustainable communities. For instance,

WORKING GROUP MEMBERS:

Thunder Bay Food Action Network:

A coalition of individuals and organizations from health, social services, agriculture/food production, city planning, businesses, emergency food aid, education and environmental protection working to improve community food security.



Photo by Connie Nelson



Photo by Lisa Haessler



Photo by Lisa Haessler



Photo by Brad Doff

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It is estimated that if every household in Ontario spent \$10 a week on local food, we would have an additional \$2.4 billion in our local economy at the end of the year and create 10,000 new jobs. Urban farms, rooftop greenhouses, and small-scale processors are up and coming examples of how food is transforming cities and positioning itself as able to respond to many of the social, economic and environmental challenges of our day.

In recent years, public awareness of local food issues has boomed and the number of non-profit and for-profit businesses working towards food systems change has also sharply increased. The Food Action Network (FAN), established in 1995, was an early pioneer in improving the local food system and has been involved in establishing the Regional Food Distribution Association and Good Food Box program, and promoting local food through farmers markets, community gardens and kitchens, and gleaning programs.

In 2008, the City of Thunder Bay and the District Social Services Board endorsed the Thunder Bay Food Charter, which is a set of principles that help guide decisions, policies and collaboration for building a robust local food system. In early 2012, FAN, in collaboration with the City and surrounding municipalities, held a Regional Food Summit that identified the development of a Food Strategy as a necessary next step.

There are many players involved in Thunder Bay's local food movement including educators, farmers, health care professionals, anti-poverty advocates, First Nations, civil servants, and many others. Developing and implementing the Thunder Bay and Area Food Strategy (set to be finalized in 2014) will create linkages across departments and with community partners so that efforts can strengthen one another and help us move more effectively toward the 2020 targets.

The Food Strategy will be built on seven pillars of a sustainable food system, defined by community leadership at the 2012 Regional Food Summit. EarthCare Thunder Bay strongly supports the development, initiation, implementation and sustained funding of the Thunder Bay and Area Food Strategy.



In 2012, City-owned institutions such as long-term care facilities and day cares, and City-run events increased local food purchases by 2%. Building on this success, the City is undertaking a project to increase purchases of local food by 10% by 2015.



Photo by Brad Doff

THE CITY OF THUNDER BAY & COMMUNITY PARTNERS WILL WORK TOGETHER TO PROMOTE FOOD SYSTEMS CHANGE IN THE FOLLOWING AREAS:

- A. Forest and Fresh Water Foods:** Increase our region's knowledge of available forest and fresh water foods and their sustainable harvest, protect and conserve forest and fresh water food ecosystems, and support a diverse and sustainable forest and fresh water foods economy within the region. This economy includes both harvesting for personal consumption and the development of commercial opportunities.
- B. Urban Agriculture:** Increase food production in the urban landscape and support the participation of citizens in urban agriculture activities.
- C. School Food Environments:** Improve the eating habits, food skills and food literacy of children and youth in Thunder Bay and Area through supportive healthy school food environments.
- D. Food Access:** Create a food system in Thunder Bay and Area based on the principle that food is a human right, not a commodity, and in which all community members have regular access to adequate, affordable, nutritious, safe and culturally appropriate food in a way that maintains dignity.
- E. Food Production:** Protect and encourage growth in farm-scale production so that a greater proportion of food is grown, raised, prepared, processed, and purchased closer to home.
- F. Food Procurement:** Leverage procurement food spending to develop a public sector food supply chain that contributes to the economic, ecological and social wellbeing of Thunder Bay and Area through food purchases that foster local production, processing, and distribution.
- G. Food Infrastructure:** Support the creation of a local food supply chain that links production, processing, distribution, consumption, and waste management to make local food more accessible and the supply chain more economically and environmentally efficient.



Photo by Brad Doff



Roots to Harvest

Roots to Harvest provides transformative educational opportunities for youth by engaging them in learning about local agriculture through their urban agriculture site, greenhouse, aquaponics system, and time spent harvesting, selling, and processing food.



Photo by Erin Beagle

Farm to Cafeteria

In fall of 2013, four high schools integrated local foods into their cafeteria menus. Meals were \$5 and included a combination of burgers, pulled pork, coleslaw, corn on the cob, squash soup, and roasted and mashed potatoes. 1,300 farm-to-cafeteria meals were sold (a total of 16 farm to caf days), with the cafeterias selling out each time and under 20 minutes. Survey results showed that 96% of students would purchase the meal again.

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DEFINITIONS:

What is a Sustainable Food System?

Food systems encompass the economic, environmental and social factors involved in food production, distribution, processing, consumption, and waste. Decisions about food tend to be disjointed and do not take into account the role of food in shaping healthy environments and strong communities.

A sustainable food system:

- Protects and nourishes the environment
- Improves health and access to food
- Fosters local and diverse economic development
- Encourages community involvement

Environmental benefits of a healthy sustainable food system.

- Reduced greenhouse gas and smog emissions from long distance transportation of food
- Reduced use of pesticides and fertilizers
- Healthier soils and greater biodiversity
- Improved public health and quality of life
- Local economic development
- More vibrant, green and unique urban spaces to live, work and play

Thunder Bay Country Market

An average of 6,000 visitors shop at the Thunder Bay Country Market each week for local meats, cheese, eggs, produce, baking and handcrafted items. The market has grown from 11 vendors in 1997 to 100 seasonal and year-round vendors today. The Country Market adds close to \$5 million to the local economy.

WHAT YOU CAN DO:

- Be a wise consumer by choosing healthy, locally produced, fairly-traded food
- Visit local farms and farmers' markets to learn more about where food comes from
- Choose foods without a package and a label more often
- Read the label and choose foods that have no more than five ingredients
- Grow your own produce in your backyard or at a community garden
- Compost kitchen and garden waste to have great fertilizer for your garden and reduce landfill
- Bring your own bags or bins to carry groceries
- Avoid disposable containers, dishes and cutlery
- Make healthy food accessible to all by supporting community food programs



The Thunder Bay Country Market