



The **Research Shop**

# Understanding Emergency Food Services in Guelph-Wellington: An Experience in Community-Engaged Scholarship

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**MAIN COMMUNITY PARTNER:**  
**Food Access Working Group (FAWG)**  
of The Guelph-Wellington Food Round Table ([www.gwfrt.com](http://www.gwfrt.com))



The Guelph-Wellington Food Round Table (GWFRT) seeks to convene stakeholders on issues relating to the regional food system, and is affiliated with the Guelph & Wellington Task Force for Poverty Elimination (PTF). The FAWG consists of representatives of a variety of organizations doing emergency food provision and/or food security work in Guelph-Wellington. Its purpose is to increase food security for low income people in the community.

**RESEARCH SHOP ACTORS:**

Six Research Shop interns were involved in research design, data collection, analysis, writing, dissemination of results, and ongoing communication with community partners. One of these interns acted as Project Manager, while the ICES/Research Shop Director oversaw the entire process.

**PROJECT PURPOSE & OBJECTIVES**

The purpose of the research project was to address the need to improve food security and the provision of emergency food services in Guelph-Wellington.

The specific research objectives were to:

1. Assess key strengths and weaknesses of the current emergency food provision system in Guelph-Wellington;
2. Identify programs and services other than emergency food provision that contribute to improved food security in Guelph-Wellington, and assess the key strengths and weaknesses of these initiatives;
3. Analyze best practices that have proven effective at increasing food security in other communities, and;
4. Identify strategies for the development of food system initiatives designed to improve food security in Guelph-Wellington.

Date	Main Activity	Main Actors
Spring, 2010	Discussion of challenges to emergency food service system	FAWG Poverty Task Force
February, 2011	Research proposal developed and presented for feedback	Research Shop FAWG
March-June, 2011	Data collection	Research Shop interns
June-July, 2011	Data analysis and report drafting	Research Shop interns
November, 2011	Final report published	Research Shop
March-November, 2011	Community consultation	Research Shop 3 FAWG representatives 1 Wellington County rep.
November, 2011-present	Sharing results	Research Shop FAWG, PTF, Community Resource Centre

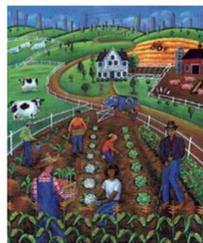
**RESEARCH METHODS**

Review of best practices in emergency food provision and community food security

23 semi-structured interviews with emergency food providers and others working with populations experiencing food insecurity in Guelph-Wellington

6 surveys with emergency food providers in Wellington County (to complement a survey previously applied to emergency food providers in Guelph)

**"Community Food Security"**



"...a condition in which all community residents obtain a safe, culturally acceptable, nutritionally adequate diet through a sustainable food system that maximizes community self-reliance and social justice" (Community Food Security Coalition, 2011)

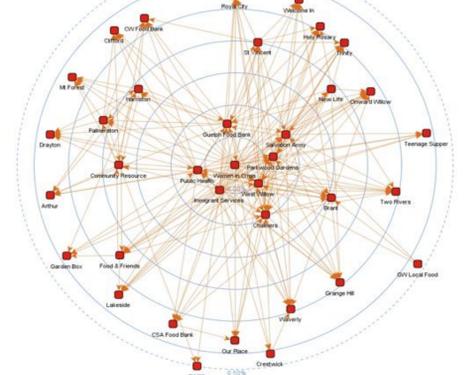
**"Food Hub"**

A place (that can be physical or virtual) where a number of different food-related activities are concentrated and coordinated in an effort to maximize efficiency and impact.

An **Emergency Food Hub** focuses on collection, storage and distribution of emergency food. A **Community Food Hub** incorporates a wide variety of food-related activities, that could include emergency food collection and distribution, community gardens and kitchens, nutrition and food production education, advocacy work, etc.

**THE IMPORTANCE OF LINKAGES**

In both Guelph and Wellington, the #1 strength of the existing emergency food service system as identified by research participants was collaboration between organizations. This diagram depicts information-sharing relationships.



**THINKING ABOUT FOOD HUBS**

"I think [a food hub] is just a place where communit[ies] gather around food and then, from that, everything happens." (Research participant)

A majority of research participants felt some kind of local food hub project would be beneficial in terms of facilitating access to fresh food, solidifying existing collaborations and helping to forge new ones, and increasing food-related knowledge and skills.

"I think the idea of having a hub is genius because then...we could ship out whatever to all these local food banks and [that would help make the food] more accessible." (Research participant)

**GETTING TO KNOW THE COMMUNITY:** Developing a gradual understanding of the community context (including identification of key actors, their roles, perspectives, and relationships) and learning how to effectively and appropriately navigate within that context was a challenge. As the project moved forward, improved understanding of community context made it easier to effectively engage.

**SPEAKING THE SAME LANGUAGE:** Being explicit about the terminology used in the project was important for avoiding confusion and misunderstanding.

**DEFINING ROLES, RESPONSIBILITIES AND EXPECTATIONS:** Over the course of the project, there was increased recognition of the importance of: clear communication with community partners at all stages of the research process; establishing well-defined roles, responsibilities and expectations for each research and community actor involved, and; maintaining ongoing records of all communication and decision-making to help ensure clarity as the process moves along.

**Working Towards Action**

Following the presentation of this project's final report to both FAWG and the PTF, the PTF decided to strike a sub-committee dedicated to developing a set of specific recommendations for moving forward with improvements to the emergency food service system in Guelph-Wellington. Consisting of individuals familiar with emergency food services in Guelph-Wellington (but not directly involved in emergency food provision), this committee is currently working on these recommendations. Once they have been decided upon, they will be presented to the PTF, and a course of action will be determined.

