Exploring Local Food Systems Planning Approaches in Southern Ontario: a
descriptive timeline of the process taken on by Waterloo Region, Niagara
Region and Simcoe County

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University of Guelph, 2014

Abstract

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The local food system (LFS) has undergone many changes over the years. Even the most agriculturally-active and conscious communities have watched a corporate, invisible system take the place of a LFS rooted in quality, seasonality and local tradition. Growing concerns around food safety, quality and origin have communities working to reestablish the once integral connection between the local producer and consumer. Communities are realizing the potential of LFS to address issues related to poverty, public health, food security, local economy, environmental sustainability, climate change, loss of farm land, and community development. The overarching intent of the LFS is to bring positive change to the community, through efforts where successful relationship building and community engagement play a key role in determining the success of these initiatives.

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1 Introduction

Rural surplus feeds urban centers. There was a time when this relationship was clearly understood and valued. Unfortunately, over time this seemingly clear connection has become blurred and even forgotten as urban sprawl (Sonnino, 2009) and industrial scale producers effectively pushed the subject of food out of sight and out of mind of consumers around the globe (Pothukuchi & Kaufman, 1998). This change in understanding along with a shift to a food culture centered on convenience, perceived cleanliness, and low cost, instead of quality, seasonality and local tradition has effectively created an invisible food system.   In recent years individuals have identified a growing number of concerns resulting from the invisible food system with respect to its implications for food safety, economy, environment, as well as community and individual health. In response, concerned citizens and small scale producers interested in a seeing a shift back to a food culture based on quality, seasonality and tradition began to take the stage. Local initiatives are working to regain control of the food system by rekindling an interest in the origin of food and reestablishing a link between the local consumer and the local producer. Petitions for change from increasing numbers of local producers and consumers prompted municipal governments to take action to further existing community efforts to strengthen LFSs.

Despite the limited jurisdictional authority of regional governments over food systems, a growing number of Canadian municipalities are working to implement local level initiatives and strengthen supporting policy to improve the health and sustainability of their own LFS. There are as many reasons for implementing a LFS as there are municipalities interested in their establishment. Communities are realizing the potential of LFS to address issues related to poverty, public health, food security, local economy, environmental sustainability, climate change, loss of farm land, and community development. It can be understood that although the initial motivators leading to the development of a

LFS are likely to vary in each community, two key factors remain the same. Firstly, to bring positive change to the community and secondly, to develop strong connections between local producers and consumers.

1.1 Purpose and Significance of Research

The topic of LFS planning is becoming increasingly popular. This has been made apparent through the growing emergence of LFS initiatives and supporting policy at various levels of government in communities across North America. As this trend continues, a thorough understanding of the process required to achieve LFS and the resulting impacts on the hosting region becomes increasingly important. Although communities have come to realize the importance of establishing healthy, sustainable food systems, the question remains, how do we reestablish the LFS?

The purpose of this research is to construct a descriptive case study from the perspective of various stakeholders outlining the key factors driving the on-going evolution and development of three LFS in Southern Ontario: Waterloo Region (WR), Niagara Region (NR) and Simcoe County (SC). This will be achieved by analyzing regional grey literature, including government reports, newspaper articles, and websites, in addition to conducting semi-structured key informant interviews with individuals directly involved with local food projects. The resulting timeline will outline observed motivators, processes, experiences, successes and pitfalls as well as similarities amidst many differences of these LFS initiatives. This research paper will explore the role of various stakeholders including local consumers, producers and regional government respectively in LFS planning. It will work to illustrate the importance of successful relationship building and community engagement in determining the success of these initiatives. The key objectives of this research are as follows:

1. To illustrate the evolution of the LFS in WR, NR, and SC describing relevant historical context, motivations, key players and the role of community members in establishing a LFS as well as

the subsequent development of any supporting policy at a municipal, regional and provincial level.

2. To identify common characteristics of a LFS in Ontario by comparing and contrasting the experiences, successes and challenges described by key stakeholders involved in LFS development in each of the three areas with reference to current academic literature.

3. To provide recommendations based on insight and lessons learned from the stakeholders involved so the recommendations can be used by other communities in the future.

1.2 Note on Terminology

Local. Local Food. Local Food System. Sustainable Local Food System. Increased attention to issues related to food has made it nearly impossible for many individuals in Canada not to associate these words with criticism of the mainstream food system. Often, discussion of the food system centers on the potential negative implications on environmental and human health (Blay-Palmer & Donald, 2008). In fact, each of these terms inherently have no meaning and in many cases can prove to be quite difficult to define. As such, they are often defined by the individuals, organizations, and larger communities involved in the discussion around them, and they are modified to suit the context in which they are used. The definition is typically determined by the needs, values and beliefs shared by the people using the term. For some, the term "local" may refer to a pre-defined radius while others may understand local to be food grown within a certain boundary, for example a single municipality, a region, a province or an entire county (SMDHU, 2014).

At a most basic level, a food system can be understood to be comprised of five key components: production, processing, distribution, consumption, and disposal (MOMAH, 2010). As such, it can be understood that each of these areas was initially a part of a food system which has evolved and changed over time. Currently, increased awareness of the potential for food systems to address a growing number of issues has resulted in a growing interest among communities to reevaluate the current state

of the food system and, often, implement initiatives to enhance the local focus. In the context of this paper, the terms local, local food, and LFS are discussed by each community in the manner that best represents their understanding or use of the terms. Interestingly, many of the key informants mentioned challenges associated with defining "local" at the start of community food initiatives. Definitions drawn from key organizations involved in the local food movement will be included in each of the backgrounds described below.

1.3 Methodology

This research paper explores the process undertaken WR, NR and SC to improve the health of the LFS and the impact of various stakeholders, including the community members, in ensuring success. The case study approach to exploring the development of LFS initiatives was used as it creates an opportunity to compare and contrast the projects taking place on the ground, with researchers discussing the LFS, the players who should be involved, and the role of the community in ensuring success.

The aforementioned regions were selected as case studies for a few key reasons. Although each of the areas has a long history of food production, the subject of the LFS has been approached in different ways. WR was selected because of its national and international reputation as a leader in community food projects (Food Secure Canada, 2013) as well as its current standing as a leading agricultural producer in Ontario (ROW, 2011). NR was selected, not only because of its aptitude for agricultural production, but also because of the largely successful and recognizable local food and beverage brand. Finally, SC was selected because, although the focus on food system projects in SC is relatively new, the initiatives that have been implemented to date have proven to be highly successful.

This paper is organized in 5 sections. Section 1 provides an introduction to the major paper by outlining the purpose, research objectives, and methodology. Section 2 presents a literature review

exploring the potential for LFSs to impact communities, and the factors that are understood as integral for success. Section 3 outlines each of the three case studies in three parts. First, a general background for the three areas is provided, followed by summaries of the key informant interviews. A narrative timeline consolidates the information, gathered from the various sources including key informant accounts and various government reports, organizational websites and newspaper articles. In Section 4, an analysis of the experience of the community and how it compares with the discussion described in the literature is presented. Finally, Section 5 includes some broad recommendations for others initiating similar LFS projects based on the successes and pitfalls observed in the three study areas.

1.4 Research Methods

The research methods used for this major research paper were a literature review and key informant interviews. The combination of these methods allowed for a "behind the scenes" understanding of the work being done in the development of the LFS.

Understanding the potential of the LFS from both a theoretical perspective as well as through the recounted experiences of projects on the ground can help municipalities engage in LFS initiatives and identify recommendations before moving forward. A literature review was completed to explore the current discussion surrounding the food system in the planning context. To begin, factors that have contributed to the perceived issues with the current food system were identified, followed by an overview of the many "non-rural" issues food systems planning can effectively address. Next, the unique roles of community stakeholders and planners in the development of LFSs were explored. Finally, identified gaps in research and potential for policy will be analyzed.

Case studies of each of the identified areas were completed by first examining relevant government reports as well as a range of grey literature, including organizational websites and newspaper articles in each of the three case study areas. Secondly, key informant interviews were

conducted. Key informants participated in a semi-structured, open-ended interview to offer additional insight based on their lived experience with projects happening on the ground. They were able to provide additional information with respect to the process involved in bringing the discussion of LFSs to the table, as well as shed light on the successes and pitfalls of the experience to date. In addition, the interviewees provided valuable lessons to share with others. Additional research was done to fill in any outstanding information following the interviews.

2 Literature Review

The food system has effectively disappeared from the consumer's view. With the majority of the global population living in urban centers, the average urbanite has little or no concept of the complexity of the virtually invisible industrial system. Fortunately, this is beginning to change. In recent years, the mainstream invisible food system has come under critical scrutiny as a growing number of concerns arise with respect to our failure to understand the LFS and the perceived negative implications for food safety, local economies, the natural environment, as well as individuals' health and well-being (Blay-Palmer & Donald, 2008; Mount et al., 2013; Pothukuchi & Kaufman, 1999). Not surprisingly, a growing number of producers and consumers across North America are demanding that the food system be brought back into focus and the once understood urban-rural links be re-established (Sonnino, 2009).

Interestingly, a growing number of researchers suggest that the once exclusively rural subject of food systems planning is gaining relevance and attention as a means of addressing a range of urban issues. As communities become increasingly aware of the potential for local food systems to address issues related to health and well-being, food security, social justice, environmental degradation and

economic development, the topic is taking the stage in various planning and development initiatives, both urban and rural. Of particular note is the Healthy Community movement.

The purpose of this literature review is to understand the current discussion and relevance of food systems as they are seen in the context of planning. This is accomplished by first developing an understanding of the factors that resulted in the mainstream broken or invisible food system causing issues today. Next, the potential for alternative or LFSs planning to address a wide range of non-rural issues in the realm of social, economic, and environmental health is explored. The literature review concludes with a discussion of identified opportunities and constraints, and examples of observed successes and pitfalls of projects on the ground. Further, a discussion surrounding the role of community in successful local food system projects is offered; the literature suggests a community's members are a project's greatest asset. Finally, the role of planners in food systems planning, the identified gaps in research as well as the growing need for additional policy are will be discussed and analyzed.

2.1 The Invisible Food System – Bringing food back into Focus

The process of consumers becoming estranged from the food system was not sudden, as notable changes began to take root in the North American food landscape in the 1800s (Blay-Palmer, 2008; Pothukuchi & Kaufman, 1999). A number of factors have contributed to the current "low visibility" or invisible food system which is common today. A discussion of some of the key reasons, including the definition of urban, technological advancements resulting in industrialization, as well as urban growth and the resulting loss of farmland, will be described below.

Historically, the creation of cities was made possible with surplus food production (Pothukuchi & Kaufman, 1999) and natural resources becoming available in surrounding areas (Sonnino, 2009). Early urban dwellers would have relied on a predominantly localized food system based on direct

"production-consumption connections" (Blay-Palmer, 2008, p. 17). In the early twentieth century, this well understood urban-rural dependence resulted in the definition of cities as settlements where inhabitants could not produce food (Pothukuchi & Kaufman, 1998). Although this definition would suggest a need for maintaining a relationship between agricultural producers and urban consumers, instead, this distinction laid the ground work for many of the issues that are still prominent today.

By defining urban areas as non-agricultural, issues related to food, agriculture and the food system became categorized as not urban, but distinctly rural (Campbell, 2004; Pothukuchi & Kaufman, 1999). In addition, further distinctions were made by identifying issues which were indisputably urban, such as housing, transportation, or economic development (Sonnino, 2009). With food removed from the urban conversation, the appreciation for the once integral urban-rural link began to fade with time (Born & Purcell, 2006; Feenstra, 2001; Pothukuchi & Kaufman, 1999; Sonnino, 2009).

By the twentieth century, populations were growing rapidly with an unprecedented number of people living in urban centers (Sonnino, 2009). Cities expanded to accommodate the larger populations by thoughtlessly overtaking and destroying surrounding farmland. The advent of new technologies facilitated the ongoing disconnect between urban and rural. Mechanized farming, improved transportation, refrigeration and food processing provided the tools required to transform the food system (Pothukuchi & Kaufman, 1999; Sonnino, 2009). In addition, this perpetuated a misguided belief that urban centers are capable of existing without access to any local resources. As this perception continued to grow, an understanding of the value of localized farming further diminished, and the destruction of adjacent resources, including farmland, went largely unnoticed (Pothukuchi & Kaufman, 1999).

With the rural-urban link effectively decimated, the food system continued to shift and change to the point that the production, distribution and sale of food, in many ways, became no different than

manufacturing cars (Blay-Palmer & Donald, 2008). The impacts of these changes are evident today as the average Canadian consumer tends to be unaware of where his/her food comes from or what it means to be part of a food system. For many, the concept of a food system conjures images of meticulously managed supermarkets and countless restaurants open at all hours of the day providing food options suitable for every lifestyle choice (Pothukuchi & Kaufman, 1999). Consumers also understand that emergency food systems are managed to ensure food is available for those in need of assistance. Not surprisingly, with so many operational food sources at their finger tips, food is perceived to be easy to access and for many it is also affordable. As such, for many there is no reason to believe that there are issues related to the current food system. With the food system completely out of sight, and deceivingly appearing to be functional, the distinction of classifying food as non-urban is taken a step further and the issue of food and agriculture is perceived to be one to be addressed at a higher level of government, either national or even "supra-national (Sonnino, 2009, p. 431).

For these unaware consumers, it can be argued that ignorance is bliss because the realities of the food system are not what they seem. Campbell (2004) explains that the corporate or globalized food system's key priorities lie in "profit maximization and market dominance" (p. 342). The system can be identified by a number of key characteristics. First, it requires high-level specialization, exceptional efficiency and standardization. Further, it is heavily dependent on biotechnology and large-scale agriculture supported by government inputs. Next, all processing, marketing and distribution is vertically integrated within the corporation to ensure complete control over the process. Finally, the finished product's success depends on a guaranteed low-cost and a system reliant on imports and exports. A break-down of the invisible system to these basic components or characteristics, in effect, illustrates that Blay-Palmer and Donald's (2008) comparison of the current food system, with the production of commodity vehicles, is not far off. Further, a discussion of the food system with reference to the outlined characteristics effectively brings to light the potential to damage local economies.

Commonly, the invisible food system demands large-scale production of a pre-determined engineered crop or livestock as uniform (Campbell, 2004). This need for standardization in the global food system, leaves little room for small-scale farmers, particularly those who have a preference in terms of the seed they grow and livestock they raise. This current approach to food systems planning has demonstrated that it is not an effective strategy for communities to achieve sustainability for two key reasons (Sonnino, 2009). First, the producers, even after they have worked to meet corporate requirements, "have not been guaranteed a fair price, and secondly, too many consumers do not have access to affordable healthy food" (Sonnino, 2009, p. 431). Understanding the above mentioned implications of the current food system on local community health may lead to individuals and municipalities recognizing the need for change; planners can play a key part in facilitating that process.

2.2 Employing Local Food Systems Planning – Notes for Planners

A general understanding of food systems planning is particularity important to planning professionals because the health of a LFS speaks directly to its sustainability (Feenstra, 2001). The way in which food is accessed, grown, processed, distributed and eaten has a direct impact on the social, economic, environmental and spiritual well-being of the community (Feenstra, 2001). In order to achieve this level of positive impact and meaning from a food systems project, planners should take initial steps to understand the community before attempting to arrive at an agreeable solution (Campbell, 2004; Feenstra, 2001). Campbell (2004) explains that developing a thorough understanding of the community's stakeholders and existing food system is a necessary first step and can be achieved with a stakeholder analysis, which is a tool used to identify overlapping goals and interests within a community as part of an effort to identify opportunities for collaboration. Not surprisingly, the tool is often employed by mediators working to resolve disputes. Although the process may appear to be time consuming, a stakeholder analysis can assist planners in avoiding miscommunications and subsequent mediocre solutions to complex food systems problems.

In line with this thinking, Feenstra (2001) offers insights from lessons learned from past projects. A case study analysis revealed two major themes which were consistently noted in successful projects. First, Feenstra (2001) suggests that projects in their formative spaces, benefit immensely from "created space". Projects where the facilitator effectively created social, political, intellectual and economic space saw the greatest success. A brief description of each type of space and its potential impact on a community project, as described by Feenstra (2001), follows. Social space provides community members with a safe environment where they can come together to discuss, plan, and build trust, as well as establish a common goal or vision with community participants for their project moving forward. Social space plays an important role in building social capital and is arguably the glue piecing the new food systems initiative together. Feenstra (2001) explains that the health of the created social space can provide a clear indicator of how successful a final project will be. Related to, and dependent on social space, is political space. Political space encompasses the work done from the onset of a project, as a group works collectively to inspire changes to policy at a local or regional level, Feenstra (2001) argues. Intellectual space is the vision that drives the outcomes of the project. Throughout the process, intellectual space must be maintained with ongoing reflection, analysis and evaluation (Feenstra, 2001). It is important to remember that the evaluation processes can be risky, as setting the wrong scope can limit the understanding of the project's impacts. Economic space relates to financial capital driving the project and ultimately re-circulating into the community. Securing funding at the start of a project, alongside a responsible manager, is essential to success (Feenstra, 2001).

The second major theme Feenstra (2001) suggested is the three "Ps": public participation, partnership and principles. Public participation first and foremost is essential because participants are a project's greatest asset. In order to involve the local heroes, the public participation process must provide the community with real decision-making power. Partnerships with community stakeholders improve access to resources, as well as the ability to effectively analyze and evaluate project outcomes.

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Strong partnerships increase the likelihood for long-term success and project growth. Finally, principles

and values speak to the group's deep-set or guiding values, Feenstra (2001) explains. Groups that are

collectively passionate about a common goal are far more likely to survive major barriers and pitfalls

than groups that have developed just one or two of the other P's.

In recent years, the interest in LFS planning as a tool to bring positive change to a community

has been a growing topic of discussion. This is an important step for the planning community, as not

long ago gaps were identified in the profession's holistic approach. Criticisms were raised by Pothukuchi

and Kaufman (1999) following an observation that the food system had not been taken into

consideration in any past projects. Since these criticisms were brought forward, an increased focus has

been placed on food system planning, and numerous initiatives have taken place in communities around

the world. Professional planning associations have also drawn attention to the shortcomings identified

by Pothukuchi and Kaufman (1999), and developed guidelines for planners to take into consideration

when moving forward with community initiatives in the food system planning realm. Further, new

formal education opportunities, centered on food system planning, have become available (Hammer,

2004). Arguably, not all planners require a formal education in food systems planning but do require

access to resources, such as those created by professional associations, in order to effectively raise

awareness of the issues and propose appropriate steps moving forward.

Today, professional planning associations are addressing the criticism of Pothukuchi and

Kaufman (1999) by calling on planning professionals to address the aspect of food. The Ontario

Professional Planners Institute's (OPPI) *Healthy Communities and Planning for Food Systems in Ontario;*

A Call to Action, for example, notes that as the demand for local food continues to grow, it becomes

increasingly apparent that an increasing number of people in Ontario wish to be better connected to

their LFS (OPPI, 2011). As such, the OPPI suggests that this demand calls on planners to better address

issues related to the food system, reminding planning professionals that the food system plays a key

role in developing "complete and healthy communities" as a result of its implications on the social, economic and environmental aspects of the community (OPPI, 2011, pg. 1). The *Call to Action* was developed in response to the overwhelming interest in LFS related issues demonstrated by both urban and rural planners present at the OPPI symposium in 2010. With a growing number of planning professionals currently involved in LFS-focused work, and many more are expressing an interest in becoming involved, it is becoming clear that planners have the influence required to advocate for meaningful change.

The OPPI identified the Key Planning Issues of Food from a number of perspectives. The key issues include a need for improved links between urban and rural communities, the integration of food systems into planning policies at a provincial and regional level, and identifying and mitigating the impacts of barriers to LFS planning. Additional key planning discussion is on the impact of food planning related to increased demands on water, the need for best management practices to promote sustainable farming, the protection of farmland to curb urban sprawl, and preparing for climate change and its anticipated impacts on the food system. Further key issues are economic development growing from connecting local producers with local markets, food entrepreneurship, renewable energy production and agri-tourism, for example.

In addition, the OPPI's *Call to Action* speaks to the complexity of food systems planning and the increasing need for educators and researchers to explore the subject. Also, it reminds planners of their important role to connect the various stakeholders in the community in order to effectively understand and address the issues impacting each community. Finally, citizens are encouraged to actively become involved and to become familiar with planning concepts. The *Healthy Communities and Planning for Food Systems in Ontario; A Call to Action* is part of a series of documents or guides created by the OPPI that discuss strategies to engage in planning for healthy communities. The Healthy Communities movement works to improve the health and well-being of a community in a measurable way by first

understanding community values and identifying available resources in order to arrive at meaningful

solutions (Noris & Pittman, 2000). Noris and Pittman (2000) suggest that the success of the Healthy

Communities movement's approach to community development is that it relies on a strong community

relationship and trust, as well as listening to a community's needs and utilizing local skills and talent.

Further, it calls for cooperation between various levels of government, and encourages the many

departments within them to work collaboratively toward community health. The Healthy Community

groups have achieved a great deal of success in communities across North America, with numerous

examples in the United States. This approach to community planning is very much in line with the

strategies and recommendations discussed by both Feenstra (2001) and Sonnino (2009).

The discussion to this point draws from examples and experiences described in the literature. By

exploring these examples, important insights and strategies moving forward can be are identified.

Through an examination of various municipal efforts, Sonnino (2009) explains that cities have

demonstrated that they can learn from each other and, in many cases, are keen to do so. This identified

a significant opportunity for additional research for academics, and a new focus for community

engagement for practitioners. Researchers can work toward "knowledge building" at the municipal

level as part of an effort to assist both planners and policy makers in developing an understanding of the

food system and its limitations, while social scientists, such as planners, can work to facilitate inter-city

"knowledge-exchange" (Sonnino, 2009, p. 433). The question as to whether or not regional or national

governments could be persuaded to engage in shared learning has been raised among municipalities.

The potential of an effective knowledge-exchange is currently underway through the increased

attention to the subject of the LFS at the OPPI's recent symposium (OPPI, 2011) as well as through the

creation of the *Bill 36, Local Food Act 2013* in the Province of Ontario (Province of Ontario, 2013).

The main objectives of the *Act* are to develop a successful local food economy, increase

awareness of local food, and support the creation of new local food markets. In addition, the *Act*

amends the *Taxation Act, 2007*, which provides a tax incentive to local farmers who donate surplus

produce to registered charities and food banks (Ontario, 2013). This new legislation is the first of its

kind in Canada, and if it proves to be successful in its efforts, for example the reporting process

illustrates a positive impact on the accessibility of local food, or to improve the local economy, it could

very well be trailblazing. The *Act* also promises to improve access to local food in schools, cafeterias,

grocery stores, and restaurants as well as to improve the economy, with a $30 million investment over

the next three years, to support job creation and "innovative local food projects" (Ministry of

Agriculture and Food, 2013). Currently, legislation at a federal level has not been enacted, while a

growing number of upper tier and lower tier municipalities are working to integrate policies in support

of local-level food system initiatives into their Regional and Official Plans (ROP/OP) respectively.

Researchers suggest that the planner should take on the role of project facilitator with a

visionary capacity, as an advocate for policy change (Campbell, 2004; Feenstra, 2001; Sonnino, 2009).

This role should be taken on with consideration for community context in order to gauge the

appropriateness of the proposed initiative. Despite the demonstrated potential for success with local

food initiatives, it is important to note that LFS planning is not always the best choice (Born & Purcell,

2006; Campbell, 2004; Feenstra, 2001). Born and Purcell (2006) raise strong cautions about what they

have termed as "the local trap"; although there is no reason to dispute the positive benefits that can

arise from local-scale food projects, it is important to note that a local-scale may not always be

appropriate. The local trap seems to be perpetuated by a misconception that local is inherently better,

when in fact "local-scale food systems are equally likely to be just or unjust, sustainable or

unsustainable, secure or insecure" (Born & Purcell, 2006, p. 195). Too often, the discussion of local

appears to suggest a correlation between local and a guaranteed positive impact for the community,

environment and economy. Similar to Campbell (2006) and Feenstra (2001), a case is made for taking

time to appreciate the context of the community under consideration (Born & Purcell, 2006).

To illustrate this point, the reader is asked to consider a hypothetical proposal of a local food initiative in Arizona (Born & Purcell, 2006). Naturally, this can be filed under "bad idea" because any environmental benefit achieved through reduced food miles, for example, would have been outweighed by irrigation requirements. With the proposed project site in the desert, it is easy not to fall into the trap and recognize the misallocation of resources, but the answer will not always be so clear. Planners working to establish a LFS that is sustainable must first identify a community's strengths and resources, then work to maximize them if they wish to launch an initiative with a chance at long-term success.

Pothukuchi and Kaufman (1999), for example, suggest the creation of a Municipal Department of Food that would be responsible for market analysis, identify short and long-term planning around community food issues, and alert the public to any food security issues. As well, the potential success of Food Policy Councils, as demonstrated in Toronto, for example, suggests it would be a worthwhile initiative.

Finally, Campbell (2004) draws attention to the need for a common language to drive discussion of practitioners and academics in the field, particularly surrounding food systems planning. The overall goal should be to "build a common table" to host the ever-changing discussion on the subject (Campbell, 2004, p. 353).

2.3 Literature Summary and Key Consideration for Case Study Analysis

In summary, a number of lessons can be drawn from the literature for planners. First, planners are encouraged to take steps to ensure the discipline is living up to its claim of taking a holistic approach. This can be achieved by ensuring that food and the food system are understood to be an important aspect of the planning practice in need of attention. Next, community buy-in and meaningful community participation have a demonstrated potential to, first, ensure agreeable solutions are achieved for all involved stakeholders who will then help guarantee that, second, the project will

achieve long-term success. Further, there is a great deal of importance inherent in considering the

needs, interests and resources of the stakeholders in the community as well as the physical

characteristics of the place in which any planning decisions are to be made. Finally, a call for additional

research has been made across the board.

3 Food Systems Planning in Waterloo Region, Niagara Region & Simcoe County

3.1 Case Study 1: Waterloo Region

<u>Background and Notable Achievements</u>

The Regional Municipality of Waterloo or Waterloo Region (WR) is a community located in

Southern Ontario, approximately 100 kilometers west of Toronto, 80 kilometers north-west of Hamilton

and west of the City of Guelph. WR was created in 1973 and is comprised of three urban municipalities,

Cambridge, Kitchener, and Waterloo, as well as the rural townships of North Dumfries, Wellesley,

Wilmot, and Woolwich (ROW, 2010).

WR is currently one of the fastest-growing communities in Ontario and according to the 2011

census WR holds 507, 096 residents, representing a 6.1 percent increase in population from the year

2001 (Statistics Canada, 2012a). To supplement the census data, WR staff work to generate a year-end

population and household estimate (Martin & Parkin, 2014). The estimate is determined based on the

census data with the addition of an approximate number of temporary residents such as university and

college students; this places the regional year-end 2013 population at 563,000. These estimates are

intended to assist regional and area municipal bodies when making various decisions. Further, a portion

of population growth can be attributed to the immigrant population which in 2011 was reported to have

exceeded non-immigrant population growth (ROW, 2011). WR can expect to continue to grow.

WR has a rich and varied history that undoubtedly has influenced what it has become today. The

area was initially inhabited by a wide variety of settlers including groups of German, German-

Pennsylvanian Mennonite, British, and Scottish-Celtic ancestry (ROW, 2010; Vinodrai, 2010). From the

skills and expertise of these early settlers grew the region's tradition of manufacturing, and agricultural

production (ROW, 2010; Vinodrai, 2010). Not surprisingly, WR is still known today for its agricultural

culture and production, as well as its extensive efforts related to local food projects. As such, WR is

considered a leader nationally and internationally for the high quantity and quality of its community

local food projects, and has been recognized for its innovative and comprehensive work on community

food systems (Vinodrai, 2010).

Given that agriculture is the largest land use in the WR with over 65 percent of its land classified

as farmland in 2006 by Statistics Canada (ROW, 2011), an interest in LFSs is not surprising. Further, WR

is currently "one of the most economically-productive agricultural land bases in the province" (Nelson et

al., 2012, p. 2). Xuereb and Desjardin (2005) explain that the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural

Affairs representatives often refer to WR as "the king of small farms" (p. 20). In 2000, WR was the

second most-productive region in Ontario on a per acre basis, because their farms are smaller and more

labour-intensive than average (HCA, 2003; Xuereb & Desjardin, 2005). According to the 2011 Agricultural

Census, this trend continues; farms in the WR continue to generate among the highest incomes in the

province (ROWPH, 2013). As such, WR's farms can be described as small and mighty.

3.1.2 Key Informant Interviews - Waterloo Region

3.1.2.1 Key Informant Interview 1 (KI1): Region of Waterloo Public Health

<u>Background and Notable Projects</u>

An interview with Waterloo Region Public Health (WRPH) staff was conducted in order to

understand the process involved in identifying the health of the LFS as a priority in the department. KI1

explained that the priorities of public health departments are determined at a provincial level. The

Province sets very clear, specific and detailed public health mandates with well-outlined deliverables

which must be accomplished and reported on annually. To date, local food has not been identified by the Province as a public health mandate. Public health mandates center on a number of defined social determinants of health that fit into the general categories of environmental, economic, and social aspects of health. As such, the work on the LSF in WR, which began in 2000, grew out of a concern for chronic disease and an effort to reduce diet-related chronic disease. KI1 explained that WRPH approached the issue from a standpoint which did not place blame on individuals for their choices but, instead, analyzed the environments in which choices are made. This position brought to light the connection between individual diet choices and the health of the food system. KI1 suggests that an understanding of this connection inspired WRPH to not only examine the current environments in which food becomes available, but additionally explore the potential for policy changes to support new initiatives that further the health and sustainability of the LFS.

KI1 explained that the first steps to formalizing WRPH's interest in local food came out of a study that was completed in 2003. The research objective was to determine the level of interest among key stakeholders with regard to creating an organization that would link producers and consumers. This resulted in the creation of Foodlink, an organization that still exists today, along with the first notable food systems initiative in WR, the *Buy Local! Buy Fresh! Map*. To date, the *Map* effectively works to link local consumers with local producers, and Foodlink continues to expand and publish the *Buy Local! Buy Fresh! Map* each year.

By 2005, there was a growing interest in local food. In response, WRPH explored the idea of developing an organization with a broader focus beyond just local food issues and farmers, which would work to effectively represent all the sectors of the food system. The proposed organization would monitor the success of efforts geared towards developing a healthier food system as well as provide suggestions for future action items or changes. The group would have a voice where WRPH was silenced by limited jurisdiction. A recommendation was made through the *Towards a Healthy*

Community Food System in Waterloo Region – Interim Report and out of this process the Food Systems Roundtable was created in 2007. The Roundtable has proved to be particularly effective at pushing for policy changes, with the notable achievement being the amendment to the ROP in 2009, with a section that speaks to access to healthy and local food. Since the project's launch in 2000, there have been many achievements related to the LFS.

Project Challenges

As KI1 explained, "change takes time". A key challenge is that, to date, the WR has not seen any significant changes. Community members are often frustrated with the amount of time required to achieve the goals that have been set out. The Roundtable is proud of the changes made to the ROP in 2009, for example, but these changes have not been seen on the ground in municipalities and townships in WR. Residents are campaigning in Kitchener, Waterloo and Cambridge for by-laws that will support a community garden initiative, an objective that was addressed in the 2009 ROP amendment. Another notable challenge described by KI1 is rooted in the inherent challenges of not only recruiting and retaining volunteers, but determining effective strategies to constructively utilize their energy and enthusiasm.

Valuable Insights for future

KI1 suggests that, as a first step, one must work to bring people together around a shared vision and values, be clear in what is wanted, and provide a clear way for individuals to get involved. There are many community residents and business owners interested in furthering the LFS, but everyone approaches the project from their own perspective and concept of what next steps should be. Finding a way to focus all that energy on a common purpose will likely help propel the movement more efficiently.

Why local food systems?

Bringing focus to the food system is important because it will exist independent of whether a community chooses to put energy into it or not, the KI1 explained. People need to eat, food is grown, and the waste is disposed. The key is to invest energy into building a food system that is healthier, more sustainable environmentally and provides people with access to healthier diets without too much additional effort, at a reasonable cost, while ensuring farmers and food industry employees are paid a fair wage.

3.1.3 Waterloo Region Timeline

WR defines a healthy food system as "one in which all residents have access to, and can afford to buy, safe, nutritious, and culturally-acceptable food that has been produced in an environmentally sustainable way and that sustains our rural communities" (RWPH, 2013, p. 2).

Despite the strong connection to food and agriculture, according to accounts of KI1 as well as available grey literature, prior to the year 2000 very few notable projects had been undertaken by regional agencies, organizations or local governments. Foodlink (2014) explains that the process began in the summer of 2000 when a unique mix of community stakeholders met to discuss strategies to improve food security in WR. These stakeholders, including WRPH, the community gardens network, emergency food organizations and local organic growers, despite their wide range of perspectives, agreed that work could be done to address growing issues of community food access in a manner that supported the local producers (Foodlink, 2014). Out of this discussion grew the first two successful food-focused initiatives in WR in 2002.

First, WRPH and Foodbank of Waterloo Region worked to expand the discussion to include broader community involvement (Foodlink, 2014). Soon, it became clear that direction and coordination of any proposed actions related to the food system were essential for success and a steering committee was formed. This steering committee incorporated in March 2002 as the non-profit

Foodlink Waterloo Region, an organization that works to bridge the urban-rural gap. Secondly, the new

Foodlink and WRPH worked in partnership to create a resource that could effectively connect

consumers with producers in the WR (Xuereb & Desjardin, 2005). The *Buy Local! Buy Fresh! Map*

identifies various products that are grown or raised in WR. The *Map* quickly began to have an impact on

the community. By 2004, producers noticed increased farm visits and sales while consumers explained

they associated the *Buy Local! Buy Fresh! Map* with building relationships with local farms as well as an

opportunity to spend quality time with family and educate children about food (Xuereb & Desjardins,

2005). Although the *Map* was not the first of its kind, its impact and success in WR inspired other

municipalities to follow suit and similar maps now exist in many communities (KI1, 2014).

The *Buy Fresh! Buy Local! Map* continues to be published annually by Foodlink. Foodlink's

mandate has shifted and changed since its inception in 2002; today, Foodlink operates as an

organization that promotes local food, addresses the needs of local consumers, farmers and the food

industry, and engages the community and decision makers through outreach and education.

The level of consumer buy-in and resulting success of *the Buy Local! Buy Fresh! Map* is likely the

result in a pre-existing consumer interest. In 2003, WRPH began to explore the potential of the LFS in

WR to impact the community and worked to assess the level of interest among community members to

support local food-focused initiatives. As such, WRPH conducted a survey that worked to gain insight

into "consumer attitudes and practices" surrounding the subject of local food (Xuereb & Desjardins,

2005, p. 21). The responses demonstrated overwhelming support for local food with 87.1 percent of

respondents suggesting they believed purchasing local food was important, and 71.3 percent suggesting

an interest and desire to buy local (Xuereb & Desjardins, 2005). Some of the reasons for buying local

included the perception that local food results in protection of farmland, support for farmers, reduced

need for imports, fewer miles traveled in transport, lower cost, and fresher cheaper products. As

consumer demands for access to local food continues to grow, a number of new businesses such as farm

stores and buying clubs have appeared, offering local and healthy food products (Xuereb & Desjardins, 2005).

Further, WRPH commissioned an Economic Impact Study of the Agriculture and Food-Related Sectors in WR (HCA, 2003). The *Growing Food Economy* report examined the impact of the agri-food sector on the local economy in WR. This focused on providing WRPH staff with the information required to develop relevant programming and to make informed policy recommendations in support of the LFS that "are economically sound, environmentally sustainable, and socially responsible" (HCA, 2003, p. i). The report made a number of recommendations for future action including steps to preserve farmland; to create of an agriculture and food advisory board; to develop a WR local food brand; to increase the demand for local food products; and to improve access to local food at supermarkets, and various institutions.

The need for improved access to local food at supermarkets was further identified by the *Food Flow Analysis Study* that was completed in 2005. The authors, supported by WRPH, analyzed the food system in WR in order to determine the amount of local food, specifically produced in WR, was being consumed locally (HCA, 2005). This was achieved by following a number of pre-defined "Food Basket" items and determining, for example, the availability of the products at supermarkets and convenience stores, and whether or not food processors sourced any content from WR.

The research demonstrated that sourcing food items that were locally grown, raised or processed in WR locally was challenging. Of the examined processed food items, none relied on WR producers exclusively for their ingredients. Similarly, supermarkets stocking Ontario produce often relied more heavily on suppliers from neighbouring regions than those in WR and, as such, the best avenue for consumers interested in accessing food products produced within WR, farm gates, famers markets, and select local retail markets offered the most reliable source of food products local to WR.

At this time, the question of how WRPH become involved in food systems initiatives arises. KI1 explain that WRPH's work on the LFS grew out of a public health mandate to address chronic disease, and the subsequent promotion of healthy-eating to help offset diet-related chronic disease. The Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care defines chronic diseases as "long-term diseases that slowly, over time, often progress in severity, and can often be controlled but rarely cured (MOHLTC, 2007). Cardiovascular disease, diabetes, cancer, arthritis and chronic depression are just a few examples of chronic diseases. Unfortunately, these diseases are highly prevalent among Canadians, and are very costly for the health care system. Fortunately, there are a number of behavioural or lifestyle changes that individuals can make in order to prevent chronic disease or help mitigate and manage symptoms. Among the changes that can have a significant impact on disease prevention is healthy eating.

Approaching the subject from a standpoint that did not blame individuals for their diet-related choices, but instead focused on examining the environments in which the choices were made (KI1; MOHLTC, 2007), clarified the connections amongst individual health, access to food, and the health of the food system. This marked the first step towards work on LFS-related projects in WR through the lens of public health as was previously described.

Moving forward, with an identified and growing interest in local food among community residents, WRPH became increasingly interested in the creation of a formal group or body that, in partnership with WRPH, would be responsible for coordinating and engaging key stakeholders from the various sectors involved in the food system (Xuereb & Desjardins, 2005). The body would be responsible for developing programs and influencing policy changes that will advance the health of the food system and ultimately the public (ROWPH, 2013). Further, the group would monitor and evaluate implemented projects to determine their impact on the community. Most importantly, the organization would have a voice where WRPH lacked jurisdiction and authority (KI1). A recommendation was made in the 2005 report *Toward a Healthy Food System for Waterloo Region* to create this group or body. A year later,

Council approved the idea and appointed WRPH staff to support the initiative. The process began with a group of eight representatives coming together to define the purpose and mission for the proposed organization. In 2007, the Waterloo Region Food Systems Roundtable formally came to existence and officially began its work in January of 2008. Like Foodlink, the Food Systems Roundtable's work stems from the collaborative efforts of a broad range of stakeholders, including farmers, retailers, and emergency food providers, to name a few. To date, one WRPH staff member splits their time so that half their week is spent supporting the Food Systems Roundtable's work.

Not surprisingly, the Food Systems Roundtable has had a positive impact on the food system in WR. For example, they have worked to define the six Food System Priorities in 2010 (FSRT, 2014). These priorities work to illustrate areas of the food system in need of attention in order for the LFS to improve. These include: food sovereignty, food policy, urban agriculture, local food infrastructure, farm visibility and access to healthy food. These priorities now drive the discussion around food in WR; this is seen in the manner in which the most recent report the on the current state of food, *Toward a Healthy Food System for Waterloo Region – An Update* was formatted and reflected on each of the above-mentioned food systems priorities.

In 2006, WR's interest in the LFS expanded to include the planning department as work in response to the *Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe* required attention. This relationship proved to be quite fruitful. From a public health standpoint, advocating for farmland preservation was difficult as it was not clearly in line with any provincial mandates. From a planning perspective, farmland preservation and zoning were mandated by the *Growth Plan*.

Another notable initiative is the Neighbourhood Markets project taken on by WRPH over the course of 2007 and 2008 (Maan Miedema, 2009). Like the Food Systems Round Table, the initiative grew out of a recommendation made in the 2005 *Towards a Healthy Food System for Waterloo – Interim*

Report. With funding from Lyle S. Hallman Foundation as well as Together 4 Health, TD Friends of the Environment, and St Mary's General Hospital, WRPH worked within five target communities in WR with known food-access issues and challenges with low income. The project had three key objectives: to increase the amount of fresh produce eaten, increase social connections and support local farmers. The project worked to engage the community in the planning process and successfully brought together 26 community partners. The seasonal markets proved to be successful and three of them continue to operate today (ROWPH, 2013). Key challenges or barriers to implementing neighbourhood markets stemmed from zoning and licensing regulations that prohibited the set-up of markets in parking lots in various municipalities within WR. As part of an effort to assist communities in WR in the process of implementing similar projects, changes were made the ROP in 2009 to include a clause requiring municipalities to amend their own OP to support the establishment of neighbourhood market projects.

Challenges not discussed with KI 1 include unforeseen barriers to farmland preservation. In response to *Growth Plan* regulations, WR made changes to its ROP. The *Growth Plan* mandated significant changes to development practices of the past by calling for high density, in-fill development in place of single-family home developments on greenfields or surrounding farmland. The resulting ROP was praised as one of "the most assertive strategies in the province to curb urban sprawl" (Jackson, April 2013). The new ROP, which was adopted in 2010, slatted 85 hectares of new land for development. Unfortunately, developers were outraged by the restrictions and spoke out against the decision with an appeal to the Ontario Municipal Board (OMB). Unfortunately for WR, a decision was made in favour of the developers and over 1,000 hectares of land were designated for development by the OMB (Jackson, April 2013). This is a particularly difficult situation considering WR had in fact followed the guidelines in the legislated *Growth Plan*, only to have the decision overturned.

Finally, the 100-Mile Market is an example of an initiative that demonstrated an initial success that, unfortunately, due to challenges that have yet to be explored and understood, is no longer

operational (ROWPH, 2013). The market, established in 2007, was a large wholesaler catering to restaurants, hotels, and public institutions including hospitals and schools. The company effectively pooled together over 100 producers from across WR in order to meet the needs of customers with consistently high-quality products. The project demonstrated a significant amount of initial success and was presented the Premier's Award for Agri-Food Innovation Excellence in 2009. Unfortunately, the company was bankrupt by 2011; however, further research to identify the cause of this failure has yet to be undertaken. There are valuable lessons to be learned from this initiative in terms of identifying the feasibility of local processing and distribution in the future.

3.2 Case Study 2: Niagara Region

3.2.1 Background Niagara Region

The Regional Municipality of Niagara, or Niagara Region (NR) is a community located in Southern Ontario. NR is adjacent to the United States border with New York State across the Niagara River, and is also in close proximity to a number of Canadian cities with Hamilton to the west, Toronto 130 kilometers to the north, Lake Erie to the south and Lake Ontario to the north. NR was created on January 1, 1970 and is comprised of 12 municipalities including Fort Erie, Grimsby, Lincoln, Niagara-on-the-Lake, Pelham, Port Colborne, St. Catharines, Thorold, Wainfleet, Welland, and West Lincoln (Niagara, 2014). NR is a best known for its natural heritage and natural beauty, and is known as a leader in tender fruit and grape production in Canada (Planscape, 2003). NR hosts numerous seasonal festivals that, along with its beautiful landscapes, draw many tourists into the community each year.

NR has a long and established history of agricultural production. It is consistently recognized as one of the most agriculturally-productive areas in Canada (Planscape, 2003). NR has over 230, 000 acres of agricultural land, and more than 2,200 farms (Niagara Region, 2014d). NR's placement between the Niagara Escarpment and Lakes Ontario and Erie creates a microclimate that allows for the production of

a wide variety of tender fruits, nuts, and vegetables that are suited to few other places in Canada

(Planscape, 2003). Further, NR's land base is predominantly classified under the Canada Land Inventory

as prime agricultural; this is particularly significant as only 5 percent of Canada's land fits into this

classification. Not surprisingly, agriculture drives the local economy and the NR's planning framework

has worked to manage the resource (Planscape, 2003). However, NR has not been entirely successful in

protecting its land resources, as development pressures due to the construction of the Queen Elizabeth

Way resulted in long-term negative impacts on the tender fruit production in the area.

NR, although still growing, has experienced a population growth that is below the provincial

average. The 2011 census reported a total Regional population of 431, 346; this represents a 0.9

percent population growth since 2006 (Statistics Canada, 2011c). Further, NR's residents are getting

older; the 45 to 49 age bracket accounts for the largest portion of the population.

3.2.2 Key Informant Interviews – Niagara Region

3.2.2.1 Key Informant 6 (KI6): Planners Niagara Region
Background and notable achievements

In NR, the subject of food has been on the agenda since the region was first established in the

1970s. This was evidenced by the immediate creation of a regional Agricultural Subcommittee alongside

the creation of NR. KI6 explained that the smaller communities which came together to form NR would

have historically had their own Agricultural Subcommittees. As such, the tradition was carried forward

in order to maintain the same community engagement opportunities that residents would have

previously enjoyed within the new regional government structure. KI6 explained that, as a result of this

long history of community engagement, community members often reach out to Regional staff with

requests for assistance when exploring the potential of various new initiatives. As a result of this

relationship, many farms have benefited from Regional support in the past. Furthermore, NR has offered

numerous presentations on the subject of agriculture and local food, and has been invited to participate in many initiatives including the development and growth of the wine industry.

Needless to say, NR has a long history of working with the agricultural community in a variety of ways. The Regional Planning Department, for example, focused on land preservation long before it was a requirement outlined in the *Provincial Policy Statement* or the *Growth Plan*. Nevertheless, there was a process involved in bringing increased attention and focus to the idea of local food, and the LFS.

As mentioned, food and agriculture have always been important to the community. KI6 suggests that nearly everyone in NR knows someone who is directly involved in agriculture in some capacity, either as a farmer, a farm hand, in processing, equipment repair, and more. Despite the connection to agriculture, many things have changed over the years. In the 1950s and 1960s, for example, the food system was not a topic to discuss; it was simply another aspect of everyday life KI6 said. The food system was understood quite simply as the value-chain and people were very aware of their role in it. Small changes over time resulted in the community moving away from traditional practices and the deep-set relationship with local producers. In other words, the once obvious connection has become blurred and damaged.

The shift to work on local food and agriculture as the LFS, instead of the value-chain, began following the Niagara Smart Growth Summit in 2001. Discussion at the Smart Growth Summit on the sustainability of the community prompted Council to form the Agricultural Task Force in 2002. The Agricultural Task Force, similar to the Agricultural Subcommittee, would provide members of the agricultural community with a venue to make recommendations to Council, contribute to the implementation of meaningful community projects, and work to influence policy changes. The Agricultural Task Force, for example, took the lead in developing an *Agricultural Action Plan* that has

inspired a number of successful projects, continues to influence decisions in NR and has inspired a number of projects.

The revitalization of the Vineland Research Institute is an example of a project that grew out of the *Agricultural Action Plan*. Over the years, the Institute has not only been a great community resource, but also a source of pride for residents of NR, but more recently the Institute has been in decline, KI6 explained. The Task Force recommended that work be done to revitalize the Institute, and the subsequent the work effectively "brought it back from the dead". The re-birth of the Vineland Research Institute has already demonstrated a great deal of success. Among the interesting research initiatives taking place at the Institute is the work to better understand current consumer preferences. An improved understanding of consumer preferences aids farmers in identifying new markets, and allows them to prepare for upcoming agricultural trends.

Another key project that influences the current work and focus on the LFS is the *Regional Agricultural Economic Impact Study,* completed in 2003. KI6 suggested that the Study's results drew attention to the positive economic impact of agriculture in NR. This Study was the first of its kind in NR, and effectively encouraged people to look at agriculture in a different way. The results of this Study were eye opening for many people and created a new emphasis on food and agriculture.

KI6 explained that although the planning department has a long history of working with the agricultural community on the subject of food and agriculture, the current LFS focus arrived in the NR planning department in 2008. This is of particular significance because changes were being made to the way in which work on the LFS would be approached. Traditionally, NR has approached the subject of food and agriculture from the perspective of the producer. Significant work has been done to build relationships with farmers in NR, as well as to seek input and feedback with respect to policy and other municipal projects. The changes in 2008 resulted in a new approach to food systems planning in NR.

KI6 explained that, for the first time, the perspective of the consumer, in addition to that of the

producer, was to be taken into consideration.

KI6 suggest that in NR culture and agriculture are linked. The communities within NR celebrate

the seasons with festivals showcasing food and beverages including strawberry, grapes, peaches, and

lavender, as these crops reach their prime each year. NR residents really understand the seasons, KI6

explained. Nevertheless, they touched on some of the noticeable changes that have taken place in the

community. These changes may have influenced this new, consumer-focused approach to food systems

planning in NR.

In recent years, there has been a notable resurgence in the interest for more traditional

approaches to accessing and preserving food. Canning, for example, has become increasingly popular

and a growing number of community organizations are offering instructional classes; community

gardens are being established in municipalities across NR; there are a growing number of Farmers'

Markets; and a visible increase around promoting community festivals has been seen. With the amount

of demonstrated interest in local food in NR, KI6 suggested that the natural next step in building a LFS is

to focus on improving access to local products and rebuilding the local connections between consumers

and producers. The Economic Development Office (EDO) in NR has played a key role in the work on the

LFS. Although the EDO is a separate, non-governmental organization, it has been undertaking marketing

initiatives in support of the LFS and has worked collaboratively with NR on numerous projects.

<u>Valuable Insights</u>

KI6 explain that by establishing committees, such as the Agriculture Sub-Committee and the

Agricultural Task force, NR has successfully built long-standing relationships with the community. It is

not uncommon for community members to reach out to the municipality for support when taking on

new initiatives, often related to local food. NR, for example, has worked to provide presentations to the

community on the subject of agriculture and local food, and has been invited to participate in various initiatives, including work to develop the wine industry KI6 said.

Through this work, the KI6 explains that they have gathered valuable insight and discuss a lesson learned from their work with the community on LFS initiatives. KI6suggest it is especially important to approach community projects without personal biases, or preconceived notions of the desired project outcomes. Project facilitators should leave it up to the community to decide on project goals and intended results since they will be directly influenced by the proposed work. Further, investment of time and energy to allow for meaningful dialogue amongst stakeholders will help participants foster working relationships, ensure agreeable and appropriate solutions are reached, and encourage participants who are keen to work collectively to implement LFS initiatives. KI6 suggest that the same results could not have been achieved if each group worked independently in isolation from the others.

KI6 implied that a project in NR which could have benefited from this lesson is the Niagara Culinary Trail. The project began with funding from the Trillium Foundation. At the start of the project, approximately 100 culinary trail points had been identified. Unfortunately, assembling representatives from the 100 trail points in order to discuss and arrive at a single efficient, effective, financially feasible and sustainable strategy for implementation and maintenance proved to be a challenge that could not easily be overcome. KI6 explained that additional issues have resulted from the challenges inherent with securing additional operational funding to support project operations beyond the initial start-up. As such, the Niagara Culinary Trail provides an example of an exceptional project proposal that has fallen short as a result of ineffective engagement or outreach to the intended stakeholders during the project launch, and subsequent issues with ongoing maintenance due to a lack of ongoing funding opportunities suggest KI6.

<u>Project Challenges</u>

KI6 explained that when CanGro, the last cannery in NR, closed its doors in 2008, it was a shock to the entire community: residents, farmers, business owners, municipal staff, Council members, everyone. The aftermath saw many farmers ripping out their orchards in order to transition away from fruit production toward soybeans. KI6 suggest that this is not the most constructive use of the best farmland in Canada.

Nevertheless, the agricultural sector is incredibly important in NR and it is important for the regional government to find new ways to support it. KI6 suggest that the increased attention to the LFS at a regional level was likely driven by community members. KI6 said the process came together organically as Councilors and regional department staff noticed a growing number of community members across NR requesting support for initiatives related to the LFS. With so many community members interested in undertaking similar initiatives individually, the planning department took on the role of facilitator. NR planning department staff worked to connect community members by rebuilding old networks as well as to establish new connections as part of an effort to advance LFS initiatives.

KI6 notes that, despite the efforts of staff members to create these networks, at times it seems there are too many groups, people and communities within NR working to implement LFS initiatives. Although work towards creating a LFS that is healthy and sustainable requires community buy-in, support and input, KI6 explains that keen community interest in NR has resulted in unique challenges. Despite efforts of NR staff to consolidate community efforts, for example, many projects are being established as isolated efforts with no connection or collaboration with NR staff or other community initiatives. As such, little can be done to ensure that the work being done is effectively contributing to the LFS in a positive way. Further, NR has seen numerous instances of duplicated programs across NR. This duplication is not a means of undermining another group's efforts, but simply the result of a lack of

communication and awareness across the system. KI6 explained that the LFS in NR would benefit from an effort to "connect all the dots". A single point person that would be made known to the community with the main purpose of helping community members streamline their initiatives, pool resources, and work in collaboration with each other could help move the LFS forward in a positive way, KI6 suggested.

3.2.2.2 Key Informant 7 (KI7): Public Health Niagara Region
<u>Background and notable achievements</u>

An interview with a staff person with knowledge of the Public Health Department (PHD) in NR illustrated work taking place from a public health standpoint. As was the case in WR, a key focus of the PHD is addressing chronic illness through the promotion of lifestyle changes, such as healthy eating. KI7 explained that healthy food can be imported from China, or produced by a local grower. Further, locally produced food is not inherently healthy; locally-produced sausages or jams, for example, although delicious, are not necessarily healthy. With this understanding, the PHD integrated the subject of the LFS into their work from the perspective of improving access to healthy food. As such, the main goal of the PHD was to explore the policies within the food system that could improve access to healthy food for all residents in NR.

KI7 explained that there is a complex process involved in growing, raising, distributing food and disposing of food waste. As such, it is important that consumers learn to understand the bigger process or puzzle that spans beyond food and eating. Food can be understood to be just one piece of the large and complex food system puzzle. Another piece is economic development. Economic development relates back to a number of the social determinants of health, including income distribution, food security, and affordable housing, that drive the thinking of public health departments. As such, KI7 suggested the economic development piece is of particular interest for the PHD in NR for a number of reasons. First, connecting local producers with local consumers can help ensure that farms survive and thrive; in turn, successful farms can provide a reliable, source of healthy food for residents of NR.

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Second, a LFS that is thriving and sustainable may address the current issue of food deserts in the NR though increased opportunities to access fresh, local food. In NR there are currently individuals who rely on gas stations or corner stores as a primary source of food, KI7 said. This is often the case in communities where there are no grocery stores or farmers markets located nearby.   As such, individuals are required to travel in order to access fresh food, a requirement that creates further challenges for individuals without access to a vehicle, particularly in NR where the public transit options are very limited.

The aim of PHD in the process of exploring the possible connections between public health promotion and support for the LFS was to understand the full picture of the work currently taking place across NR. KI7 explained that it was important to first build relationships with community stakeholders, such as other regional government departments and community organizations currently undertaking LFS initiatives in NR. By bringing together a range of identified leaders and stakeholders who would represent various sectors including, health, food security, planning, agriculture, to name a few, the assembled groups were able to build a more complete picture of how each of the represented areas overlapped and intertwined. The relationships built through this process laid the groundwork for the more recent initiative taken on by the planning department, the Agricultural Agro-Food Strategy, which is expected to be completed in the spring of 2015.

Why local?

KI7 explained that work on the LFS has been a top priority in NR, particularly in the planning department, but the health perspective is gaining ground. There has been tremendous political support with a great deal of resources being allocated to supporting its ongoing redevelopment. At this point it is difficult to gauge the amount of buy-in, but there does appear to be an appetite for increased awareness about local food. KI7 explains that the term "local food" has in many ways become a buzz

word with little concrete meaning associated with it. With this in mind, it is important to remember that local food is a small piece in the larger puzzle of the food system. It is not just about food and farming; it is about eating; it is about economic development; it is about local health; it is about affordability and alleviating poverty; it is about the natural environment. KI7 notes that no one group can effectively build a LFS that is sustainable and healthy, and it seems that people are finally beginning to understand that.

3.2.3 Niagara Region Timeline

In NR, local food is defined quite broadly. The idea of local food is approached from the perspective that local includes ingredients that have been grown and produced in NR, but still support the food system across Ontario and Canada (Niagara Region, 2008). In NR, buying local translated to support for farmers and business in the region and surrounding area. This definition was created in response to the feedback shared by community residents on the subject of what they consider to be "local".

KI6 explained that food and agriculture in the NR have always been on the agenda. Arguably, this focus pre-dates the official creation of NR. This is because many of the smaller communities that form the NR had Agricultural Sub-committees. As such, the tradition was carried forward and the Regional Agricultural Sub-committee was established in 1972, making it the oldest in Ontario (Omvlee, 2007). Niagara's Agricultural Sub-Committee was a sub-committee of the Regional Planning Services Committee and as such worked together with planning staff on various initiatives. The Sub-Committee had two main purposes: first, to provide input on planning issues and select development application from the perspective of the agricultural community and, second, to offer support to the Federation of Agriculture's programs that promote the agricultural sector (Niagara Region, 2014b).

Taking into consideration the physical landscape and the local economy, it is not at all surprising that food and agriculture are important in the community (Schaer, January, 2012). KI6 said that in NR

agriculture is a part of life and suggest that this is because everyone knows someone who is involved in

the agricultural sector in some capacity. Further, residents of NR cannot avoid driving by a farm stand,

or hearing about a festival or event that is showcasing or celebrating seasonal food including

strawberries, peaches or lavender. KI6 explained that, in the 1950s and 1060s, discussions related to

food and agriculture centered on the idea of the "value-chain". People were very aware that they were

a part of it. Unfortunately, over time, a number of factors moved people further and further away from

this relationship and the once obvious connection between producers and consumers has become

damaged.

Work to rebuild this connection, and work to expand the community's understanding of the

value-chain to that of the LFS, did not begin until the early 2000s. In 2001, a new focus was placed on

planning and consultation in the NR as part of a strategy to "promote citizen-centered service delivery

and a 'more healthy livable' community" (Niagara Region, 2001, p. 1). In 2001, NR saw important

initiatives that continue to impact the food system today.

First, a decision was made by Regional Council to access the current state of agriculture as well

as its importance in NR (Niagara Region, 2001). As such, the Regional Agricultural Economic Impact

Steering Committee was assembled to take on the proposed project (Planscape, 2003). The steering

committee tasked with driving the study included stakeholders representing the agricultural community

and the NR. The *Agricultural Economic Impact Study* was the first of its kind in NR and it effectively drew

attention to the positive impact of agriculture in the community (KI6). The findings have people looking

at food and agriculture in a different way, and have again brought to light the potential positive impact

of agriculture on both the economy and quality of life in NR (KI6; Planscape, 2009).

Second, the work of the Smart Growth Steering Committee resulted in NR's first Smart Growth

Summit. KI6 explained that, from the discussion on smart growth, community planning and

sustainability grew an awareness of the need for increased attention to the LFS and the potential opportunities for agriculture and related business. As such, Council formed the Regional Chair's Agricultural Task Force in 2002 (KI6). The Task Force had two main objectives, both of which were in line with the growing focus on the agricultural sector (ICP, 2013). First, it would work to identify barriers to the long-term agricultural viability in NR and propose strategies to mitigate or offset their impacts. Second, the Agricultural Task Force would work to lobby for changes to policy impacting the agricultural sector at all levels of government. Operating with the understanding that a thriving agricultural sector requires more than just access to land, the Agricultural Task Force worked to make recommendation for activities that would comprehensively address a broad range of issues and ultimately contribute to the long-term success of the sector (Planscape, 2009).

In 2013, Regional Council had decided that the Agricultural Sub-Committee and the Regional Chair's Agricultural Task Force would amalgamate and become the Agricultural Policy & Action Committee (APAC) (ICP, 2013). The amalgamation would allow the once separate committees to align their focus and work together to advise Regional Council via the Integrated Planning Committee, on issues and planning related matters currently impacting the agricultural industry. Further, the Committee would work to deliver the tasks outlined in the *Agricultural Action Plan* and *Local Food Action Plan*, updating progress and making changes to these action plans as well as to the *Economic Impact Study, as required* (ICP, 2013; Niagara Region, 2014b)

Recognizing the impact of the agricultural sector on the local economy as well as on quality of life, it became apparent that steps needed to be taken to ensure the health and prosperity of the sector in the future. As such, NR and the Agricultural Task Force worked to prepare an action plan that outlined various activities that could support this objective (ICP, 2013). The resulting *Agricultural Action Plan* was completed in 2003.

Since the Agricultural Task Force released the *Agricultural Action Plan*, there have been successful outcomes generated from their recommendations (KI6). The Vineland Research Institute, for example, was faltering, and had almost been abandoned (VRAP, 2006). Fortunately, a turn of events was set in motions in response to recommendations made in the *Agricultural Action Plan*, and a Vineland Renaissance Panel was appointed in 2006. The Vineland Research Institute is now operating under the guidance of a 10-year revitalization framework, which was the result of a process involving extensive industry consultation. The resulting vision sees the Institute becoming a world-class research center (VACP, 2006). To date, the re-birth of the Vineland Research Institute has already demonstrated a great deal of success as both an important resource and source of pride for the community (KI6, 2014).

Although LFS initiatives had been underway in NR with support from the regional government, since the early 2000s, KI6 explained that it was not until 2008 that a decision was made by Council to change the way in which the regional planning department approached food systems planning. News came from the Commissioner that the department would expand its current focus on food and agriculture to include not only the production side, but also the consumer side of the LFS (KI6). This decision effectively allowed planning staff in NR to examine the entire system when making decisions related to food systems planning.

Following the *Agriculture Action Plan*, work began on the *Local Food Action Plan* in 2008. The report was prepared in consultation with community stakeholders. The main objective of the report was to outline the potential actions that will assist the food industry in NR as it grows, and works to identify new market channels. The report explores strategies for producers to access reliable markets, local economic development opportunities to enhance culinary tourism, and strategies to ensure a safe and secure food supply for consumers. The *Local Food Action Plan* outlines a number of action items under the four categories: Information Resources and Research; Local Food Network and Infrastructure;

Education and Awareness Raising; and Supportive Policy and Funding. The PHD was engaged through the process and continues to promote these action items.

Similarly, KI7 explained that regional health department's work in support of local food did not begin until 2010. At the time, NR, along with the community partnership organization Healthy Living Niagara, focused on healthy eating and food environments. Healthy Living Niagara is organization that works in partnership with 35 organizations, including the NR PHD, "that brings people together to inspire collective action so the healthy choice is available" (HLN, 2014).

PHD staff and Healthy Living Niagara are working in support of programs and policies directed at addressing the needs of low income community members, such as the Good Food Box program (Perrotta, 2011). The Good Food Box is a non-profit organization that is working to improve access to food through a group buying program (Good Food Box, 2013). Program participants "pool their money" in order to access more affordable wholesale price. Participants then receive a box of fresh food approximately the size of a standard recycling bin once monthly. The content of the box varies due to a number of factors including seasonality, and affordability. Whenever possible, the program purchases locally-produced food directly from farmers.

In January 2009, the Integrated Community Planning (ICP) Department was created (Robson, 2010). The ICP was created in order to coordinate the existing mandates and roles of groups within NR working on LFS-focused initiatives toward a collaborative and common goal. The five divisions involved in this collaboration include: the Clerk's Division, Corporate Communications, Regional Policy Planning, Community and Corporate Planning and Regional Emergency Planning.

The group, which since March 2014 operates as the Planning and Development Committee, (Niagara Region, 2014e), continues to pay attention to the implementation of the *Agricultural Action Plan* and *Local Food Action Plan* (Niagara Region, 2014f). The creation of this committee demonstrates

the ongoing commitment to interdisciplinary and collaborative work on the LFS. A notable success which came out of the work of the Planning and Development Committee is the proposed regional policy amendment pertaining to agricultural value-added activities and a permitted land use activity. The rational is that allowing farmers to engage in value-added activities will in turn result in a "diversified, profitable and sustainable agricultural industry" in NR (CIP, 2009, p. 1).

Challenges

The Niagara Culinary Trail began as a small group of local farmers working in collaboration with "foodies" to entice consumers to purchase their food directly from farm gates (Kaiser-Smit, 2008). Since its inception, the organizational priorities have changed and the main goal of the Niagara Culinary Trail today is simply to increase community awareness of the LFS. Over the years, the organization has faced a number of challenges in its efforts to implement the initiative. In 2008, the trail was officially launched, boasting its ability to effectively link agriculture, tourism, producers and consumers around a celebration of food. Culinary tourism in NR was slow to develop and the Trail worked to link consumers with key local culinary features. The project, operating under the Agricultural Task force project, began with approximately 100 identified sites, and project funding from the Trillium Foundation (Kaiser-Smit, 2008). Throughout the process, efforts to bring potential players together proved to be extremely challenging and participants could not arrive at an agreeable and effective implementation strategy. Issues with securing funding have further created challenges for project sustainability; without funding support for ongoing project coordination, the project which got off to a rocky start is likely to continue to struggle in the future (KI6).

Valuable Insights

An important lesson that KI6 provided was a reminder not to approach community based projects with a preconceived idea of the intended outcome. Collaborative projects and community

projects alike involve a range of individuals approaching a problem from a variety of perspectives, all of which are important and worth considering, and that may lead to diverse outcomes.

3.3 Case Study 3: Simcoe County

Background Simcoe County

The Corporation of the County of Simcoe or Simcoe County (SC) is a community located centrally in Southern Ontario is just 150 kilometers north of Toronto. SC is comprised of sixteen towns and townships (County of Simcoe, 2014). While not officially a part of the County, the cities of Barrie and Orillia are deeply linked to the community. SC accounts for a substantial land mass, making it the third largest county in Ontario. Due to its size, the County has a largely varied geography as is spans from Georgian Bay to Lake Simcoe (TSC, 2014). As such, SC is unofficially divided into North Simcoe, and South Simcoe (County of Simcoe, 2014). South Simcoe is closely linked with the socio-economic facets of the GTA and home to the agricultural sector under discussion through this paper, while North Simcoe is closely linked with the Muskokas. The vast geography in SC also contributes to the area's ability to attract tourists who enjoy the many natural, out-door attraction and activities, such as a network of county-wide trails that showcase the best of the area (TSC, 2014).

SC has experienced rapid growth since the early 2000's (Birnbaum, 2004). The 2011 census reported a population of 446, 063 for SC, being a 5.7 percent growth in population from the previous census in 2006 (Statistics Canada, 2012c). It is currently the second most populous county in Ontario (County of Simcoe, 2014).

3.3.2 Key Informant Interviews – Simcoe County

3.3.2.1 Key Informant 2 (KI2): Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, Simcoe County
Background and Notable Achievements

A discussion with a long-time Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs representative illustrated the evolution of the Ministry's approach to the subject the LFS in SC. Key informant 2 (KI2) explained that over the years work on the LFS has been approached in many different ways and called a variety of different things. A number of research initiatives and community programs have been implemented in SC to address various issues related to support for farmers, farm production, value-added farm production, as well as programs related to food and nutrition, but it was not until recently that the initiatives were understood to be elements contributing to the overall health and sustainability of the LFS in SC. KI2 explained that, not too long ago, an economic impact study of agriculture in a given geographic area, for example, would have been considered a topic of discussion exclusively for the EDO; Ministry-employed Home Economists worked to deliver educational workshops related to food, nutrition and food safety as part of a Health Unit initiative; land use designations and issues related to farmland protection were strictly issues for the Planning Department to consider. Although these initiatives were not labeled as LFS work, the project outcomes directly contributed to what we currently understand to be the health and sustainability of the LFS in SC. As such, KI2 said, the Ministry's work on the LFS in SC is in no way a new priority.

Today, the understanding would be that these research initiatives and community programs were tools to address aspects of the local LFS KI2 explained. Economic development, food, food access and nutrition, family and social services, land use planning, along with many additional elements, have a role to play in improving the health of the LFS. The terminology is always shifting and changing. KI2 suggested that only in the last 10 years has the term local food come into play in SC. Before then, the idea of local food or a local food system was unheard of and essentially meaningless. KI2 explained that, previously, the community would have discussed and understood the food system as the value-chain, but that term does not encompass all the meaning a discussion around LFSs inherently implies today.

Over the years, the Ministry has worked to assist the community in identifying opportunities, building and facilitating partnerships, as well as lending a hand when possible, to access resources in support of project implementation. The LFS has always been important to the community, and as such efforts have been made to utilize available funding to further food-related projects. The work to support the Simcoe Country Farm Fresh Marketing Association (SCFFMA) that began in 2005 is an example of this relationship. The SCFFMA was created by active farmers in response to a growing interest in increasing the income of local producers in the area. The Ministry was at the table, but the remaining stakeholders and participants were actively farming in SC. The intended strategy was to improve the connection between the consumer and the producer through improved marketing efforts. Producers would benefit from a better understanding of consumer preferences, while consumers would benefit from a better understanding of the local food available in SC. This process resulted in the creation of the highly successful *Local Guide Map* or *Food Route*. Today, the SCFFMA continues to work in support of the LFS and has seen a growth in membership.

Despite the success of the local food map, new questions began to arise around strategies to effectively connect with the community. KI2 explained that from these questions grew a discussion on creating a food and agriculture charter. A charter would outline the community's collective vision for the LFS and encourage decision-makers to consider and incorporate elements of the identified needs and wants of the community when planning for the future. Recognizing the importance of a broad based approach, collaborative work between the many stakeholders such as farm organizations, staff at the SCFFMA, the Health Unit, the EDO at both upper and lower tier municipalities, to name a few, ensured the impact of food and farming was considered from every lens. Interestingly, KI2 explained that when the creation of the Charter was initially proposed in 2012, the discussion centered on food. Naturally, given the active involvement of producer groups, the scope of the Charter was soon expanded to include both food and agriculture because participants felt strongly that without agriculture, there

cannot be a discussion of food. As such, the project's mandate was expanded to include both food and agriculture.

KI2 explained that there are already strong linkages between intended outcomes identified in the *Food and Agriculture Charter* and the projects taking place on the ground. KI2 suggested that much of the Charter's success can be attributed to the positive communication and relationship building that took place between the many diverse stakeholders involved in its development well before the idea of a *Food and Agriculture Charter* was incepted through the SCFFMA, for example. These relationships carried forward and contributed to a successful process and final project.

Understanding that food distribution is often identified as a barrier to a developing a LFS, KI2 explained that a steering committee was formed to guide the process of exploring the potential for a local food hub in the area. A Food Distribution Hub Steering Committee was assembled to ensure that a broad range of stakeholder perspectives was taken into consideration. To date, the committee has worked through two phases, with the second wrapping up in 2014. The Food Distribution Hub Feasibility Study identified a number of gaps in available information. KI2 suggested that these gaps made it impossible to accurately assess the likelihood for a successful project. Although in some ways this disparity resulted in an unexpected setback, it was an important outcome that clearly illustrated the additional research required to make an informed decision. Further, KI2 explained that the process brought to light the benefit of inter-departmental work on various aspects of the LFS.

Three additional successful ventures discussed by KI2 include:

- SCFFMA's award winning, Savour Simcoe agri-culinary event. Since its launch eight years ago, the event has effectively brought together community members, local business and organizations to celebrate local food and agriculture.

- Numerous producers from SC have been recognized with the Premier's Award for Agri-Food Innovation and Excellence. Most recently in 2013, two local dairy farms have worked to strengthen the link between producer and consumer by processing and distributing their dairy products locally.

- The new Food Safety Regulatory Training program is a project which was developed in partnership with Georgian College. This tri-county initiative, involving Grey, Bruce and SC, was created in response to growing discussions around entrepreneurship and an identified opportunity to link food and entrepreneurship. A strategy was created to improve training and education related to the often confusing realm of food safety regulations related to food business. The program is still in the pilot phase but has already seen significant uptake and success.

Project Challenges

Challenges described by KI2 center on securing funding for staff salaries. Many organizations are working in the community with the intention of creating an impact and are faced with the challenge of pushing projects forward with extremely limited or no staff support. KI2 suggested that without this investment, it is very difficult to make meaningful or big things happen.

Further, KI2 suggests that SC's proximity to the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) and the Greenbelt presents many opportunities, as well as a number of challenges. As the GTA continues to grow, there are increasing pressures resulting from competing land uses. KI2 explained that despite the fact that the land between Alliston and Newmarket is incredibly productive, for example, there is a growing interest in utilizing this land for renewable energy production, most notably wind and solar, as well as residential and commercial development.

Valuable Insights

KI2 suggested that when looking back at the work on the LFS achieved over the past 10 years, the creation of a driving vision or overarching LFS strategy for SC would have helped to strengthen, or give the work achieved to date "more weight". KI2 explained that the advantage of a vision or a strategic plan is that instead of each LFS focused project being a one-time community program, each initiative would act as a piece contributing to the success of a larger pre-determined goal. That is not to say that a guiding roadmap would have completely altered the work that has been accomplished in the SC to date. Instead, KI2 suggests that the LFS initiatives the community has already achieved, when observed collectively, would have demonstrated a number of links and connections, and would have helped to better illustrate the impact on the community and the LFS to date.

Why local?

Food and farming has always been important to the community, but there are a number of factors, many clearly relevant and others seemingly unrelated, that may have contributed to the success and momentum seen on the ground. KI2 explained that, first, it is possible that the momentum which is now propelling LFS focused initiatives grew from a contentious land use planning issue commonly referred to as Site 41. The farming and non-farming community came together in 2007 following the approval of a dump site that had previously been rejected years earlier. Regardless of individual opinions as to whether the project was favorable or undesirable, there was endless community discussion about the dump site and its potential impact on issues related to, for example, land use planning. Second, KI2 said there was a lot of general interest in the subject of local food. A growing number of popular books were being published that explore the subject of the food system and food supply, and inspired individuals to redirect their focus, energy and habits to support the LFS. Finally, KI2 explained that the Ministry identified local food as a priority, and various institutes and organizations made funding available for local food initiatives - a decision that allowed for additional community

action. Each of these factors happened at the same time, allowing for a positive "snowball effect" in support of improving the LFS in SC, said KI2.

KI2 suggests that in SC there has been a considerable investment of time, money and resources into building and sustaining the LFS. There are really great things happening, they said. Nevertheless, more could still be done. If budgets allowed, a designated Agriculture and Food Economic Development Officer, or a staff person working at a municipal level to represent the sector, for example, would undoubtedly push the current efforts forward, KI2 explained.

3.3.2.2 Key Informant 3 (KI3): Economic Development, Simcoe County

Background and Notable Achievements

An interview was conducted with an individual with insight into the work of the EDO as it related to the LFS in SC. Key informant 3 (KI3) explained that from an economic development standpoint, it is important to support existing businesses as well as to promote new business ventures in SC. The agricultural sector, although not a prime employer, is unquestionably the largest land use in SC and, as such, farmers represent a large portion of the local business owners in need of the EDO's support and attention. Past efforts to assist farmers in identifying new market channels revealed a number of economic development opportunities stemming from keeping locally produced food in SC. Retaining food for retail, for example, could lead to further opportunities for local processing, bring about new product innovation, and result in job creation.

Once the potential for local food to generate an economic spin-off had been established, the EDO's goals centered on strategies to keep food and agriculture within SC - a change which began in 2010. The new LFS focus was formalized in 2011 following the release of the *10-Year Economic Development Strategic Plan* in which agriculture was officially identified as key for industry in the SC. KI3

explained that, from there, the process of exploring the potential for a regional food distribution hub in SC began and, as such, the Regional Food Distribution Hub Steering Committee was formed.

KI3 explained that the purpose of the Steering Committee was to explore the potential of a central location within SC to distribute local and regional agricultural products. There were many stakeholders at the table, including but not limited to The Federation of Agriculture, Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, Regional Health Units, commodity groups and agricultural organizations, Holland Marsh Growers Association, SCFFMA, and a local Community Futures Development Corporation. KI3 explained that stakeholders approached the discussion from a broad range of perspectives - for example, improved market channels for producers was a priority of the Federation of Agriculture, encouraging more processing locally was advocated for by the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs - and food sovereignty was a key focus of the Health Unit.

In addition to identifying areas in need of additional research, the community engagement process in SC also identified a number of community needs. The community expressed, for example, a desire for improved access to information related to value-added food entrepreneurship, such as food safety and food processing. From a community economic standpoint, KI3 explained it is important to support and encourage food processing because an increase in value-added food entrepreneurship could, in turn, contribute to the larger goal of local economic development.

Project Challenges

KI3 described some of the challenges faced by the Regional Food Distribution Hub Steering Committee. To begin with, it proved to be quite difficult for the broad range of stakeholders to agree on a definition for local or regional. From there, the group struggled to determine the most appropriate model for a food distribution hub in SC or to identify the new market channels that would become accessible as a result of the initiative. Through this process, a number of questions came to light

surrounding strategies to entice a major grocery store chain to consider doing business with a local distribution hub, or if assessing SC would be able to provide the right products to stock a food distribution hub. As was discussed by KI2, KI3 mentioned that the steering committee identified a number of gaps in available information during the first phase of the food distribution hub feasibility study. KI3 said that additional research is required in order to better assess the quality, quantity and types of food produced within SC. Only with a complete picture of the current state of the food system can decisions be made with respect to next steps, such as moving forward with a food distribution hub. Further, KI3 suggested that the growing shift to oil seed or cash crop agriculture presents a problem because these crops tend to be grown on a contract basis for export, and effectively conflict with the current LFS efforts in SC.

Another challenge discussed by KI3 stems from consumer misconceptions with regard to the LFS. Popular books and documentaries illustrate a range of food system issues that often not relevant in the Canadian context. Unfortunately, many Canadian consumers are unaware of the distinctions and as such confront producers with questions and concerns about measures to address issues that often do not apply to the Canadian food system.

Finally, KI3 discussed some of the challenges related to community engagement. First, at the start of the Food Distribution Hub Feasibility study, community feedback was identified as essential to moving the process forward. Unfortunately, there was some distrust from the agricultural community that likely grew out of a past issue related to a proposed dump-site, KI3 explained. The proposed dump site resulted in a heightened awareness of the increasing pressures put on farmland in SC. Concerned community members responded to the situation with the creation of citizen groups in opposition to the proposed site use. These groups approached the issue from various standpoints, including the lack of policy to protect prime agricultural land. Eventually, the dump-site project was overturned. Many

factors contributed to this final decision, but KI3 suggests that community opposition was likely a driving

cause.

Despite the positive outcome, the resulting distrust among community members toward

decision-makers presented challenges when moving forward with the food distribution hub feasibility

study. Understanding the importance of community buy-in, effort was required to rebuild damaged

relationships with members of the agricultural sector. Although the steering committee was regaining

the trust of the agricultural community, a second issue arose. KI3 explained that in SC there are over

2000 active producers. The steering committee felt strongly that it was important to make every effort

to ensure each producer was given the opportunity to contribute their opinion to the process of arriving

at an agreeable solution. KI3 explained that even though the community engagement process saw many

participants, and in many ways it could be considered a success, arguably more could have been done.

The process effectively collected feedback from 100 or 200 of the 2000 producers in SC, a small fraction

of the community that will be impacted by the final outcomes of the project. KI3 explained that despite

the challenges with community engagement around the proposed distribution hub, the community

seems generally interested in LFS initiatives, as other projects saw significantly more community buy-in.

Valuable Insights

As mentioned, although community engagement was a priority of the steering committee,

effectively soliciting feedback proved to be a challenge. KI3 explained that looking back at the

community engagement strategies, a number of things could have been done differently. For starters,

the process could have benefited from a more varied and reactive approach. Take as an example the

emailed survey that was circulated to all the producers in SC; only 60 survey responses were received.

Once it became clear that there was limited interest from individuals to respond to the emailed survey,

the steering committee could have prepared a Plan B designed to appeal to those less inclined to participate online, they said.

KI3 also mentioned that although SC producers were well represented during the process, the buyer side, such as major food service providers, local markets and large scale grocers, were difficult to include in the conversation. As such, the perspective of the buyer on the subject of a food distribution hub was obtained through an interview process that was completed by a hired consultant. The key informant suggests that additional insight and feedback from the buyer's perspective would be beneficial moving forward with the decision making process. Finally, KI3 said the initiative would benefit from a dedicated staff person, or project manager who would to take the lead and drive the process. The current approach to community projects sees staff being brought on temporarily to complete a one-off project. This approach to project delivery makes it difficult for program coordinators to look beyond their pre-determined project deliverables and to plan strategically for improvement over the long-term.

Why Local?

KI3 explained although it was only within the last decade that the term "local" gained any significance, it was important to realize that in SC the LFS has always been important to the community. Today, the idea of local continues to represent a growing trend. From a marketing perspective, there has never been a better time for local and, as such, it is wise to capitalize on the appeal of the word. SC is seeing a growing number of individuals taking advantage of the growing interest in LFS with successful grocery stores and specialty shops that offer regionally-grown and processed foods emerging with the key marketing message of "we are local". KI3 explains that, with the GTA in close proximity, local food is a new opportunity for economic development that local producers require support in accessing.

3.3.2.3 Key Informant Interview 4 (KI4): Simcoe County Farm Fresh Marketing Association
Background and Notable Achievements

A member of the SCFFMA outlined the evolution of the organization as well as described the work that has been accomplished by the organization since its inception. Key informant 4 (KI4) notes that during the 90s the market began to change; as such, many farmers became interested in taking steps to increase their revenue. Farm gate sales proved to be an effective strategy of attracting new customers for many producers, explained KI4. Unfortunately, although there has always been a segment of society with an interest in accessing local food, the vast majority of the consumer base require a bit more convincing.

It was not until the 2000s that work to formalize the process began. In 2004, a group of farmers began to discuss various strategies to improve marketing opportunities for SC producers. Following the lead of other municipalities in the province, the group worked to establish a collective marketing association. The association would work to build relationships between, first, the various local business owners or producers in SC and, second, connect local producers and consumers through efforts to improve awareness about local food. By improving market channels, the outcomes of the association's efforts could bring a positive impact to the community in a number of ways including economic development and improved access to fresh food, KI4 explained. One of the earliest outcomes of the marketing association's work is the *Buy Local Guide Map*. The *Buy Local Guide Map* created in SC, like other local food maps before it, provides a guide to local food sources for consumers by identifying various local food producers and retailers in SC on one, easy-to-read map.

When funding from the Agricultural Adaptation Council became available in 2006, the group wrote a proposal for a three-year pilot project. Following its success, the organization incorporated as a not-for-profit organization in 2007 and began work to expand its membership. Today, the organization, formally known as the SCFFMA, is managed by a Board of Directors made up of volunteer members.

Why Local Food?

KI4 suggested that the successes of the SCFFMA and the growing interest in local food in SC are likely the result of growing consumer interest in understanding where their food comes from, and how it was grown and processed. Responding to this growing interest, by promoting buying local, presents an opportunity to improve that understanding as well as to bridge the gap between producers and consumers. KI4 suggests that local food and support for local farmers are increasingly in need of attention for a number of reasons, including food security, food safety, environmental health, and the local economy; supporting the LFS makes sense.

KI4 explained that the health of the LFS in SC is on some municipal agendas but not all. SC has a total of 19 governing bodies - 18 municipal governments with an overarching County government. Some of these municipalities have been very supportive of the LFS while others continue to be indifferent. In general, more urban areas that do not host farms tend to not offer support to the LFS; this may be because they do not understand its impact on a variety of urban issues.

Challenges

The main challenge described by the member of SCFFMA centered on securing organizational funding to maintain their operation.

3.3.2.4 Key Informant Interview 5 (KI5): Local Producer, Simcoe County
Background and Notable Accomplishments

This individual offered insights into the evolution of the LFS from the perspective of a local producer with 30 years of experience and a keen interest in contributing to the ongoing evolution of the LFS. LFS projects in SC, KI5 explained, involve a number of collaborators. Organizations, such as the Food Partners Alliance (FPA), brought together some very dissimilar groups who were already talking about food in isolation from their own perspectives. The FPA encouraged these groups to explore the potential for interdisciplinary collaboration. The Health Unit, for example, was focused on initiatives related to

promoting healthy eating, but the connection between healthy eating and the food being produced locally had not been drawn. Additional groups that came to the table to discuss the potential of food and agriculture include, but are not limited to, the District School Board, the EDO, and County Tourism.

These discussions and collaborations resulted in the development of SC's unique *Food and Agriculture Charter*. The process was initiated following the Food Matters conference in 2011 when Council approved support for the creation of the Charter following discussions centered on the challenges of food production, sustainability, and barriers related to access to food. KI5 explained that although many municipalities have developed their own Food Charter, their documents can be described as urban-centric as they do not focus on agricultural production. SC's Charter is one of the first that speaks to both food and agriculture. In addition, a great deal of energy was invested to ensure that the opinions and feelings of both the community's producers and consumers were expressed in this guidance document, KI5 said.

Since the completion of the Charter, the FPA created the Charter Champion Awards. The awards highlight the efforts of various producers, organizations as well as individuals whose efforts on the ground are effectively supporting various aspects of the Food and Agriculture Charter. The nominations included community garden projects, individuals or organizations demonstrating outstanding environmental stewardship, successful locally-focused businesses, and programs offering food skills education, to name a few. The success of the Charter can be seen even through the simple fact that other counties and regions are utilizing Simcoe SC's *Food and Agriculture Charter* as a template or starting point for the creation of their own charters.

Another notable project described by KI5 is the ongoing work of the Food Distribution Hub Steering Committee. Following an initial study called *Growing Links*, the SCFFMA in partnership with a number of other organizations including the EDO and the FPA, worked to better understand the various

aspect of food distribution, including the potential for providing local food to institutions such as the Ontario Provincial Police Headquarters, local district school boards, post-secondary institutions, and hospitals. Although, the research revealed a significant amount of interest in improved access to local food options, these institutions explained that, in order for them to consider dealings with local food producers, they would require access to a streamlined system, ideally with a single point person who would coordinate all their food needs, local and otherwise. These initiated subsequent work to explore the feasibility of a local food distribution hub in SC.

Key Challenges

Moving forward with the second phase, the *Food Distribution Hub Feasibility Study*, KI5 explained that the steering committee came to realize that they would require additional information in order to make an informed decision regarding the proposed distribution hub. The steering committee was concerned that the data available with regard to an inventory of agricultural production in Ontario did not offer enough information to complete their task for two key reasons. First, steering committee members with an in-depth knowledge of the agricultural sector in SC noted discrepancies in the number of reported versus actual active producers in SC. Second, additional information with regard to the quantity and quality of yield in Ontario would be helpful when discussing a distribution hub. Although certain agricultural products are carefully tracked - for example, Ontario's poultry and dairy producers keep meticulous records - the majority of agricultural products are inventoried to a more general and vague standard. KI5 explained that without reliable information, it was difficult for the steering committee to accurately assess the current state of agricultural production in SC. This created a barrier to making an informed decision with regard to the feasibility of the distribution hub. As such, the hope is that, moving forward, a research project identifying the full spectrum of food and agricultural production in the SC and the surrounding area will be completed.

Another challenge described by KI5 demonstrated a need for improved communication and information sharing. KI5 noted that ensuring participants had a clear understanding of the purpose and significance of a *Food and Agricultural Charter* would have been beneficial to the process. Toward the end of the *Charter* development process, it became apparent that many participants were operating under the misconception that a *Charter* was a legal and regulatory document. As such, many community members were disappointed to learn that in fact, the *Charter* was only a guidance document with the intent of expressing to policy makers the community's position with regard to their food system in order to influence decisions related to the LFS. KI5 said that having experienced the outrage of community members who felt their efforts were wasted on a document that was not worth the paper it was written on emphasized the importance of effectively communicating intended project outcomes.

Valuable Insight for future

Another lesson discussed by KI5 centre on the importance of measuring project outcomes. KI5 explained that, already, the *Food and Agriculture* Charter has demonstrated positive impacts on LFS initiatives in SC. Unfortunately, unless the impacts can be measured, it is all hearsay; "say what you do, do what you say and prove it", KI5 said, explaining that this is the expectation of all community projects, including the *Charte*r. As a next step, evaluation criteria to quantify the success of the project are being developed. Having the right tools to measure the outcomes of the *Charter* will make it possible to provide evidence of the impact on the overall health of the LFS.

Similar to other key informants, KI5 explained that since the *Food and Agriculture Charter* has the potential to impact the entire community, it was particularly important to ensure that every possible effort was made to provide all SC residents with an opportunity to contribute to the process. The steering committee employed a number of strategies to encourage a broad range of participants, such

as providing free transportation to help include individuals in marginalized communities; this tactic proved to be quite successful.

<u>Why Local Food?</u>

The ongoing intent is to build a strong, sustainable, agricultural community in SC, said KI5. An important aspect of ensuring this involves negotiation on behalf of the farm community to drive decision-makers to support the future of farming and the production of food for local consumers. It is also important that consumers not only understand where their food comes from but also become aware of the high quality of the food produced in Canada. KI5 explained that the Canadian food supply is subject to very strict regulations that make it some of "the best and safest food available". In addition, it is important that the community at large understands the magnitude of food and agriculture in terms of its contribution to the economy. KI5 said "people need to get hooked on the production of food again". It is important that food becomes a part of the conversation again and consumers understand their role in the LFS instead of operating with the assumption that someone else is taking care of it, KI5 explained.

SC is geographically very large, with a large percentage of its land mass being designated for food and agriculture. As such, KI5 explained that it is not surprising that the SC has been supportive of LFS projects since day zero. The EDO has always looked at food and agriculture as the underpinning of their initiatives. As interest in the LFS increased among community members, SC was at the table for the inception of the FPA. Of course more could always be done, but the municipality has been supportive in many ways, including offering funding support, facilitation at conferences, and providing meeting space for public events, to name a few. Even these seemingly-small items have contributed to the overall success of the LFS focuses projects in SC, explained KI5.

3.4 Simcoe County Timeline

Similar to WR, despite a strong connection to food and agriculture, formal work to improve the LFS in SC did not begin until the 2000s. Discussions with key informants (KI2, KI3, KI4 & KI5) identified a number of factors that collectively contributed to building the momentum required to inspire a shift in focus toward collaborative work in support of the LFS. The key informants noted that each of these factors played a role in creating change and no one factor is more or less important. As such, they will be described in no particular order.

One contributing factor stems from a controversial land use issue surrounding a proposed landfill on a parcel of land called Site 41 (KI2 & KI3). When the project was first proposed in the mid-1980s, the proposal was "rejected as environmentally unwise" (Friesen, August 2009). Nearly 20 years later, after a new environmental impact assessments suggested the project was in fact safe, SC approved the dumpsite in 2007 and soon after construction began. Not surprisingly, a conversation exploring all sides of the issues exploded throughout the community (KI2 & KI3). The community banded together either to demonstrate support or express total outrage and concern. In the summer of 2009, SC Council decided to overturn the approval (Friesen, August 2009) and followed up with a motion a month later to protect the parcel of land from development permanently (The Canadian Press, September, 2009). Despite all the frustration and community outrage surrounding the proposed development, the process effectively raised awareness of issues related to land use planning, farmland protection and the need for supporting policy as well as encouraged dialogue and activism (KII2 & KII3).

Key informants (KI2, KI3, KI4 & KI5) in SC suggest another factor that contributed to the growing momentum around the LFS were various popular books and documentaries outlining issues related to the modern food system. The Canadian authors of the popular book *The100-mile Diet,* challenged fellow Canadians to attempt a 100-mile or 170-kilometer diet that required individuals to limit their diets to food that was grown, produced and accessed within a 100-mile radius of their homes (Pearce,

September, 2008). This approach to eating promised to benefit the environment by reducing

greenhouse gas emissions, strengthen the local economy by keeping food dollars in the community, and

provide consumers with fresher, more flavorful and "better for you" food (Pearce, September, 2008).

With the potential for so many positive benefits, it is not surprising that the idea caught on; farmers

reported an increased interest from consumers with regard to where and how their food is grown.

Further, as an understanding of the economic potential of agriculture began to crystallize, the

EDO in SC increased its efforts to keep food and agriculture within the area partly through increased

support for LFS projects (KI3). This focus was formalized after agriculture was identified as a key industry

in need of support in the *County of Simcoe, 10-year Economic Development Strategy Plan* and, as such, is

an example of another factor that may have contributed to the growing community interest in the LFS in

SC.

In addition, once the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs identified local food as a

priority, various funding sources became available in support of LFS initiatives (KI2). One funding body,

the Local Food Fund, was created by the Province of Ontario as part of a strategy to provide financial

support for new local food initiatives and innovations (Ontario, 2014). The three-year funding program

offered support to projects that "reduced barriers to regional economic development; result in

sustainable regional economic development; and have a positive impact on the Ontario economy"

(Ontario, 2014, p. 4). These types of programs improved access to funding resources for LFS initiatives

and provided the means for many project ideas that otherwise may not have been realized.

Key informants suggest that each of these factors collectively created the environment

necessary to push LFS initiatives forward in SC. The first notable initiative that grew out of this newly

established LFS focused momentum is the SCFFMA. Work toward the eventual establishment of the

SCFFMA may have indirectly begun a decade earlier. KI5 explained that following the changes to the

market that took place in the 1990's, SC saw a growing number of farmers looking to improve sales by connecting with new customers. Farm gate marketing had a proven track record of effectively attracting new customers, and as such became a popular strategy to increase revenue for individual farmers. Unfortunately, individual farm gate sales, and their associated marketing efforts were only able to attract a small, niche market, comprised of individuals who were already interested in accessing locally produced food. It soon became clear that more complex marketing strategies would be required in order for local producers to break into local markets (KI5).

Work to explore new marketing opportunities began in 2004 (KI3 & KI5; SCFFMA, 2014). A group of SC producers came together to discuss strategies to break into new market channels. Through this conversation, a number of shared priorities were revealed. First, the individuals shared a common goal of increasing awareness about local food, as a step toward reducing the gap between producers and consumers in SC (SCFFMA, 2014). Second, it was agreed that improved connections or networks between local producers and local business owners would present an important, new market opportunity (SCFFMA, 2014). Finally, a shared interest in pooling resources in order to develop more effective marketing campaigns was identified (SCFFMA, 2014). Not surprisingly, following the example of other municipalities with similar associations, the group took steps to create a grass roots organization in 2005 called the SCFFMA. For the following two years, SCFFMA worked to bring together a broad spectrum of stakeholders interested in discussing the LFS from various perspectives, including agriculture, economic development, human health, food security, tourism, the environment and more (My Collingwood, May, 2007). The organization incorporated as a non-profit marketing association in 2007 (SCFFMA, 2013). Once a group was formally assembled, the SCFFMA applied for funding support from the Agricultural Adaptation Council for a three-year pilot project that would work to educate consumers about the importance of supporting local farmers; the grant was awarded in 2007.

The first notable initiative, achieved by SCFFMA, was the *Buy Local Guide Map* (KI5, 2014; SCFFMA, 2013). The *Map* provides consumers with an all-encompassing resource that identifies the location of farms and retailers across SC as well as outlines the various food items they offer. Producers report an increase in new customer visits as a result of this marketing strategy alone (SCFFMA, 2013). Since its launch in 2008, the *Map* continues to grow in popularity with a growing number of both consumer and producers making use of it (SCFFMA, 2013). KI5 suggests the success of this map and other marketing efforts undertaken by SCFFMA have been amplified by technological advances, such as the internet and all its related modern communication, that allow for communication between the producers and consumer that was never before possible (KI5).

Another important organization in SC is the FPA. Similar to SCFFMA, the FPA was created in response to a growing awareness of issues and challenges related to the LFS that could ultimately put it at risk (Food Partners Alliance, 2014). The organization is member-driven and is managed by a Board of Directors made up of member-volunteers (Food Partners Alliance, 2014). The FPA works to bring together a broad range of "agriculture, government, environmental, health and educational organizations" that would have previously discussed food-related issues in isolation (Food Partners Alliance, 2014; KI5). The resulting multi-sectoral organization works to increase awareness of aspects of the LFS in need of attention, build partnerships to further the goals outlined in the *Food and Agriculture Charter*, and monitor, evaluate and report on the progress of initiatives supporting the work of the Charter (Food Partners Alliance, 2014).

A proposal to develop a *Food and Agriculture Charter* in SC was approved by Council in 2011 at the Food Matters Conference, an event that centers on challenges related to food production, sustainability and barriers related to food access (KI5; TFPC, January 2014). Council contributed both funding and staff support for the initiative and a Food and Agriculture Steering Committee was assembled to drive the work that began in 2012 (FPA, 2013). The idea of developing a Charter was not

unique to SC. Other municipalities in North America, and more specifically within Ontario, including WR, have already developed Food Charters. Nevertheless, the Charter created in SC is unique as it is the first to speak to not only food, but also agriculture (KI3 & KI5,). Given the active involvement of the farming community, it is not surprising that SC's Charter also advocates for the production side of food.

Key informants (KI3 & KI5) explain that the Food and Agriculture Charter Steering Committee placed significant emphasis on gathering input from community members throughout the Charter development process. As a first step to both promoting the initiative and gathering community feedback, a survey was prepared to understand the community's priorities as they relate to the LFS. The survey was distributed online and in print during the months of January to March 2012. In addition to the survey, a visioning day was hosted in February to provide an additional opportunity to gather community feedback. Participants were asked to comments on the topics of "healthy eating; food and economic development; farming resilience and the environment; food, access and hunger; education and employment; food and culture; farmland protection and food and skills development" (FPA, 2013, pg. 1). Further, five consultation meetings followed in the fall of 2012 to provide community members with the opportunity to review the first draft. These visioning day and consultation meetings saw over 150 and close to 120 residents, respectively.

The final draft was endorsed by SC Council in January 2013 and the *Food and Agriculture Charter* has since been widely accepted and endorsed by the community, local businesses and organizations, as well the government at all levels (FPA, 2013b). Following the official unveiling of the *Charter*, the Steering Committee announced the "Charter Champion Awards". The awards are intended to highlight the work of the key players on the ground working to support and further the vision and guiding principles of the *Charter*. Today, there are numerous projects underway in the community that directly support the *Food and Agriculture Charter*. KI2 suggests this is a symptom of the extensive community engagement undertaken, both throughout the development of the *Charter* as well as the strong

community networks built in advance of the *Charter*'s inception. Since its completion, the *Charter* has acted as a template for other counties and regions working to implement similar initiatives.

Three additional successful events worth noting include the Savour Simcoe, the Agri-Culinary Tourism Development, and the Food Safety Regulatory Training program. Savour Simcoe was an initiative launched in 2007. The award winning agri-culinary event was created by the SCFFMA as a strategy to connect community members, local businesses and organizations around an event featuring the best food and drink SC has to offer (SCFFMA, 2014).

The Agri-Culinary Tourism Development was launched by the SCFFMA in partnership with Lafontaine-based Éco-Huronie in 2013 (Podgorski, 2012). This project was not discussed during any of the key informant interviews. The food trail worked to address an identified interest among consumers to experience authentic local food and drink. Naturally, this was a project specifically catered to the strengths of the SCFFMA as it has developed a strong network of connections with local food producers and business owners since its inception. A resulting project, the Huronia Food Trail is an Agri-Culinary Trail that offers users the opportunity to take a self-guided tour of the food landscape in SC, specifically in Midland, Penetanguishene, and the townships of Tay and Tiny. Participating businesses and producers will benefit from the promotion created by the branded trail and creative tourism destination.

In response to growing discussions around promotion of entrepreneurship in support of local economic development, naturally the idea of food entrepreneurship arose, said KI2. The new Food Safety Regulatory Training program was launched in 2013. It is a tri-county project involving Grey, Bruce and SC in partnership with Georgian College (Georgian College, 2014). The training program hopes to provide interested participants with all the information and resources they require in order to effectively tackle the often-confusing food safety regulations inherent in food business ventures big and

small (KI2 & KI3, 2014 Georgian College, 2014). The project is still in the pilot phase, but initial up-take was significant and the success of the project is quite promising.

<u>Challenges</u>

Challenges discussed by the key informants include securing funding, conflicting land uses and the importance of involving all the required stakeholders. An increasingly common challenge faced by individuals and groups working to deliver local food initiatives is the fact that funders are increasingly unlikely to offer funding to support staff dollars or operational costs (KI2 & KI3, 2014). KI2 and KI3 note that without an initial investment to provide projects with the support of a coordinator or staff person responsible for driving projects forward, it can prove to be extremely difficult to deliver impactful projects, that not only survive, but thrive over the long term. This challenge is not unique to SC; it is just the trend we are seeing.

SC's global location and proximity to the GTA and the Greenbelt can be considered both an opportunity as well as a major constraint. On the opportunity side, as KI3 explained, the interest in the LFS is on the rise, and a growing number of the GTA's consumers are looking for local food option; there has never been a better time for SC farmers to capitalize on this emerging market opportunity (Planscape, 2006). On the constraint side, as populations continue to grow, SC's agricultural land is under increasing pressure to host solar and wind farms, as well as residential and commercial developments; little is being done to curb that trend (KI2; Planscape, 2006).

The Regional Food Distribution Hub Feasibility Study is another important project undertaken in SC. Similar to the Food and Agriculture project, the appointed Regional Food Distribution Hub Steering Committee worked to engage a broad range of stakeholders, as well as to engage a broad range of community members in the process of accessing the potential viability of the proposed project.

The project grew out of the *Growing Links* study funded by the Greenbelt Fund of The Broader

Public Sector Investment Fund (RMCG, 2012). The *Growing Links* report was commissioned by the

SCFFMA because food distribution is commonly discussed in food systems planning publications, as a

key challenge to developing a sustainable food system (KI5). The second phase, expanding on the

findings of the *Growing Links* study, was the Regional Food Distribution Hub Feasibility Study, which

began in the summer of 2013 (EDO, 2013b). A Regional Food Distribution Hub Steering Committee was

assembled with the purpose of exploring the potential of a central location to distribute local and

regional agricultural products in SC and the surrounding area (Bryan, 2014; EDO, 2013b). A broad range

of stakeholder, including SCFFMA, FPA, The Federation of Agriculture, the Ministry of Agriculture, Food

and Rural Affairs, Regional Health Units, commodity groups and agricultural organizations, the Holland

Marsh Growers Association, a local Community Futures Development Corporation and more, were

brought to the table to ensure a broad range of perspectives were considered and that opportunities for

community engagement were made available (KI5).

The outcomes of the Regional Food Distribution Hub Study that are described in the *Simcoe*

County Food Distribution Hub final report are quite different than what was initially anticipated because

the Steering Committee was unable to determine the viability of the proposed distribution hub (Algie,

January 2014; EDO, 2013b). This unexpected outcome was the result of gaps in available information

related to the quality, quantity and value of the food being produced in SC (EDO, 2013b). Without a

clear picture of the current state of agricultural production in SC, specifically with regard to the products

that are available, it became difficult to assess if SC would be able to consistently provide the required

products to stock a distribution hub. As such, recommended next steps include a call for additional

research that will help address the identified gaps. Further, the committee faced challenges in

developing an understanding of the current distribution channels being utilized in the SC. This aspect

relates to another challenges discussed by the key informants. KI3 and KI5 explain that although the

Steering Committee effectively brought together a broad range of representatives, an important

stakeholder was missing from the conversation: the buyer. Instead, a consultant carried out an interview

process with a number of food service providers and large scale grocers. The interviews, which were

reported on in the *Simcoe County Regional Distribution Hub Report*, worked to gather insight and gauge

the level of interest of various buyers to utilize an alternative food distribution channel (Bryan,2014; KI3

& KI5). KI3 and KI5 voiced concerns that more could have been done to better explore the proposed

distribution hub from the perspective of the buyer because, ultimately, the success of the project may

be dependent on their buy-in.

In contrast, KI5 suggested that up to this point in the process of exploring a potential

distribution hub, the Steering Committee was arguably not ready to include the buyer in the

conversation. Now that two phases of the project are complete, and the promise of upcoming projects

to continue the work of the Regional Food Hub Feasibility Study, the group has gained enough credibility

to invite the buyers to the table and expect them to be interested to learn more about the ongoing

initiative and to discuss the potential of future business dealings. Furthermore, the same information

that may help to entice buyers may also be the key to gaining support for LFS projects from decision

makers, suggests KI5.

Both the Food and Agriculture Charter Steering Committee as well and the Regional Food

Distribution Hub Feasibility Steering Committee experienced challenges related to community

engagement. The Food and Agriculture Charter Steering Committee notes issues caused by poor

communication at the onset of the project. As such, only in the final stages of the project did a number

of participants learn that the proposed document would serve as a guidance document, and would not

be legislated. KI5 explained that much of the disappointment could have been avoided had additional

time been spent to ensure that everyone understood the final purpose of the Food and Agriculture

Charter.

The Regional Food Distribution Hub Steering Committee faced a different challenge. At the start of the study there was a level of distrust within the agricultural community toward the regional government following the events centered on Site 41, as discussed above (KI3). This created additional challenges when efforts were made to reach out to the community to solicit feedback. In this case, KI3 explained, the Steering Committee placed a great deal of emphasis on gathering feedback from the approximately 2000 active producers in SC. The key strategy was to solicit feedback though online surveys that were emailed to the intended participants, a measure that saw limited uptake. Arguably more could have been done to encourage additional responses, said KI3, for example by preparing alternative outreach strategy in place of initiatives that were unable to effectively gather the amount of feedback required by the Regional Food Distribution Hub Steering Committee.

4 Discussion

Having reviewed each of the examined case studies in detail, the following section will compare the experiences of the three communities and identify how they relate to the literature. It will outline interesting similarities, notable differences, as well as highlight successes and challenges seen through the experiences of the case study areas in their LFS work.

To begin, the researchers identify the broad range of issues that can effectively be addressed with increased attention to the health of the LFS, such as environmental sustainability, improved human health and wellbeing, economic development and improved access to food (Born & Purcell, 2006; Campbell, 2004; Feenstra, 2001; Sonnino 2009). Not surprisingly, there is a gorwing interest to employ a more interdisciplinary approach to LFS initatives, with varying success in WR, SC and NR.

In each of the case study areas, successful LFS initiatives have been undertaken by local public health departments / units as part of an effort to address the mandate of chronic disease prevention (Foodlink, 2014; MOHLTC, 2007). Of the three case study areas, WR accounts for the greatest number

of projects undertaken from the standpoint of public health. This can be attributed to the fact that the

WRPH effectively spearheaded LFS work in WR in the year 2000. Work in WR expanded beyond the

public health focus when WRPH and the Planning Department worked in collaboration to develop

sections of the new ROP in 2009 (KI1). Since the work on the ROP concluded, WR has not developed any

formal channels for collaboration at this time, but does appear to have a number of informal networks

as departments have been know to work together (KI1; Perrotta, 2011). KI1 explains that although the

planning department has not forgotten about the LFS, some time has passed since planners have taken

a seat at the Food Systems Roundtable, and WRPH contiues to drive the LFS initatives in WR.

In contrast to WR, in both NR and SC LFS focused work began in the planning department before

expanding to include public health and the EDO. NR is currently beign recognized for its interdisciplinary

initatives such as the Agri-food Strategy as well as the newly-established ICP department.

Collaborations between the EDO, Planning and Public Service, Regional Public Healthy as well as a

number of other stakeholders on the subject of LFS are becoming common place in NR (Perrotta, 2001).

The same is true in SC and has been demonstrated by the work surrounding the Food and Agriculture

Charter, the Regional Food Distribution Hub Feasibility study, and the Food and Safety Regulatory

Training Course. The growing attention to food, agriculture and the LFS in various regional government

departments represents an important success for the future of the LFS (KI2; Perrotta, 2011).

Another common theme is that in each case study area, work is being done in consultation with

action and policy organizations that were initially created by local Council, such as the Food Systems

Roundtable in WR, the SCFFMA in SC, and the APAC in NR. Each of these organizations works to drive

new projects, monitor progress of the initiatives taking place in the community, and make

recommendations with regard to supporting policy for the LFS (Niagara Region, 2013b; FSRT, 2014;

SCCFFMA, 2013).

The work being done in WR, NR, and SC to develop policy and action committees is in line with the recommendations outlined by the researchers. The creation of an organization responsible for the ongoing monitoring and evaluation of the work taking place on the ground is discussed as an important step to ensuring the long-term success of the LFS (Feenstra, 2001; Pothukuchi & Kaufman, 1999). Pothukuchi and Kaufman (1999) caution that the trouble with policy and action committees is that there is no guarantee that a long-term commitment will be maintained. Nevertheless, given past examples of successful committees and their positive implications on LFS work in various municipalities, their employment is recommended as a second choice. A first choice, or best strategy, should budgets allow, is the creation of a Municipal Agricultural Department, or Municipal Food and Agriculture Department that will work to ensure improvements to the LFS are achieved. Interestingly, key informants (KI2, KI3, & KI5) drew attention to the benefits that could come out of the creation of food and agricultural focused departments, or the designated LFS-focused staff position(s). With that being said, key informants recognized the many budget restrictions that would stand in the way of making such a position possible in the foreseeable future.

Interestingly, the creation of these advisory bodies in both WR and SC coincided with the development of both WR and SC's local food maps (Foodlink, 2014; SCFFMA, 2013). Both local food maps represent the first notable LFS-focused initiative in WR and SC, and mark an important first step to connecting local producers and consumers. The maps effectively identify local farm locations throughout WR and SC respectively, and provide consumers with easier access to locally grown and prepared products (Foodlink, 2014; SCFFMA, 2013; Xuereb & Desjardin, 2005).

The process of creating an advisory body in NR is notably different. Although NR's first policy and action committee, the Agricultural Sub-Committee, was created and began working collaboratively with the planning department in the 1970's, their work focused on agricultural production (Niagara Region, 2014b). It was not until the early 2000s that the consumer perspective was also taken into

consideration (KI6). In 2002, the Agricultural Task Force was assembled with the intention of addressing

LFS issues from this new, more holistic perspective. The first notable initiative completed by the

Agricultural Task Force was the *Agricultural Action Plan* that continues to have an impact on the work

begin accomplished in NR today (Planscape, 2003).

Key informants in each of the case study areas described challenges associated with obtaining

funding support for new and ongoing LFS projects. Increasingly, funding agencies are not willing to

provide grants to support staff salaries, to pay for programs beyond their initial start up, or to provide

organizations with core funding. Key informants (KI2, KI3, & KI6) explained that a project coordinator or

point person plays an important role in harnessing community energy to establish successful community

projects. Often, staff salaries represent a small investment in the overall development of a project

because they effectively encourage community buy-in, maximize limited resources, and plan for future

initiatives that will help ensure a project's success over the long-term (Feenstra, 2001; KI2, & KI6). These

observations described by the key informants align closely with the discussion on the subject presented

by Feenstra (2001). As such it becomes clear that issues related to securing reliable funding sources are

not unique to Southern Ontario.

Feenstra (2001) explains that if it is assumed that the typical community project requires three

or more years to become established, many projects are not able to demonstrate significant positive

impacts on the host community before a funding term is complete (Feenstra, 2001). This can become

significantly magnified if evaluation criteria are centered on long-term outcomes which are not feasible

in the short term. Fortunately, community projects can be compared to "icebergs". That is because,

following the first phase of a project, it may appear as though little has been accomplished when in fact

many of the anticipated impacts may require additional time to take effect and run much deeper. To

ensure that project outcomes are effectively assessed, care must be taken to ensure that evaluation

criteria are suited to the short term, or if criteria are prescribed and looking for long-term impacts, there

is an understanding that the effects will become apparent over time.

Both WR and SC have worked to develop local Charters that provide decision-makers with

insights into the collective vision of the community with respect to the ongoing development of the LFS

(FPA, 2013; WRFS, 2013). Interestingly, NR does not have a local food charter.

An initiative that is unique to SC is the Food and Safety Regulatory Training Course (EDO, 2014a;

KI2 & KI5). The project is worth noting for three reasons. First, community members interested in food

entrepreneurship demonstrated a need and interest in improved access to information related to health

and safety regulations (EDO, 2013a). Second, the resulting training course was created in partnership

with Georgian College, Grey-Bruce and SC. Finally, the project was launched as a means of encouraging

local economic development in SC through food entrepreneurship.

It is also important to note that each of NR, WR and SC are home to recipients of the Premier's

Award for Agri-food Innovation Excellence (OMAFRA, 2013). This demonstrates the inherent interest

and commitment of the community to support the future of the LFS.

4.2 Challenges

Failure is not nearly as easy to discuss, but nevertheless there are important lessons to be

learned from project barriers, challenges and pitfalls. Some of the key challenges that have become

apparent thought this process will be discussed.

In WR, a number of challenges have been identified when it comes to translating theoretical

projects discussed and described on paper, and actually implementing them in the community. Although

WR has been praised for its work around the LFS, significant changes to the food system in WR have yet

to be seen (KI1, 2014). KI1 attributed these challenges to the fact that "change takes time" and

discussed the frustration that related to the time required for changes made at a regional level to take

effect in lower tier municipalities. Two examples of this challenge relate to the work on the

Neighborhood Market project. In 2007, WRPH secured funding to implement a Neighbourhood Market

project, an initiative that aimed to improve access to food in low income communities in WR (Maan

Miedema, 2009). The project would see the creation of five seasonal or temporary neighbourhood

markets during a two-year period. Unfortunately, as work to implement the projects began, groups

learned that local zoning in various municipalities across WR prohibited the set-up of market stalls in

parking lots. As such, temporary exemptions were granted for the duration of WRPH's project.

Following the success of the Neighbourhood Markets, the Food Systems Roundtable recommended

changes be made to the ROP that would require local municipalities to amend their local OP in order to

better support local food projects in the future, such as neighbourhood markets and community

gardens; the changes to the ROP were adopted in 2009 (ROWPH, 2013).

Unfortunately, KI1 explained that despite the amendments to the ROP in 2009 in support of

local food projects, local level municipalities have been slow to make the prescribed changes. As such,

residents of various municipalities across WR, including Kitchener, Waterloo, and Cambridge, are

currently leading campaigns to press on local level governments to pass local level by-laws in support of

community gardens in line with the ROP (ROWPH, 2013). Not surprisingly, situations of this kind can

prove to be frustrating and largely discouraging for project stakeholders (KI1).

The observed challenges resulting from the slow uptake of local municipalities to adopt changes

prescribed in the ROP could be the result of limited stakeholder consultation at the onset of the project.

Perhaps the changes recommended by the Food System Roundtable were either unrealistic, or perhaps

decided without adequate representation of the community members and municipalities that would be

most impacted by the proposed changes. If the changes being made to the ROP were decided without

direct consultation with each of the impacted municipalities and townships, for example, the

subsequent reluctance to adopt the newly prescribed by-laws is not surprising. Local-level

municipalities may lack resources to effectively implement and administer proposed changes, for example. The issues observed in WR may be a symptom of the way that LFS projects began. WRPH not only spearheaded LFS-focused initiatives in WR, but has also actively supported the Food Systems Roundtable since its inception (Xuereb & Desjardins, 2005). As such, as representatives at the table change, the only guaranteed constant is a public health focus from the perspective of the regional government. Perhaps strategies that consider a holistic perspective need to be established prior to offering recommendations and/or prescribing changes. This ensures that the capacity of other departments and local-level governments are considered, further promoting future buy-in and participation.

The researchers suggest that maintaining community interest and participation is very important because local heroes are a project's single most valuable asset (Feenstra, 2001; Campbell, 2004). In order for community members to buy-in and remain interested in a project's success over the long-term, they must be provided with opportunities to contribute to project development and delivery in a meaningful way. Feenstra (2001) suggests that the best strategy for ensuring long-term community engagement and overall project success is to bring people together around a common goal rooted in shared values. In line with the recommended strategy, KI1 reflected on the experience in WR and explained that community engagement strategies effectively bring a large number of people together to discuss a single topic from a broad range of perspectives. KI1 suggested that the process could be streamlined if community energy and input centered on a pre-determined and communally-established driving goal or vision (ROWPH, 2013).

Further, Feenstra (2001) notes that projects engaging participants who truly believe in the projects they are working toward are more likely to survive major barriers, such as prolonged gaps in available funding. Key informants (KI2, KI3, & KI5) from SC share the example of Site 41, a contentious land-use issue, to demonstrate the power of a community that has banded together around a shared

common purpose. The citizen groups formed and fought for the outcomes they believed were right despite a seemingly one-sided battle (Friesen, August 2009). It is difficult to inspire this level of commitment and engagement.

Unfortunately, a lack of a common vision and driving values can prove to be problematic, particularly when working to engage the broader community (KI5). Following the process of developing the *Food and Agriculture Charter* in SC for example, a number of community participants felt misled, frustrated and disappointed when they learned the final product was a guidance document and would not be legislated. This misunderstanding is likely the result of poor communication and inadequate clarification surrounding the purpose of the *Charter* at the onset of the project. The disappointment could have been avoided if care was taken at the start of the project to ensure everyone involved understood the intended project outcomes, as well as agreed to the project goal that was driving the discussion. The participants who felt uninformed and misled when the project concluded are unlikely to take part in future community initiatives and, as such, will not act as local heroes.

It is important to keep in mind that a guiding vision or goal is not determined with the sole purpose of keeping community members engaged, enthusiastic and on track. A project vision can play an important part for larger organizations and even government bodies by outlining the driving purpose for all programs and initiatives. KI2 said that the only thing missing from the work achieved in SC over the past decade is a driving vision or strategic plan. KI2 explained that if a strategic plan was determined at the start of the LFS work in SC, it would not have impacted the number or types of projects delivered to date; instead, the body of work achieved and their resulting outcomes would have collectively contributed to larger LFS portfolio. As such, the impact of the projects would have been perceived to be greater.

Further, a unique problem currently impacting NR is the issue of too many local heroes acting without a collective vision, goal or common purpose. Although NR has formally existed since the 1970's (Planscape, 2013), the many municipalities and townships it represents tend to compete with one another instead of pooling resources to work collaboratively (KI6). Since the community has demonstrated a limited interest in working together, duplication of initiatives is common in NR. Thankfully, the established relationship that exists between the agricultural community and the regional planning department provides regional staff with the opportunity to connect like-minded individuals and to encourage resource and skills sharing. Nevertheless, there are countless individuals and community groups working in isolation on new initiatives.

Another interesting challenge comes out of efforts on the part of SC to address issues related to the ongoing Regional Food Distribution Hub Feasibility Study. Key issues faced by communities working to develop the LFS tend to include challenges related to distribution (KI2 & KI3, 2014). As such, additional efforts are underway in SC to access the feasibility of a distribution hub. The major barriers faced by the Steering Committee were related to gaps in the information available with regard to the quality and quantity of food production in SC (RMFG, 2014). KI5 said that the Steering Committee noted some discrepancies in the information available in the agricultural census and the actual farming activities taking place in SC. KI5 suggests that the incomplete information creates challenges not only for community stakeholders and regional departments interested in exploring the possibility of a food distribution hub in SC, but also for decision makers faced with decisions related to the agriculture sector. Without a clear picture of the current state of agriculture in SC and other parts of the province, it becomes difficult, if not impossible, to make informed (K15). As such, the Steering Committee has identified a need for additional research in order to better understand the existing conditions of the agricultural sector, and in turn determine the feasibility of a food distribution hub in SC, KI5 said.

It would appear that the Steering Committee in SC is working to avoid Born and Purcell's (2006) "local trap". In communities with a prominent agricultural sector, such as SC, it is easy to assume a local scale is appropriate. Instead, SC is currently undergoing a meticulous evaluation process that will assess all aspects of the existing LFS, in order to determine if it is capable of supporting a food distribution hub (KI3 & KI5; RMFG, 2012), an important step recommended by Born and Purcell (2006). As the Food Distribution Hub Feasibility Study in SC enters its third phase, the complexity of assessing the suitability of the local scale becomes clear.

In contrast, a project that may have fallen victim to the local trap is the 100-mile Market, a failed business venture in WR. The local wholesaler quickly achieved success, and was praised as an award winning project, until the project suddenly went bankrupt (ROWPH, 2013). The cause of the company's rapid demise is not yet known, and as such it is difficult to make any definitive conclusions as to what resulted in the closure of the local distributor. Nevertheless, the example of 100-mile Market encourages communities interested in taking on similar initiatives to approach with caution.

Further, the example of the 100-mile Market and the challenges related to community engagement experienced during the *Charter* process relate to the cautions raised by KI1 and K16. KI6 explained that it is important not to approach community projects with a preconceived notion of suitable final outcomes. This reiterates the discussion in the literature suggesting that the community is the greatest asset to LFS planning (Feenstra, Campbell, 2004). The researchers suggests that, ultimately, a facilitator should work in a visionary capacity and advocate for policy change in support of the community vision whenever possible (Feenstra, 2001; Campbell, 2004; Sonnino, 2009). This requires planners to approach a project objectively, to begin by assessing community needs and interests, and to consider activities that would be complementary to the resources available (Born & Purcell, 2006; Feenstra, 2001; Campbell, 2004). Once the perspective of key stakeholders is understood, additional steps can be taken to create an environment that supports and encourages meaningful participation, as

well as helps to ensure an agreeable solution that is appropriate for the context of the community and viability over the long-term is achieved (Feenstra, 2001).

As such, it is not surprising that key informants (KI2 & KI6) identified the project coordinator as an indispensable resource in the delivery of community food projects. This is because of the visionary role they take on when identifying common interests and values, and assisting the community in the process of arriving at an agreeable and exciting driving vision (Born and Purcell, 2006; Feenstra, 2001; Campbell, 2004). Moving forward, the facilitator works to achieve project success by harnessing the enthusiasm and interest of the community and effectively channels the positive energy toward a tangible goal that addresses community needs and maximizes available resources. The need for a project coordinator is clearly demonstrated in the challenges currently described by KI6 from the planning department in NR. The challenges related to accessing funding are becoming increasingly difficult, but nevertheless, every effort should be made to secure funding when possible.

Opportunities to improve the community engagement and participation process were also discussed. This included improving communication, varying outreach strategies and identifying strategies to best utilize the energy and enthusiasm of volunteers (KI1 & KI5).

In order to continue to increase understanding of the value of a sustainable LFS, the need for ongoing education among community members has been identified in both the WR and SC Charters respectively (FPA, 2013; FSRT, 2013).

5 Conclusion

Steadily-increasing populations and the resulting expansion of urban centers over the past century have brought on dramatic changes to the global food system. In recent years, there have been growing concerns about the safety, quality and origins of food. In response, communities are becoming increasingly interested in rebuilding the most basic connection between local producers and consumers

(Sonnino, 2009). As such, there is a growing interest in developing LFS that are healthy and sustainable

and that effectively address issues related to the natural environment, the local economy and human

health. In order to achieve this, municipalities are exploring strategies to increase education and

awareness of the potential positive impacts of an improved LFS, protect agricultural land and,

increasingly, coordinate efforts to bring communities closer to achieving a sustainable food system.

Unfortunately, with even the most agriculturally active and conscious communities depending on the

invisible food system, steps must be taken in order for changes to transpire. There are a number of

important lessons to carry forward for the many communities currently exploring the possibility of

undertaking LFS planning initiatives, as well as those interested in working to explore possible actions.

Some of the key lessons to carry forward, as observed from successes and challenges, are summarized in

the following section.

5.1 Recommendations

Understanding that the food system has a direct impact on a broad spectrum of both urban and

rural planning issues, municipalities are increasingly exploring potential strategies to support and

integrate a LFS focus in the work accomplished within the municipality. The work undertaken in each of

the case studies has demonstrated that various municipal departments and non-government

organizations, such as the EDO, planning and public health, have an aptitude for spearheading,

delivering and evaluating initiatives related to the LFS. Further, WR, NR and SC's initiatives illustrated

that a collaborative and interdisciplinary approach that engages community stakeholders appears to

yield the most successful results. As such, it is recommended that municipalities as well as grassroots

organizations make every effort to employ a collaborative and interdisciplinary approach in order to

maximize resources, such as budgets for staff salaries.

Created with the intention to monitor, evaluate, advise and act on local food initiatives taking place in the community, local policy and action organization in WR, NR, and SC have a proven track record of making notable changes to the LFS. Although these organizations rely on volunteers for their membership, they are provided with support from the municipality, often with a staff point person. Further, policy and action organizations often have a voice where municipal department staff do not and, as such, can advocate for new programs and policy changes in support of the LFS in response to identified community needs (KI1). Achievements of policy and action organizations in the case study areas include the changes made to WR's ROP following the recommendations of the Food Systems Roundtable (SCFFMA, 2014), the *Agricultural Action Plan* created by the Agricultural Task Force in NR that drives LFS-related decisions (Niagara Region, 2014), and the unique SC *Food and Agriculture Charter* (FPA, 2013). While the literature cautions that there is no guarantee for success when working with community organizations, it also explains that the potential benefits make the risks worthwhile (Pothukuchi & Kaufman, 1999). As such, it is recommended that municipalities make every reasonable effort to create local policy and action organizations with ongoing support from municipal staff.

Each of the case studies experienced issues related to securing funding resources, particularity for staff salaries and general operational funding. This issue is not unique to community organizations in southern Ontario and, as such, represents a barrier that groups working to realize community initiatives can expect to face generally. Despite these challenges, it is important not to underestimate the power and importance of an effective project coordinator or facilitator in coordinating, driving and ensuring the long term success of community LFS initiatives. Although securing a staff person for the long-term is ideal, a project coordinator can make a lasting impact during a short period of time. As such, it is recommended that municipalities and grassroots organizations make every reasonable effort to hire designated staff for community projects at the onset of a project by pooling limited resources, undertaking fundraising efforts, and engaging in collaborative knowledge and skill sharing.

WR's *Buy Local! Buy Fresh! Map* set the stage for many similar projects in a number of other communities, including SC (Foodlink, 2014). The creation of local food charters and action and policy organizations offer a similar example. Key informants (KI3 & KI5, 2014) explained that various municipalities asked to utilize the *Food and Agriculture Charter* as a template for their own guidance documents. This demonstrates that municipalities are both interested and willing to learn from each other's successes and failures (Sonnino, 2009). Further, the Food Safety Regulatory Training course is an example of a tri-county initiative created in partnership with Georgian College in response to an identified community need. As such, it is recommended that municipalities and grassroots organizations engage in knowledge and skills sharing and explore the potential for the joint delivery of programs in order to maximize limited resources and avoid duplication.

The charter documents created in both WR and SC work to outline the visions of both communities with respect to the future development of the LFS. These charter documents can serve as guidance documents for community leaders looking to make decisions related to the LFS on behalf of the community (FPA, 2013; FSTR, 2013; KI5). As such, it is not surprising that the process called on community stakeholders for input and feedback. The charters have already successfully raised awareness and general interest on the subject of local food and agriculture in WR and SC. The "Charter Champion Awards" in SC, for example, celebrated the community's ongoing commitment to delivering LFS initiatives in line with the Charter's priorities and effectively raised additional excitement and enthusiasm for LFSs (FPA, 2013). It is likely that the success of the Charter, particularly in SC can be attributed in part to the amount of community engagement that was undertaken through the development process. Although the process may be time consuming, the resulting document is likely to accurately reflect the community's needs and interests. As such, it is recommended that municipalities develop Food / Food and Agriculture Charters through a participatory process, by appointing committees or supporting grassroots organizations with the capacity to facilitate the process. Further, it

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is recommended that decision-makers and elected representatives support the Food / Food and Agriculture Charters developed by their respective communities by advocating for policy in support of the described vision for the future of the LFS.

Facilitators leading a community engagement process are reminded to approach a project without a pre-determined concept of the goals and outcomes most appropriate for the project. Community stakeholders should be given the opportunity to participate in a meaningful way in developing goals and hoped-for outcomes, as well as to guide program development by expressing their individual needs and interests. The Food and Safety Regulatory Training Course, for example, grew out of an identified interest among aspiring entrepreneurs to improve access to resources related to the food industry (EDO, 2013a). The resulting two-day course, although only in the pilot phase, has seen significant uptake. As such, it is recommended that municipalities and grassroots organizations approach community facilitation with an open mind in order to effectively examine the specific context, available resources, and any unique opportunities based on community interest with support from municipal staff.

The literature as well as the experiences of the case study areas reinforces that the community is a project's most valuable asset. Unfortunately, KI1 and KI6 discussed issues related to volunteer recruiting and retention, limited coordination of community LFS initiatives, and challenges related to effective use of volunteer energy and enthusiasm. As such, it is recommended that municipalities and grassroots organizations make every reasonable effort to ensure that community stakeholders are given the opportunity to participate, connect with other community members and stakeholders, and contribute to the development of the driving project goals and values in order to deliver more meaningful and impactful projects with limited resources.

Finally, a common theme both expressed in the literature and among key informants from all three areas is that more could be done on the part of the government to provide regional and local municipalities with the resources required to launch and maintain meaningful projects in the community that will contribute the overall health of the LFS. Funding for these projects could be addressed at a municipal level in two ways.

First, it is recommended that municipalities take the lead on LFS planning by developing a food department responsible for overseeing, managing and delivering a wide range of programs related to the sustainable LFS with a designated municipal budget. This approach echoes the recommendations of Pothukuchi and Kaufman (1999) to develop a municipal food department. The ICP Department created in NR effectively brought together representatives from various regional departments to encourage collaborative work on the LFS. If the department proves to be successful over the long-term, other municipalities may be encouraged to follow suit. The benefit of this model is that the municipality maintains control of the program delivery, and can effectively allocate funding in response to community needs. Further, the municipality will be able to effectively assess progress as it happens in the community. The downside to this approach is that it will unquestionably be a costly endeavour, requiring resources and staff.

Second, it is recommended that municipalities provide support for grassroots organizations already operating in the community by creating an annually-available Community Food Systems Corporate Grant Program using the municipal budget. This option would require an appointed staff person to act as a community liaison with the task of identifying successful community organizations with the capacity to deliver meaningful programming in support of the LFS and invite them to apply for funding support. Further, the staff person would ensure ongoing and successful networking and collaboration among various community organizations in order to prevent duplication of programming, as well as to maximize skills and limited resources by pooling them together. Finally, the staff person

would work to facilitate inter-departmental communication that would help to further the work taking place within the community and that it is approached with consideration for all aspects of the complex food system.

The benefit of this approach is the reduced cost; non-profit organizations have far lower staffing and operation costs than regional municipalities. As such, the budget allocated to the Corporate Community Food Systems Grant Program would be able to be stretched further. In addition, non-profit organization can seek additional funding to supplement deficits in program funding allowances, or materials for a special project. Further, local community organizations have well-established ties with the community that a regional municipality may never be able to rival. Finally, at the end of each project term, project success can be reported to the municipality and the decision can be made to continue funding the organization and its portfolio of work, or to move on to another.

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