2013

Ontario Edible Education Network Action Plan

School and Community Food Gardens Engaging Children

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This document provides the Ontario Edible Education Network's Action Plan to advance its School and Community Food Gardens Engaging Children 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

Ontario Edible Education Network: School and Community Food Gardens Engaging Children Action Plan

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Summary: Action Plan Goals and Objectives:

1. **Increase Data Collection**: Continue and increase data collected about the current climate for school and community gardens that engage children and youth in Ontario so as to develop more comprehensive information and statistics about on-the ground gardening projects.

2. Advance advocacy and actions to support:
    a. ***Increased opportunities for project funding***
        - Respondents noted external sources of funding are critical for tools, equipment and staffing.
    b. ***Increased awareness of good collaborative practices and networking to foster partnerships***
        - Multi-stakeholder projects are most successful.
        - We should build on existing networks and conference opportunities to share good practices and learn from one another / foster new projects and alliances.
    c. ***Increased dialogue with planners and policy makers to understand how and why to include food gardens in community planning***
        - Respondents noted that it would be valuable for municipal and provincial community planning to prioritize food gardening as a use of public space.
    d. ***Increased access to food growing infrastructure (ie, water, fencing other items) and planning supports (soil testing & safe construction practices) in communities:***
        - Respondents noted that infrastructure to support food production in public spaces is important to support new project growth and relieve the burden on community groups to fundraise externally for these items.
    e. ***Recommendations to government***
        - Based on our review of research undertaken by Green Thumbs Growing Kids (GTGK), *School Food Gardens in Ontario -- Educating for Health and Sustainability*, and additional feedback gathered during the action planning process, we recommend that school food gardens be employed to advance established policy goals, at the provincial and local level, in the area of environmental education and how existing frameworks support their development and expansion.
        - Specific recommendations are outlined in the table below.

In addition, the **Imagine a Garden in Every School** (IGES) campaign is committed to researching policies and best practices in other jurisdictions in order to explore how best to work with the Ministry of Education, school boards and individual schools in Ontario.

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
Support teachers to know the opportunities that are out there to interact and learn about successful school/student food garden projects. ✪	High	A lot of training workshops are already being hosted across Ontario in a more local context that enable teachers to learn from each other and identify activities, project ideas and potential future collaborators/supporters.– for example, Green Thumbs, Ecosource, FoodShare and Evergreen all host different types of related school based education. Rather than duplicate these great resources by creating a new program, it would be most helpful to better promote the opportunities available for this type of support. Create an online platform via the Network website and newsletters, listserves etc.
Increase linkages with post-secondary institutions.	Medium	Encourage active networking with Colleges and Universities to encourage students to examine and publicize the results of their research. ***See further details in research section.***
Encourage stronger links between schools and garden/farm groups.	Medium	Foster relationships through identifying key individuals who represent local horticultural societies, Master Gardeners, 4-H clubs and farm associations, eg. NFU and NFU women's organization etc. (Some contacts may emerge from existing networks, or through surveys ongoing – ***see further details in research section.*** Highlight at the Royal Winter Fair, horticultural events etc. opportunities for teachers and students to learn how students can take local seasonal produce back to their communities and grow it in their own school yard. ***Some of these events may link in to farm-to-school action planning and the implementation of the Local Food Act.***
Increase communication with parents, health and other education advocacy groups	High	People for Education HC Link

Funder Education

Priority Messages	Priority Level	Implementation Details
School gardens and public community gardens grow healthy kids and allow us to save money on healthcare. ✪	High	Develop short fact sheet(s) to provide 'rationale' / case for support for school and community gardens in terms of individual health ***(see resource development section)***
Municipal governments and public health units have a role to play by providing funding and facilitating access to outdoor growing space for students (especially summer gap) ✪	High	Share information with relevant municipal policy working groups via Sustain Ontario to emphasize three key elements to municipal policy makers: 1. Not all schools have access to appropriate spaces for food growing. Municipal parks and other public lands are resources that should be available to students in this situation. 2. Municipalities and school boards must be encouraged to collaborate to create space-sharing arrangements and summer maintenance/ community sharing strategies. 3. NGOs have a key role to play in supporting multi-stakeholder projects as they often act as the facilitator bridging the gap between different types of bureaucracy etc – and they need to be funded.
As new 'acts' or policies are approved, they need to be linked to funding to implement them (ie, the Local Food Act), and funding supports should be multi-year to best support initiatives. ✪	High	Share the following information: • New policies are not 'enabling' when they are not accompanied by funding resources for implementation/ infrastructure improvement. • Funding support should be for ongoing projects – multi-year, (ie, 3 years minimum) to address instability in the NGO sector.
Gardens need gardeners who know what they are doing	Med	We cannot expect people to volunteer forever (especially people living on low incomes) – gardeners have expertise and knowledge that is valuable. Whether garden co-ordinators are paid by non-profits, schools, or school boards, this gives the garden sustainability.

B. Aggregating Thought and Information

Sharing information, resources and stories:

Priority Actions / Areas	Priority Level	Implementation Details
Link to Imagine a Garden in every school interactive map ✪	High	Facilitate a link to shared stories via the IGES website.
Enable and promote a platform to share/rate the great resources for lesson	High	There are already a lot of great online resources that exist to support individuals in planning gardens, so there isn't a need to duplicate these resources – there is more of a need to facilitate

planning etc. that already exist on the internet ✪		sharing 'favourites' that are rated or endorsed as good websites/books etc. by those currently using them.
Increase social media connections that celebrate local school and community gardens. ✪	Medium	Encourage Network members and stakeholders to showcase projects and share information via Facebook, Twitter and instagram photos. For example, taking advantage of 'bring your device policies' to encourage teachers to use ipads and digital cameras to post projects online – creating a shared hashtag (ie, **#ilovemyschoolgarden**) could be added to the Network and IGES blog posts etc.

Research Gaps / Data Collection:

Priority Actions to Address Research Gaps	Priority Level	Implementation Details
Compile updated scans on community and school garden ✪	High	• There is a need to continue filling out the information about what is currently happening in Ontario – both via the IGES survey of school projects, and the OCGN survey via Sustain Ontario. • ✪ IGES and GTGK already has secured a university intern to work on the IGES school garden scan • Complete the Sustain Ontario-led OCGN survey process, and share results widely.
Increase research into indicators for impact of school gardening and increase length of studies	High	There are lots of great studies out there, but there is a gap in knowledge related to two areas: • **Longitudinal studies** that examine the impact of school gardens and/or community garden participation on the health and wellbeing of children and youth over time – ie, follow the same individuals for multiple years etc. • **Indicators** that can be used to understand different aspects of garden participation – for example, **best practices to evaluate** nutritional impacts, physical exercise impacts etc. These are challenging based on the complexity of how many different areas gardens impact. Current qualitative research design still only asks a limited number of questions – producing results along each area of knowledge but it is very difficult to bring that back in to a comprehensive whole.
Highlight and Increase research with schools and universities ✪	High	• There is a need for more engagement between community projects and post secondary studies. • Results of student projects undertaken should be highlighted – many are already underway but results aren't always published. We should encourage students and community research projects to share their results. ✪

Communications: Fact Sheets, Handouts, other resources:

Priority Communications Resources	Priority Level	Implementation Details
Prepare a list of hints to use in approaching School Boards ✪	High	Aggregate information into a fact-sheet about the reasons' why a garden is a good idea/strategies to address common school board logistics problems and concerns.
Prepare a list of 'how gardens impact the community' to use in educating funders / supporting communities to develop funding plans ✪	High	Aggregate information into a fact-sheet for funders in health – learning how school gardens could save them money, using a health promotion and wellness lens. See point A in funding support.
Prepare a list of 'community assets' and asset mapping enablers that can be used to assess complimentary resources (financial and non-financial) ✪		This resource may not need to be 'created' per se- may be able to link to A-B-C-D (Asset Based Community Development) via McKnight etc - http://www.abcdinstitute.org/ and other online project development sites which have some good summaries of this practice.

C. Advocacy and Government Relations

Priority Policy Objectives / Opportunities	Priority Level	Implementation Details
Ministry of Education should be included as a target of advocacy through their current "Great to Excellent" initiative	High	Recommendation that OEEN extend scope of advocacy further to include Ministry of Education consultations in target groups. Opportunity to partner with IGES who will be engaging in this type of advocacy – http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/document/reports/fullan.html http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/policyfunding/memos/may2013/BuildNextPhase.pdf
LINKS TO HEALTHY KIDS PANEL ***LINKS TO LOCAL FOOD ACT***		***Recommendation #1:*** *That the Ministry of Education invest further into the Healthy Schools Recognition Program, to create a best practices platform and evaluation strategy, and offer prizes and increased exposure to participating schools which achieve measureable results.*
LINKS TO HEALTHY KIDS PANEL	Med	***Recommendation #2****: That the Healthy Schools Recognition Program recognises and highlights the health-promotion potential of school food gardens.*
LINKS TO MINISTRY OF EDUCATION ADVOCACY		***Recommendation #3****: That the Ministry of Education recognize school grounds as places for student instruction, and adjust the education funding formula so as to recognize the variable and place-based costs involved with establishing and/or refurbishing grounds to make outdoor instruction possible.*
LINKS TO MINISTRY OF EDUCATION ADVOCACY		***Recommendation #4****: That the Ministry of Education revise design standards for new and refurbished school grounds to include areas for outdoor instruction, with shade and biodiverse plantings, as well as a sunny spot with a raised garden bed large enough for an average class to gather*

		around, and good access to water.
LINK TO POVERTY REDUCTION STRATEGY		***Recommendation #5:*** *That the Ministry of Child and Youth Services expand the Student Nutrition Program to include support of community organizations working in partnership with schools to develop and maintain school gardens.*

Appendix A: How the Action Plan was informed

In spring 2013, as a part of the Ontario Edible Education Network Action Planning process, a survey specific to community and school food gardens that engage children and youth was created. This survey was administered online by Sustain Ontario and also promoted through the Imagine a Garden in Every School Campaign. By the end of September 2013, 18 projects had completed the School and Community Food Gardens Engaging Children portion of the survey: 2 from Hamilton, 2 from Guelph,1 from Fergus, 2 from Ottawa, 1from York Region, 10 from the GTA.

The results of the survey helped to inform the Action Plan in addition to the following:

- The Sustain Ontario 2012 Needs Assessment Survey (see Appendix B).
- Additional information and recommendations were gathered through:
    - Work done by the Imagine a Garden in Every School Campaign led by Green Thumbs Growing Kids including the document *School Food Gardens in Ontario: Educating for Health and Sustainability* (Green Thumbs Growing Kids, 2013)
    - Reflections upon the years of experience in the field of the action planning team
    - Conversations with community stakeholders undertaken by the Action Plan authors, including Sunday Harrison's attendance at the Nishnawbe Aski Nation Food Sovereignty conference in the summer of 2013 (which included approximately 60 individuals from across Northern Ontario).

**** Imagine a Garden in Every School is continuing to administer the School and Community Food Gardens Engaging Children survey. A comprehensive report of the results of the survey will be developed and communicated in 2014.**

Appendix B: Summary of results from 2012 survey

139 people responded to the first Sustain Ontario survey that collected responses from January 2012 – February 2013. 67% of all responses were from Southern Ontario, however all areas of the province were represented.

This survey reflected an overall enthusiasm for school food gardens:

- When respondents were asked to identify "activities that you are not currently involved in that you would like to be" the most popular category aside from advocacy was "school gardens" (34%) with "Hands-on workshops and training on gardens" not far behind at 29%.
- In addition, 28% of respondents replied they already utilize school gardens and 30% of respondents replied that they utilize "Hands-on workshops and training on gardens" to "help connect children to good food".

With regards to **Networking**, the top two activities rated as "very useful" were "website" (47%) and "mentorship program" (48%). "Conferences or meetings in regions around the province (48%) and "a conference bringing together groups around the province (46%) were the two top activities rated as "useful".

With respect to **Communication**, 50% of respondents rated Monthly electronic news with updates from different groups and initiatives and 48% rated Quarterly newsletters profiling great work as "very useful".

In the area of **Capacity Building**, the top two activities rated as "very useful" were Regional funding (70%) and A platform for provincial advocacy (47%).