

The **Research** Shop

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FARMER-FOOD BANK LINKAGES

NOVEMBER 2012

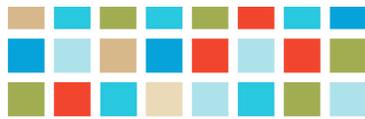
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This report presents the results of a study on opportunities for farmer-food bank partnerships in Ontario. Researchers at the University of Guelph conducted the study for Community Engaged Scholarship/Research Shop, in collaboration with FarmStart. The objectives of this study were two-fold: to gain a better understanding of the current status of farmer-food bank relations, and to identify key opportunities and challenges involved in building and strengthening partnerships. These objectives were addressed through a scan of grey and academic literature to identify some promising practices, as well as through a series of informational interviews conducted with key informants from both the emergency food and farming sectors.

The most frequently cited challenges constraining linkages between farmers and food banks were: 1) difficulties coordinating logistics (i.e. transport and storage of fresh produce); and, 2) the lack of financial incentives to sustain ongoing relationships with farmers. Moving away from the current charitable model – in which farmers simply make donations to food banks – toward a more mutually beneficial model would allow for greater incentives for sustained farmer involvement.

An important opportunity that was widely cited was the potential for farmer-food bank partnerships to be developed in collaboration with other community-based programs and/or organizations that make use of fresh produce, as opposed to in isolation. This kind of integration could increase storage and transport options, and make bulk purchases from farmers or farm groups more viable. In order to realize such potential, however, there is a need for an individual or organization to facilitate discussion and spearhead relationship building. In other words, a champion is required to help build and organize collaborative partnerships. A second opportunity that was identified that may be of special relevance to newer and/or smaller-scale farmers was the potential to supply culturally appropriate produce to food banks, especially in cities with significant immigrant population. In order for this opportunity to be effectively explored, it would be important for food banks to survey the needs of their clients with respect to culturally appropriate produce.

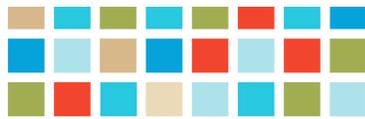
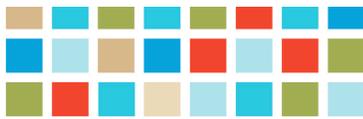


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INTRODUCTION

The contents of this report were gathered and put together by graduate student interns from the University of Guelph's Research Shop. The project was done in collaboration with FarmStart, a non-profit organization that works to support a new generation of entrepreneurial, ecological farmers.

The report will begin with an overview of the research goals, including some explanation of why connecting farmers and food banks is an important concern. The results of informational interviews will then be presented, with a focus on: 1) the current state of farmer-food bank collaborations; 2) the challenges associated with the existing – primarily charitable – model; and 3) the perceived opportunities and barriers associated with developing more mutually beneficial partnerships. The report will conclude with a summary of the results as well a presentation of some recommendations.

BACKGROUND

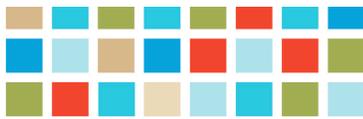
Food banks in Ontario are in need of fresh produce. At the same time, many of the province's farmers who grow and harvest fruits and vegetables obtain at least some surplus yield. According to recent estimates, 25 million pounds of food are ploughed under each year [OAFB 2010]. This situation suggests that there could be significant opportunities to develop mutually beneficial partnerships that could help get fresh produce to those who need it.

In 2010, the Ontario Association of Food Banks (OAFB) developed a charitable model for connecting food banks and farmers called Community Harvest Ontario. This program highlights 3 different avenues for obtaining fresh produce: 1) direct donations from farmers; 2) gleaning of non-marketable produce left on the fields; and 3) allocation of land where produce is grown specifically for food bank donations [OAFB 2010]. Representing 120 food banks and 1100 hunger relief programs in Ontario, the OAFB's program has distributed 1.5 million pounds of fresh produce to Ontarians in need since its inception [OAFB].

While the Community Harvest program provides an important example of how farmer-food bank interactions can be encouraged, the model it presents may not be appropriate for all farmers or food bank programs – particularly those working at a smaller scale. It also does not address all of the barriers that can inhibit farmer-food bank linkages, particularly over the long term.

RESEARCH PURPOSE AND GOALS

This report aims to explore strategies for connecting farmers with emergency food providers, with a particular focus on: a) models that are mutually beneficial rather than purely charitable, and b) models that may have particular relevance for small-scale and/or new farm enterprises. The report will identify some of the existing challenges and opportunities within Ontario for this kind of partnership, as well as identify some effective practices currently used in North America.



The main intent is to gain a better understanding of the current status of farmer-food bank partnerships in Ontario, as well as possibilities for future development, from both the farming and emergency food perspectives.

METHODS

KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEWS

Informational interviews were conducted with key representatives from both emergency food organizations and the farming sector. A total of 9 interviews were conducted – 4 with representatives of emergency food organizations, 4 with representatives of the farming sector, and 1 with a representative of Ontario’s provincial government. (See Appendix I for a list of interview participants.)

The interviews consisted of questions related to the logistics and funding of current farmer-food bank programs, their perceived efficacy, opportunities for fostering new connections, opportunities for culturally appropriate produce for emergency use, and barriers preventing mutually beneficial partnerships. (See Appendix II for the complete interview guide.)

LITERATURE REVIEW

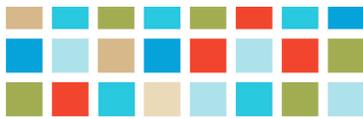
A scan of both scholarly and web-based literature was conducted on farmer-food bank connections in order to provide some examples of effective models and practices.

RESULTS

CURRENT FUNDING MECHANISMS FOR FARMER-FOOD BANK CONNECTIONS

Funding is one of the most important factors when it comes to facilitating farmer-food bank connections. Land, farming resources, equipment use, storage, and transportation – each item implies significant costs that cannot generally be adequately covered by the food banks themselves. According to the Daily Bread Food Bank in Toronto, food banks in Ontario do not receive government funding, and therefore depend on private fundraising and/or collaboration with community partners to support their work. In terms of covering the costs associated with sourcing produce from farmers, four different avenues are most common: foundation-based grants, community partnerships, consumer support, and donations from farmers.

According to a representative of Hamilton Food Share, the OAFB’s Community Harvest program was started with foundation-based grant funding – primarily from the Ontario Trillium Foundation. Local partner organizations in the province-wide program, such as Hamilton Food Share, also contributed funds. One research participant noted that programs such as Community Harvest tend to attract funders because they are perceived as having wide-reaching social, economic, and even environmental benefits for communities. In addition to Trillium,



Heifer International was also cited as a foundation that could assist farmer-food bank connections, as it provides start-up funds for farms and targets community development initiatives with a focus on food and farming.

In addition to foundation-based grant funding, some farmer-food bank partnerships are made possible through support from networks of organizations within a community. For example, North York Harvest Food Bank, one of the largest food banks in Toronto, collaborates with non-profit organizations PACT and FutureWatch to obtain fresh organic vegetables from their small-scale urban farm. Similarly, Tigchelaar Apples and Berries farm in Puslinch, Ontario generates fresh produce for food banks in conjunction with a local church on land that is accessed through United Way funding.

A third funding mechanism used to facilitate farmer-food bank linkages is provided by private citizens. For example, Cedar Down Farms in Neustadt, Ontario is able to fundraise through the sale of Community Supported Agriculture (CSAs) shares in order to provide weekly salad greens to the Salvation Army in Hanover. In some cases, farmers may charge a slightly elevated price, and let consumers know that the extra money they are paying covers the cost of produce given to a local food bank.

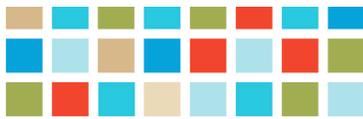
Finally, farmers themselves are often willing to support food banks at their own expense. In some cases, they allow volunteers from food banks or pantries to glean from the fields - taking produce that would not be suitable for market, but is still nutritious. In the case of Cedar Down Farms, a dedicated amount of fresh produce is grown specifically for weekly donation to Chalmers Community Services in Guelph.

LOGISTICS

While covering costs is an important concern in and of itself, a separate (though related) issue that can constrain farmer-food bank connections is the logistics of food distribution and storage.

In terms of food distribution and transportation, a representative of Guelph-Wellington Local Food observed that food transport to a food bank or pantry is often the farmer's responsibility. The OAFB and Hamilton Food Share explained that the Community Harvest program seeks to address that problem by providing transportation, as well as shipping and receiving warehouses/hubs, all paid for by the OAFB, or covered by a particular food bank's budget. A Member of Provincial Parliament – and advocate of farmer-food bank connections – who participated in this research noted that farmers tend to take responsibility for transporting food from rural Ontario to local food banks, while the OAFB contributes to province-wide transportation of produce to help ensure goods get to food banks that may not be serviced by local farmers.

Like distribution, food storage presents a challenge for farmers and food banks seeking to work together. Plan B Organics – a farm based in Branchton, Ontario – partnered with the OAFB in



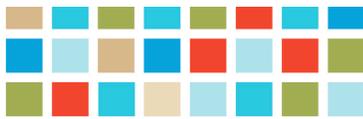
the summer of 2010 to grow specifically for food banks; however, they encountered problems due to limited capacity for on-farm cold storage, vegetable washing, and packaging/bagging. They concluded that they did not have the necessary equipment to sustain a long-term food bank partnership. Cedar Down Farms has been able to solve the potential storage problem by transporting produce immediately to the Salvation Army, which has sufficient storage space to handle their donations. The research results made clear that there tends to be some difference in terms of capacity between larger-scale – often urban-based – food banks, and smaller-scale – often rural – emergency food providers, with the former being more likely to have the kinds of storage space, or other facilities, required for accepting fresh produce on a regular basis.

Challenges with transportation and storage logistics are often compounded by the irregular availability of farm produce for emergency food use. This is especially the case when produce is sourced from smaller-scale operations, which often cannot guarantee consistent quantities of produce at regular intervals.

CREATING AND MAINTAINING RELATIONSHIPS

Research results demonstrated that, while many farmers may have a desire to donate produce to food banks, and may do so on occasion, maintaining sustained, longer-term partnerships can be difficult. Providing financial incentives for farmers to work with food banks is generally seen as one means of facilitating partnerships that go beyond one-time, or irregular, produce donations. To that end, MPP Bob Bailey is advocating for Bill 104 – a private member's bill that proposes a tax credit to reduce a farmer's personal income tax by 25% of the value of goods donated. This tax credit proposal is supported by Hamilton Food Share as well as the OAFB; however, at the time of writing, was held up in the legislature. Another strategy to provide financial incentives for farmers to maintain relationships with food banks has been suggested by the OAFB. They suggest establishing projects wherein the OAFB would help pay the costs of a farmers' equipment in return for guaranteed fresh produce donations. This model is similar to a Washington-based program called 'Food to Bank On'. In addition to funding for equipment, that program also offers new, sustainable farmers business training, links to potential markets, and mentorship in exchange for fresh produce donated to food banks and shelters.

While a lack of financial incentive may inhibit longer-term farmer-food bank relationships, issues of distance and liability are also important to consider. In the case of the OAFB and its Community Harvest program, communication with farmers located far from the organization's central offices in the Greater Toronto Area can be challenging. As a result, the program tends to be most successful when Community Harvest coordinators are present at the local level and can meet regularly with farmers in person, thereby creating and maintaining close relationships. In terms of liability, participants noted that many farmers may be concerned about food safety and liability issues. These concerns could be at least partially addressed by providing information about the "Donation of Food Act", which was passed in Ontario in 1994 and relieves donors of all liability in the event that consumption of donated foods results in injury or sickness, provided that previous measures were taken to prevent the creation of rotting or stale food.



OPPORTUNITIES FOR MUTUALLY BENEFICIAL PARTNERSHIPS

Research results suggested that a number of considerations are important when thinking about how to move away from a charitable model (within which farmers assume the costs and responsibilities of donating produce for emergency use) toward a model based more on the idea of mutually beneficial partnership.

Incentives for New/Small-Scale Sustainable Farm Businesses

In order for a mutually beneficial partnership to occur, it is important for farm businesses to receive some kind of incentive in return for produce that goes to food banks. The first and most obvious incentive would be financial support of some description. As charitable organizations, food banks generally require third party funding to purchase farm produce. Another potential incentive cited by participants is the potential for farmers to advertise their support for food banks as a means of raising their community profile, and marketing themselves as socially conscious businesses. A further opportunity is that clients of food banks that receive fresh farm products may become farm customers in the long run.

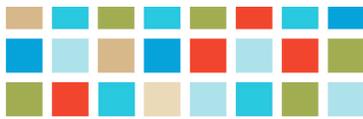
The aforementioned charitable tax credit could also be an important incentive. Although the tax credit proposed by Bill 104 is would not actually lead to profits for donation, the amount of money saved would help defray costs of labour, processing, storage, or transportation, making it easier and potentially more financially worthwhile for farmers to regularly donate produce to food banks.

Non-financial incentives for engaging with food banks can also be valuable, especially to new farmers. Beyond the obvious satisfaction gained by helping meet a community need, partnerships with food banks can be a useful way to train on-farm assistants, and can create opportunities for support with harvesting, storage, and shipping produce. In cases where food banks have sufficient storage capacity, partnership could help increase the storage capabilities of small farms.

Culturally Appropriate Produce

A number of research participants felt that culturally appropriate produce represented a potential opportunity for building farmer-food bank connections – particularly connections with newer and/or smaller-scale farmers who specialize in crops targeted at specific cultural markets. One example mentioned was the case of Onward Willow – a neighbourhood in Guelph that is characterized by a high immigrant population. According to one research participant, a local good food box program might have greater uptake in the neighbourhood if it was able to offer culturally appropriate produce.

According to the OAFB, the main opportunities for linking culturally appropriate produce with emergency food service are within the GTA. North York Harvest and Hamilton Food Share both agreed that an initial survey or research would be required in order to understand the



specific products needed and the degree of need. The Ontario Fruit and Vegetable Growers Association noted that some growers currently produce “ethnic vegetables” for clients in particular neighbourhoods; however, effectively coordinating the distribution of these products to food banks where they are in demand could be difficult without resources dedicated to the effort.

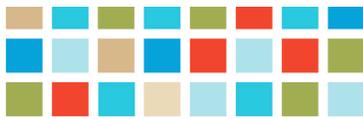
Fostering Relationships

Finally, relationship building was stressed by a number of interview participants as a way of encouraging more effective farmer-food bank partnerships. One specific suggestion was to approach farm organizations, such as the Ontario Tender Fruits Association, Ontario Federation of Agriculture, and the Ontario Fruit and Vegetable Growers Association, and educate them about the OAFB in the hopes that they could encourage their members to view partnering with food banks more favourably. That kind of effort could encourage communication across sectors, and also make it easier for food banks to purchase in bulk from farming collectives rather than on a purely individual basis. This could also allow a more cost-effective approach to transportation and storage.

For both farm and food bank representatives, open communication was extremely important for effective collaboration. For example, ongoing conversations with local food banks regarding the type and quantity of produce needed were very helpful for farmers wanting to make contributions. Suggestions for improvement included: 1) the development of a directory of local farmers that would offer some information about their willingness to work with food banks, and the potential surpluses they might have; and, 2) encouraging farmers and food banks embarking on partnership agreements to openly discuss topics such as costs of production, storage lifetime, and market price of different products.

Most importantly, interview participants tended to agree that there is a general need to bring different stakeholders together to focus on common goals. Ideally, discussions should include farmers’ associations, donors, and government agricultural agencies, and should also focus on both the emergency food sector specifically, and on building farmer-community relationships more generally to encourage fresh produce consumption – for example within after school and breakfast programs, as well as at food banks. The introduction of Bill 104 offers a potentially useful platform for encouraging these kinds of broader discussions.

Finally, it is important to note that farmer-food bank relationships can offer benefits to food bank clients beyond just an increase in available fresh produce. As programs like Lettuce Links in Seattle and Garden Harvest in Maryland demonstrate, and as some interview participants explained, providing people with agricultural knowledge and skills, or in some cases simply with opportunities to visit farms, can help improve their physical and emotional well-being, and contribute to feelings of empowerment and increased self-sufficiency.



CONCLUSIONS

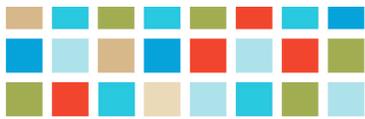
The first major theme to emerge in this report is that there is a lack of clarity in terms of who is (or should be) responsible for coordinating and paying for food storage and transport when farms contribute food to food banks. If farmers feel that their only option is to use their own resources to ship fresh produce to a local food bank, this can inhibit their desire or ability to collaborate. This is especially true in the case of smaller food banks that do not typically have any resources to aid farmers with transport or storage.

A related theme is that, even when farmers do decide to take on the costs of donating to food banks, this charitable model is not necessarily sustainable over the long term. Farmers cannot guarantee a substantial surplus every year that would be cost-effective for transport, nor would it be a constant and dependable supply of fresh produce for the food banks. A move toward a mutually beneficial partnership, whether the incentive is financial or non-financial, would help create more sustainable relationships.

A final theme to emerge from the research is the importance of incorporating farmer-food bank connections into broader efforts designed to increase fresh produce availability in communities. Working together with groups that are in need of fresh produce offers opportunities to create a greater demand for local fresh produce, as well as increase transport and storage options. Importantly, this kind of broader collaboration would require an individual or an organization to act as a champion, facilitating discussion and action.

REFERENCES

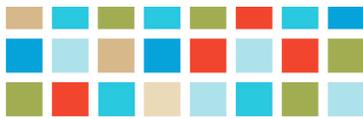
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2. Ontario Association of Food Banks Website. Accessed September 1, 2012. www.oafb.ca



APPENDICES

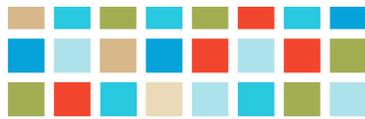
APPENDIX I: INTERVIEW PARTICIPANT LIST

1. Daily Bread Food Bank
2. Hamilton Food Share
3. North York Harvest Food Bank
4. Ontario Association of Food Banks
5. MPP Bob Bailey (Sarnia-Lambton)
6. Cedar Down Farms
7. Plan B Organics
8. Ontario Fruit and Vegetable Growers Association
9. Guelph-Wellington Local Food



APPENDIX II: INTERVIEW GUIDE

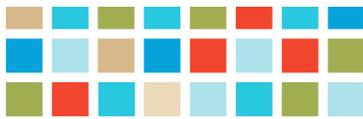
1. Do you or your organization currently have/participate in/know of any programs that partner new farmers with emergency food programs (e.g. food banks/pantries)? If so, please give a brief description of the program(s), focusing on how the following issues are dealt with/managed:
 - a) Funding (including payment for food, etc.)
 - b) Transportation/food distribution
 - c) Food storage
 - d) Creating and maintaining relationships (e.g. continuity and consistency of donations/food collection)
 - e) Coordination/management
2. If you know of and/or participate in any such program, how effective do you feel it is at meeting its goals? Please explain.
3. What future opportunities do you believe could be developed for connecting new farms to emergency food programs?
 - a) What would the prerequisites be for such connections to function? (e.g. farm size, type of production, distance to program location, etc.)
 - b) Could you see a way for such a connection to help contribute to the development of a small-scale sustainable and/or new farm business? Please elaborate.
 - c) How do you believe such opportunities could be fostered? (e.g. policy, networking, organizational coordination, etc.)
4. Are you aware of any programs that specifically aim to source culturally appropriate produce for emergency use?
 - a) If so, please describe.
 - b) If not, do you feel this could be considered an opportunity? Why or why not?
5. What are some barriers or challenges that you feel prevent mutually beneficial partnerships between new farms and emergency food programs?
 - a) Are you or your organization currently working to overcome these barriers? If so, how?



APPENDIX III: ORGANIZATIONS CONNECTING FARMERS AND FOOD BANKS

List of Organizations and Practices that Connect Fresh Food to Food Banks

Name	Website	Location	Description
Food to Bank On	http://sustainableconnections.org/foodfarming/FTBO	Washington	Food to Bank On is a project that connects new sustainable farmers with business training, potential markets and mentorship while at the same time providing farm-fresh products to food banks and shelters.
Lettuce Links	http://www.cityfarmer.org/lettucelink.html	Seattle	Lettuce Links is an emergency food and gardening program. They provide fresh organic produce, vegetable seeds, gardening supplies and information to low-income residents. This organization believes that fresh healthy food is a human right and therefore works to ensure that food bank clients and other low income clients have access to this resource, either through actual produce or the capacity to produce it themselves.
Garden Harvest	http://www.gardenharvest.org/	Maryland	This organization is interested in alleviating hunger and poor nutrition. To this end, this organization establishes community farms that teach people about farming so they can grow their own food.
Community Harvest Ontario	http://oafb.convio.net/site/PageServer?pagename=oafb10_home	Ontario	This organization provides larger volumes of fresh produce to those in Ontario who use the food bank.
Buy Local, Share Local	http://www.oafb.ca/blsl.html	Ontario	This organization will host food drives at farmers markets and encourage patrons to purchase extra fresh food to be donated to the food bank.



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FARMER FOOD BANK LINKAGES

The Milk Program	http://www.oafb.ca/milk-program.html	Ontario	Diary farmers donate milk to local food banks to support this program. The milk donated is over 1 million liters a year.
Not Far From the Tree	http://www.notfarfromthetree.org/about	Toronto	This program is run by volunteers who pick fruit from urban trees. 1/3 of that produce is bicycled to local food banks.
Fresh Food Partners Gleaning Program	http://yrfn.ca/programs/fresh-food-partners-gleaning-program/	York Region (GTA)	This group organizes low-income members of the community the opportunity to go out to a farmer's field and pick the remaining produce for their own consumption. The program is free to the participants thereby increasing access to fresh food at no cost.
Surrey Food Bank	http://www.surreyfoodbank.org/?page=116	British Columbia	This food bank has a program which volunteers glean farmer's fields for the food bank. (Gleaning is picking the produce left in the field)
The Stop	http://thestop.org/	Toronto	This organization runs a number of food initiatives, one of which is a food bank. They have a program that purchases produce from specific farms with money from donations. They also connect citizens without a space to garden with citizens that have space they are willing to share.
Food Share Garden	http://www.foodshare.net/garden02.htm	Toronto	This organization provides food to low income neighbourhoods through community gardens and food boxes. The food boxes are filled with produce, which the organization purchases, from farmers or the Ontario Food Terminal.
Gathering Place	http://www.nuggett.ca/ArticleDisplay.aspx?e=3568133	North Bay	This is a soup kitchen, which has planted its own garden that will be staffed by volunteers to produce their own food to give to the poor rather than purchase it from Sysco.