

2019

## COMMUNITY REPORT

# NIAGARA



# forum



**United Way**  
**Niagara**

Niagara Food Forum  
Community Report  
January 16th, 2019

Hosted by United Way Niagara

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A thorough funding analysis of food-related program investments by United Way Niagara identified the organization is contributing over \$500,000 in funding annually. To investigate this further and address increasing challenges faced by organizations and community-led initiatives across Niagara, United Way hosted a community consultation in January 2019. The Niagara Food Forum consultation brought together many food-related service providers to engage in dialogue, increase knowledge and understanding, drive collaboration, leverage resources, identify challenges, barriers and opportunities, and recommend action steps to improve food security for all residents in Niagara.

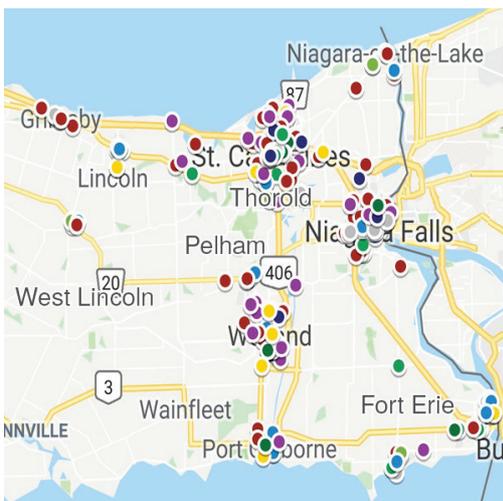
Invitations were distributed to 109 service providers from community groups, networks, non-profit agencies, charitable organizations, faith groups and others working to address food-related needs and challenges. Attended by 70 participants representing 48 local agencies, the forum featured several panelists, speakers and presenters. Critical dialogue amongst participants was encouraged to garner the feedback necessary to inform future community-wide decisions, as it relates to improving food security across Niagara.

While community-wide dialogue and solution-focused discussions formed the basis of the forum, other tools, resources and technology were identified as support systems to improve food security:

1. The Niagara Food Assets Map, an online Google-based mapping tool, developed with the help of area data brokers.
2. Potential technological tools, such as online resources and mobile applications, that could be developed to support the critical work of food-related service provision.
3. Key information relating to the FoodRescue.ca program (a pilot investment in Niagara that aims to improve food security by obtaining edible, unsold, surplus food from across the supply chain and distributing it to local social service organizations and schools).

A multifaceted topic, food security is one element of a much larger and complex social system in Niagara. Several factors, such as income, housing, employment, mental health, physical well-being and community engagement, all play a role in shaping an individual's success. Food Systems in Niagara represents the cycles and interconnections of growing, distributing, eating and recycling food. In 2015 and 2016, Niagara Connects engaged over 100 people in the food systems conversation and collaboratively developed the Food Systems in Niagara Map identifying eight components to the integrated system.

The Niagara Food Forum identified many next steps and key recommendations for Niagara's food-related service providers and the community as a whole: engaging further stakeholders; investigating innovative food provision models, community hubs and best practices; promoting advocacy efforts and education; improving collaboration and coordination among Niagara's service providers; increasing volunteerism; addressing many geographic, logistical and service delivery barriers; data and knowledge sharing; developing tools to support service provision; and the continuation of the forum network to address critical issues.



Food Asset Map

*Representing all food services across the region.*

## INTRODUCTION

Food security is defined as a measure of food availability and individuals' accessibility to it, where accessibility includes affordability. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) says, "Food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food which meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life."

Dedicated to creating the opportunities people need to improve their lives and build a better future, United Way Niagara is the largest non-governmental supporter of human and social services in the region. United Way's work is fueled by research and powerful partnerships, which allows them to identify gaps and responsibly mobilize volunteer and financial resources for the greatest direct impact; effecting positive and lasting change.

United Way investments address both short-term and long-term issues by meeting basic needs and tackling the root causes of the community's most complex social issues. These investments are guided by three priority areas:

1. Poverty to Possibility
2. Strong Communities
3. All That Kids Can Be

Each investment priority area addresses strategic community-level outcomes aimed at improving lives. Food security is one of three outcomes addressed through United Way's 'Poverty to Possibility' priority area framework.

In 2018, the three United Way organizations located within the Niagara region formally amalgamated to create United Way Niagara. This amalgamation process provided a deeper assessment of United Way's financial investments which address complex human and social issues. United Way Niagara currently funds 103 programs, delivered by 48 agencies. Over a third of these programs, either directly or indirectly, results in food-related programming or access for people in need.

A thorough funding analysis identified United Way investments total over \$500,000 annually for food-related programming in Niagara. With this significant investment, United Way wants to ensure it's supporting opportunities for coordination and collaboration that effectively leverage community resources to best meet the needs of vulnerable people in Niagara. To confirm this, a community engagement strategy was initiated to gain the necessary community feedback.

On January 19, 2019, United Way Niagara hosted the Niagara Food Forum. An invitation to participate in the forum was distributed to 109 service providers from across the region. They included community groups, networks, non-profit agencies, charitable organizations, faith groups and others working to address food-related needs and challenges across Niagara.

### GOALS OF THE NIAGARA FOOD FORUM:

- Bring together, for the first time in Niagara, the many service providers and agencies tackling food-related issues.
- Leverage resources to grow together.
- Increase knowledge and understanding of current and emerging barriers, as well as the evolving role of the non-profit sector in addressing food security.
- Improve, increase and drive collaborative efforts among service providers.
- Develop a formal report to inform the community about potential opportunities, possible next steps and further recommendations.

The forum was attended by more than 70 participants, representing 48 agencies and community initiatives from across the region. This diverse group of organizations and individuals characterized a continuum of food-related services, from grassroots initiatives to large established organizations, all committed to collaboratively examine shared challenges and strengths, and to create opportunities for connections and future growth.

The one-day forum focused on building knowledge, driving collaboration and coordination, as well as informing United Way and community stakeholders on these many challenges, barriers, opportunities, emerging issues and community assets. Food systems are evolving and so are the community's needs. With evidence-informed practices, as well as new tools and technologies becoming more available each year, opportunities for innovative approaches to address deep-rooted problems are emerging. There are new ways for United Way and the sector to work together to leverage resources available in the community.

The forum and any other community level efforts and further outcomes are opportunities for United Way Niagara to collectively create an improved food access system for people in need. A backbone support to these crucial community conversations, United Way Niagara will continue to contribute its leadership to any next steps or efforts identified to propel possible solutions forward.

The Niagara Food Forum was, and is, the first step in an ongoing process. United Way appreciates that food security is only one element of a much larger and complex social system and acknowledges it can only be addressed in the long-term through systemic and policy level changes. The feedback shared here, within this Community Report, forms the basis for short and long-term recommendations to address food security for the people of Niagara.

## **FOOD-RELATED STATISTICS IN NIAGARA**

- Food insecurity affects 10 per cent of Niagara households and a quarter of these households have no place to go for food.<sup>i</sup>
- On a daily basis, more than 17,000 students access food through Niagara Nutrition Partners' school nutrition program.
- Over 10,000 Niagara residents access food banks each year and many more access community meal programs, food pantries, after school programs, mobile outreach and other community initiatives helping to address food insecurity.
- In Ontario, food bank visits counted in March 2018 totalled 323,931. This is considered to be unacceptably high by Food Banks Canada.<sup>ii</sup>
- Children make up a third of all food bank visits.<sup>iii</sup>
- Nearly 50 per cent of all food bank visits are made by single people, 19 per cent are single parent families, 18 per cent are two-parent families and 9 per cent are couples with no children.<sup>iv</sup>
- Over 32 per cent of food bank visits are made by people on disability-related support, 28 per cent of food bank visits are made by people on social assistance, while 8 per cent of food bank visits are made by people whose primary source of income is through their employment.<sup>v</sup>

## PRE-FORUM ENGAGEMENT

In the fall of 2018, United Way Niagara's community impact team began to design, plan and prepare for the successful execution of the Niagara Food Forum. With the support of information and data collected through 211 Ontario, INCommunities and Niagara Connects, the team developed a data set of food-related service providers to engage.

An overview of the planned Niagara Food Forum objectives and goals, along with a brief survey, was distributed to 109 food-related service providers from across the region. This initial engagement was also an invitation to participate in the January 2019 forum.

The survey asked community groups, networks, non-profit agencies, charitable organizations, faith groups and those working in the sector to identify their name along with three key pieces of information:

1. What type of food/meal/outreach programming do they provide?
2. What type of resources do they have access to that support their programs/services?
3. In what ways do they currently collaborate to deliver food-related programs/services?

The survey gathered responses from 48 service providers. The information collected formed the Service Provider Directory and was shared with the original data set of 109 service providers involved in food-related programming within the Niagara region.

## THE NIAGARA FOOD FORUM

The Niagara Food Forum brought together diverse stakeholders involved in food-related services and programming across Niagara. Community groups, networks, non-profit agencies, charitable organizations, faith groups and others working to address food-related issues united during the forum to address key factors, including knowledge and resource sharing, improving collaboration and coordination, as well as identifying the key challenges, barriers, opportunities, emerging issues and community assets. The short and long-term recommendations outlined within this report are based on the collective feedback received at the forum.

The forum agenda was strategically designed to allow for presentations and inclusive dialogue that would inform recommendations for Niagara, as it pertains to food-related access and supports. The forum composition included panel discussions, speaker presentations and data sharing sessions. Each forum agenda component was followed by participant table discussion and essential feedback gathering.



## EMERGING CHALLENGES, BARRIERS AND OPPORTUNITIES

The Niagara Food Forum was facilitated by Dr. Frances Owen, Professor, Department of Child and Youth Studies, and Department of Applied Disability Studies, Brock University.

The forum commenced with a panel discussion featuring Carrie McComb, Community and Family Services Manager, Salvation Army; Karrie Porter, Coordinator, Start Me Up Niagara; Betty-Lou Souter, CEO, Community Care St. Catharines and Thorold; John Wellwood, volunteer and former Ward of Welland's Holy Trinity Anglican Church; and Elisabeth Zimmermann, Executive Director, YWCA Niagara Region.

The panelists each shared their unique sector perspectives acknowledging the various types of food-related service provision in Niagara. They also highlighted their observations of the key challenges experienced by people and organizations, of varying capacities, working to improve food access for people in need across Niagara. Participant table dialogue followed the panel discussion, which resulted in identifying emerging challenges and barriers for service providers delivering food-related programs or services.

### Identified barriers and challenges to food access in Niagara:

- Capacity and sustainability of food provision across Niagara.
- Community need is increasing while the quantity of food donations is stagnant or declining, as are the additional resources required to meet client needs.
- Lack of available and accessible community space, in particular dry and cold storage, as well as community kitchen space.
- Challenge with adequate transportation to pick up food and related items.
- Competition for, and lack of, funding and resources for food-related programming.
- Competition and scarcity of resources act as a barrier to collaboration.
- Lack of appropriate, healthy food choices to meet the nutritional needs of participants (i.e. focusing on healthy foods versus simply providing food for consumption).
- Challenge recruiting, matching and coordinating volunteers with required skills, specific training or licenses.
- Donor and volunteer fatigue, volunteer scheduling and logistical barriers.
- Lack of knowledge regarding other sector service providers, what programs and services they offer, eligibility requirements, service hours, etc. resulting in silo-effect.
- Lack of communication amongst service providers, capacity to connect with each other and share resources, as well as the ability to communicate in real time with each other.
- Lack of data/information sharing on community needs and challenges in the sector.
- Cost of food continues to rise.
- Accessibility challenges in agency facilities.
- Adequate system to distribute cooked food for use in food-related programming.
- Social support system is complex and many other health, human care and social issues play a role in food access and provision; lack of understanding of these issues.
- Lack of affordable housing, rental market landscape and lack of vacancies, as well as the increase in renovations to properties that once were affordable units.
- Food deserts across Niagara and the lack of perishables and produce in some areas.
- Lack of quality food providers and quality food.
- Precarious employment across Niagara.

- Lack of education for the general public on how to help support adequate food access.
- Lack of understanding of the many faces of poverty and need across Niagara.
- Lack of resources available to build organizational capacity and community partnerships.
- Lack of formal network collectively addressing food-related issues across Niagara.
- Changing demographics across many of Niagara's municipalities.
- Niagara's broad geography can be a barrier for collaboration and sharing of resources.

### **Identified opportunities to overcome barriers and challenges:**

- Investigate the development of a community food hub/shared storage facility, engage other stakeholders, research options and feasibility, as well as community need.
- Explore opportunities for improved volunteer recruitment and coordination using existing community resources, such as INCommunities volunteer data system, etc.
- Explore opportunities to engage in data sharing and joint advocacy to share relevant information, coordinate with Niagara Connects and other organizations currently collecting and sharing data in Niagara.
- Investigate possible funding opportunities and collaborative funding models.
- Engage with municipal, regional and provincial governments to inform, educate and advocate for adequate resources to support Niagara's unique needs and challenges.
- Affect food security by addressing other complex social issues through advocacy efforts and policy changes.
- Development of tools and technology to facilitate opportunities for coordination and collaboration amongst service providers (i.e. Food Asset Map, mobile application development, website, etc.).
- Coordinated effort in working with local companies that can, or are, donating food.
- Public education campaigns that shift perceptions to social justice rather than charity.
- Continuation of the Niagara Food Forum network to address food-related priorities identified by the collective, through ongoing service provider meetings.
- Establish priority specific sub-groups to address next steps and key recommendations.
- United Way to develop a report, share forum feedback and offer further support to forum participants with facilitation and coordination.
- Explore other academic, community and agricultural partnerships across Niagara.
- Investigate bulk purchasing power, purchasing programs and potential benefits.
- Maximizing the utilization of the Niagara FoodRescue.ca program pilot.
- Developing collaborative pathways for client navigation across the social system.
- Leveraging resources that exist and discovering new methods and best practices.

## FOOD RESCUE

The Niagara Food Forum provided an opportunity for participants to learn about the practice of rescuing food and the potential impact this type of program is capable of having in Niagara. Rescuing food is the process of obtaining edible, unsold, surplus food from across the supply chain and distributing it to local social service organizations and schools. Lori Nikkel, CEO, Second Harvest, presented information on how food rescue has helped to change the landscape of food access and provision in Toronto.

FoodRescue.ca is the creation of Second Harvest, Canada's largest food rescue organization. Rescuing surplus food for 34 years, they have matched food donations from generous businesses, who understand the importance of recovering healthy, nutritious food and diverting it to those in need. In 2018, over 12 million pounds of food was redistributed; however, there is still far too much unsold, edible food being thrown away. Businesses realize that it's a shame to send unsold food to a landfill, which damages the environment through the release of unnecessary greenhouse gases. Currently there are over 740 food businesses which donate surplus to Second Harvest, which in turn is redistributed to over 370 social service organizations in Toronto and food programs in communities across Ontario. The FoodRescue.ca program platform takes a local approach, giving food donors throughout Ontario a simple and fast system to connect directly with social service programs in local communities. <sup>vi</sup>

### **Second Harvest is known for:**

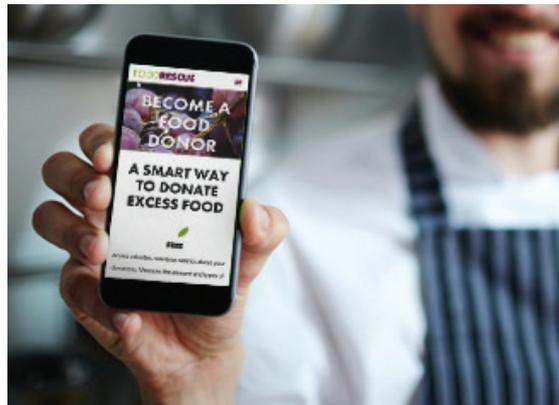
- Providing fresh, healthy, perishable food for over 34,000 meals a day.
- Being a global thought-leader on redirecting unsold, excess food, providing environmental protection by reducing unnecessary waste.
- Active participation in the development of Canada's National Food Policy.
- Averting 26 million kilograms of greenhouse gas emissions from entering the atmosphere in 2018.
- Providing educational resources, food safety training and certification.
- Prompting best practice sharing among community food programs.
- Supporting five training kitchens in Toronto (Harvest Kitchens).
- Being a non-partisan supporter of all people, regardless of age, gender, race or religion, thereby ensuring everyone has access to healthy food.

In Nikkel's presentation, she shares that "worldwide, we produce more than enough food to end world hunger; however, people are not able to access the food and remain hungry. In Canada, we produce enough food for 52 million people yet 4 million are food insecure. Canada is one of worst food wasters on the planet. When food waste ends up in landfills, it produces methane gas which traps 100 times more heat than carbon dioxide. Every year, Canada generates 56.5 billion metric tons of methane gas which is equivalent to 12 million cars driving all year. Typically, when we think about climate change, we don't think about food. Canada is getting warmer and wetter and average temperatures have increased by 1.7 degrees since 1948; this represents a higher rate of warming than any other region in the world. The United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change reports that we have 12 years to mitigate a climate change catastrophe. While surplus food will never solve food insecurity, as there are many socio-economic factors that influence food security, rescuing food can play a role in the larger food system. It can also support demystifying what food waste is and allow us to recognize the value of food."

In April 2018, Community Care of West Niagara, in partnership with Second Harvest and Niagara Connects, hosted Niagara's FoodRescue.ca Symposium. This Symposium brought service providers together with corporate sector food donors in the launch of a web-based platform for sharing surplus food that would otherwise be lost to waste (FoodRescue.ca). Ontario's Minister of the Environment and Climate Change, Chris Ballard, was in attendance at the Symposium and announced \$600,000 in funding would support FoodRescue.ca pilots in three additional communities in the province: Kingston, Sudbury and Niagara.<sup>vii</sup>

Community Care of West Niagara (CCWN) is leading the FoodRescue.ca pilot in the Niagara region. CCWN's Carole Fuhrer and Lynda O'Donnell showcased the local pilot project details and explained how local service providers can utilize the program. While much has been discussed or conducted over the years with respect to sharing resources and possible solutions, the barriers of Niagara's geography, access, transportation, management and waste disposal, resulted in few solution-based outcomes.

Today, FoodRescue.ca has the potential to create an improved system of distributing surplus food through non-profit and charitable organizations in Niagara. To realize the full benefits of FoodRescue.ca in the Niagara region, a genuine commitment from service providers must be achieved. This would mean a commitment to be part of a collective effort, to remove any protectionism and territorial pretenses, and the development and sharing of partnerships and resources.



## RESOURCE SHARING AND LEVERAGING COMMUNITY ASSETS

Critical to the goals of the Niagara Food Forum was a dialogue concerning resource sharing and leveraging community assets. Forum participants individually, as well as in group discussion, identified opportunities which exist to better share and leverage community-based resources and assets. They also acknowledged the barriers to resource and asset sharing they believe are inhibiting collaboration within the sector and what can be done to overcome these obstacles.

### Identified barriers to leveraging resources, working collaboratively and coordinating with food service providers in Niagara:

- Niagara's geography and challenges associated with location of programs and services.
- Transportation and logistical challenges.
- Storage capacity and limitations (dry and cold storage).
- Donor and volunteer fatigue.
- Program and service hours and locations.
- Many organizations continue to work in silos.
- Lack of knowledge of agencies, programs, services and community initiatives and what each are doing to support people in need in Niagara, as well as the resources available.
- Sector service providers do not have an official forum for engaging each other and sharing information (beyond the Niagara Food Forum).

- Territorial concerns and the protectionism of resources and donors.
- Fear of collaboration due to potential losses for own organization.
- Competition and historical practices.
- Regulations (i.e. Public Health, Ministries, Health and Safety).
- Resource constraints which don't allow for adequate support of community needs.
- Risk of losing organizational identity, philosophical organizational differences.
- Restrictions from funding sources and/or grantors.
- Organizational capacity which results in reactivity versus being proactive.

### **Identified opportunities to leverage resources, work collaboratively and coordinate with food service providers in Niagara:**

- Opportunity to build on existing community resources, such as FoodRescue.ca, Niagara Connects and INCommunities.
- Utilize technology to encourage collaboration and communication.
- Opportunity to partner with other service providers on issues including bulk purchasing power, food storage, transportation, volunteers, scheduling, training, procurement, logistics, sharing resources and data, etc.
- Create a "food hub(s)" to collectively address food-related access and services.
- Utilize community gardens and surplus food for training, education and food programs.
- Educate other community stakeholders and all Niagara residents on the needs and opportunities in this sector (social justice versus charity, healthy food requirements, best practices for food donations, one community voice versus many, etc.).
- Backbone or organizational leadership to facilitate open dialogue and collaborative work, such as the Niagara Food Forum network.
- Shared access to resources, learning opportunities and problem-solving.
- FoodRescue.ca Niagara pilot project opportunities for system-wide engagement.
- Maximizing the use of underutilized community and kitchen spaces.
- Collective, collaborative and expanded funding opportunities.
- Collective research and identification of best practices for sector.
- Opportunity for collective advocacy within Niagara on key issues and possible solutions.

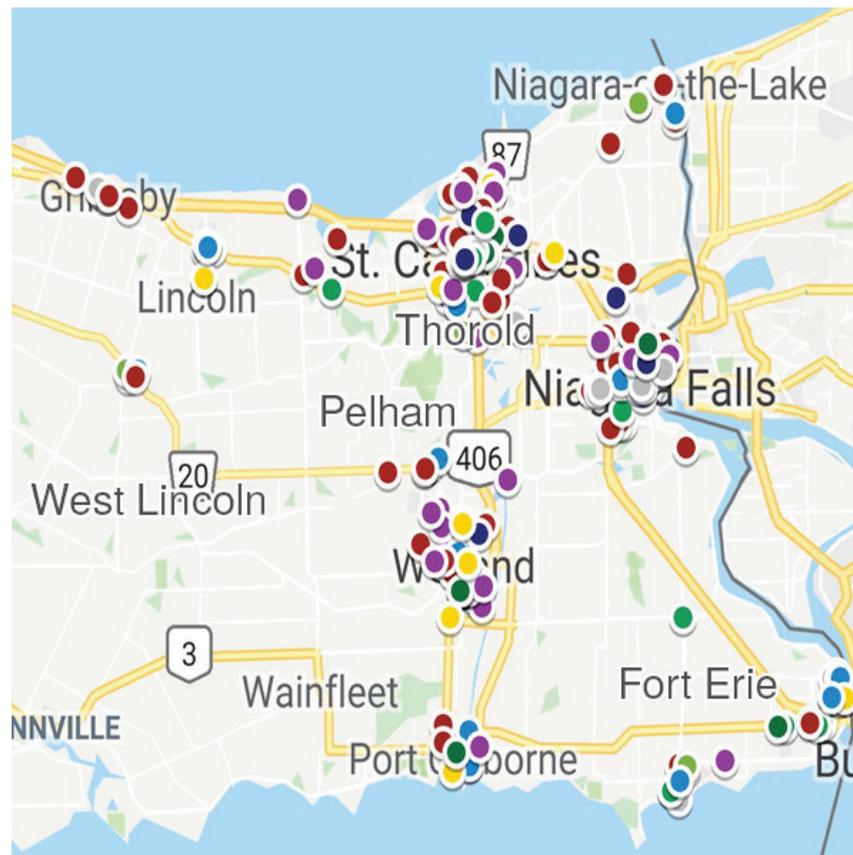
## **MAPPING NIAGARA'S FOOD ASSETS**

Through the forum and engagement with food-related service providers and community leaders, United Way identified the lack of knowledge service providers had with respect to the many programs, services, outreach efforts and supports being provided across Niagara. United Way also recognizes the sincere desire among service providers to gain the necessary knowledge to improve food access, as well as increase collaboration and coordination.

The Niagara Food Assets Map was developed to support opportunities for community groups, networks, non-profit agencies, charitable organizations, faith groups and those working in the sector to improve food security at the local level. To advance the collaboration and coordination among service providers, United Way collected data through available sources and service providers in key food-related asset areas. The goal of the Niagara Food Assets Map tool is to help service providers and participants easily identify food-related programs, services and resources within their communities. The map is also vital in identifying geographical gaps in food provision and access, as well as identifying potential opportunities.

## The Food Assets Map features 10 layers of food-related community assets:

- |  |                                  |
|--|----------------------------------|
| 1. Food Banks and Pantries             | 6. Other Community Food Programs |
| 2. Community Meals                     | 7. Workshops and Training        |
| 3. Mobile Outreach                     | 8. School Nutrition Program      |
| 4. Congregate and Home Delivered Meals | 9. Farmers' Markets              |
| 5. Community Gardens                   | 10. Retail Food                  |



Each asset layer within the map provides an overview of the various food-related programs, services and resources available in a geographical location. Information provided within each map layer directory identifies the name of the organization or group, a description of the program/service offered (including hours, eligibility and any other requirements), as well as the address, contact information and a live link to the website.

The data utilized to populate the Niagara Food Assets Map was derived from information provided by the organization or group delivering the program/service and through the support of organizations such as INCommunities, Niagara Open Data, Niagara Connects, Niagara Region Public Health and other partners in the community.

### Niagara Food Assets Map:

<https://www.google.com/maps/d/viewer?mid=12014pHcj9At3pzClpC88q14AsomJv4RZ&usp=sharing>

## TECHNOLOGY TO SUPPORT COORDINATION AND COLLABORATION

In addition to the Niagara Food Assets Map, United Way is researching the development of other technology, tools and resources that would improve collaboration and coordination for food-related service providers. Through discussion at the forum, it's evident that tools to support improved communication and coordination, particularly in real time, would be of great value to the sector and service providers. In response to this need, a mobile application for service providers is currently being developed through a Service Learning Partnership with the Goodman School of Business at Brock University.

Forum participants pin-pointed necessary features to include in the creation of a mobile application in order to meet sector needs:

- Ease of use is vital
- Agency profiles with food-related program and service information including data similar to the map (i.e. program type, hours, eligibility, etc.)
- Users linked to the agency profiles, with multiple users permitted per agency account
- Ability for other users to search and view all agency profiles and program information
- Ability to message individual users in real time (private)
- Discussion boards and topic threads posted to all users (public)
- Post needs, offers, requests, opportunities, information, resources, etc.
- Search function for agency profiles/information, program/service information etc.
- Include links to other local resources (i.e. Niagara Food Asset Map, INCommunities, 211, Niagara Knowledge Exchange, Niagara Connects, etc.)

Other possible technological tools may be considered in the future should this need be identified by the network. Additional technological features identified by forum participants as important include: live chat; search and filter functions, agency and programs/services directory, messaging capability, public forums and bulletin boards, community resources links, social media functions, newsfeeds and data collection and knowledge sharing.

## FOOD SYSTEMS IN NIAGARA WORK

The convening of food-related service providers at the Niagara Food Forum, while incredibly important, is only one aspect of improving food access and security for Niagara residents. Food Systems in Niagara is a complex topic that represents the cycles and interconnections of growing, distributing, eating and recycling of food.

A community blog published by Niagara Knowledge Exchange on March 9, 2017, states "In 2015 and 2016, Niagara Connects engaged over 100 people in the Food Systems conversation. These individuals work in: growing, preparation, consumption, access, processing, marketing, distribution, agritourism, education, nutrition, health, research, business, economic development, employment, waste/disposal, environmental sustainability, policy and government." <sup>viii</sup>

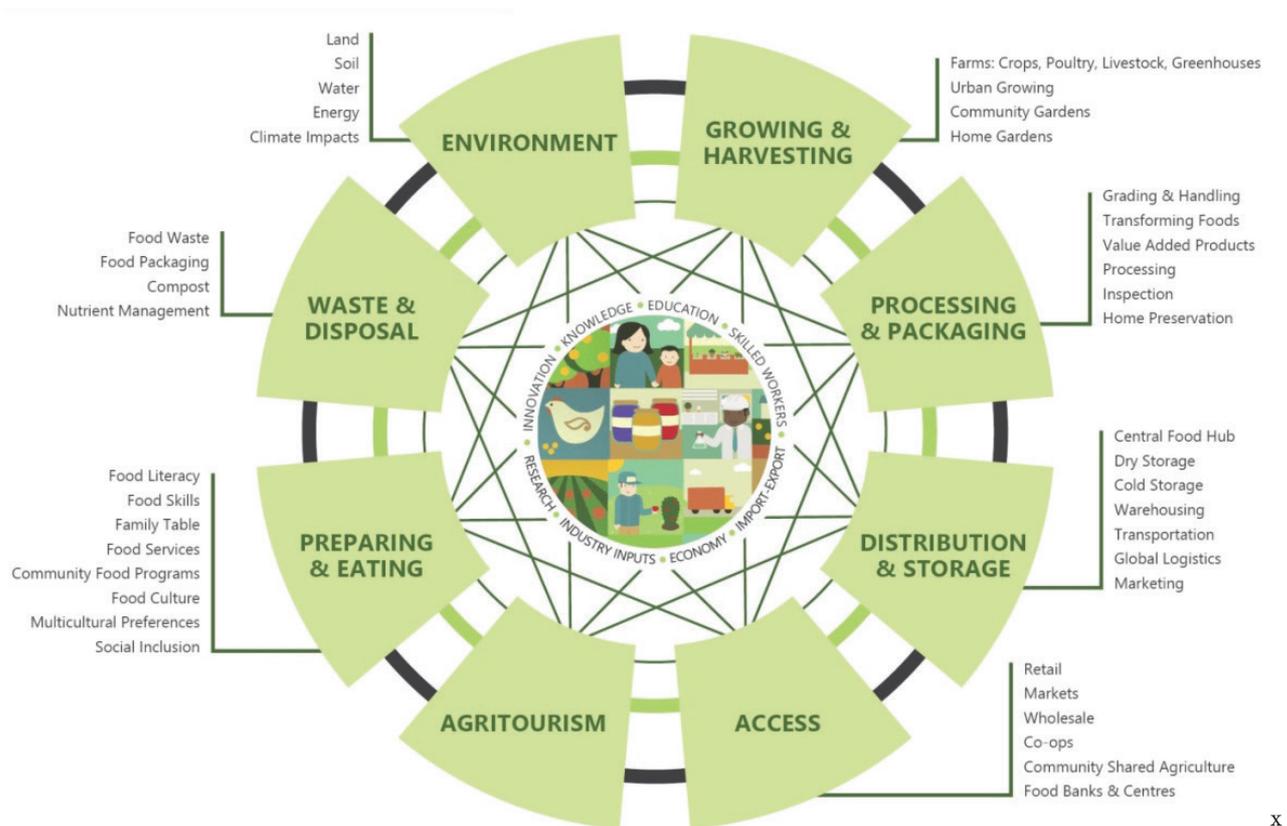
Eight (8) Food Systems in Niagara Building Blocks were gathered and reviewed. These include a 2015 network map that illustrates connections and lines of communication among 210 people from 143 organizations in the food continuum in Niagara and beyond. Eleven (11) inter-connected food systems categories were identified: Agriculture; Land Use Planning; Local Food; Economic Development; Food Distribution; Retail and Food Outlets; Food Security and Poverty Reduction; Health; Child and School; Education and Research; Garden and Food Skills.

A Food Systems in Niagara Map was co-created, to show the inter-connected, complex web of assets that make up Niagara's food system. Six (6) Suggested Action Steps to advance this work for Niagara were identified and are outlined in the Strengthening Our Food Assets to Boost Niagara's Vitality: Call to Action to Build a Food Systems Network for Niagara report.

### Opportunities and suggested action steps:

1. Take a collective impact (Kania & Kramer, Stanford Social Innovation Review, Winter, 2011) approach.
2. Convene a reference group of leaders.
3. Better understand how and where food systems work fits into Niagara and beyond.
4. Explore food literacy and how it relates to health outcomes.
5. Gain an understanding of Niagara's food system vulnerabilities.
6. Explore food as a force to draw people together to improve one's capacity.

The Food Systems in Niagara Map (2016) was collaboratively developed by people working in diverse aspects of food in Niagara, with facilitation support from Niagara Connects and the Niagara Knowledge Exchange. The intent is, and was, to begin describing how a healthy, secure, sustainable food landscape contributes to Niagara's social, political and economic vitality." ix



Food Systems in Niagara Map (Niagara Knowledge Exchange, Niagara Connects, March 9, 2017):

<http://www.niagaraknowledgeexchange.com/resources-publications/niagara-food-system-map/>

## NEXT STEPS AND RECOMMENDATIONS TO IMPROVE FOOD ACCESS ACROSS NIAGARA

United Way recognizes the January 2019 Niagara Food Forum as the first of many phases in the strategic work required to make all residents in Niagara food secure. Several critical next steps have been identified to maintain the momentum of this initiative:

1. Compile the feedback from the Niagara Food Forum into a formal community report. Present the report's findings and recommendations to community stakeholders. The stakeholders identified include, but are not limited to:
  - Niagara Food Forum participants and food-related service providers
  - Niagara Region
  - Public Health
  - politicians including municipal, regional, provincial and federal
  - other service providers indirectly involved in food-related programs or access (i.e. housing providers, mental health providers, etc.)
  - other stakeholders involved in the Food Systems in Niagara work (i.e. agriculture, suppliers, distributors, waste management, storage, etc.)
  - individuals and families with lived experience
  - data providers
  - volunteers and donors
  - social justice experts
  - media
  - education sector (all levels)
  - general public
  - business/private sector
  - funders
  - provincial and/or national associations/groups (i.e. Ontario Food Bank Association, Food Banks Canada, etc.)
2. Coordinate a meeting with other community stakeholders (outside of food-related service providers) to present the report's findings and recommendations.
3. Investigate the development and best practices of a community food hub(s)/resource centre(s).
4. Utilize a complete systems approach to addressing food insecurity and access issues.
5. Include individuals with lived experience in all aspects of planning and implementation.
6. Explore opportunities for improved volunteer recruitment and coordination using existing community resources, such as INCommunities volunteer database.
7. Explore opportunities to engage in data sharing and joint advocacy to:
  - a. share relevant information with city, regional and provincial governments to advocate for further resources/support and make aware of regional needs and challenges; and
  - b. coordinate with the Niagara Region, Niagara Connects (including Niagara Knowledge Exchange), and others collecting data in Niagara.

8. Develop tools to facilitate opportunities for coordination and collaboration amongst service providers, including, but not limited to:
  - a. Niagara Food Assets Map;
  - b. Foodrescue.ca promotion where feasible; and
  - c. Mobile application or online tool development which will address the need for improved communication, resource sharing and collaboration among service providers.
9. Create a Niagara-wide community of practice relating to food systems work.
10. Establish, where necessary, sub-committees on priority food-related topics or projects.
11. Invite other relevant stakeholders to join sub-committees or projects where relevant.
12. Continue to regularly bring together service providers to address Niagara's food needs.
13. Investigate further funding opportunities to support the work of the forum network.
14. Investigate how Niagara's waste management plays a role in the food system work.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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- Renee Delaney, *Founder, Small Scale Farms*
- Carole Fuhrer, *Executive Director, Community Care of West Niagara*
- Carrie McComb, *Community and Family Services Manager, Salvation Army*
- Lori Nikkel, *CEO, Second Harvest*
- Lynda O'Donnell, *Administrative and Fundraising Coordinator, Community Care of West Niagara, and Regional Coordinator, FoodRescue.ca*
- Dr. Frances Owen, *Professor, Department of Child and Youth Studies, and Department of Applied Disability Studies, Brock University*
- Karrie Porter, *Coordinator, Start Me Up Niagara*
- Betty-Lou Souter, *CEO, Community Care St. Catharines and Thorold*
- John Wellwood, *volunteer and former Ward at Holy Trinity Anglican Church, Welland*
- Mary Wiley, *Executive Director, Niagara Connects*
- Elisabeth Zimmermann, *Executive Director, YWCA Niagara Region*

United Way would also like to recognize the following community partners, organizations and stakeholders for their generous support and many contributions to the Niagara Food Forum:

- 211
- Community Care of West Niagara
- Community Care St. Catharines and Thorold
- FoodRescue.ca
- Holy Trinity Anglican Church, Welland
- INCommunities
- Niagara Connects (and Niagara Knowledge Exchange)
- Niagara Open Data
- Niagara Region Public Health
- No One Goes Hungry Niagara Falls
- Salvation Army
- Second Harvest
- Small Scale Farms
- Start Me Up Niagara
- YWCA Niagara Region

Prior to the January 2019 Forum, (between 2016 and 2018), a consortium of local food banks, championed by Community Care St. Catharines and Thorold (along with Project Share, The Hope Centre, and Community Care of West Niagara), investigated the potential need and feasibility of a perishable food hub in Niagara. The impetus for this collaborative effort was to capture as much of our local agricultural bounty that could be diverted to those in need. Through the valuable investment of time and expertise of everyone involved, all indicators supported the significance of the endeavor. This pioneering provided a sound foundation for our community to benefit from in the future.

## APPENDIX A

### List of the Niagara Food Forum Participating and/or Contributing Agencies

Advancing Crystal Beach  
 Bethlehem Housing and Support Services  
 Boys & Girls Club Niagara  
 Community Care of West Niagara  
 Community Care St. Catharines & Thorold  
 Community Crew  
 Community Garden Network  
 Community Outreach Program Fort Erie  
 Community Support Services of Niagara  
 Food4Kids Niagara  
 Grimsby Benevolent Fund  
 Holy Trinity Anglican Church Welland  
 INCommunities  
 Knox Presbyterian Church  
 Links for Greener Learning  
 Meals on Wheels Niagara Falls  
 Meals on Wheels Port Colborne  
 Niagara Connects  
 Niagara Falls Christian Ministries  
 Niagara Nutrition Partners  
 Niagara Regional Native Centre  
 No One Goes Hungry Niagara Falls  
 Open Arms Mission Welland  
 Ozanam Center  
 Pelham Cares  
 Port Cares  
 Project SHARE

Quest Community Health Centre  
 Rotary Club of Welland  
 Second Harvest  
 Silver Spire United Church  
 Small Scale Farms  
 Southminster United Church  
 Southridge Community Church  
 Southridge Jam Co.  
 Southridge Shelter  
 St. Alfred's Church  
 St. George's Anglican Church  
 Start Me Up Niagara  
 The Breakfast Bank  
 The Hope Centre  
 The RAFT  
 The Salvation Army  
 United Way Niagara  
 West Lincoln Community Care  
 Westview Centre4Women  
 Women's Place of South Niagara  
 YWCA Niagara Region

*\*We apologize for any agencies that participated in the Niagara Food Forum that may have been missed.*

## REFERENCES

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- ii iii iv v <https://hungercount.foodbankscanada.ca/ontario/>

Food Rescue Reference:

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Strengthening our Food Assets to Boost Niagara's Vitality Report (Niagara Connects) Reference:

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