

Home Grown

HOW COMMUNITIES CAN TAKE BACK THEIR FOOD SYSTEMS

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The food we eat is an important environmental issue. How we grow, process, transport, consume and dispose of food is harmful to the planet. From farm to plate, Canada's agricultural sector accounts for almost 30 per cent of our national greenhouse gas emissions. This number rises to 50 per cent when considering global emissions.

Our food system influences health and social inequalities too. Canadians are struggling to put nutritious food on the table. Nearly one in five deaths in Canada are linked to unhealthy diets. In 2015-2016, the Halifax region had one of the highest increases in food bank usage in the country. Approximately 70 per cent of Canadians over the age of 12 do not eat the recommended amount of fruit and vegetables.

It's a national problem that requires change at the local level.

By making changes in our food system we can build more sustainable, just, healthy and economically vibrant communities. To achieve it, changes are required at all levels of government; however local action can directly benefit our communities.

The Role of Municipalities

Across Canada, municipalities have been stepping up, working collaboratively to promote change in our food system. A 2013 survey found 64 local and regional municipalities engaged in diverse actions to improve the food system. Examples include using municipal tools such as resources (i.e. funds, land, facilities and staff), projects and programs (i.e. support for community gardens) and regulatory and policy instruments (i.e. food charters) to impact how food is produced, processed, distributed, purchased and protected.

Collaboration is a cornerstone of these activities. Just as food-related challenges are interconnected, so must our solutions work across government, businesses, the community sector and with citizens. How a city is designed and the way it engages citizens in making decisions influence the various stages of the food system, from production to disposal. Therefore, it is important not only to leverage and share resources but also to ensure that community is at the centre of our policy and program decisions.

One example of this is implementing a food charter—a call to action for a coordinated effort to strengthen local food systems.

Initiatives such as food policy councils provide important supports to this work, convening a broad set of actors and facilitating discussions to work together on solutions.

The Halifax Food Policy Alliance (HFPA) is a partnership of individuals that represent all different sectors of the food system, including EAC's Our Food Project. The vision of the HFPA is to achieve a Halifax where everyone has nutritious food, produced locally for generations to come. The expertise offered by the HFPA actively supports the municipality to integrate food systems into its strategies and plans. HFPA also provides an important bridge between HRM Regional Council, citizens, and local experts, ensuring locally-relevant and community-engaged recommendations and solutions to food system challenges. By working alongside the municipality, the HFPA is creating and implementing a strategic food action plan that will help coordinate efforts across government, community, and the private sector on food-related goals.



“ When the Regional Plan was being updated in 2013 and Mayor Savage was hosting his conversations on Healthy and Livable Communities, we heard loud and clear that HRM should be supporting the local food system and promoting food security. Being part of the Halifax Food Policy Alliance has been crucial for charting the municipal role and forging partnerships with community experts like the Ecology Action Centre and Nova Scotia Health Authority, recognizing that we need to work together to make positive change. ”

- Leticia Smillie, Planner, Halifax

Many departments within Halifax Regional Municipality have been key champions for food issues in the region and continue to demonstrate how the municipality can play a leadership role in supporting and promoting regional food systems.

In Nova Scotia, municipalities have started to take action by:

- Proposing visions and implementing action plans, such as food charters and strategies;
- Creating community and municipal plans that encourage healthy food retail and promote urban agriculture;
- Using municipal assets like libraries, community centres and transit systems for community food programming and to maximize existing infrastructure;
- Buying local, sustainable, and healthy food for use in municipal programs and activities;
- Working to reduce food waste;
- Bringing together different kinds of partners, such as community, government, business, health, researchers, and others to create leading-edge ideas and initiatives;
- Working with provincial and federal governments to ensure that food policies and programs are coordinated across jurisdictions.

