2013

Ontario Edible Education Network Action Plan

Local and Sustainable Food in Schools

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This document provides the Ontario Edible Education Network's Action Plan to advance its Local and Sustainable Food in Schools focus area.

The Ontario Edible Education Network's process involved the development of 6 Action Plans for the following priority areas: (1) Food in the Curriculum, (2) Food Education Outside of the Classroom, (3) School and Community Food Gardens Engaging Children, (4) Food Skills and Cooking Programs, (5) Local/Sustainable Food in Schools, and (6) Student Nutrition Programs.

More information about the Ontario Edible Education Network is available at:
http://www.sustainontario.com/initiatives/ontario-edible-education-network

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Ontario Edible Education Network:
Local and Sustainable Food in Schools Action Plan

Table of Contents

Summary: Action Plan Goals and Objectives: 1

Priority Actions and Implementation Details: 2

A. Network Building and Connecting 2

B. Aggregating Thought and Information 3

C. Advocacy and Government Relations 4

Appendix A: What was heard – Environmental Scan 5

Summary of Current Environment and Needs 5

Summary: Action Plan Goals and Objectives:

1. **Continue to collect data on the successes and challenges of local and sustainable food procurement in schools.**
    a. Greater research needs to be completed in Northern Ontario in particular, as well as throughout the province as innovation and infrastructure improvements to Ontario's food system continue to develop.
    b. Research needs to be undertaken to explore what "sustainable" Ontario products are being supplied and what options are available as there is a gap in this area.
2. **Secure ongoing funding sources for regional food program human resources and marketing.** As the food system increasingly focuses on local procurement it is necessary to find funds to: maintain personnel to facilitate local food action groups; source local options; make connections with appropriate producers and distributors and train other staff; promote new local products to distributors and student and parent markets.
    a. The new Local Food Fund and Student Nutrition Program expansion is a good start that needs to show successes in its first year to ensure re-investment.
    b. Under the umbrella of the Local Food Act, continue to support the concept of inter-ministerial commitment to longer term funding for school boards and school board local food projects including the maintenance and expansion of OMAFRA's Local Food Fund, Broader Public Sector Fund, Ministry of Health and Long Term Care funding such as the Northern Fruit and Vegetable program and Farm Fresh Fundraiser with emphasis on school board projects.
    c. Solidify plan to "operationalize" goals of the Student Nutrition Program expansion to ensure provincial coordinators have the training and resources needed to link with local food businesses and food distribution networks and ensure local food education occurs simultaneously.
    d. Continued fundraising efforts to fund the Ontario Edible Education Network to ensure that a strong community voice is present to work in partnership with government institutions and agri-business.
    e. Compile current local food in schools funding opportunities (ex. Local Food Fund Fund, Fresh from the Farm Fundraiser, etc.) to prepare to share in combination with pairing with a mentor/consultant.
3. **Improve local food sourcing and distribution avenues to ensure local food can get to school markets.** Local food infrastructure needs to improve simultaneously with the establishment of regional local food action groups. Regional food hubs have provided a positive model and should continue to be supported and expanded.
    a. Compile updated scan on Regional food hubs (Northumberland, Simcoe, North Toronto, Halton, etc.).
    b. Create Local Food Fund project to make connections between regional local food school action groups and regional distribution hubs as in Goal #5.
4. **Strengthen policy among school boards, their food service providers and nutrition programs for local food purchasing.** Positive advances have been made in recent Ministry of Education policy, such as the School Food and Beverage Policy (PPM150) and Acting Today, Shaping Tomorrow to

emphasize environmentally responsible purchasing and the purchase of local food "where possible". Positive models of food service Request for Proposals and contract language should be shared as an inspiration to other school boards across the province to meet the guiding principles laid out in these policy documents.

   a. Follow up on Sustain Ontario's recommendation on the Local Food Act, to create a provincial food literacy and Student Nutrition Program policy framework to build the market for local food in schools.

   b. Identify mentors with experience in school board local food policy creation to mentor regional school action groups as in Goal #5.

5. **Create regional local food school action groups across the province with mentorship from existing successful models.** Multiple stakeholders who influence food procurement in regional school systems need to come together to map assets available locally at school boards across the province, as each region has unique opportunities to increase local food in the school food system.

   a. Identify key stakeholders in regions across the province who are well positioned to facilitate such groups.

   b. Identify mentors from within the Edible Education Network community who have had success in delivering similar models.

6. **Continue to connect both small and large-scale local food projects across the province utilizing the Network website, e-newsletter and Bring Food Home Conference.** There are a number of successful Farm to School programs and institutional food procurement policies across the continent that should continue to be highlighted online and at in-person meetings and conferences as inspiration and for the sharing of resources, good practices, and development of policy development.

   a. Through website and e-newsletter, share current resources available to boost small-scale fundraising opportunities (ex. Fresh from the Farm Fundraiser and OntarioFresh website linking school programs with local producers interested in serving schools).

   b. Seek local food in schools champions from this research to hold local food in schools focused workshop at Bring Food Home

Priority Actions and Implementation Details:

✪ = "Quick Win": Priority action that can be taken in the next year, using limited resources, to demonstrate movement, and build momentum

A. Network Building and Connecting

Facilitated Relationship Building

Priority Actions	Priority Level	Implementation Details
Bring together community organizations that have experience	High	a. Hold a meeting on opportunities for collaboration among Network members who have delivered local food projects (as

delivering local food in schools projects to deliver coordinated local food action hubs		per Local Food Fund requirements) ✪ b. Assess priority funding opportunities (Local Food Fund, SNPs) c. Determine best course of action - apply for funding in partnership or as individual groups

Funding Support

Priority Messages	Priority Level	Implementation Details
The priorities of the Local Food Act and Local Food Fund have synergies with the new expanded Student Nutrition Program goals	High	Apply for funding to train SNP coordinators on local food procurement and connect them to local food distribution options ✪

B. Aggregating Thought and Information

Sharing information, resources and stories:

Priority Actions / Areas	Priority Level	Implementation Details
Increase use of Ontariofresh.ca website to connect regional school projects with local food producers and distributors	High	a. Have multiple current local food projects test the Ontariofresh.ca site for further gaps ✪ b. Feedback any gaps to the Greenbelt Foundation c. Include use of Ontariofresh.ca as part of future local food projects
As regional local food projects grow, collect contract and policy language used by school boards to encourage other school board champions	Med	Include as searchable database on Network website

Research Gaps / Data Collection:

Priority Actions to Address Research Gaps	Priority Level	Implementation Details
Compile updated scan on Regional food hubs (Northumberland, Simcoe, North Toronto, Halton, etc.)	High	Secure a university intern position overseen by Network member organization ✪
Specific research needs to be delivered for "sustainable" Ontario products available and to specifically research options available.	Med	Secure a university intern position overseen by Network member organization

C. Advocacy and Government Relations

Priority Policy Objectives / Opportunities	Priority Level	Implementation Details
Communicate successes of local food projects by Network membership to Ministry of Agriculture and Food to help establish policy goals and targets for local food procurement in schools	High	a. Compile procurement successes from top local food projects in schools in Ontario b. Deliver results to Minister with request to set realistic procurement and policy targets at schools
Raise awareness of Local Food Act among the public to encourage greater "teeth" for the Act	Med	Utilize Local Food Week in October to blitz programming related to local food in schools

Appendix A: What was heard – Environmental Scan

Summary of Current Environment and Needs

A number of sources informed the development of this Action Plan from various perspectives in the local food system; community organizations that coordinate local food programs in schools, student nutrition programmers, local food manufacturing, food service providers and schools boards. In general, informants noted that to ensure the resiliency of Ontario food programs in schools it was important to support models on multiple scales including localized, small-scale Farm to School programs while continuing to increase institutional local food champions all along the food distribution chain.

- Although the majority of organizations and programs scanned defined "local food" as food "grown in Ontario", there was also importance placed on food grown as locally as possible, within the same Region and on school grounds.
- Both larger-scale distribution through the mainstream food system and local small-scale approaches have a part to play in increasing access to local food in schools and complementing healthy food education.

Foundations exist at each point along the food system to create greater access to local food in schools, but more linkages along the food system are required.

Foundations in place:

- Farms in Ontario have the capacity to provide increased products to schools.
- Smaller scale distributors (and some larger-scale distributors), and manufacturers are in place to make and distribute local, school-ready food, such as *100 Km Foods, Dairy Distributors of Ontario, Gordon food Services, Farm to Table Canada Inc.*
- Systems are in place to link schools and school food service providers to Ontario farms and distributors such as Ontario*fresh*.ca
- Food distribution programs are in place in schools that encourage local food purchasing where possible through curriculum, emerging and existing policy (Local Food Act, Student Nutrition Programs guidelines, PPM150) and school board contracts ex. School Nutrition Programs, secondary school cafeterias, hospitality programs, schoolyard food gardens.
- There is a perception among students and parents (consumers in this particular food system) that local food is healthier and good for the economy.

Future Needs / Challenges:

- Local food distribution is largely dependent on smaller providers, as the larger companies can be less flexible. To have a larger-scale impact, it is necessary to make the connections with big food players and to get them on board to change the face of the game.
- Smaller-scale Ontario food manufacturers feel they have limited access to school markets while school food programs have questions about where to source local food. There is a greater need to make these links in the food system.

- There is some hesitancy among food programs that focus on health to make a commitment to "local" food as well, should its availability or cost impede the program.
- Although the perception exists among school consumers that local food is good for themselves, for the environment and for the economy, they are not always aware of how to access local food or if they are going to like the taste and price. In some cases greater marketing is required.

Financial Support

As changes take place all along the food distribution system, those involved have identified a need for financial support to address the challenges in front of them:

- Ontario food producers, manufacturers, food service companies, school boards and community organizations that are facilitating relationships along the food chain and delivering local food programming have all identified a need for greater financial support.
    - Their main costs are labour (to prepare food, facilitate and promote programming) and marketing.
- New funding has been announced from the Ministry of Children and Youth Services "for the hiring of 14 food distribution and logistics coordinators across the province. Co-ordinators will work with new and existing programs to build stronger partnerships with local businesses and food distribution networks resulting in more efficient channels to purchase, transport and store food."
- New funding has also been announced by the Ministry of Agriculture and Food. The Local Food Fund is designed to support innovative local food projects that celebrate local food, and help create jobs and economic growth in Ontario. The Fund will support the following projects: Regional and Local Food Networks, Enhanced Technologies, Capacity and/or Minor Capital, Research and Best Practices, Education, Marketing and Outreach.