

Community Food Toolkit



About the Project

Nourishing Ontario constructed a community food toolkit, to help local food initiatives develop sustainable regional food systems. As part of an Agri-Food and Rural Link, the knowledge translation and transfer program of the OMAFRA-U of G Partnership-funded project, we converted this Sustainable Communities of Food toolkit into a web-based platform, using feedback from our community and research partners on both the physical and web-based versions.

This website is intended to allow communities across the province to access the Ontario Community Food Project Toolkit, which was initially produced in printed and .pdf form. This initial draft of the toolkit was launched May 24, 2012 at a workshop that included 80 participants in Waterloo and over 30 through an online webinar. In addition to being a go-to place for community food information, the website will facilitate the interaction of members of online regional food communities.

When the toolkit was launched, one of the top suggestions for improving the toolkit was to develop a typology of different hub projects (e.g. community-scale processor focused; producer focused) and to provide web links to as many examples of each type of project as possible. This will expand the information available to each community as they move to build their community food projects.

Report: Models and Best Practices for Building Sustainable Food Systems in Ontario and Beyond

The research presented in this document emerged as part of the momentum described above. It was designed to build on the findings of earlier reports, and help support practical initiatives seeking to create more sustainable local food systems. While the report presents a number of models and best practices based on research across the province, these examples represent a far from exhaustive list of the impressive array of local food activities happening in Ontario. Please [click here](#) to download the report by chapter on the Nourishing Ontario website.

Food Hub Literature Reviews

Two reviews of the literature on local food systems were developed to help understand the trends and lessons learned from local/regional food initiatives around the world. [Local Food Systems in North America](#) investigates the current discussion on North American localized food systems and identifies the terms of engagement of participants seeking to access the perceived benefits of this form of food marketing. [Local Food Systems- International Perspectives](#) provides a brief overview of the research and initiatives in other parts of the world, which may be useful for identifying patterns of successful models for local food hubs. Both these reviews were prepared for OMAFRA.

Nourishing Ontario Website

To visit the Nourishing Ontario website [click here](#).



Toolkit Rationale

We hope this toolkit will help you build more resilient, sustainable communities of food that respect the principles of ecological resilience, social justice and economic viability from field to table to compost heap.

The Process

As part of the toolkit, we provide suggestions about how to run a workshop in your community and we include ideas about how to define a vision for your community food system. We suggest ideas about who to include to make the process empowering and community-driven. We also have input about how to identify your resources and existing capacities as well as how to define where your challenges lie. We also give you detailed case studies of innovative examples of existing projects in Ontario. To identify the most useful examples for you, we scanned over 350 food projects across the province and conducted over 170 interviews. We then selected the 19 case studies that are reported [here](#).

We invite you to read the whole document or pick and choose what works for your community -- we have tried to design the toolkit with both approaches in mind.

Our Team

The team who contributed to this toolkit worked with the people in their food communities to develop this report. Together, we bring to the table voices of practitioners from across the province as well as faculty and students from eight universities. Everyone is deeply committed to creating regenerative and healthy food systems.

We hope this toolkit helps you on your journey to building more resilient food communities.

Contact the Team

[Click here](#) for contact information.

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Getting Started

Nourishing Ontario constructed a community food toolkit, to help local food initiatives develop sustainable regional food systems.

This section includes information to help you get started building a resilient, sustainable community of food that respects the principles of ecological resilience, social justice and economic viability from field to table to compost heap.

Once you have a comprehensive list of who to invite, you need to consider next steps. Depending on how far along in the process of creating a more resilient food system you are, you will have varying resources and kinds of expertise to draw on. In order to be as thorough as possible, we will assume you have no food initiatives in your community. If you have already embarked along this road, then, jump ahead to whatever next steps make the most sense for your community.

Setting the agenda

To begin the process, you may find it useful to start with a very open-ended agenda so you are gathering as much information and energy as you can from the outset. Your first agenda may be as simple as introducing yourselves and beginning the visioning process. This will depend on a few things, the most important of which is how much time you have to meet. If you are a large group, introducing yourselves and engaging in an icebreaker activity may be all you have time for. If you have more time, you may also get into setting a vision, identifying assets and gaps, reviewing your options and goal setting. Regardless of how much you do, before you leave each meeting you need to take time to:

1. ensure you can reach all the people who attended;
2. review the progress you made;
3. have a plan for your next steps; and,
4. set the next time to meet.

Facilitation

It helps to have one or two people from outside your food community to run the meeting(s) as you get started. An independent person can make things flow and helps to ensure you accomplish your goals. This person could be from local government, a school principal, community leader, or a hired facilitator. Ideally, they need to be comfortable running a large group event and also understand your goals.

Icebreakers

Allowing the people in the room to become familiar with each other and understand you have a common interest will help make the process more engaging and relevant. It will also help everyone feel comfortable contributing to the process. The icebreaker you choose will depend on how much time you have and how well people know each other before the meeting.

Some icebreakers you may want to consider, listed from least to most complex, are:

- Devise categories (for example: types of stakeholders and organizations, whether they have ever grown any of their own food, where they live) and ask people to stand or raise their hand if they identify with each group as the facilitator calls them out.

- Ask everyone to introduce themselves and in one or two sentences explain why they have come to the meeting.
- Ask everyone to take 2 minutes to write down their top three goals for their community food system and then share this with the person sitting next to them.
- Divide people into groups of up to five people. Provide 20 marshmallows, 20 pieces of spaghetti, 1 meter of string and 1 meter of masking tape to each group and ask them to build the tallest, freestanding tower they can in a given time (usually 15-30 minutes). If you have a group that doesn't know each other well and enough time, this can be a great activity to help set a positive tone. For more information and insights, you can check out the [Build a tower, build a team TED talk](#).
- Puzzles Game. Give participants a blank piece of puzzle (cut up a sheet of index card stock). Each person writes on the piece one skill which they contribute to the group. The puzzle is then assembled to show that everyone contributes to the whole. (This icebreaker is from [Training-Games.com](#) where they have even more icebreakers listed)

Regardless of what you decide to do, the questions and tone should be welcoming so people know their views are respected. One of the most important things is to have fun!

Once you feel more comfortable with each other, you can begin your building process.

Visioning Exercises

To move forward, you need to know where you want to go. So, the next step is to determine a vision with respect to your community long-term food goals. There are many different strategies in approaching the visioning process, but we will share the one from the Natural Step as it is the most familiar to us and provides a lot of support resources.

This approach is called 'backcasting' and involves imagining the future you want and then figuring out how to work towards it (Figure 1). The benefit of this approach is your group will tend to be less constrained by current pressures and be more able to envision the future you want (for more information refer to the [Natural Step, Backcasting](#)).

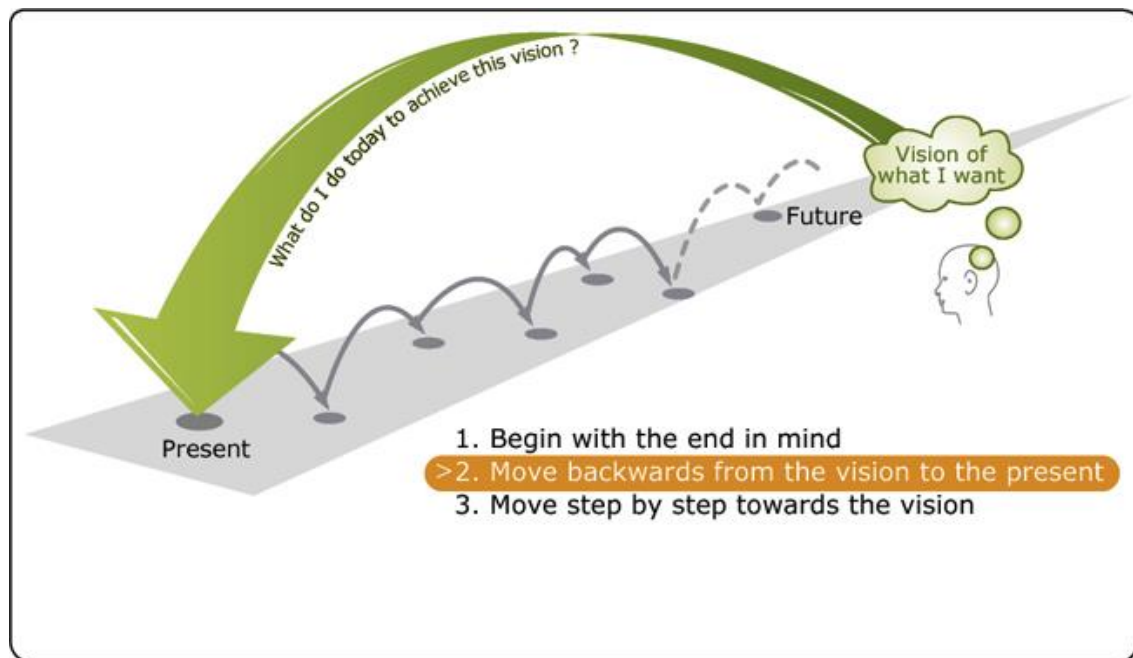


Figure 1. Backcasting (Source: [The Natural Step](#))

The backcasting exercise (to help envision where you want to go)

One way to begin this process is to divide your large group into sub-groups of 4-6 people and ask them to answer a series of questions or fill thoughts in to complete sentences. For example:

- What kind of food would you like the people in your community to have access to in twenty years? Describe what that system would look like. Where does the food come from? What kind of food is it? How much does it cost? Who has access to it? How is it produced?
- My ideal food system includes _____

Each person within the sub-groups can answer the questions and you can then discuss and compile your answers or the group can develop a list together.

World Cafe Approach

Or you can use a [World Cafe set-up](#). Using this approach, you ask people who want to, to write an idea about their ideal food community on a large piece of paper at the front of the room. Once you have several ideas on offer, ask those people to lead a discussion group about that idea and ask people to join whichever group most interests them. Also, encourage people to move from group to group and to share ideas.

Whether you use the sub-group approach or the World Cafe approach, after a set amount of time for discussion - usually anywhere from 20 minutes to one hour -- each smaller group needs to put their list in order of most to least important ideas. Once you have lists developed in each of the smaller groups, you are ready to gather your ideas together into a cohesive set. Ask each group to share their top answers with the entire group. You will need someone writing down these points. Flip charts are usually good tools to use for this type of exercise.

When you have a list of ideas that are posted for everyone to see you can figure out which ideas have the most traction...

- ask for a show of hands
- have people vote on the ideas they think are the most important. Giving everyone a set number of sticky dots and letting them place their dots on the ideas of their choice can be effective.
- group ideas together and ask people to express support
- develop a consensus by having a discussion

The goal is to develop a vision that expresses where your community food system aspirations. Some sample visions are:

Ottawa Food Action Planning:

We envision...

A city where all people have access not only to healthy and affordable food, but also access to knowledge, information, and opportunities to learn about food, nutrition, agriculture, and food systems. A city that supports partnerships and linkages between emergency food relief services, food security programs, and a broad spectrum of community-based and city-run food programs and services.

Durham Food Charter

"Planning Food Into Our Future"

The Durham Region Food Charter reflects the community's vision for a food secure Durham Region focused toward building a just and sustainable local food system as a foundation for population health. Based on community participation a sustainable local food system will improve the economic viability of Durham Region's food industry, work in harmony with natural heritage systems as well as the built environment, and promote overall health...A food secure Durham Region is financially sound,

environmentally responsible and socially just, contributing to the future well being of our region and its residents.

These are some suggestions about how to get your process started. Every community is different so you will find what works for you by getting started and as you work through the process.

SWOT Analysis and Asset/ Gap Mapping

Getting from the present to the future - what you have and what you need

The next step is to establish where you are and to get a handle on your baseline resources. It is important to explore community resources, both strengths and weaknesses. Defining your existing capacity and gaps will allow you to see more clearly what you have to offer and where you need to develop more resources.



Figure 2. SWOT analysis (Source: [Wikipedia Commons](#))

Many people are familiar with and use a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) analysis while others prefer to use an asset-gap analysis. A description of both techniques follow, but again, this is what we have used and you may have other approaches you prefer to answer these questions. The important thing is to establish a realistic, well bracketed, clearly defined inventory of what you have and what you need.

A Strength, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats (SWOT) analysis allows your community to think about its capacity for change. Your SWOT assessment will give you a baseline to plan from and refer back to so you can monitor your progress, deal with your challenges and chart your successes. By first developing your vision and now conducting a SWOT (or comparable assessment) you are beginning to develop a strategy and the tools needed to create food system change in your community.

To help get started, here are some ideas about what could fit into each category.

Strengths originate or are found within your community of food. They help you achieve your objectives. For example, you may have community gardens or a farmers' market in your community, or perhaps you have good community networks.

Weaknesses also originate from within your food community. These are the things that make it difficult to get things done. For example, you may have to rely too heavily on volunteers, you may not have enough funding, a lack of vision or there may be regulations that present challenges.

Opportunities exist outside your food community. These are attributes of the environment external to your organization or network that help you to accomplish your objectives. For example, there may be a local institution interested in buying sustainable, local food or a community group looking for partners.

Threats also exist outside your existing food community. These are factors external to your organization or network that inhibit or prevent you from accomplishing your goals. These could include a lack of farmers or eaters aware of the benefits of local, sustainable food or the need for local processors.

Asset-gap mapping

Similar to a SWOT analysis, asset mapping allows you to benchmark your existing resources. It is founded in a livelihoods approach so asks you to determine your natural, physical/infrastructure, human, social and economic resources (Figure 3). Each kind of asset (also referred to as 'capital') is elaborated as follows:



Figure 3. Considerations in an asset-mapping process

Natural resources: This describes your environmental and ecological assets and can include, but is not limited to your waterways, air quality, green spaces and biodiversity. You may space for community gardens.

Physical resources: This is the infrastructure in your community and can include roads, hospitals, schools, and waterworks among other assets. Perhaps you have a food processing facility in town.

Human resources: These are the people living in your community and what they know. This would include, different demographic groups (age, gender, ethnicity), skills or labour specializations for example, a community college or high school that graduates people with cooking skills.

Social capital: These are the connections and networks where you live. For example, there may be people in your community who have developed links between farmers and a hospital or long-term care facility.

Economic resources: These are the financial resources in your community and includes economic development offices, business associations or credit unions.



Figure 4. Sample map from an asset mapping exercise (Source: georgian bay mapping culture)

Mapping the way forward

Now that you have a better sense as to where you are heading and what tools you have to get there, you can start to map out a plan. It is important to remind yourselves as you go through these exercises that there is value in the:

- process of having these meetings as they help to build community, and
- outcomes as these will be tangible results of your efforts together.

The first, most practical step is to identify as many initiatives as possible to move you from where you are in the direction of your vision. The case studies will help you brainstorm practical ideas but here are some questions to get you started:

1. What are the projects that make sense in the short, medium and long-term? Community gardens can be stepping stones to bigger projects. Start with the low hanging fruit and work towards the more complex goals. Remember, working together helps to build community capacity whether or not you accomplish anything more tangible in the short-term.
2. Set concrete objectives with timelines. Ensure you have people who are willing to commit their time to make projects succeed. Identify the people who want to manage and lead the projects. You will also need to identify the resources you need to get started (funding, people, garden tools, access to water, vehicles, store front). The case studies have specific examples and useful ideas in answer to many of these questions.
3. Celebrate your accomplishments. The more fun you have, the more engaged and wider the circle grows.

Ontario Case Studies

Geographic Region

([Eastern Ontario](#) | [Northern ON](#) | [Golden Horseshoe](#) | [Southern ON](#))

Organizational Type

([Non-profit](#) | [For-profit](#) | [Public / Governmental](#) | [Cooperative](#) | [Multi-stakeholder](#))

Primary Rationale

- (1) [Collaborative food systems development](#)
- (2) [Promotion of local food and regional development](#)
- (3) [Creating viable farm income](#)
- (4) [Enhanced distribution channels](#)
- (5) [Access to healthy food](#)

At some point you will find it useful to discuss examples of community food projects you could copy or build on. As each community is different, we provide a range of different projects at the end of this toolkit. We anticipate you would pick and choose different insights, strategies and ideas from several, or even all, of the projects to create a tailored approach that works best for your community.

To facilitate this process, we have identified case studies that capture different types of community food initiatives. They are all Ontario-based so these stories should be of particular use to you. Each case study begins with three to five bullet points that summarize the most important features for the organization. This may help you be more strategic about which projects are most suitable for you to draw upon. Each detailed project description includes an organizational overview, motivational rationale and history, organizational resources including human, physical, natural, financial, and community/social; the policy and program resources and challenges; the desired assets; constraints, challenges and solutions; successes; relevance as well as links to other projects. We have extracted the summaries and provided them below to give you an idea about what kinds of information is available in the detailed case study reports.



In this section, we present nineteen case studies to give you an overview of the innovations taking place in community food systems across the province of Ontario. These were selected from over 170 interviews conducted in the summer of 2011. While all the projects reviewed are remarkable in their own ways, the case studies presented here were selected based for their unique or outstanding combination of organizational type, motivational considerations, type of activity, scale and scope.

While we recognize that these categories can occasionally overlap, we have organized the case studies by [geographic region](#), [organizational type](#) and [primary rationale](#) to help you navigate through Ontario's diverse community food initiatives.