

***CITY OF THUNDER BAY AND FOOD ACTION NETWORK
BROADER PUBLIC SECTOR
EDUCATION STRATEGY
IMPLEMENTATION PROJECT***

SUMMARY REPORT

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INTRODUCTION

In the fall of 2012 the City of Thunder Bay received a grant from the Friends of the Greenbelt Foundation to conduct research into the needs of local public institutions and the capacity of local farmers to meet those needs. By identifying these needs the City planned to help bridge gaps between public sector purchasers, the agricultural community and others in the value chain in the Thunder Bay area.

The City hired Kristine Hammel and Brenda Hsueh of the Grey Bruce Centre for Agroecology as consultants on the project, which was completed and presented via workshops in late winter, 2013. The Final Report for that project, titled “Making the Connections for Public Sector Local Food Procurement” included an assessment of the supply and demand for local foods and profiled the stakeholders on both production and procurement angles. Recommendations for an Education Strategy were included which identified a number of opportunities where the City of Thunder Bay and the Food Action Network could provide training and information to stakeholders in the local food system to bring parties closer to a middle ground.

Hammel and Hsueh described three audiences that an education strategy for local food procurement should address:

1. Public sector buyers
2. Local producers
3. Support groups
 - a. Staff in municipal government, public health, and other public agencies
 - b. City councilors and other politicians
 - c. Civil society organizations
 - d. Engaged citizens.

Recommendations were made for targeted content and learning approaches for each audience.

The Broader Public Sector Education Strategy Implementation Project addressed these recommendations through a step-by-step approach that incorporated new learnings from each phase into the planning for the next.

This report describes the steps taken to implement selected recommendations made by Hammel and Hsueh as well as the learnings gathered along the way which influenced the project’s direction.

FARMER CAPACITY-BUILDING WORKSHOPS

Various recommendations were made in the Education Strategy to *support local producers in building the capacities they need in order to supply public sector buyers*, including one to *provide local producers with education and training opportunities in business planning, production planning, and marketing*.

Because farmers would be returning to farm work and would be unavailable to participate beyond the end of the winter, farmer workshops were made a priority and a series of workshops was planned which provided a look at some business tactics for improving operations and preparing for expansion.



Two days of workshops were hosted at the Pioneer Village Founders' Museum aimed at the operators of small meat and vegetable farms. Chris Blanchard of Flying Rutabaga Works, a farmer and speaker from Decorah, Iowa, presented four topics in four sessions:

- Record-Keeping
- Farm Finances
- Marketing Beyond the Farmers' Market and CSA
- Managing Labour

Chris demonstrated how critical thinking can result in improved profits using examples from his own successful farm enterprise. Chris showed how he captures and sorts data and ensures he acts on it within an appropriate time frame, how he keeps financial and tax records, how his labour is managed with a set of instructional templates which also contain record-keeping devices and check-and-balance systems, and how moving into an expanded enterprise which sells mainly wholesale can create new opportunities for profit.

Between 12 and 14 farmers attended each of the four sessions; some were able to attend the entire two days. A total of 19 different individuals attended the different workshops. Feedback was very good: all four workshops received ratings of Excellent Value from at least 1/3 of the

evaluators and Good Value from most of the others, with Reasonable Value being the lowest score.

See Appendices for attendance information and hand-out samples.

CITY BUYER WORKSHOPS

The Education Strategy also made recommendations to *support public sector buyers in building their capacities to increase their use of local foods.*

To address these recommendations we hosted two half-day workshops at the Regional Food Distribution Association with Don Mills, president of Local Food Plus (LFP) presenting. LFP is an organization from southern Ontario which provides consulting services to help organizations develop informed and effective strategies for local food procurement. Prior to his visit Don and his team assembled a series of case studies from their own portfolio and across Canada in which public sector institutions and large businesses have overcome challenges similar to ours and successfully connected with local food producers.



During the morning workshop Don Mills made a presentation geared to buyers and food-service staff in cafeteria-style situations like those found in our high schools, post-secondary institutions and hospitals' public cafeterias, where dining in is optional and diners may choose to eat elsewhere. After a networking lunch, Don presented to a group working mostly in situations where meals are served on an in-patient basis, addressing challenges experienced by hospitals preparing meals for patients, child care centres serving children and nursing homes serving residents. Both presentations offered a historical capsule of the food movement to date and presented the issue of institutional procurement from the perspective of community

economic development and good business practices. This gave attendees an understanding of the economic rationale for institutional use of local foods; the benefits, the challenges and some examples of how other regions' activities have affected their local economies.

Most of the case studies explored systems for aggregation which have been successfully developed in other markets and offered insights into the business relationships involved in bringing local food from farm to institutional fork.

A group of 15 unique individuals attended one or both workshops, including representatives from City-run and private retirement homes, private daycares, Confederation College, Thunder Bay Regional Hospital, the Lakehead Public School Board, small distribution businesses, Sodexo and Sysco.

See Appendices for attendance information.

PERSONAL OBSERVATION

At the afternoon workshop I spoke briefly with Zeferina Hladyniuk from Pioneer Ridge about items they were already sourcing locally. Zeferina asserts that they source almost all of their potatoes locally from B&B or Breukelman's, all of their eggs from Vanderwees and their milk from Sleeping Giant Dairy (Beatrice.) We discussed the difficulty in using local beef; she feels the supply of cuts makes it difficult. They use ground beef in 5-lb packages in her kitchen. She expressed interest in a later discussion Nikos Mantis fostered about using a whole cow every month in meals at Isabella/Hilldale Retirement Homes.

ONE-ON-ONE STAKEHOLDER MEETINGS

Following the buyer workshops Don met with a selection of interested people from both buyer and producer communities to take a more in-depth look at their operations and provide feedback on a one-on-one basis.

1. Confederation College Children & Family Centre

Heather Conrad, the cook at this centre, is responsible for the use of local food in their lunch and snack menu; she's pursued local options aggressively and out of a personal commitment to eating local and healthy. As a result of her influence the centre maintains two freezers full of local meats and vegetables from the centre's garden and from local farms which staff have frozen themselves. They participate in the Silver Mountain staple buying-group. Children are regularly exposed to cooking activities, gardening and tasting new dishes in addition to other learning.



Don was able to offer Heather some contacts in Southern Ontario among organizations like the Confederation College Children and Family Centre and among social enterprise organizations serving centres like it. Don also educated us about Real Food for Real Kids, a catering company serving fresh-made meals made with fresh and local ingredients to child-care centres.

2. DeBruin's Greenhouses

DeBruin's Greenhouses is generally known as the largest greenhouse vegetable operation in the area. Owner Arjen DeBruin took Don on a tour and we examined some of their new innovations and labour-saving mechanisms. Don and Arjen discussed product quality, variety and quantity as well as the distribution mechanisms the business is currently using.

3. **Team Munshaw**

We met with Dan Munshaw and Cathy Bevilacqua from the City of Thunder Bay's Supply Management office and engaged in a frank discussion of Thunder Bay's realistic prospects for local food procurement. The consensus at the table seemed to be that, despite the variety of produce available at the farmers' market during harvest season, very few farmers are producing vegetables in sufficient quantity to meet institutional requirements, and year-round supply is impossible for many of the products that are available in some quantity. Criteria for aggregation and delivery, consistency, quality and quantity are more easily met by a wider supply market such as that available to large corporate suppliers; this is a huge challenge for small farmers and an obstacle to implementation by buyers who are responsible for maintaining budgets and managing staff time.

The conversation turned to existing local storage and distribution infrastructure, most of which is corporately owned. Sysco has centralized in Winnipeg and the warehouse on McKellar has been downgraded to an off-load-on-load facility. What will happen with their freezer storage?

We discussed Luis Alves from LA Quality Foods who had attended the morning session on the day prior. He seems to have an interest in becoming a hub for aggregation of local product. Working with suppliers – Sysco, GFS, McDonald's Consolidated – is the most practical place to begin. The institutional customers of these suppliers renew their contracts every 3, 4, 5 years; they could be giving their suppliers notice now that in the next contract negotiation there would be a percentage requirement for locally-sourced food. This would give them time to find ways to meet these requirements.

Dan explained a little about plans to transfer Grandview and Dawson Court nursing home beds away from the City into the care of St. Joseph's Care Group. He seems to be willing to pilot programs until this happens.

4. **LA Quality Foods**

Luis Alves is the owner of LA Quality Foods, a food distributor with an integrated meat processing plant. His processing plant is set up to receive whole carcasses; he's now

making beef on a bun packages, sausage, retail cuts, ground beef and some smoked products on the premises and offering them both retail and wholesale. His delivery area includes communities from Marathon to the Manitoba border and he's interested in making better use of his return trips, seeing opportunities to deal in local product. He described plans to install a new traceability system that would enable him to bring carcasses in from the Rainy River abattoir and track all of it through processing to the final products. Don advised him to apply to the Greenbelt Fund for this project, as it falls within their criteria for projects supporting the aggregation of local product. Luis has since made partnerships with the Rainy River District Regional Abattoir Inc. and the Thunder Bay Cattlemen's Association to submit an application.



CONSIDERATION:

If Dan Munshaw is willing to support pilot projects through City-run retirement homes and support is implied at the front-line level by Zeferina's interest in local beef, is there a way a wholesaler like LA Quality Foods could pilot his traceable regional beef supply mechanism through the City homes, starting with 5-lb or larger packages of ground?

FARMER GAP & POST-HARVEST HANDLING WORKSHOPS

To meet the Strategy's recommendation to *provide local producers with training in Good Agricultural Practices and support them in developing systems appropriate for their operations* we retained David Cohlmeier, Sustainable Foods Consultant and former owner of Cookstown Greens, to present workshops for local producers on the CanadaGAP™ program and good post-harvest handling practices.

CanadaGAP™ is a food safety program for companies that produce and handle fruits and vegetables. It is designed to help implement and maintain effective food safety procedures

within fresh produce operations and offers a third-party certification which is recognized across the country.

In the morning session David provided an overview of the program that described its value to the producer and covered the scope of its requirements. 15 producers attended the morning CanadaGAP™ session.

In the afternoon session David described practices for growing product which would store better as well as techniques for extending the shelf-life of produce. Topics covered included soil testing and nutrient management and stressing of plants as well as best practices for controlling climate for various products. 18 producers attended the afternoon session on post-harvest handling.

PERSONAL OBSERVATIONS

This was not the most successful workshop held in this series and feedback was not as positive as for earlier speakers. The GAP material, while quite relevant to the requirements of the developing institutional market, is not exciting and our presenter was unable to create any excitement around the information; consequently attendees felt they could have read the material at home instead. Feedback from the afternoon session was mixed; while some participants were enthusiastic about the “capsule” format in which information was presented, some who had attended the earlier Chris Blanchard workshops had been hoping for a similar, more linear presentation style.

INFRASTRUCTURE RESEARCH PROJECT

Based on workshops and conversations held to date with producers and buyers, it became apparent that an important group of stakeholders had been omitted in the development of the Education Strategy.

Procurement stakeholders wish product to be aggregated and pre-processed whenever possible before it arrives at their door in one convenient delivery. They had expressed concerns about consistency of supply and regularity of delivery. On the supply side, area farmers are not typically producing enough on individual bases to be able to support institutional needs individually. Middle infrastructure for transportation, aggregation and,

in some cases, processing appears to be a necessary component of a successful local food system in order to bring both parties together to mutual benefit.

Accordingly we moved to support the recommendation to *map out the Thunder Bay value chain to see where links may be missing or underserved*, seeking out stakeholders involved in that middle infrastructure and asking for information about the businesses, equipment and people involved in the transportation, aggregation and resale of food in the area.

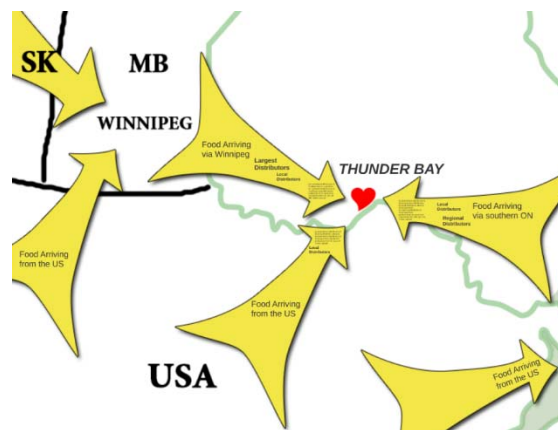
We began by scanning local business listings to assemble a target list of stakeholders operating in the local area including wholesale distributors, meat processors, food manufacturers, commercial realtors and farms with onsite processing.

Initial informal interviews with distributors, farmers and foodservice operators provided us with insight into the different scales of operation serving the Thunder Bay area and informed the questionnaire developed for the formal interviews.

Interview questions were designed to elicit information about stakeholders' scope and scale of operation so they could later be placed in context with their suppliers and customers as well as with other stakeholders in similar operations.

The research concluded that, because the large distributors with the largest proportion of food sales reach into our market from outside Ontario with non-Ontario product, there is a significant opportunity for local manufacturers, processors and distributors to expand to serve the growing institutional market for Ontario product.

The complete infrastructure research report has been appended to this report for more information.



INFRASTRUCTURE WORKSHOP

Upon completion of the research, all stakeholders approached as part of the infrastructure research were invited to attend a morning workshop to learn of the results of the research and to become acquainted with contextual information. In order to offer an element of relationship development, stakeholders from the procurement and production communities were invited to join the group for lunch and an afternoon discussion session.

The morning workshop was designed to present both specific information about the market and contextual information about local food initiatives at the provincial and municipal levels. The focus and tone were kept deliberately positive, focusing on the opportunities that exist for local business to supply a growing need which the large international suppliers are not currently addressing, and presenting a business case for expansion in support of local food procurement initiatives.

Speakers included:

- Raili Roy from Beanstalk Consulting, who presented on the regulatory and economic development contexts as well as the results of the research;
- Franco Naccarato, Program Manager with the Greenbelt Fund, by teleconference who described the way distributors can support local food initiatives profitably;
- Brendan Wylie-Toal, Grant Program Specialist with the Greenbelt Fund, who described some of the obstacles he has observed in institutional procurement as well as the opportunities he has observed to overcome them. Brendan also facilitated a group discussion about the barriers and opportunities that exist in this market;
- A group of community partners who presented about funding, training and financing opportunities available for business expansion in service of local food development
 - o Stacia Kean from the City of Thunder Bay's Entrepreneur Centre
 - o Terry Smith from the Northern Ontario Innovation Centre
 - o Royden Potvin from Thunder Bay Ventures
 - o Glen Currie from BDO

The morning session was attended by 25 stakeholders, among them representatives from large broad line distributors like Sysco, medium local distributors, a small local distributor, processors, manufacturers, abattoirs, farms with on-farm processing and even the local grading station. An additional 9 community stakeholders involved in government,

community development and, in a couple of cases, the administrative side of institutional procurement also attended.

Margaret Wanlin, Thunder Bay Ventures, made notes during Brendan Wylie-Toal's morning discussion; these can be found in the Appendices, and identify concerns on both producer and procurer sides about a few key points:

- Sufficient supply
- Consistency of supply
- Price

The lunch networking session was also well-attended, with an additional 8 producer stakeholders joining the group. Introductions were facilitated between attendees and feedback on the opportunity to connect was very positive. Disappointingly, however, with the exception of the two procurement stakeholders attending the morning session, procurement was not represented and feedback from producer and infrastructure representatives indicated that they would like to see a meet and greet planned for the future specifically with procurement representatives.

21 stakeholders from among the three groups – procurer, producer and middle infrastructure – remained after lunch for a facilitated discussion about some of the issues still confronting the group. Discussion was mainly positive and much focus was given to communications issues among and between groups which are affecting the trust relationships and collaborative opportunities which could lead to more aggregation and product consistency at the producer level.

As part of the discussion Dan Munshaw from the City of Thunder Bay's Supply Management department addressed some of the gaps in knowledge with advice about the current and anticipated needs of the City's long-term-care and day-care facilities and stressed the City's openness to working with local producers. Bill Darby, President of the Rainy River District Regional Abattoir Inc., described the success his organization had in applying for funds which they then used to hire a consultant to develop relationships with institutional buyers and create products tailored to institutional requirements, building a foundation for business success.

Important next steps identified by the group included improving communication among and between groups, ideally through face-to-face meetings with procurement representatives; and growing the available supply of product.

Details on workshop attendance and discussion notes can be found in the Appendices.