Background

Food banks in Ontario often suffer chronic shortages of fresh food. There is an opportunity for Ontario farmers to help address this problem; however, a number of factors constrain the ability for farmers and food banks to connect.

This project was done in collaboration with FarmStart – a non-profit organization that works to support a new generation of entrepreneurial, ecological farmers. The research focused on identifying barriers to farmer-food bank collaboration, and opportunities for building mutually beneficial, sustainable relationships.

Methodology

Conduct a literature review to identify effective examples of projects connecting farmers and food banks

Create a key informant contact list of individuals who may have knowledge about farmer-food bank interactions

Conduct 9 phone interviews with key informants from the farming and food bank sectors

Develop a report on the current situation and future opportunities for farmer-food bank relationships in Ontario

Conclusions

• There is a need to facilitate increased communication between farmers and food banks and strengthen relationships between actors in the two sectors. Maintaining a directory of local farmers interested in working with food banks could help improve communication. In Guelph-Wellington, there is also interest in creating an app to facilitate farmer-food bank communication. An undergraduate Computer Science class is currently working on developing such an app, in collaboration with the Food Access and Food Distribution working groups of the Guelph-Wellington Food Round Table.

• In order to build longer-term, more stable farmer-food bank partnerships, it is important to move away from the charity-based model that relies on farmers donating surplus and, in many cases, assuming responsibility for food transport. A tax incentive for food donations could contribute to that shift, as could the creation of other mechanisms to ease the logistics of food transport and storage.

Outcomes

• Responsibilities for food transport and storage are often unclear due to insufficient farmer-food bank communication

• The ability of a farmer or food bank to help with the logistics of food storage & transport depends on scale

• Farmer donations depend on surplus and not always reliable

• Incentives for farmers could enable longer-term partnerships

• Food banks are volunteer-based and difficult to arrange deliveries

• Involve farming associations and farming collectives to reduce costs

• Involve other community partners for transport and storage options

• Fresh produce impacts our health and local economic vitality

Acknowledgements: The authors would like to thank FarmStart and Erin Nelson for assistance with this project.