

In Every Community a Place for Food

The Role of the Community Food Centre in Building a Local, Sustainable, and Just Food System

Metcalf Food Solutions

The Stop Community Food Centre
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Foreword

Food — how and where we grow, process, distribute, sell, and eat it — is a fundamental human concern and central to the health of our communities, economy, environment, and bodies. Food is elemental, yet the system we have built around it is complex, rigid, and opaque.

There is growing concern that our current food system is not working well — some would say it is broken. In Ontario, many farmers are facing an income crisis. Too many people lack access to healthy food. And, despite growing demand for local food, our centralized, large-scale food processors, distributors, and retailers are unable to provide it.

Efforts to rebuild the local food supply chain and restructure Ontario's food and agriculture system have been building momentum in the last few years. Ontario's residents are expressing a burgeoning desire to create a food system that is more sustainable, equitable, and economically viable.

For the past eight years, the Metcalf Foundation has been seeding and supporting food- and agriculture-related initiatives across the province, from agricultural land trusts to sustainable food certification, from new farm incubators to low-income neighbourhood farmers' markets, from diversified forms of street food to new models for community food hubs.

Starting in 2007, we convened our funding partners who were working on the supply and equitable distribution of local, sustainable food. We wanted to explore the possibilities for cooperative, integrated efforts to transform Ontario's food and agriculture system. These gatherings led to the creation of Sustain Ontario — the Alliance for Healthy Food and Farming which, after only one year of operation, is already playing a central role in supporting the efforts of its growing membership. The discussions also led to our publishing the paper *Food Connects Us All: Sustainable Local Food in Southern Ontario* in February 2008, which identified some of the barriers to a local, sustainable food system and the many roads to change.

Building on that first paper, in 2009 we decided to focus on solutions, rather than just the obstacles to progress. We have learned about innovators and activists, academics and growers who are engaged in new ways of understanding and engaging with food systems. Yet too little of this experimentation and innovation has been entering the policy conversation. We issued a call for proposals seeking tangible ways to advance a local, sustainable food system agenda in Ontario over the next five to ten years.

Executive Summary

Since food banks were first established in the early 1980s, a growing number of Ontarians have come to rely on food charities to meet their basic needs. These under-resourced charitable organizations can provide only uneven service, and the food quality is often less than optimal. Thus many low-income people either go hungry or consume cheap, processed foods — which contributes to the high rates of poor health and diet-related illness seen in poorer communities. At the same time, people across the socio-economic spectrum have lost touch with the skills necessary to choose, grow, and prepare healthy food. While there is growing interest in local, sustainable food and in the regaining of lost food-related skills, much of this interest is expressed through the marketplace. This has led to a two-tier food system in which the gulf between those who have access to high-quality food and those who don't continues to widen.

Over the years, The Stop Community Food Centre in the Davenport West community of Toronto has evolved from a food bank into a thriving community centre where people come together to grow, cook, and eat food, as well as to advocate for measures that can increase food security in the wider community. It maintains its emergency food programs, but has complemented them with a range of capacity- and skills-building programs.

This paper suggests that The Stop can serve as a model for those seeking to address key issues of food insecurity in other communities. The paper incorporates a review of the literature on the social determinants of health and how food programs in general can address them. It also examines evidence gathered by The Stop regarding the impact of its programs in increasing food access and equity, reducing social isolation, and improving health and food skills.

Individual programs similar to some of those at The Stop exist elsewhere, and they generate many benefits. However, this paper argues that it is time to look at larger-scale social investment in building a new type of institution modeled on The Stop's multi-faceted approach to food security. There is a strong case to be made that a place-based food organization — underpinned by a holistic approach to food security and possessing an adequate physical infrastructure (in order to house a critical mass of staff and programs) — can have a powerful impact on the health and well-being of not only individuals but also larger communities.

The paper lays out the principles that animate The Stop's programs and that have supported its expansion. As well, a range of informants was interviewed to generate feedback on the challenges and opportunities for replication of the model. Interest from other communities was confirmed and some of the challenges underscored — particularly those relating to leveraging the necessary financial resources. The authors propose a three-year plan moving toward replication, including a joint private-public funding strategy, a pilot phase, and the development of an umbrella organization to help resource and oversee the founding of a network of community food centres across Ontario.

Who We Are and What We Are Recommending

The Stop Community Food Centre is located in Davenport West in Toronto, one of Ontario's lowest-income, most diverse communities. The Stop's mission is to increase access to healthy food in a manner that maintains dignity, builds health and community, and challenges inequality. The organization started in the mid-1970s as a food bank, offering emergency food relief and pursuing anti-poverty goals to combat hunger, but it has evolved into a thriving community food centre that is a hub of activity related to food, where people come together to solve a variety of "problems" related to food — or, stated more positively, a place where people can come together around a good meal; learn how to grow, cook, and choose healthy food; and find inspiration to work towards change by the powerful persuasion of good food.

There are many stories at The Stop that highlight the role a multi-service food centre can play in a process of personal transformation. Take the story of Robert Jones. When Robert first came to the drop-in meal program at The Stop, he was fighting mad. A former metalworker, he had suffered an injury that left him unable to work and struggling with chronic pain. He was losing his housing and had not been able to access disability benefits. What Stop staff saw at first was a man who started fights and spoke so abusively to the people who tried to help him that they wondered whether he should be barred from all but The Stop's emergency programs. The community advocacy coordinator decided to make a last-ditch effort to work with him to address his issues. With her help, he got medical care to manage his pain, secured disability benefits, and found stable housing. Eventually he expressed an interest in volunteering. The volunteer coordinator enlisted the community garden coordinator to put him to work in the garden, in what they hoped would be a soothing environment. Gardening struck a chord with him, and he became an enthusiastic participant in The Stop's gardening program, getting involved with an art project and dusting off some landscaping skills to help out relandscaping the front garden beds at The Stop. Inspired by The Stop's *Yes in My Backyard* project, Robert is now hoping to get his landlord's permission to transform his backyard into a vegetable garden that can be cultivated by someone without access to a garden.

The level of personal advocacy that Robert received at The Stop is more intensive than most — after all, The Stop is a food centre — but his story illustrates some powerful principles at work at The Stop. Lots of other stories share a similar arc. While many people come to The Stop for a brief transitional time for a meal or a food hamper and then move on, many others come out of

desperation and end up somewhere else entirely — maybe gardening or cooking, perhaps working with a group to push for adequate social assistance, perhaps volunteering at the bake oven or Good Food Market. Almost certainly, they'll have enjoyed many good meals along the way, picked up some skills, and made new friends.

The story of The Stop is one of gradual, measured expansion. Its evolution has taken place alongside the evolution of the growing awareness of food — its pleasures and its potential to catalyze changes to personal and community health. Though there is a level of specificity about The Stop's experience, we have learned lessons in the process that we believe can be applied elsewhere. What this paper tries to offer is a description of an approach, a set of principles, and the beginnings of a strategy to move towards a network of community food centres across the province and, in the process, a more sustainable and equitable food system.

Some details of The Stop's programs emerge throughout the paper, and a program list is offered as an appendix, but it may be helpful to briefly summarize what The Stop does. The Stop offers emergency food programs in the form of a food bank and drop-in, as well as community kitchens, community gardens, and educational workshops that emphasize skill building and the reduction of social isolation. Civic engagement programs aim to involve participants in advocacy and community development initiatives: a Speakers Bureau works with community members to tell their stories about their experience of poverty; Bread and Bricks is a community-driven grassroots social justice advocacy group facilitated by The Stop; and the community advocacy program trains and supports community members with an experience of poverty to make referrals and advocate for others in a similar position. A low-cost market and outdoor wood-fired oven bring the community together around free or low-cost food. All programs run with a significant volunteer component.

In 2009, The Stop opened a satellite site, The Green Barn, a sustainable food-production and education centre — part of a redeveloped heritage site, the former TTC streetcar repair barns in the Wychwood area of Toronto. A \$5 million capital campaign supported the development of The Stop's part of the site, which includes a large greenhouse, a kitchen, demonstration gardens, and a classroom. In the year since opening, The Stop has developed a food systems education program for local Grade 5 students, as well as an after-school program for 9- to 12-year-olds that emphasizes hands-on cooking and gardening opportunities. The greenhouse, powered by a geothermal energy system, demonstrates greenhouse production methods, produces seedlings for Toronto community gardens, houses a composting and vermicomposting demonstration project, and generally acts as a classroom for children and community members who visit or volunteer at the site.

A cluster of cooking and gardening programs have been developed for marginalized adults, to build their skills and confidence in cooking and gardening in the therapeutic environment of the kitchen and garden, as well as to engage different generations and cultures in passing on traditional skills.

With the opening of The Green Barn, The Stop has expanded its social enterprise dramatically, operating dinners, classes, catering, and teambuilding to raise money, while promoting cooking skills and local, sustainable food.

Clearly, with over 40 employees and two sites, The Stop has grown to a size not easily replicable in other communities in the short term. However, it's important to remember that The Stop operated for many years very effectively with just one community space, a garden, and a kitchen. These are the minimum physical requirements for a Community Food Centre (CFC).

A critical mass for staffing is also required, so that staff can reach community members in a variety of ways and maintain a level of respectful service. In the early stages of the development of the CFC, we believe this number to be in the range of four staff, focusing on cooking, gardening, emergency food programs, and civic engagement.

Specific iterations of programs would differ somewhat from community to community, but would generally include a primary focus on the needs of low-income community members, and programs that would include a combination of drop-in healthy meals, a food bank, community kitchens and cooking classes, community gardens, food-systems education, and volunteer and civic engagement projects that involve people in setting program directions and advocating for systemic change in the various areas contributing to food security. Fostering revenue generation opportunities for local farms or co-operatives would be another potential direction.

All new CFCs would be guided by a shared set of principles and approaches, similar to those set out in this paper, although likely defined to a finer grain. While fundraising and social enterprise could be a useful local element, less emphasis would be placed on this in other CFCs, given the difficulty of replicating the level of private funding necessary to fuel an organization like The Stop.

This paper sets out the beginnings of an organizational development and fundraising strategy that could centralize the most problematic part of replication — the resource development necessary to support it — through the establishment of a provincial organization that could assemble the resources necessary to underpin the expansion of the model. By necessity, the process of developing a CFC replication strategy will be complex and iterative, as partners, stakeholders, and opportunities shape the process. This paper is offered as the first step along the way.

Why and How We Wrote This Paper

In December 2008 the Metcalf Foundation released a request for solution papers on ways that Ontario can develop a more local, sustainable food system by identifying key points to leverage change. The project came at an ideal time in The Stop's historical development. This paper has been written both in response to Metcalf's call and for the numerous organizations, policy makers, and community groups that have expressed interest in learning more about our Community Food Centre (CFC) model and ways to replicate its successful approach in other communities. The paper reflects on The Stop's role in building a food system that is locally viable, ecologically sustainable — but also, and perhaps most importantly, equitable.

This paper is based on reflections upon The Stop's 30 years of experience and consultations with individuals and representatives of organizations across the province who are currently working on projects that share aspects of the CFC model. We also consulted senior-level philanthropists, policy experts, politicians, and bureaucrats about their thoughts on The Stop's model.

When this paper was first proposed, its original intention was to identify opportunities to chart a direct path to the provincial government, with the ultimate goal of identifying a large-scale funding stream that would support replication. While it is never an easy time to inspire governments to invest in significant new funding streams, senior policy experts in the first round of interviews pointed to short-term barriers presented by the current poor economic climate. They also mentioned strategic difficulties relating to finding a home for an initiative that addresses objectives across ministries, but is specific to no one particular ministry.

The potential for shorter-term support for this project was identified within private-sector foundations and supporters, leading to a reassessment of how the model could be replicated. We conceived the idea of an intermediate phase of development — that is, a series of pilot projects in co-operation with local partners to build “facts on the ground” and create a stronger case for the model and for a full-fledged provincial funding stream, or possibly for a hybrid public/private funding model. Therefore, this paper is intended to provide the basis for getting to this stage by articulating the Community Food Centre model, including its origins, philosophy, and vision, as well as offering a provincial development strategy.

Food as an Opportunity: The Moment is Ripe

Before considering a solution, it is necessary to first define the problem. In the case of food security, one way of defining the problem is “hunger,” which suggests an answer such as food distribution — any food that will “fill hungry bellies.” Institutionally, this approach has led to the proliferation of food banks and meal programs.

The creation of a Community Food Centre (CFC), however, is based on the perception that the problem is much broader than hunger and touches on social issues and related policies in the areas of poverty, health, social cohesion, and the food economy.

The problem is this: food is viewed today first and foremost as a commodity, whose production, distribution, and consumption are determined solely by the marketplace. We propose an alternative view: to see food as a public good, one that is key to human health and an equitable society — and as such, one in which society as a whole has an interest.

A Community Food Centre exists to innovate grassroots-level programs that are based on a view of food as having profound social, cultural, and material significance, and which operate either partly or wholly outside the market. Many of the impacts of the problems span all socio-economic classes, though to a much greater degree, higher-income people can solve these problems on an individual level within the market system.

The Community Food Centre approach accepts the overarching realities of a market-based food system, but also claims that there are many instances where it is logical and necessary to press for state-level regulations, interventions, and investments in the food system — particularly where the interests of low-income people are concerned.

The Problem: Ontario’s Broken Food System

At its most basic level, food insecurity can be described as a condition in which people lack the food that would provide the energy and nutrients they need to live an active and healthy life. Poverty is one of the main reasons why people experience food insecurity, and although poverty reduction has been inching its way onto the agenda of policy makers, the impacts of this awareness have yet to be seen, a situation that has been worsened by the economic recession.

According to the most recent Canadian Community Health Survey, 379,100 households (about 9%) in Ontario were food insecure and the prevalence of food insecurity was higher (about 11%) in households with children (Health Canada

2007). In Ontario, 28% of adults reporting the lowest household incomes experienced food insufficiency more than double the provincial average (Cancer Care Ontario 2005, 17).

As a household expense, food is a flexible budget item, whereas the costs of other necessities (e.g., housing, heat, electricity, etc.) are fixed or less negotiable. Therefore, many households rely on in-kind food charities, such as food banks, to make up the income shortfall, or they consume cheaper, more calorie-dense, processed food to avoid the most acute forms of hunger (Drewnowski 2004). In some cases, poor mothers deprive themselves of food in order to ensure that their children eat (McIntyre et al. 2003). The consequences for the long-term health of the people in these households is serious.

Since the early 1980s, food banks have remained the most common response to hunger and food insecurity across Canada. The most recent *Hunger Count* published by Food Banks Canada (2009) noted that in Ontario, almost 350 food banks struggle to serve approximately 380,000 people, 40% of whom are children. These numbers increased by 17% from 2008 to 2009, and show no signs of decline (Daily Bread Food Bank 2009). As the need grows, food banks continue to be ad hoc and under-resourced, run by volunteers, dependent on charitable donations, and uneven in the services they are able to provide. Often the volunteers and staff who operate the programs struggle to provide basic services and would be hard pressed to take action on the systemic issues that contribute to household food and income insecurity.

What are these systemic issues? Control of the food system is increasingly being ceded to industrial farming and processing practices that take place far from the eye of the public. Recent food-safety crises have brought to light some of the problems of a globalized food system based on mass industrial production and maximizing corporate profit. Examples include Maple Leaf's *Listeria* contamination in 2008, and most recently the Swine Flu (H1N1) pandemic connected to large-scale concentrated animal feeding operations.

While agri-food business profits are higher than ever, there has been an ongoing decrease in farm incomes and wages for food processing workers (National Farmers Union 2005). The ecological impacts of industrialized monoculture farming, fossil-fuel inputs (used for fertilizers and fuel), industrial livestock operations, and long distribution lines have all been identified as contributing to pollution, climate change, and a loss of the biodiversity necessary for a productive farming sector (Weis 2007).

Food is an Opportunity

Food, unlike other commodities, engages individuals in a fundamental way, since we depend on it for our very survival. Despite an element of cultural specificity, food can also cut across class, ethnic, national, and even political

boundaries. Food, according to Welsh and MacRae (1998, 214) “allows for a political reawakening, as it touches our lives in so many ways.” Unlike cars or clothes, food is a uniquely “intimate commodity” precisely because of its connection to social reproduction, nature, and everyday life, and the central role it plays in human society (Winson 1993). Thus food has special potential as a politicizing tool for inspiring collective action — both as a way to draw people together and as a focus for activism to gain access to it. Understanding food can help us understand the social and political systems that affect us at the individual and community level.

In urban centres, there is growing public and private interest in building a more local, sustainable food system. This shift in attitude has been attributed to a number of “pull” factors that attract people to local, sustainable food — factors such as its freshness and high quality, an interest in supporting local farmers, or the positive social experience of sharing food — and to “push” factors that are turning people away from industrially produced foods (Campsie 2008).

At the same time, increasing concern about health as it relates to diet has led to demands for programs and policies that support healthy nutrition, particularly for children (Heart & Stroke Foundation 2008). Non-profit organizations and public health units are increasingly looking at cooking and gardening programs as a way to promote exercise and improved nutrition.

Whereas a generalized concern about “poverty” may not exist, there does appear to be a growing consensus about the benefits of healthy food and the need to revive our skills and local food economy. Potential and actual champions exist in a variety of sectors, as does a growing consensus about the value of programs that promote health through inclusion and skill development, and that increase access to food. Social inclusion, poverty reduction, and civic engagement are also currently on at least some political and policy agendas.

The Community Food Centre has a role to play in supporting these emerging agendas. It can be the venue where programs, policies, and dialogues about food are based. In an interview with one of the authors, consultant and researcher Jeb Brugmann said: “Every successful city requires an institutional foundation for policy implementation which involves collaborative infrastructure.”¹

When governments approve new policies, they require a strong set of institutions with the local experience and connectedness to the community to support policy implementation. As Ontario begins to move towards supporting its local farmers and promoting a more sustainable food system, it will need to rely on on-the-ground institutions that focus on access and equity in the changing system. Health promotion programs also need a way to reach low-income communities through trusted organizations that offer more than a “talking to” about personal choice.

¹ Personal communication.

Communities, both urban and rural, need a place where people can gather and experience food and its many transformative possibilities and where conversations about local, sustainable food issues and policies can take place. In downtown Toronto, that conversation might focus on social assistance rates, urban food production, emergency food programs, and the need for more accessible markets and more comprehensive school nutrition programs. In a smaller community, these conversations might include local farming issues, kitchen incubators to make value-added processing possible, the formation of Community Shared Agriculture (CSA) projects, or marketing co-operatives that support local farmers.

“No job, no money. Food is important. The Stop is everything right now.”

“There's times when I'm starving. I don't want to resort to stealing food.”

“It's a good thing they are doing here. It gives me something to do. I have a criminal record, which excludes me from almost everything.”

“I'm getting something that will help with the mental stress of wondering where the next dollar is going to come from, or the next loaf of bread, finding what to eat.”

“It's a culture of people who care, in and out.”

“The food is actually healthy. It's why I keep coming back.”

“[Coming to The Stop] plays a very vital role; it helps fuel my recovery with drug addiction.”

“I'm happy to come because they respect your privacy. Staff are not judgmental, and there's no gossip. They always give you a little something. It's a friendly place.”

“I get to know people instead of sitting at home doing nothing, come and learn something.”

“It's a place to go, to wander back to when you're homeless or on the street.”

“[Healthy Beginnings] was very important to me because I was alone and the father of my son had abandoned me. Here I found a lot of emotional support. They helped me even with the diapers for my baby. When I first came to Canada, I didn't have money to eat and they helped me and didn't ask for anything back.”

Why Community Food Centres?

The Stop, as a Community Food Centre, grew up alongside the anti-poverty and community food security movements. It is also the product of many authors — staff, participants, board members — and of a particular historical time and place. In Toronto, organizations like FoodShare Toronto and the Toronto Food Policy Council have contributed to making the city a vibrant incubator of projects and new thinking about a particularly Canadian approach to community food security over the past twenty years, an environment that The Stop has learned from and to which it has contributed.

Before turning to a discussion of the CFC's core principles, it is helpful to consider its evolution within the context of Canadian and U.S. food security movement.

Anti-Hunger and Charitable Emergency Services

Growing concern about hunger has been a rallying cry for private businesses and corporations, non-profit organizations, and individuals with an interest in supporting those who do not have enough to eat. There was a surge in the prevalence of hunger in the 1970s, spurred by the global oil crisis, which led to rising inflation and interest rates, unemployment, and poverty.

Since that time, the emergence of private charitable food programs such as food banks and soup kitchens has been paralleled by neo-liberal restructuring marked by continued government cuts to the social safety net and universal entitlement programs. When the first food bank incorporated in 1981, it was intended as a temporary solution to a short-term problem, but by 1985 more than 75 food banks existed across the country (Riches 1986). As of 2009 there were well over 900 (Food Banks Canada 2009).

In describing hunger, Janet Poppendieck (1998, 5) writes that it has become both “a *symptom* and a *cause* of our society's failure to face up to and deal with the erosion of equality.” She views charity as society's moral safety valve, which allows people to relieve, through donations and volunteering, the discomfort that poverty evokes — at the expense of pursuing more radical solutions. As she also notes, food bank recipients report that these charity responses strip them of their dignity and do little to solve their longer-term challenges. Other researchers have criticized charitable responses as both ineffectual and depoliticizing in the face of hunger (Tarasuk and Eakin 2003).

The Stop's leadership has been informed by these critiques and agrees that instead of reducing hunger in a permanent and sustainable way, charitable emergency food programs contribute to preserving the status quo and preventing more fundamental action.

Anti-Poverty and Community Food Security

Anti-poverty perspectives, which evolved from social movements in the 1960s, attribute food insecurity to inadequate income and widespread poverty (Tarasuk and Davis 1994). Activists view food as an entitlement and focus on the failing social safety net, unemployment, low wages, the high cost of rent, unequal distribution of wealth, and the state's increasing inability to provide for its citizens. For anti-poverty activists, food itself is peripheral, used primarily as a marker that points to challenges with the current social system. The resulting policy focus is on individual entitlements and public social security programs.

The 1960s also saw the birth of a movement promoting ecological agriculture, focusing primarily on reducing the environmental impacts of food production and consumption. The movement's proponents were less concerned with individual hunger than with opposing industrial practices such as biotechnology, chemical pesticide use, and fertilizer toxicity. From an anti-poverty perspective, the goals of this movement are at best irrelevant, and at worst counterproductive, in that implementing more environmentally sustainable agricultural methods is seen as potentially leading to rising food prices, to the detriment of low-income people.

The concept of *community food security* (CFS) was developed in the early 1990s, in an attempt to create broad-based and systemic approaches to reconnect food production and consumption (specifically for low-income people) and ensure an adequate and accessible food supply (Toronto Food Policy Council 1994; Winne, Joseph, and Fisher 1997). Community food security initiatives attempt to build a more comprehensive approach by integrating the perspectives of both anti-poverty activism and ecological agriculture to address the challenges in the food system (Clancy 1994; Gottlieb and Fisher 1996; Allen 1999; Bellows and Hamm 2002).

The concept of community food security has gone through many changes, but it is generally defined as “a situation in which all community residents obtain a safe, culturally acceptable, nutritionally adequate diet through a sustainable food system that maximizes community self-reliance and social justice” (Hamm and Bellows 2003). As this definition illustrates, the idea of community food security constitutes an explicit critique of mainstream definitions of food security, by not only stating that people need adequate amounts of food but also including criteria for the system that produces food and the manner in which people obtain food.

Rather than focusing solely on the state to meet food security needs, community food security advocates called for local food systems in which the sustainability of “food production, processing, distribution, and consumption is integrated to enhance the economic, environmental and social health of a particular place” (Feenstra 2002, 100). The focus is on community self-reliance, and the goal is to develop a community-based food system grounded in regional ecological production and local decision-making. Proponents work primarily at the local level to develop projects that create long-term self-sufficiency.

Although the community food security approach has caught on widely, it has been criticized for not adequately helping low-income residents or addressing the structural issues of poverty and institutionalized racism (Allen 1999; Guthman 2006; Slocum 2006; Allan 2008). Some critics have suggested that the community food security approach effectively helps create a two-tiered food system, in which economic development initiatives that create expensive food alternatives benefit the producers and sellers, but are not available to all.

Patricia Allen (2008, 159) points out that many local food initiatives, such as farmers’ markets and Community Shared Agriculture projects, have inadequately addressed questions of social justice. She notes, “Without a direct focus on justice issues, alternative agri-food efforts may only create marginal, safe spaces for the privileged that may simply serve as a bleeder valve for the dominant agri-food system.” In her view, the industrial food system has actually been a levelling force — one with serious flaws, but for which the solution is not foods that are not widely accessible.

Critics have also argued that the focus of the community food security movement on localism can be limiting, since “local” does not necessarily mean socially just or environmentally sustainable (Allen 1999; Hinrichs 2003; DuPuis and Goodman 2005). Instead, localization must form part of a broader political strategy aimed at connecting with groups in other communities and influencing the policy environment, including repairing the social safety net.

The concept of food sovereignty developed by rural peasant organizations in the southern hemisphere is consistent with many aspects of the developing community food security approach and has much to contribute to understanding the broader implications of The Stop’s work. Like community food security, food sovereignty was a direct response to mainstream definitions of food security, but focused on the democratic deficit in its definition and practice (Menezes 2001). The argument voiced by peasant farmers is that until the people who are most affected by food- and agriculture-related policies have a democratic voice and a hand in implementing these policies, food security means very little. Thus, food sovereignty is a call for democracy and a redistribution of power in the food system away from corporations and into the hands of the people who eat and produce food (People’s Food Policy Project. No date.).

The Community Food Centre: A Comprehensive Approach

The Stop's Community Food Centre (CFC) model is something of a hybrid in that it promotes the development of grassroots alternatives to the mainstream food system, while pursuing state-level policy change and building food citizenship.

The Stop was originally established as a food bank in a direct response to hunger in Toronto. As its leaders and staff saw people's growing needs and the insufficiencies of charity-based emergency food provisioning, the organization came to embrace the philosophy of community food security as a theoretical and practical approach, which led to the creation of programs directed at community self-sufficiency and embodying ecological principles. However, its roots in a community that continues to suffer entrenched poverty has led it to retain a strong commitment to an anti-poverty approach and an emphasis on the role of the state in creating solutions.

But individual organizations can do only so much. The Stop continues to focus on the need for larger-scale resources to increase the scale and impact of its programs. In the U.S. community food security movement, there has been a strong emphasis on building food-based entrepreneurial opportunities for farmers and urban food producers. However, The Stop has also recognized the potential conflict between the goal of building economic opportunities for local producers and the goal of increasing the accessibility of affordable food for low-income people.

The solution we propose is not to call for cheaper food, but rather to increase incomes to allow everyone to purchase food at its real cost. In the meantime, in the absence of changes that would bring about such an outcome, The Stop effectively injects a "subsidy" into food distribution supported by the charitable donations it receives. This subsidy is targeted at everything from the emergency food distribution that substitutes for adequate social programs, to paying for meals and accessible food distribution mechanisms that support local food economies, to food skills programs that can ultimately affect government health care budgets. This subsidy acts as a substitution (obviously severely limited in scale) for the work that ultimately should be supported by the state. The Stop continues to push for the investments that would put responsibility for this subsidy back into government hands.

Food policy expert Dr. Rod MacRae describes the CFC model as a "full spectrum" approach of intervention towards achieving community food security.² This view is connected to a framework developed by MacRae: the Community Food Security Continuum (Toronto Food Policy Council, 1994) which comprises three stages: efficiency, participation/transition, and redesign.

² Personal communication.

At the *efficiency* stage, minor changes are made to existing practices to address an immediate and pressing need; these changes generally take the form of charitable responses to hunger. For the CFC, this entails serving fresh, high-quality, well-prepared food in emergency programs such as a food bank and meal program, and improving access to local food. It is also reflected by day-to-day practices that ensure dignity and reduce the stigma attached to these emergency services.

At the *participation/transition* stage, new practices or processes are substituted for ones that have been found to be inadequate. In this stage, the focus is on capacity-building, emphasizing the broader goal of self-reliance. Food distribution is shifted from charity responses to community-focused food initiatives. For a CFC, this would involve establishing community kitchens, community gardens, farmers' markets, and supporting community economic development efforts. At this stage, the CFC also focuses on building decision-making skills by encouraging the participation of community members in food-based networks such as food policy councils.

The third and final stage, *redesign*, involves reframing social problems and responses. This stage calls for strategies and activities that institutionalize community food security. For a CFC, this would include building community capacity for civic engagement, advocating for policy changes on issues such as increased minimum wages, social assistance, urban agriculture and food systems education, and promoting the institutionalization of the model itself.

“Sometimes when I am at home, I sit by myself and I am sad. Coming here, seeing nice people, seeing plants, making friends, makes me remember why it’s good to live still. I feel happier. I know where to go. When I pop in, for the time I stay here, I talk to people. There is companionship.”

“It has helped substantially with my mental health, gives me something to do, a reason to get out of bed in the morning.”

“When you are at home you think about all of your problems. Here I talk to people and I don’t think about them.”

“Coming to The Stop gives me a sense of purpose... and a sense of comfort. I am not alone. It’s like having an extended family.”

“Gives me a reason to get up and get going instead of staring at the ceiling.”

“Workers and volunteers are like family, more family than my own.”

“Coming to the Stop has helped me connect the dots. It’s helped me see how policy affects those at the bottom.”

“There are people of all walks of life with the same problems. It helps to break down stereotypical misconceptions.”

“[At The Stop] you get a lot of information. They give us information about where to go with your kids and how to find food. I was isolated in my home during two years. I only got out to go to my children’s school. Now I want to study, and I am going out to different places.”

The Stop Community Food Centre's Core Principles

Through a process of reflection and discussion, we have identified some of the core principles of The Stop, which we offer here along with some examples of those principles in action. Although future CFCs will make specific programming choices to reflect local needs and circumstances, we believe that the following principles should underpin all CFCs.

1. Meet People's Immediate Needs, and Meet Them Where They Are

The Stop's work is rooted in a response to poverty and hunger. Most people come to The Stop because of the emergency services it offers, and the food bank continues to be one of the busiest programs, serving 6,000 to 7,000 households a year with a monthly food hamper containing a three-day supply of food.

Despite growing demand, The Stop has chosen not to let the provision of emergency food relief consume its work. A deliberate choice was made to limit the food bank service to once a month, instead of putting energy and resources into improving the size and quality of the hamper. Because of this decision, resources can be invested in other approaches to addressing food insecurity in the community.

The Stop distributes more food than most food banks in the city, and we believe it is more efficient to hand it out in this way than to serve users more than once a month and dole out smaller amounts of food each time. That said, the need for emergency food assistance has not decreased, and although The Stop shares the vision of those who call for food banks to shut down altogether, until there is a viable alternative in place to deliver emergency food provisions, The Stop will continue to provide these services.

Meeting immediate needs is a principle that translates into all of The Stop's programs. These range from ensuring that food is provided at meetings to developing programs (such as the community advocacy initiative) that recognize the complexity of poverty in people's lives, and the multiple needs to be addressed (e.g., housing, social assistance/disability access, child care, medical services, etc.). By providing services that help to meet some of people's most pressing needs, The Stop builds trust and keeps the door open for people to participate in programs that engage and support them in more profound ways.

This next stage of contact might be the chance to contribute to the movement for social change or to develop skills to be healthier, more empowered cooks or

gardeners. It might be the opportunity to connect to social services and entitlements, or to others in the community.

This core principle pushes The Stop beyond a strict food focus. Because food is interwoven with other needs, dealing with those needs is often the best way to address food issues (for example, helping someone access disability benefits gains them approximately \$400 a month that can, in part, contribute to their food security). It is a fine line to walk, because food needs to anchor the work. But if one views food as not only an end in itself, but also a means to achieving the broader goal of more empowered, healthier people and communities, it makes sense to address the issues that matter to participants and that will lead to these ends.

To meet people where they *are* rather than trying to drag them where one would *like* them to be, is a way of restating Voltaire's famous quote "the perfect is the enemy of the good." If people want French fries, and you serve them raw beet burgers, you are going to fail in your objective of encouraging healthy eating. Simply telling people that something is good for them, or using the fact that the food is free to force them to eat things that they dislike, will never promote changes in people's choices.

As proponents of social marketing have long argued, there is a gap between a knowledge of the virtues of a course of action and the propensity to actually take that action (McKenzie-Mohr 1999). In nutrition, this gap can be bridged with persuasion and demonstrations that nutritious food can also be delicious — popular education techniques that are hands-on and more successful in the long run. The Stop is continually negotiating and re-evaluating the territory where "nutritious meets delicious" with the food that it serves, distributes, and promotes.

Meeting immediate needs is a principle that is also at work in a different way within The Stop's civic engagement programs. Decision-making processes within programs must feel safe and incorporate enjoyable social opportunities. No one wants to join anything that is stressful or that involves continual sacrifice, least of all those who deal with stress and sacrifice on a daily basis. It is also important to define intermediate advocacy goals that are satisfying and do-able, rather than defining the ultimate goal as "ending poverty" — a dispiritingly remote prospect. (In fact, the community advocacy program was born out of this need to make an immediate difference identified by civic engagement participants.)

In civic engagement programs, "meeting people where they are" translates into finding appropriate ways for different people with different issues and skills to be involved, while recognizing the limitations that poverty and marginalization can create. The Stop has found that, when dealing with very marginalized community members, simply canvassing for opinions on "what we

should do” — while offering the opportunity for valuable input — or handing over the “bottom-line” responsibility for things such as meeting facilitation, event organizing, or advocacy campaigns, is unrealistic and ultimately frustrating for all concerned.

Rather, experienced individuals, who are paid to be responsible and accountable, can create a space for participants as both volunteers and staff to make engagement with social issues possible — and to create a sense of what *could be* possible, since a position of marginalization is often not the best vantage point from which to see the possibilities for change. For The Stop, this approach has taken the form of supporting people materially to participate in decision making (by providing food, transportation, honoraria, and child care) and offering educational opportunities to develop organizing skills.

After too many meetings that were derailed by some participants’ very real need to vent about stressful life experiences, or the disruptive influence of a new member with mental health issues, we realized not only that space is needed for meetings to contain a sharing component, but also that different types of participation opportunities need to be created for people who are unable to commit to participating in an organizing process.

Today, participation levels range from being members of the Speakers Bureau or community advocacy team (both of which involve training, a selection process, and an honorarium), to paid organizing internships, to Bread and Bricks advocacy committees (that offer a lower-commitment opportunity for involvement), to social and political film nights, where everyone is welcome and open conversation is encouraged. Offering honoraria and internships and hiring community members who either already had or have developed the necessary skills is, of course, also an important way to recognize participants’ existing work and skills.

2. Good Food is an Investment in Good Health

Providing fresh, nutritious, and delicious food is central to The Stop’s approach. Incorporating good food requires investment, and that means raising and targeting funds towards buying it, developing relationships with socially and ecologically conscious food suppliers to source it, and hiring trained, experienced, passionate chefs to prepare it.

The Stop’s drop-in meal program developed as a way to complement the food bank by providing food for people who have no way to cook, to supplement their food access, and to provide a friendly, social space in a community with few public meeting places. Deciding to hire a professional chef to coordinate meal preparation has contributed to an increase in the quality of meals, which is particularly important because for many, the meal may be the only food they eat

in a day. Participants have reported that a good meal is important for not only their physical health but also their emotional health and a sense of belonging.

The Stop has pursued other ways to increase access to healthy food and has made strategic investments in a few areas. A dedicated grant from the Keenan Foundation enables a monthly purchase for the food bank of the “food of the month” – usually an item of fresh produce, sourced from a local farmer, and often organic. The *Grow for The Stop* campaign involves a partnership with The New Farm, a local organic farm; donors are encouraged to contribute to a fund that The Stop can use to buy food from farmers for its meal programs and drop-in meals. The farmers receive the full price for the food, and low-income people get better access to healthy food.

Because the food bank could absorb an endless supply of food, The Stop has looked at other mechanisms for food distribution that are more economically sustainable and that offer benefits beyond merely food provision. At the Davenport West site, a weekly Good Food Market offers very low-cost food sourced from FoodShare Toronto. Bread and Bricks, a social justice group that is part of the civic engagement project facilitated by The Stop, has chosen to focus their energies on this community economic development project, and The Stop offers staff support.

Increasingly, the low-cost produce from the Ontario Food Terminal has been supplemented by organic produce sourced from The Green Barn market, a largely organic and sustainable market operated by The Stop in a higher-income neighbourhood. This food cannot be sold at full price in the Davenport neighbourhood, but the subsidy is provided by a combination of revenue from The Green Barn market, sales of donated food (food that could not be resold by farmers), and, if necessary, subsidy from core Stop funds.

Recently, The Stop decided to offer a food voucher program for volunteers. Some of the funds were found by reprioritizing expenditures. For example, rather than spending money on a volunteer appreciation party, we can offer low-income volunteers (who request them) vouchers redeemable for fresh produce at the Good Food Market. The intention is to increase access to fresh, healthy food for volunteers, reduce reliance on the food bank, introduce them to the benefits of shopping at the market, and build the vibrancy of the market.

As a guiding document, The Stop has developed a *Healthy Food Philosophy* (see Appendix A) that articulates its commitment to investing in healthy food sourced in a way that is mindful of the interests of the people who produce it and its impact on the environment. The Stop uses its own purchasing policy to bring to life its values, by giving priority to local products and fostering direct relationships with local farmers and with suppliers who get top-quality food into The Stop – without squeezing producers who can ill afford to donate or sell produce at too low a rate.

3. Provide a Welcoming and Respectful Environment: Reduce the Blame and the Shame

People who use charity-based programs such as soup kitchens and food banks are represented in the media and popular culture as, at best, desperate and downtrodden, and at worst, lazy or criminal. Understandably, this portrayal results in a feeling of stigmatization by those who use the programs. The Stop works hard to reduce the signs and symbols of traditional food charity, such as long line-ups, intrusive means testing or determinations of need, and lack of choice in food. The Stop has also applied for and received several grants to improve a once-dismal space to create an atmosphere that reflects respect for the people who use it.

Having well-trained and accountable staff is vital to maintaining a respectful climate at The Stop. Many food banks have so few resources that they rely entirely on volunteer labour, and do not have the luxury of being able to train volunteers or enforce policies that combat discrimination. Staff at The Stop can ensure that all service users are treated respectfully and that transparent and fair policies are followed.

The Stop also works to reduce the stigma of poverty through its civic engagement project. People can take part in “community action training” to qualify to become community advocates or members of the Speakers Bureau. In these courses, they are exposed to political and economic ideas that encourage them to see their own experience of poverty within a larger political and historical context. Meeting and sharing stories with others in a similar position, they learn that they are not alone. Through the media work and community speaking engagements of the Speakers Bureau, they can educate a wider audience and put a human face on the abstract issue of poverty.

4. Remake Ourselves: Build Knowledge and Skills to Grow, Prepare, and Advocate for Good Food

The Stop’s cooking and gardening programs seek to unlock the material, social and emotional power of food. Knowing how to prepare and grow food can be a significant source of personal pride and self-esteem and can help people participate in meaningful social relationships.

The Stop’s education programs target people across the lifecycle — from children and new mothers to marginalized adults and seniors — helping them to reclaim these skills. The Stop’s community kitchens bring people together around food to promote healthy eating and cooking skills. The Earls court community garden produces well over 900 kg (2,000 lbs) a year of fresh, organic produce, which is divided between The Stop’s programs and garden volunteers. The garden, located in a public park, and the backyard-sharing program, *Yes in My Backyard (YIMBY)*, both seek to take advantage of available

land and the investment of individual labour to make available the highest quality food in the neighbourhood — food that in the marketplace would be priced out of the reach of low-income people. These programs also offer hands-on opportunities for people to get their hands dirty and learn basic growing skills.

Bringing people together to cook and garden has great benefits, from informal and hands-on learning to positive social experiences and the development of mutual support networks. More intentional or intensive efforts at education can produce even greater benefits for behaviour and health. One of the The Stop's oldest programs, the *Healthy Beginnings* perinatal program, offers a range of supports to pregnant women to encourage healthy nutrition for mothers and their children. These include workshops and referrals to ensure healthy birth outcomes, and support for breastfeeding. This explicit emphasis on education, combined with practical material help, has yielded impressive results — with 98% healthy birthweights and over 90% of women breastfeeding — demonstrating the powerful potential of intensive, but relatively small interventions (not to mention savings to the health care system).

The Stop has begun to extend this commitment to food skills education, particularly since the opening in early 2009 of The Green Barn, a sustainable food production and education centre.

- The Stop's *After School Program* is an intensive intervention with youth from low-income families during a formative period in their lives. Through engaged, hands-on activities, youth can develop healthy, proactive attitudes towards good food and healthy eating.
- The *Shovels and Spoons* program connects with groups at partner agencies, including youth with mental health issues, isolated seniors, and survivors of abuse, and uses the healing and soothing environment of the kitchen and garden to encourage both relaxed socializing and skills development.
- In 2010, a new gardening project will bring together diverse seniors, families, and youth to share skills and work together in a garden setting, with the aim of fostering social ties across generations and sharing gardening knowledge and skills.
- The Stop's urban agriculture staff have developed an extensive roster of workshops on a variety of horticultural topics that are available as one-offs to community members or as skill-building workshops for garden participants, volunteers, and backyard program participants.
- The Stop's cooking program has begun to move towards more formalized workshops and the development of nutrition and culinary curricula for community kitchens.

5. Work to Remake the Food System

The Stop works to build knowledge and skills around food at the individual level and to create grassroots food access alternatives, while recognizing that larger systems and public policy contribute to food insecurity at the neighbourhood and family level.

Despite the value of knowing what's good for you and how to prepare it, such knowledge is useless if nothing in your environment supports these choices and activities, and no resources exist to support them. The Stop has long contributed to coalitions and campaigns working on income-security issues, pressing for adequate social assistance and minimum wages, employment opportunities, and affordable housing. Recently, this advocacy has taken the form of two campaigns launched by The Stop itself: *Do the Math* and *Put Food in the Budget* (eventually adopted by the Social Planning Network of Ontario). Both are intended to push for basic adequacy for the poorest Ontarians, who rely on social assistance, and for a review of social assistance that ties the rates to an estimate of what it actually costs to live in Ontario.

The Stop has increasingly come to believe, however, that adequate income is a necessary but insufficient condition for food security. The bigger problem is that the food system itself is broken. If farmers cannot grow food profitably, if the quality of our food is declining within an industrialized food system, if farming practices are degrading the soil or food is unsafe, if the food industry inundates us with advertising promoting unhealthy food, then we do not have an equitable food system. These issues affect everyone, but often affect low-income people disproportionately. Low-income consumers cannot afford to protect themselves from these impacts by buying expensive “clean” food. They, more than anyone else, need policy to ensure that farmers can grow good food locally, that the environment is protected, and that good healthy food is accessible to all.

Obviously, The Stop cannot work on all these fronts and scales at once, but these issues cannot be ignored. Nor can they be solved at the grassroots level — system change must occur through major initiatives and investments by governments. Thus The Stop works on educational initiatives that help their participants understand the food system and food policy, and push for change, while joining with coalitions and networks — for example, The Stop is one of the founding members of Sustain Ontario and is active in a number of urban agriculture coalitions, as well as the Toronto Food Policy Council — to advocate for a food policy that is sustainable environmentally, socially, and economically.

6. Build Infrastructure and a Critical Mass for Food Programming

There is a strong place-based element to The Stop's work. Having a physical space that thousands of people can walk into, in which they can sit down for a meal, volunteer, cook, make a telephone call, or connect to community resources

is essential. In 1995 The Stop first moved into a large space in a social housing building, complete with a community room. Later, we received funding to build a commercial kitchen. These were each, in turn, breakthroughs. Gardening space in a local park has also proven to be an important physical element to enable programming. Now the kitchens are a hub of activity, used by children’s programs, people cooking meals for the drop-in, gardening and civic engagement cooking sessions, and more. Markets and wood-fired ovens at both The Stop’s sites provide free outdoor public spaces where community members can meet multiple needs — buying healthy food, meeting neighbors, entertaining kids. These spaces allow for all types of additional programming that can reclaim public space and enhance the quality of community life.

The Stop is a community space where people can have a conversation about food and food policy — be it with staff, who tend to become experts in their program area and related policies, or with community members who can generate ideas or contribute to a range of food issues. The Stop is continually being approached by other groups that want to reach low-income and diverse communities to “take their temperature” on everything from poverty-reduction strategies to neighbourhood infrastructure and health. This is possible because The Stop is a place where people are already gathering and talking about social issues. Similarly, when other non-profits or the government launch initiatives involving food, The Stop is often asked to serve as a pilot site.

In addition to physical infrastructure, human resources infrastructure is also important. The staff complement has grown to a size where specialization by function is possible, allowing for greater efficiency and the luxury of collaboration across program areas. A culture of collaboration has been nurtured among staff, and a continual effort is made to maximize contacts with participants in order to have the largest impact possible.

The many people coming through the door for emergency food assistance represent a large pool of people who can become participants in other programs. As the impacts range from wide and shallow (smaller impact, large numbers) to narrow and deep (greater impact, smaller numbers), The Stop can work with many different types of people in different ways.

At critical points in the Stop’s evolution, well-timed investments in management and fundraising personnel have also provided the infrastructure needed to ensure the resources to expand programming.

7. Take Advantage of the Inspirational Power of Food to Make Friends and Raise Money

We cannot overlook the vital importance of money. The Stop started out raising money through conventional means — direct mail, grants, foundations — and was reasonably successful. This approach continues to comprise the bulk of

the organization's funding. There is undoubtedly a core constituency for alleviating poverty, and for the message that The Stop works with people in ways that build people's own capacity and agency. Also, the multifaceted nature of the organization's mandate allows a broad range of people to see their interests in the work, and for funding proposals to be tailored to the interests of funders with quite different mandates.

With growing interest in food, there are many people who are potential allies for the "Good Food Revolution," from entrepreneurs to chefs and people who simply enjoy food. The Stop has increasingly attracted interest and support from these sectors — for example, third-party events have been increasing. One example is the *Stop for Food* initiative, whereby Toronto restaurants donate a portion of a prix fixe menu to The Stop.

In the past few years, The Stop has also taken an entrepreneurial approach to in-house events, cooking classes, catering, and other revenue-generating activities centred on food. We have invested in hiring both an events fundraiser and a high-profile chef, who are more than paying for their salaries through their work.

Key to The Stop's success in social enterprise have been both the capacity of senior staff to build and use networks of key supporters, and a clear-eyed philosophy on separating fundraising and mission-driven goals. It is tempting to try to join mission objectives (e.g., training marginalized people) to fundraising activities (e.g., catering), but in reality the two can end up undermining each other. The Stop's social enterprises and events are clearly directed at generating funds, and have been successful at doing so. At the same time, the enterprises are complementary to the mission, in that they are food-related, and emphasize the importance of cooking and growing skills, and of supporting local and sustainable food producers.

The Stop has been exploring the potential of these new relationships with "allies" from higher-income groups (partly through its presence in a new neighbourhood with a more affluent demographic profile, with the creation of The Green Barn in the Wychwood neighbourhood). A staff position has been created to work with the civic engagement program to bring advocacy priorities into the Green Barn area, and to build opportunities for farmers' market customers to go beyond purchasing and to engage with policy issues related to sustainable agriculture, either by fundraising or volunteering in specialized capacities.

The Stop raises 90% of its funds from private sources (individuals, foundations, corporations, special events, and social enterprise). While there is an advantage to the programming flexibility this approach provides, there are clearly weaknesses to the model that might be even more pronounced in other communities. These include dependence on a certain staff skill set or resource

environment and a vulnerability to the vagaries of the economy. This vulnerability underscores the need for a more constant source of core funding to underwrite the expansion of the model.

“[The community garden] allows me to be in contact with the plants. The pressures I have had in this country — for me this is a way to relax. We nourish ourselves from these plants, it is medicine also. It makes me be more in contact with nature. Here is where I created my first friendships (in Canada). The ladies that are here give me food to eat. When I’m stressed I come here, and (from being with the plants) I see that my worries are not as important as I believed — the plants never complain at all.”

“What I like best about the garden is that the principle of respecting everyone is really engrained. There is a strong sense of community and knowing how to welcome people.”

“The staff at the garden have really been there for me. They’ve provided me with a lot of help with gardening and also helped me get a job.”

“Being outdoors has helped to improve my health....Being in the garden makes me happier — it beats staying at home.”

“I feel happy when I come to the garden. I like to come out to see people. When my kids moved out, I felt sad. At the garden, I could talk to someone.”

Impacts of the CFC

Viewing a CFC within the framework of the social determinants of health also helps one to understand the impacts of the CFC approach. The World Health Organization has taken the position that notwithstanding the importance of medical care for treatment of some serious diseases, “more important for the health of the population as a whole are the social and economic conditions that make people ill and in need of medical care in the first place” (Wilkinson and Marmot 2003, 7). The social determinants of health are the “economic and social conditions that shape the health of individuals, communities, and jurisdictions as a whole . . . [and] determine the extent to which a person possesses the physical, social, and personal resources to identify and achieve personal aspirations, satisfy needs, and cope with the environment” (Raphael 2004, 1).

In this section, we will consider the impacts of the CFC in relation to the social determinants of health. In theory, despite the systemic nature of the determinants, health impacts resolve at the individual level and should therefore be measurable. Yet health is the product of many factors, and it is difficult to demonstrate the impact of a particular intervention. Systemic impacts, such as the effects on policy or public opinion, are even harder to analyze.

Over the years, The Stop has increasingly emphasized evaluation, within the limitations of its resources. However, this is undeniably an area in which more work needs to be done, and in which larger-scale evaluation investments are needed. One Stop program — the *Healthy Beginnings* perinatal program — has benefitted from a significant investment in evaluation by its funder, the Public Health Agency of Canada. This experience has shown some of the powerful findings that can come to light if the “light” shone on them is bright enough.

With the establishment of the satellite site (The Green Barn Sustainable Food Production and Education Centre) and a grant from the Trillium Foundation that includes resources for evaluation, The Stop is trying to build new programs from the bottom up that are outcome-oriented and that have impact measurement built in. Until longitudinal tools are used, however, proof of long-term changes to behaviour and ultimately to health status will be elusive, and only suggested through logical inference or connection to research elsewhere.

Here we have assembled some of the information available about both the scope and scale of The Stop’s activities, what Stop participants say about themselves, and their involvement with the organization, as well as some references to the impacts described in literature about similar programs.

The most significant source of information is The Stop's annual survey of 120 program participants, who are asked about their circumstances and their opinions of The Stop. The survey is random and weighted to the size of the programs, a fact worth noting because, unless otherwise noted, the results represent an average across programs — that is, 60% of respondents are food bank or drop-in users, programs which arguably are on the lower end of the impact scale.

Income, Food Access, and Employment

Approximately 75% of Stop users have an income of less than \$20,000 per year, and 73% say they have insufficient money for food after rent; 80% are unemployed, 61% are on social assistance, and 40% report that they have some type of disability.

Impacts by The Stop in the area of income, food security, and employment relate to the provisioning of food that frees up income for other necessities; referrals and supports provided through the community advocacy office; and the income security advocacy work carried out by staff and members of the civic engagement projects. The CFC's actual and potential impacts on farm incomes are also worth mentioning, as many farmers themselves qualify as low-income.

Some of these impacts in 2009 included:

- The Stop distributed 13,431 food hampers to 6,000 households (221,193 meals) and provided 4,570 meals through its drop-in meal program.
- Approximately \$500,000 in income supports were accessed through actions taken by community advocates.
- 2,500 pounds of food were grown in The Stop's community garden and greenhouse (an amount that will increase by 50% or more in 2010).
- 14,000 free seedlings were distributed to Toronto community gardens.
- 8,000 people either participated in the online *Do the Math* campaign for social assistance increase and rate reforms or signed postcards to the government.
- Approximately 1,000 community members attended film nights, anti-poverty rallies and *Put Food in the Budget* events.
- Speakers Bureau members spoke at 30 community events and were represented on poverty issues in 15 media pieces.
- 50 farms were provided with significant income at The Green Barn Farmer's Market, selling approximately \$1.25 million in local, sustainably-grown food.
- The Stop purchased approximately \$30,000 worth of local food and \$40,000 worth (22,000 lbs) of local, organic food.

- The Stop offered volunteer training and work experience to approximately 300 low-income volunteers.
- The Stop's backyard gardening project aims to cultivate 50 backyards and to produce 6,800 kg (15,000 lbs) of food.

Social Support and Connectedness

Approximately 48% of Stop participants were born outside Canada and 23% are recent immigrants. Many participants have expressed feelings of isolation resulting from their social and economic circumstances. Anecdotally, Stop's staff have heard that the agency is often the first point of contact for new immigrants in the Davenport West area.

One of the aims of the CFC is to provide a space that allows community members to meet each other, offer organizational support, and create mutual support networks. Studies have shown that people with high levels of social capital (i.e., those who are well connected) have greater access to information, financial resources, and other assets. As social cohesion decreases, mortality, suicide, poor self-related general and mental health, and homicide increase (Stafford et al. 2003).

Food can be used to bring together and build ties between members of a similar cultural group or to break down intercultural barriers. Some of The Stop's impacts in the past year include:

- 1,623 visits were made to The Stop's community advocacy office for referrals to community supports such as housing, child care, settlement, health care services, and income security entitlements (in partnership with Ontario Works and the Ontario Disability Support Program).
- A total of 3,663 referrals to services were made at The Stop.
- Each week approximately 600 people shop at The Green Barn Market, and between 50 and 80 shop at the Good Food Market.
- Each summer approximately 2,600 pizzas are baked in the outdoor bake oven that operates alongside the Good Food Market.
- Each year, the Stop offers 176 community kitchen sessions, comprising 1,664 visits for individuals.
- The Stop held 140 sessions for adults in the garden and greenhouse for a total of 1,240 visits (an amount that will increase by 30% in 2010).
- About 300 people attended 10 Social Justice Film Nights.
- The Bread and Bricks Social Justice Group held 72 meetings of its advocacy, events, and community economic development committees, each attended by an average of 10 people.
- In 2009, 409 volunteers spent nearly 20,000 hours contributing to The Stop's programs.

The annual survey found that:

- 79% said that they have made friends at The Stop, with 46% saying that they see or speak to these people outside of The Stop (the numbers increasing to 96% and 52% in the non-emergency programs).
- 89% said that The Stop plays an important role in their life.
- 39% said that Stop staff have helped them with an issue in their life.

Health Behaviours, Education, and Literacy

Currently in Ontario 43% of Ontario men and 53% of women aged 18 to 64 did not meet the minimum recommendation of 30 to 45 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity on most days. Further, approximately 40% of Ontario adults do not meet the guideline of eating five or more servings of vegetables and fruit per day (Cancer Care Ontario 2005), although about 35% of cancers can be prevented through increased fruit and vegetable consumption (Jetter et al. 2004).

The data available on programs such as community kitchens, community gardens, education workshops, and after-school programs suggest that these relatively low-cost interventions can have significant effects on social and physical health, meaning potential savings for the health care system. A review of the literature about the impacts of community kitchens shows that they can have significant impacts on social supports and connectedness, as well as on personal health behaviours related to diet and nutrition (Engler-Stringer and Berenbaum 2005, Tarasuk 2001). Studies have shown that when children have a hand in growing food, their understanding of food and its relationship to their health increases. A combination of direct instruction and hands-on gardening has shown a positive result in increasing children's knowledge of and preference for fruits and vegetables (Morris, Briggs, and Zidenberg-Cherr 2002; McAleese and Rankin 2007).

At The Stop in 2009:

- About 300 people took part in an intensive program aimed at improving social and physical health (involving the community garden, the kitchen, and after-school programs), and over 1,000 participated in gardening, farm trips, and cooking educational workshops.
- 290 children participated in a five-module food-systems education program covering poverty, cooking and food traditions, biodiversity, food security, and farming issues.
- 261 women took part in the *Healthy Beginnings* perinatal program, for a total of 2,464 visits.
- 97% of babies born to *Healthy Beginnings* participants had a healthy birth weight (15% of women had previously given birth to a low-birth-weight baby).

- 98% of women in the program initiated breastfeeding, 97% saying that they had received help or advice from staff about breastfeeding.
- 90% said the information and support that they received through *Healthy Beginnings* helped change what they eat and drink.

In our annual survey:

- 39% people from all programs said that they had learned how to choose healthy foods at The Stop Community Food Centre. The number increases to 77% for those in non-emergency programs.
- Of all participants, 48% said that they had changed their eating habits because of something they learned at The Stop, increasing to 65% for those in non-emergency programs.
- Across all programs 59% said that they had learned something about preparing healthy food at The Stop.
- 47% said that their physical health had improved as a result of coming to The Stop (54% of these were in non-emergency programs)
- 69% said that their emotional health had improved (81% of these were in non-emergency programs).

An evaluation of The Stop's *After School Program* showed that 90% of children enjoyed cooking more after the program and 100% said that they had learned something about cooking healthy meals in the program (ranging from skills to nutrition and being exposed to new foods).

Impacts on the neighbourhood are difficult to measure, but can be related to increased safety provided by better-used public space, such as community gardens. Educating people about and creating markets for ecologically produced food has a positive effect on the environment, as does fostering a reduction in the fossil-fuel impact of food by promoting the purchasing and growing of local, sustainable food.

Beneficial impacts on the neighbourhood are suggested by one study in New York showing that having a community garden improved the attitudes of residents towards the neighbourhood, evidenced in increased property maintenance, reduced littering, and greater pride in the neighbourhood (Armstrong 2000).

The presence of vegetable gardens in inner-city neighbourhoods is also positively correlated with decreases in crime, trash dumping, juvenile delinquency, fires, violent deaths, and mental illness (Bellows et al. 2003). Also, gardeners, especially older ones, feel safe and have a purpose for leaving their households and engaging in a broader landscape (Bellows et al. 2003).

“I love cooking! I'm going to go home and tell my mom that if there are any peppers to be cut I should do it because now I know how to cut peppers.”

“Before the After School Program my family ate a lot of junk food that at the time I thought was healthy. Now we buy healthier.”

“In the community kitchen I learned to eat healthy food, not junk food. Now I eat more salad and broccoli instead of pizza.”

“I never knew cooking could be so fun! Even though you have to clean up afterwards it's still so much fun.”

“I used to hate vegetables before, but now I LOVE salad!”

“From here learned to buy fresh produce. Now I go on a fruit kick, and I can't get enough!”

“[At the community kitchen] I meet people from other countries, learn about other types of food....I have learned about vegetables, and how to prepare food for my baby. Since coming to The Stop, I am more healthy.”

“Coming to the community kitchen has been very useful for us, because we are new in the country. I have used the recipes that I have learned here at home. We are meeting new people and learning.”

“The community kitchen is important to me because it is a place to go, a place to socialize. It gives me a routine and someone to talk to. People are friendly here. They make you feel welcome and warm. There are other places you go and you don't feel welcome. Since I've come here, I've learned new recipes, and about a balanced diet and how to feed my baby.”

“When I am here I eat as much as I can. I try to bring containers to bring food home. Coming here gives me a purpose, gets me out of the cycle of depression.”

The Way Forward: What Others Told Us about Advancing the CFC Approach

Increasingly, as The Stop's work has gained in scale and momentum, interest in its model has surged, in the form of both media coverage and an increasing number of requests for information and support for replication by a wide range of other agencies. Many of the people represent organizations, networks, and roundtables inspired by the same concerns and principles that motivate the staff of The Stop. Some are already offering many of the same programs in their communities, though usually not through one organization.

Part of the research undertaken for this paper involved identifying and speaking with representatives of communities where such interest exists, including Kitchener-Waterloo, Guelph, London, Sudbury, and communities in the Greater Toronto Area. These consultations have underscored that the determination to take a comprehensive approach to addressing food insecurity is widespread, and that concrete resources are needed to make progress towards that goal.³

Several groups discussed the necessity of moving beyond short-term or project-specific funding, and the need for more stable support in order to be able to build long-term programs and approaches. Others expressed the difficulties of getting stakeholders to sit down together at one table and dealing with “turf conflicts” over funding and ideological terrain. Many community leaders admitted, for example, that they were treading on new ground and were in need of support to ensure the future success of their consolidated structure and philosophy.

The areas identified as needing support included:

- stable funding
- articulating the vision of the CFC in a compelling way
- negotiating with different stakeholders on how to transition towards a more comprehensive approach
- sharing practices such as governance models, stakeholders and partnerships, space and layout design
- program development ideas

Despite these challenges, it became clear that each regional group had found unique ways to address food insecurity and food system challenges. Several

³ Comments from informants are not attributed, as it was felt that anonymity would allow them to express themselves more freely. However, a list of all those interviewed for the paper is included as an appendix.

groups, for example, spoke of successful partnerships established between community organizations, public health offices, and community centres that enabled them to expand and sustain their work.

All the groups we consulted felt that The Stop's CFC was a successful model and were interested in exploring ways that it could be adopted in their regions in a sustainable way. Some expressed a sense of urgency over the growing needs in their communities related to health issues, a lack of food accessibility, and the unavailability of social support, accelerated by current economic and political conditions. In a few cases, concerns were expressed about the quality of food and the distribution policies of local food banks. Some groups were interested in working more closely with The Stop to launch possible pilot projects in their communities or to make use of The Stop's expertise and receive advice on strategies for the development of CFCs in their regions.

We also spoke with policy experts and key informants from government and foundations — people who could offer insight into barriers to and opportunities for scaling up, as well as identifying potential allies or opponents to the idea. To prepare for these interviews, we produced a brief with a description of the CFC and some preliminary thoughts on expansion possibilities as a discussion piece.

The results of these consultations were not as clear as we had originally hoped, yet several important insights emerged. One key recommendation, repeated by a number of informants, suggested beginning the replication process with a series of community-level pilot projects to experiment with expanding the CFC model in key locations throughout Ontario.

Few of those consulted believed that it was realistic to expect government support for new initiatives, at least in the short term, given the economic downturn. Others suggested that further research into the efficacy of the model was required, along with a more persuasive case regarding how the CFC could help meet various ministries' goals. Opinions were split on whether the best approach would be a long-term process of building allies and evidence in partnership with government bureaucracy, or a shorter-term project of inspiring key political allies to adopt the CFC as a deliverable within a party platform. It was proposed that part of the longer-term strategy would be to develop a network of support that would involve pilot projects, a "community of practice" with others doing similar work, and building further interest and support among the public and key stakeholders.

We asked policy informants to identify the correct ministerial target at the provincial level. The multidimensional approach of the CFC relates to the goals of a number of ministries — for example, Community and Social Services, Agriculture and Food, Health and Long-Term Care, Health Promotion, Citizenship and Immigration — as well as to some of the current government's

key areas of interest, such as children's issues, poverty reduction, and greenhouse gas reduction.

At least two senior policy analysts stated strongly that it would be a mistake to pigeonhole the model within any one ministry, since its integrated approach was its strength. Others suggested the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care and the Ministry of Health Promotion as having the most diverse mandates, though concerns were raised about the likelihood of a sympathetic climate or available resources within these ministries. The Premier's Office was suggested as a centralized home for a CFC strategy, given the current interest in food on the part of the public and the government itself. In theory the Premier's Office could dictate priorities to other ministries, but one informant said that, although this strategy could certainly play a role in pushing an inter-ministerial agenda forward, without allies within the affected ministries, the initiative would make little headway.

Although the results from policy experts were mixed, interest from private-sector foundations was strong. It was suggested that three or four funders could potentially be brought together to support an intermediate pilot phase of the project, and possibly to resource The Stop to play a consulting role with pilot communities during this phase.

Some informants pointed to the model adopted by *Pathways to Education* as a success story in scaling up that deserves investigation. In the case of *Pathways*, the scaling-up process involved the formation of a separate organization, Pathways Canada, that enabled the work of replication to be removed from the day-to-day operations of the neighbourhood-based program, so that it would not strip the organization of resources.⁴ Though securing significant government funding has been a vital part of replication, Pathways Canada continues to oversee programming and raises funds from diverse sources.

Reflecting on the feedback from key informants, we were forced to reconsider the likelihood or desirability of a CFC replication strategy being run or wholly resourced by government, as well as the time frame of the project. In the absence of likely government champions or resources in the short term, we considered the desirability of seeking resources for The Stop or a new organization to play a facilitative or consulting role and to push the agenda forward. In the end, we decided to recommend a pilot project involving three suitable partners and supported by both private-sector resources and, potentially, smaller government grants (for example, through the Trillium Foundation). At the same time, we recommended seeking out political allies and champions within key ministries, as well as academic partners who could help

⁴ This need to provide additional resources so as not to strip away core capacity was mentioned more than once.

document the pilots. The aim of this phase would be to build a cross-province case for the model in the short term, and secure either more permanent private-sector or government support (or a combination of the two) in the longer term.

Finding a Home for the CFC: Towards an Institutional Framework for the CFC

Research for this paper involved an investigation of potential institutional structures. Through research and discussion, we identified some preferred directions, although no definitive conclusion can be reached until further conversations with local partners have taken place.

Two recent provincial reports, the *Roots of Youth Violence Report* (Ontario Ministry of Children and Youth Services 2008) and *Ontario's Poverty Reduction Strategy* (Government of Ontario 2009) discuss the benefits of community hubs for moving beyond service delivery to providing spaces that facilitate connections between individuals and enable communities to become self-sufficient. Building on these reports, the CFC can be conceptualized as a community hub.

By clustering services, hubs can address access barriers for people with limited resources. Locating numerous services in a single space or connected set of spaces would enable staff in a CFC to gain a better understanding of the needs and dynamics within the community; it would also both provide multiple access points to the hub and link various services. While residents would be exposed to the range of services offered, staff and volunteers could see how the services interconnect and create mutual support networks.

Because it provides a physical space for neighbourhood residents to meet, get to know each other, and become engaged in their community, a CFC is the ideal expression of a community hub that uses food to bring people together. Each CFC hub would be located strategically in an area where there is a low-income community requiring services. At the same time, the CFC can also involve people from across the socio-economic spectrum as financial supporters, as volunteers, and as participants in advocacy or in non-subsidized programs, such as classes or farmers' markets. The CFC hub can involve everyone in the quest for a local, sustainable, and just food system.

While the hub model has obvious virtues, there are different ways that a hub could be constituted, physically, and organizationally.

The first approach would be to establish an entirely new institution in Ontario, creating a series of CFCs that are similar in scale to the current Stop, and similar institutionally to community health centres. Existing institutions could offer space — for example, health units, community health centres, non-profit organizations, underused churches, schools, or municipal buildings. While such an investment would be worthwhile, it represents a large financial commitment, and one that is unlikely to receive support in the short term.

A second approach is to institutionalize CFC hubs *within* existing institutions, such as community health centres.⁵ Staff and programs can be partly incorporated into CHC staffing and operations, while remaining accountable to the “mothership” (that is, the central Pathways-style organization). The hub would consist of a minimum number of dedicated staff (likely about four to start with). In this version, a community health centre might have to upgrade or add facilities such as a kitchen, and resources would have to be leveraged from private or public sources to do this, but the overall approach could nonetheless be economical. Preliminary discussions indicate that this approach might fit well with the provincial community health centres’ strategy on food security. Additionally, several community health centres already have well-developed food programming under way (for example, the Guelph Community Health Centre and Toronto’s Stonegate Community Health Centre). Risks attached to this approach include becoming simply a set of programs within a larger agency, without any identity or ability to grow. If the CFC approach were to be adopted wholesale as a government program within this institutional framework, another obvious cost would be lack of both control over and flexibility in programming.

Similarly, CFCs could be housed within municipal recreation centres. Scadding Court Community Centre in Toronto is an example of a recreation centre that could become a CFC hub for the neighbourhood, particularly since it currently houses a range of food programs.⁶ The program component is funded through fees, donations and grants, and is treated like an independent not-for-profit community-based organization.

Food banks are another potential institutional home. Though under-resourced, many do have infrastructure and already have both a focus on food and connections with low-income communities. Food banks interested in reinventing themselves could follow a similar transformative trajectory as The Stop. Whether there are enough food banks that are sympathetic to this approach is a potential longer-term limitation.

A third approach would be to work with a qualified lead partner in a community, rather than focusing on any one institutional home. The partner could be a local food bank, health unit, faith organization, or other non-profit. The lead agency would have to be in a position to “add on” a food cluster to its existing work, and would require the necessary space and the support of the key stakeholders in the community. The advantage of this approach is that it responds flexibly to local capacity. The partnership could also be implemented as an “incubation” model in which the lead agency would allow the hub to operate within the agency while it is still small (or be overseen by the lead in a

⁵ This is how the Pathways organization has functioned with at least some of their satellites.

⁶ Scadding Court is one of ten community centres in Toronto that make up the Association of Community Centres (AOCCs), which acts as a hybrid somewhere between a city agency and an independent, not-for-profit, community-based organization.

separate location), but as resources and capacity grew, the CFC could become physically and organizationally free-standing.

Many communities currently have coalitions and networks that have formed to address food security issues, but a single agency would be required to act as the lead (though potentially such an agency could be constituted out of a network, if resources exist).

The Stop will propose to partners that pilots be located in lead agencies that demonstrate capacity and local support. We believe that ideally a CFC needs its own identity and physical space, therefore local partners would be preferred who express a willingness to incubate a hub that could stand alone, either initially (if the space and financial capacity exist) or in the longer term when these are secured. As the pilot progresses, opportunities for embedding the CFC within an existing government institution will be investigated, and evaluated in view of the evolving context and opportunities.

The strategy for the City of Toronto may be atypical, given the uniqueness of the resource base and the well-developed organizational frameworks. For example, preliminary discussions with the United Way of Toronto indicate that the possibility exists to integrate CFC hubs with the neighbourhood hubs they are currently developing. Opportunities may also exist through Toronto Community Housing's commitment to developing tenant empowerment and community gardening strategies, and through planned new housing developments, neighbourhood revitalization strategies, and Tower Renewal projects. Regional CFCs, located in the four quadrants of the city and based in Toronto Community Housing buildings, would be another structure. Given the potential scale of the CFCs required to serve Toronto's population, finding one institutional partner would be advisable. We recommend one carefully selected pilot in the City of Toronto that builds this key partnership and potentially unique urban model.

[Towards a Sustainable Funding Model](#)

Without any indication of the source or size of future funding streams, discussion of future resources for the CFC remains speculative, yet a short discussion is warranted. The Stop's current 90% private–10% public funding model has its weaknesses. The particularity of its own history, assets, and resource environment have enabled its growth but may not be replicable elsewhere (partly because private sources of funding may be finite, and partly because smaller local organizations may not have the capacity to pursue them).

For example, The Stop is socially and physically well positioned to appeal to affluent groups and individuals. It is located in a diverse, low-income neighbourhood sandwiched between neighbourhoods with higher-income populations. This situation provides The Stop with access to a middle-class

constituency that brings a degree of self-confidence, resources, skills, and time. Another important consideration is The Stop's location in Toronto, a city with a large knowledge economy and more capacity to support NGOs than other places in Ontario. In order to "scale-up" the CFC model, a significant and stable funding source will ultimately have to be secured.

The source and combination of public and private money for this funding remains to be seen, although a strong argument can be made that the fundraising function should be centralized and brokered through one organization (similar to the Pathways model mentioned earlier). Replicating The Stop's fundraising capacity in every CFC would be a wasteful and continual "reinvention of the wheel." At the same time, some local fundraising for each CFC would be desirable for making local connections, raising its local profile, and bringing in additional revenues. If a centralized fund were to be created, the local CFC could apply to the fund for core funding.

If a new organization were created to administer new sites, this organization would review applications against the criteria of how well they advance the CFC mission and how much local support they enjoy. Once the funds were secured by the local CFC, they would be controlled by the local organization, which would report to the central body, which would in turn be accountable to its funders, be they private or public. In the short term, securing funding for the pilot sites is a priority. Currently, the minimum amount estimated to launch each site is \$400,000 for each of two years, an amount that would cover four staff members, one director, start-up costs, and program and operating expenses. Local partners would be asked to contribute in-kind and financial resources to the degree that they are able. Additionally, funds would be sought for a consulting and fundraising function within The Stop. Although this is a significant sum, it is a realistic and feasible goal.

Summary and Next Steps

The Stop's Community Food Centre model is a unique and viable approach to helping build a local, sustainable, and just food system. Our research has led to a proposed strategy to take the process to the next stage.

These proposals include: launching a three-year pilot phase (consisting of one year of start-up and two years in an operating phase), to be succeeded by an expansion phase.

The pilot phase will consist of the following steps:

1. Consult with provincial partners to create criteria for inclusion in the pilot phase and to identify three strategic locations for pilots.
2. Research Toronto partnerships leading to a third pilot site in the City of Toronto.
3. Bring together several key potential private funders to begin resource development for the pilot phase.
4. With pilot partners, seek funds from the Trillium and Health Promotion funding streams.
5. Aim to leverage a minimum of \$400,000 for each pilot site, as well as funds to enable The Stop to play a facilitative and consulting role in the pilots.
6. Seek academic and/or private sector partners to assist with the documentation necessary to build an evidence-based case for expansion.
7. With the support and input of pilot partners, incorporate a new organization to act as an umbrella for new projects and a broker for funding.
8. Seek senior allies within government ministries to assess what would be required to unlock a significant funding stream, starting with the Ministries of Health and Long-term Care, and Health Promotion.
9. Connect with political allies in all parties and assess contacts within the Premier's Office to help drive the CFC agenda forward.
10. Based on pilot results, create criteria for future CFCs and build relationships with communities who would be interested in starting a CFC during the expansion phase.
11. Report on the results of the pilot phase and create a communications strategy to disseminate strategically.

Appendix 1: The Stop's Philosophy, Strategy, and Programs

The Stop's Healthy Food Philosophy

The Stop Community Food Centre's philosophy recognizes food as an essential part of life, necessary to maintain the good health of body, mind, and spirit.

We believe that access to food is a basic human right. Accordingly, we aim to distribute as much food as possible to our community. However, we do believe that some foods should not be distributed, and therefore we decline some of the most unhealthy donated food we receive.

As much as possible, we strive to provide fresh, locally produced foods that are seasonal, minimally processed, affordable and accessible to all. We respect the health of people who work the land and water to produce food, and acknowledge that we are part of an interdependent food system. Whenever possible we use our purchasing power to support growers, producers, and retailers who share this philosophy.

We recognize that food plays an important part in the cultural diversity of our community and work to meet those needs through our programming. In this process, we nurture community through a shared food experience.

We welcome opportunities to learn about, grow, cook, and eat food together. We promote equally the importance of healthy nutrition and of the pleasure that comes from choosing and eating food that we love. In the food that we serve and promote, we are constantly looking for the terrain where “nutritious” and “delicious” intersect.

Through innovative programming and public education, we work to promote food security at all levels. Our philosophy of food security is based on the belief that change must happen at the individual, community, and policy level. Adequate income to buy food, a food system that promotes healthy eating, and sustainable agriculture are all necessary components of food security.

Agency-wide Strategic Objectives

- Increase low-income community members' access to healthy food.
- Increase knowledge and skills around healthy food.
- Increase participants' connection to the community by linking them to Stop programs, mutual support networks, and other community supports.
- Increase community members' knowledge and ability to advocate on food policy and income security.

- Increase Stop leadership on food issues and awareness of community food centre model.
- Create an environment at The Stop that respects individual dignity and cultural diversity.
- Strengthen The Stop's financial and organizational capacity to serve the community.

The Stop's Programs (as of 2009)

Green Barn Programs

- **Greenhouse** Unique in Canada, our greenhouse is designed to Gold LEED environmental standards and grows organic produce year-round. Under the supervision of an expert team of growers, children and adults gain hands-on experience in sustainable food production. The produce grown there is used for drop-in meals and other programs at our main site.
- **Compost Systems** Our large composting units and vermicomposting bins turn food waste into a growing medium for our gardens. We use them to teach children and other visitors about biodiversity and sustainability.
- **Sheltered Garden & Bake Oven** Tucked inside heat-trapping brick walls but open to the sky, our sheltered garden is an ideal location to demonstrate season-extension techniques for growing the diverse food plants of Toronto's multicultural communities. Our outdoor wood-burning bake oven produces bread and pizzas for The Green Barn.
- **Farmers' Market** This year-round market offers everything from sustainably grown vegetables and fruit to ice cream and coffee, attracting about 1,000 people every Saturday. Music, food, product tasting, and opportunities to learn about the food system make it a vibrant public space.
- **After School Program & Summer Camp** Offered to lower-income kids Grade 3 to 6, our free after-school program runs three days a week and provides hands-on fun in the kitchen, garden, and greenhouse, as well as art, games, and homework help. Two one-week food camps in the summer also aim to inspire engagement with food issues through cooking and gardening, as well as field trips and other outdoor activities.
- **Sustainable Food Systems Education Program** Grade 5 students from local schools attend a series of workshops that are focused on food issues, run through the school year, and support the Ontario curriculum. Using games, tastings, and hands-on activities, students

learn about the many dimensions of the food system — from sustainable growing and cooking skills to social justice and biodiversity.

- **Shovel & Spoon** Working in partnership with other local agencies, this cooking and gardening program aimed at marginalized people (survivors of violence and trauma, as well as homelessness) offers a therapeutic and supportive environment for learning new skills, creating connections with nature and one another.
- **YIMBY (Yes In My Backyard)** This program connects city dwellers who have land to share with low-income people who want to garden but don't have access to space for growing food. A community and skill-building project, YIMBY works with seniors, youth, and the multicultural gardeners of the neighbourhood, offering workshops, tool-sharing, and other opportunities to learn together.
- **Social Enterprise** Led by The Stop's in-house chefs, we host a variety of initiatives aimed at raising funds for our front-line programs. These include the *Food for Change* dinner series (in which participants join the kitchen crew and learn what it's like to prepare a gourmet meal for paying customers, or simply come to enjoy the dinner) as well as cooking classes, team-building, facility rental, and catering.

Programs at our Main Site at 1884 Davenport Road

- **Food Bank** Community members can receive a three-day supply of food once a month. We strive to provide a dignified environment and the highest-quality, freshest food possible.
- **Drop-in** In our safe, welcoming space, community members enjoy nutritious food and an opportunity to connect with others as well as find access to information on social issues, housing, health care, and welfare.
- **Community Kitchens** Groups range from Meals Made Easy and Sabor Latino for Spanish speakers to moms-and-kids cooking classes. Participants learn new skills and connect with others over nutritious food.
- **Community Advocacy** Trained peer-support workers use their own experience navigating social services to provide one-on-one assistance to others who need help accessing community resources.
- **Healthy Beginnings and Family Support** Pre- and post-natal nutrition and support programs for women living on low incomes.
- **Civic Engagement** We offer support and training so community members can speak out about and work for change on issues of poverty, hunger, and inadequate income.

- **Community Gardens** At our 8,000-square-foot garden in Earls court Park, we engage community members in growing, tending, and harvesting more than 2,000 lbs of organic produce for use in our programs.
- **Bake Oven & Markets** Neighbours come together at an affordable fresh food market and enjoy a free weekly pizza-baking session at our outdoor, wood-fired bake oven.

Appendix 2: List of Key Informants

Policy Experts

Lauren Baker, Sustain Ontario
Hon. Carolyn Bennett, Member of Parliament
Jeb Brugmann, Author/Consultant
Brian Cook, Research Consultant, Toronto Public Health
Jamie Coughlin, Nova Scotia Department of Agriculture
Peter Dorfman, Toronto Food Strategy / Toronto Public Health
David Harvey, GreenThink Consulting
Rod MacRae, York University, Faculty of Environmental Studies
Michael Mendelson, Caledon Policy Institute
Wayne Roberts, Toronto Food Policy Council
John Stapleton, Metcalf Foundation

Community Groups and Non-profit Organizations

Cambridge Self-Help Food Bank (Pat Singleton)
Flemingdon Community Health Centre (Bronwyn Underhill)
Guelph Food Security Network (Andrew Seagram & Kate Vsetula)
Guelph-Wellington Food Roundtable (Kathleen Hyland)
Just Food, Ottawa (Moe Garahan)
London Community Resource Centre (Linda Davies)
McConnell Foundation (Steven Huddart)
Maytree Foundation (Alan Broadbent)
Montforte Dairy (Ruth Klassen)
North York Harvest Food Bank (Anette Chawla & Daniel Liadsky)
Ontario Association of Food Banks (Adam Spence)
Pathways Canada (Sam Duboc)
Peterborough County-City Health Unit (Susan Hubay & Dr. Rosana Pellizzari)
Peterborough Green-Up (Paula Anderson)
Scadding Court Community Centre (Krista Fry and Susanne Burkhardt)
Sudbury & District Health Unit, Eat Local Sudbury Co-operative (Bridget King)
Toronto Food Security CHC Network (Tammy DeCarie)
United Way (Frances Lankin)
Waterloo Food Systems Roundtable (Ellen Desjardins)
YWCA of Peterborough, Victoria & Haliburton (Joëlle Favreau)

Other Interviews

Patricia Allen, author
Margaret Webb, author

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