

6. Food Security

Across Canada, recognition is growing for the importance of local food systems and the integral role available for municipalities to foster their development. For better or worse, the social, economic, and environmental sustainability of cities is impacted by municipal food policy.

Action is being taken in at least 64 Canadian municipalities in areas related to zoning, procurement, transportation, and waste management, all of which contain creative solutions to multi-faceted, holistic issues surrounding our local food systems and our wellbeing (Municipal Food Policy Entrepreneurs).

There are significant benefits available to cities in addressing multi-faceted issues, such as healthcare, nutrition and recreation, with comprehensive policies that recognize the connection between these issues. Health care costs are reduced when the combination of opportunities for recreation and physical activities and access to safe and nutritious food decrease diet-related illness. Hunger is eradicated and tax base increased when the equitable and local distribution, production, and consumption of food creates local employment and supports local livelihoods — currently, one in eight jobs in Winnipeg is food-industry related.

The need for action is prevalent: from poverty, to healthcare, to the economy. In 2012, 63, 482 Manitobans relied upon a food bank each month to make ends meet — a 56.9 per cent increase since 2008, and a 14.2 per cent increase since 2011. Of these users, an unacceptable 47.6 per cent are children (Manitoba Centre for Health Policy, 2011). More than a quarter of adult Manitobans are obese, and obesity rates have increased 55 per cent since 1990. The largest increases in obesity were seen among young adults — exceptionally problematic due to the increased health risks of obesity at a young age (Manitoba Centre for Health Policy, 2011). Farmers in Manitoba make an average income lower than any other province, forcing one

in three farm families to have a second job off the farm to support themselves, while more than 3000 Manitoban farms have disappeared from 2008 to 2011 (Food Matters Manitoba). Supporting local food production would revitalize both provincial and municipal economies.

In *OurWinnipeg*, the City envisioned working through community partnerships in order to respond to food needs as identified by communities. The extensive media coverage of Winnipeg's food deserts highlights local concern for local food systems. Moreover, the number of Winnipeg individuals and organizations who have signed on the Manitoba Food Charter is exemplary of Winnipeg citizen's desire to take action supporting our local food system.

There is innovative, albeit disconnected, work being done around Winnipeg to promote food security. From the Norwest Co-ops new Community Food Centre increasing access to healthy food in Inkster, or Food Matters Manitoba's Dig In program connecting community members and farmers to promote food knowledge, initiatives are being undertaken all over the City. The popularity of Winnipeg's new downtown farmers' market is testament to the level of support available for local food. These efforts and models have the potential to benefit and multiply from supportive municipal policy. The most effective first step would be to create a municipal food policy council.

A food policy council would be made up representatives from multiple government departments and all aspects of food production — farmers, processors, chefs, distribution, grocers, and local businesses. The council would also include relevant community representatives, including anti-hunger and food justice activists, educators, non-profit organizations, newcomers, and Aboriginal people.

The council would bring stakeholders together to evaluate and develop policy, and recommend action surrounding food security in Winnipeg. Rather than having various social, economic, and environmental problems competing against each

other for limited resources, the council would allow government departments to address complex issues, such as gender, in a comprehensive and coordinated manner.

There are plenty of examples of municipal action on food — in just the last three years, 17 different Canadian municipalities have worked with their communities to improve their local food system. Food policy councils have been in operation in some cities for over twenty years: Edmonton has rolled out an inspiring Food and Urban Agriculture Strategy which mixes regulatory policies and food programs to support a “stronger, more vibrant local economy” (Municipal Food Policy Entrepreneurs).

A first priority task for a food policy council is to conduct a complete food system assessment of Winnipeg, including an inventory of all available municipal land, bringing community members together to research their local food economy and identify community priorities. A second priority would be to develop a food action plan, building upon existing food initiatives and identifying where the City can support a just and sustainable food system. Some of these actions could include:

Community Gardens

- Compiling a complete assessment and map of current community gardens, indicating available community gardening space and contact information.
- Establishing a formal application process for groups seeking to set up new community garden space.
- Providing resource support, through the use of small grants for community garden start-ups and free access to City water.

Procurement

- Prioritizing the importance of local food by sourcing from local providers for catering and events.

- Mandating community centres to provide local and nutritious food from their canteens.

Transportation

- Conducting an evaluation of bus routes to ensure people can access food in a reasonable time — the ability to avoid taking a cab to get groceries can easily save families \$40 a week.

Support for Farmers’ Markets

- Providing access for low-income community members to farmers’ markets, including incentives for farmers’ markets to set up in under-served communities, such as the Inner City and the North End.

Advocacy

- Pressuring the appropriate levels of government to relieve the burden on people’s food budget by increasing shelter benefits for EIA recipients, creating more affordable housing, and promoting Winnipeg as a living wage zone.

A comprehensive food security policy would benefit low-income people, including single parents — disproportionately women, helping them provide affordable, nutritious food for their children.

Total New Expenditures:

- Two full-time staff positions
Coordinator: \$60,000
Administrative Support: \$40,000
 - Operating budget for Food Policy Council: \$75,000
 - Start-up Cost: \$20,000
- Total: \$195,000