

FOOD SYSTEMS IN NIAGARA

Strengthening Our Food Assets to Boost Niagara's Vitality:
Call to Action to Build a Food Systems Network for Niagara

FINAL REPORT 2016



A report prepared by Niagara Connects
in partnership with Healthy Living Niagara



STRENGTHENING OUR FOOD ASSETS TO BOOST NIAGARA'S VITALITY: CALL TO ACTION TO BUILD A FOOD SYSTEMS NETWORK FOR NIAGARA

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**STRENGTHENING
OUR FOOD ASSETS
TO BOOST NIAGARA'S
VITALITY: CALL TO
ACTION TO BUILD
A FOOD SYSTEM
NETWORK FOR
NIAGARA**

In 2015-2016, Niagara Connects worked with Healthy Living Niagara to engage people in examining the role Niagara's food systems assets play in Niagara's socio-economic vibrancy. This work built on preliminary steps taken in 2013-2014 by HLN and Niagara Connects, to describe food systems in Niagara.

"Food Systems" refers to a complex topic that represents the cycles of growing, distributing, eating and recycling of food.

This report summarizes information shared at an April 13, 2016 Niagara-wide forum, *"The Food Landscape in Niagara: Describing How it Contributes to Niagara's Vitality"*. Forum participants examined priorities established by players in Niagara's food continuum, and identified opportunities to boost our region's vitality by strengthening Niagara's food assets.

The 47 highly-engaged forum participants are involved in diverse aspects of food systems: growing, preparation, consumption, access, processing, marketing, distribution, agritourism, education, nutrition, health, research, business, economic development, employment, waste/disposal, environmental sustainability, policy and government. Cited reasons for attending the forum centered around opportunities to:

- work together;
- share learning;
- gain relevant/high quality information; and
- take a big picture view of how various food systems elements fit together in Niagara.

Food Systems Building Blocks examined at the forum included:

Year	Action Report	Source
2012	Golden Horseshoe Food and Farming Action Plan 2021	Golden Horseshoe Food and Farming Alliance
2013	Getting Curious About Niagara's Food Systems	Healthy Living Niagara (HLN)
2014	Who is Doing What in Food Systems in Niagara and Beyond	Niagara Connects, in partnership with HLN
2015	Niagara Region (NR) Agri-Food Strategy	NR Agricultural Policy and Action Committee
2015	Visualizing Connectivity in Food Systems in Niagara	Niagara Connects – network mapping tool
2016	The Future of Food Security in Niagara: Through the Lens of Environment and Climate Impacts	Greening Niagara, in partnership with Niagara Connects

FOOD SYSTEMS IN NIAGARA BUILDING BLOCKS:

1. Golden Horseshoe Food and Farming Alliance (GHFFA) and the Food and Farming Action Plan 2021

Janet Horner, GHFFA Executive Director and Bill Hodgson, Niagara Region Councillor for the Town of Lincoln, Chair of the Niagara Region Agricultural Policy and Action Committee, and member of the GHFAA Board co-presented the following overview of their work at the April, 2016 Food Landscape in Niagara forum.

The Golden Horseshoe Food and Farming Alliance (GHFFA) is comprised of the Niagara Agricultural Policy and Action Committee, the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority, the Friends of the Greenbelt, the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, Vineland Research and Innovation Centre, Holland Marsh Growers' Association, Durham College, Country Heritage Park, Ontario Federation of Agriculture, Ecosource, Food and Beverage Ontario, the Regions of Durham, Halton, Niagara, Peel, York and the Cities of Hamilton and Toronto, as well as local representatives from the food and farming value chain.



In 2012, the GHFFA released the *Golden Horseshoe Food and Farming Action Plan 2021* <http://www.foodandfarming.ca/food-and-farming-action-plan/>. The plan identifies pathways for a more integrated and coordinated approach to food and farming viability in the area, to ensure that the Golden Horseshoe retains, enhances and expands its role as a leading food and farming cluster. The report outlines 62 Tasks to enable the agri-food industry to thrive within this increasingly urbanized area of Ontario. It includes 5 Opportunities for Change:

- Grow the Cluster
- Link Food, Farming and Health
- Foster Innovation
- Enable the Cluster
- Cultivating New Approaches

The GHFFA sees several Trending Challenges and Opportunities:

- Challenges to commercial farming
- Emerging power of the consumer
- Struggle to enable and grow the agri-food industry in an increasingly urbanized area of Ontario
- Broadening and deepening urban myths lead to increased attacks on farm Best Management Practices <http://www.omafra.gov.on.ca/english/environment/bmp/series.htm>
- Education and information-sharing
- Climate impacts and resiliency (could be a huge opportunity if we are prepared and innovative)

The GHFFA recently completed Asset Mapping to inventory food and farming capacities within the Golden Horseshoe by identifying existing infrastructure, including products grown, harvested and processed, as well as services rendered to the agri-food cluster. Mapping reports can be found at: <http://www.foodandfarming.ca/research/>

In 2016 Niagara Region conducted its first-ever inventory of local employers, to enrich the Golden Horseshoe mapping for Niagara, and align with best practice in other municipalities. Over 6 months, students conducted in-person surveys with 11,000 businesses across Niagara, to collect information about physical business location; business owners; business activity; and employee and staffing attributes (employee counts, seasonal workers, shift work).

<https://www.niagararegion.ca/projects/employment-inventory/default.aspx>

2. Niagara Region's Agri-Food Strategy (2015)

This strategy dovetails with the GHFFA plan by articulating Niagara's priorities related to the agriculture and food sectors. The Strategy Vision is: *Niagara is home to a broadly based, unique, innovative and progressive agri-food sector which is a pillar for economic prosperity and quality of life. Niagara Region leads in enabling the development, production and distribution of high quality agri-food products for local and global markets.*

<http://www.niagaraknowledgeexchange.com/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2015/09/APAC-Agri-Food-Strategy-Presentation.pdf>

3. Getting Curious about Niagara's Food System

This report was prepared in November 2013 for Healthy Living Niagara and Niagara Region Public Health. The process of developing the report was exploratory in nature and its purpose was to provide an important starting point to inform further discussion and possible action. The report summarizes a preliminary environmental scan of key programs, initiatives, policies, reports and organizations; stakeholder interviews with ten Niagara stakeholders and four provincial/public health stakeholders; and synthesis of qualitative data and reporting of key themes, directions and recommendations.

Getting Curious about Niagara's Food System:
A preliminary exploration of potential opportunities and directions
Executive Summary: May 2013
Completed By: Sarah Evason, MHSc, RD



Key Findings from Community Stakeholder Interviews	Key Findings from Provincial Stakeholder Interviews
⇒ Lots of context to appreciate and understand, including different perspectives, several different lenses, understanding what each player “gets out of it,” “food systems” means something different to everybody, and the perceived disconnect between ideals and reality.	⇒ Patience and time is needed 1) for the process and 2) to build rapport and relationships with all the stakeholders and sectors.
⇒ There is lots of great food systems work already happening in Niagara and there is a desire to celebrate successes.	⇒ There does not appear to be one right way of doing food systems work.
⇒ There is a need and readiness for moving food systems work forward in Niagara.	⇒ An extensive and well-developed data collection process is needed.
⇒ A PROCESS for furthering coordinated food systems work is needed: a process that is action-oriented, meaningful to stakeholders, collaborative, community-driven, grounded in reality, “right” for Niagara, and that has defined leadership.	⇒ Being collaborative and engaging all sectors was identified as essential to the process.
	⇒ There is a need for common understandings and collective definitions.
	⇒ An investment of significant resources is needed including funds, staff time, skilled people, leadership, and long-term commitment.
	⇒ Regional and Municipal buy-in and support are crucial to success.
	⇒ A change in mindset is often needed to move food systems work forward.

Recommendations generated from the 2013 report included:

- Develop and start implementation of a data collection strategy
- Define roles and have clarity about those roles
- The food systems approach taken needs to consider and incorporate findings of this report that point to the value and success in addressing food systems work in Niagara being in the process or approach taken. This is further detailed as value being in:
 - A process that engages stakeholders in a community-drive, collaborative and meaningful manner.
 - A process with established leadership and skilled facilitation.
 - A process with committed resources.
 - A process that has acquired or is working toward acquiring the necessary supports of the multiple stakeholders and ideally government stakeholders.
 - A process guided by common definitions and understandings.
 - A process that recognizes that groundwork that needs to be completed.
 - A process that appreciates and understands the Niagara food system context and the different perspective of its stakeholders.
 - A process that creates new opportunities and partnerships.
 - A process that is action-oriented.
 - A process that recognizes and celebrates Niagara and its municipalities, neighbourhoods and residents as unique.
 - A process committed to monitoring, feedback and evaluation.

<http://www.niagaraknowledgeexchange.com/resources-publications/getting-curious-about-niagaras-food-system/>

4. Niagara Food Systems: Who is Doing What in Food Systems in Niagara and Beyond

This report was prepared in February 2014 for Niagara Connects, working in partnership with Healthy Living Niagara. It details an in-depth environmental scan on who's doing what in food systems in Niagara and beyond. The report provides an important starting point to inform further discussion and possible action related to a data collection strategy for food systems work in Niagara. It also helps inform a larger food systems strategy by identifying key players, directions and priorities already established. The environmental scan identifies organizations, groups, documents, reports, policies, legislation, programs, projects, initiatives and events relevant to a broad definition of food systems in eleven different categories:

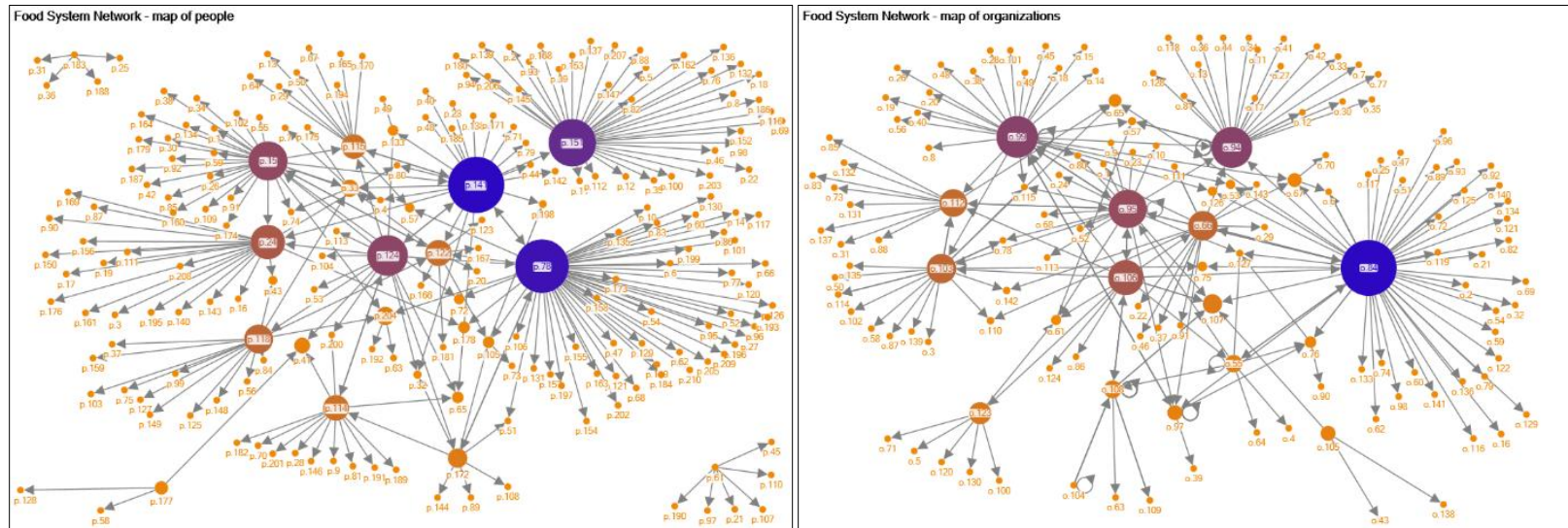
- Agriculture
- Land Use Planning
- Local Food
- Economic Development
- Food Distribution
- Retail and Food Outlets
- Food Security and Poverty Reduction
- Health
- Child and School
- Education and Research
- Gardening and Food Skills

Accompanying database appendices provide details on groups, organizations, businesses, documents, reports, plans, events, projects and programs related to food systems work in Niagara, Ontario and Canada.

<http://www.niagaraknowledgeexchange.com/resources-publications/niagara-food-systems-who-is-doing-what-in-food-systems-niagara-and-beyond/>



5. Visualizing Connectivity in Food Systems in Niagara



This report presents findings of Network Maps built in Spring, 2015, by a core group of leaders working in the food continuum in Niagara. The maps were built using the Niagara Connects Visualizing Connectivity network mapping tool. They were built for the purpose of visualizing already-existing connections and lines of communication between people and organizations working in the 11 Niagara Food Systems Categories; and to identify new opportunities for connections.

Analysis of the maps showed opportunities to enhance the vitality of Niagara through Food Systems:

- Move beyond what currently is a newly-developing network with some informal connections, to build stronger ties by working together to better understand opportunities and barriers for food systems in Niagara
- Engage the significant number of people and organizations in the periphery, in strengthening this work
- Increase connections between people and organizations working in traditional economic development aspects of food systems and those working on health and human services aspects
- Convene diverse players in the continuum to develop a Common Agenda¹ and collective approach, to bring the network together to share information, collaborate across sectors, and make connections that spark innovations

(See Appendix 2, pages 16-17 for full report: *Food Systems in Niagara: Visualizing Connectivity – Spring 2015*)

¹ Collective Impact, Kania & Kramer, Stanford Social Innovation Review, Winter, 2011

6. Examining Food Security in Niagara: Through the Lens of Environment and Climate Impacts

Examining Food Security in Niagara Through the Lens of Environment and Climate Impacts

February 2016



This 2016 report summarizes a Greening Niagara initiative to gather community partners to collaboratively examine the future of food security in Niagara, related to environmental factors. The Ontario Trillium Foundation provided funding support for Greening Niagara to complete this work, with community engagement and knowledge exchange facilitated by Niagara Connects.

Access to enough (adequate) local, sustainable, healthy food is at the center of food security. The broad-scope topic of food security encompasses both household and community food security. Environment and climate impacts are one aspect. Participants in a Niagara-wide forum and five follow-up focus group discussions identified opportunities for action in the areas of: collaboration, education, building food production capacity; and valuing farms and farmers of all types.

Suggested action steps included support for:

- action planning for an urban agriculture center in Niagara;
- advancing data-gathering and engagement to build a common vision for food systems in Niagara; and
- acknowledgement of the value in the process of diverse players working and learning together to strengthen food security in Niagara.

<http://www.niagaraknowledgeexchange.com/resources-publications/examining-food-security-in-niagara-through-the-lens-of-environment-and-climate-impacts-full-report/>

7. Profiles of Food Systems Players in Niagara

Examples of economic and community impact of food systems in Niagara were profiled at the April, 2016 forum:

Niagara Parks Commission – Chef Paul Pennock, Director of Culinary Services described implementation of the Ontario Culinary Tourism Alliance Feast ON program in Niagara Parks restaurants. In their full-service restaurants, 40% of the food and 80% of the alcoholic beverages purchased are from Ontario, at a cost of over \$1.4 million/year. Local products cost a bit more to purchase and generally are better quality than those from elsewhere. Customers are willing to pay a bit more for locally-sourced menu items. Favourable comments on Trip Advisor increased when an emphasis was placed on including local foods on full-service menus. Sourcing local ingredients helps Niagara Parks to build community ties and support the local economy in which the commission is located, and in which its employees live.

Start Me Up Niagara (SMUN) – Susan Venditti, Executive Director outlined the important role access to food plays in SMUN's service provision for vulnerable people. With a vision of 'A community where everyone is included, healthy and self-sufficient, SMUN has served 750,000 meals since 1999. Susan emphasized, "it's a drain on the economy when people have nothing to eat". By feeding vulnerable people, agencies like SMUN are making significant economic impact by preventing other social problems. Food is a focus for so much: community belonging; economic development; homelessness prevention; and celebrations. Susan challenged the group to gather information about best practice to collectively address issues such as: food waste; building community fridge/freezer capacity; health-related regulations regarding improved distribution; treating people in the lowest income quintile with respect and dignity; and building a more just food system that addresses the 'right to eat'. <http://startmeupniagara.ca/>

Niagara Local Food Co-operative – Sharon Brimsmead-Taylor, Administrative Assistant, highlighted that the co-op is an innovative marketing and distribution system for local farmers, agricultural producers, and consumers. Essentially, it is a virtual farmer's market. Instead of driving to the market on specific days, or driving from farm to farm, customers can order online at their convenience. The co-op is governed by core values of land stewardship, social empowerment, and economic sustainability. <http://www.niagaralocalfoodcoop.ca/about-us/>

Niagara Nutrition Partners (NNP) – Anne Kirkpatrick, Program Manager, outlined NNP's role as a region-wide initiative that offers support and coordination for nutrition programs in both elementary and secondary schools, as well as community based programs. NNP nourishes 16,000 children everyday in more than 200 school based and community based programs <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E2TL5dRb1uY&feature=youtu.be>. Student nutrition programs range from full breakfast and/or lunch programs, to in class snacks or grab and go stations in the hallway. NNP is able to offer support to student nutrition programs through provincial grants and local fundraising efforts. NNP works together with site based volunteers to meet the needs of student nutrition programs in each of the twelve lower-tier municipalities in Niagara. Funding for this work comes from the Ontario Ministry of Children and Youth Services (MCYS) and is administered regionally by Haldimand-Norfolk R.E.A.C.H. <http://www.niagaranutritionpartners.ca/>

8. Measuring Impact of Food Systems Work in Niagara

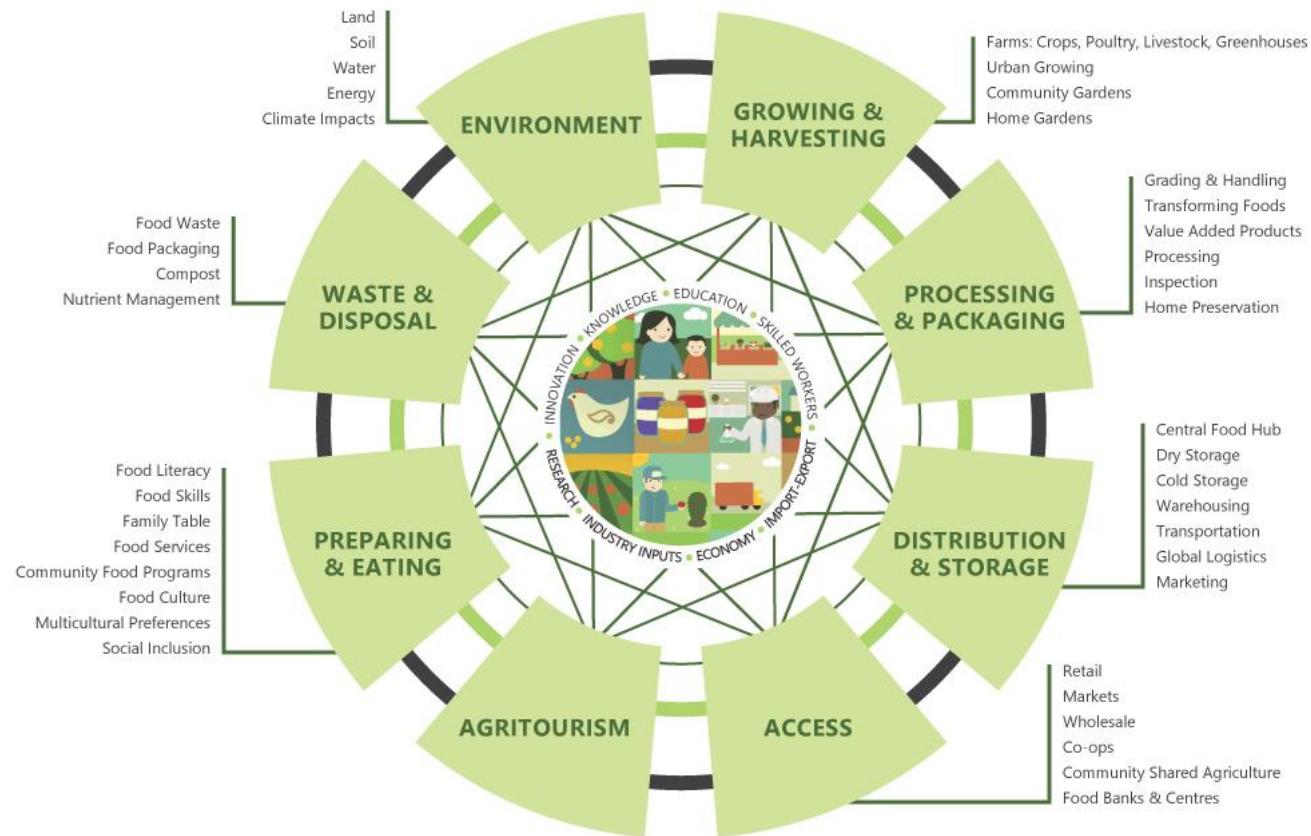
Measures to describe progress toward a Common Agenda (*see footnote 1, page 7*) for the purpose of shared learning, emerging and developing innovation and shared data could include:

- Evidence exists that common language is being used among food systems players in Niagara
- Evidence exists that data is being shared among food systems players in Niagara
- Evidence exists that networks within the larger food systems network are crossing tasks
- Evidence exists that innovations are being sparked through collaboration among food systems players in Niagara
- Food systems players in Niagara engage in building a second network map to visualize growth, since 2015, in connections and lines of communication between people and organizations

9. Visually Mapping How Food Systems Contribute to Niagara's Vitality

Food Systems In Niagara is a complex topic that represents the cycles and interconnections of growing, distributing, eating and recycling of food.

This food systems in Niagara Map (2016) was collaboratively developed by people working in diverse aspects of food in Niagara. The intent is to begin describing how a healthy, secure, sustainable food landscape contributes to Niagara's social, political and economic vitality.



This map was collaboratively refined by people who work in diverse aspects of food systems in Niagara. They participated in the April 2016 forum: *"The Food Landscape in Niagara: Describing How it Contributes to Niagara's Vitality"*.

FOOD SYSTEMS IN NIAGARA FORUM DISCUSSION THEMES (APRIL 2016)

Following is a summary of participant and group discussion responses from the April, 2016 forum, *"The Food Landscape in Niagara: Describing How it Contributes to Niagara's Vitality"*.

Forum participants self-identified as working in four main areas of food systems in Niagara:

- food production
- education and research
- food access, including food preparation, advocacy and social justice
- funding/support services for those working in food systems, including health and policy

Participants' main reasons for attending:

- networking and sharing ideas with others working in food systems
- learning from others and from a strong agenda of speakers
- food systems topic is relevant to their work
- opportunity to take a high-level view of food systems

Ideas in forum presentations that stood out for participants:

- the many opportunities to strengthen and improve Niagara's food system;
- the power and importance of food in our community;
- diversity of ideas and perspectives;
- high level of engagement of participants;
- the potential and significance of initiatives already underway to improve access to local food in general, as well as access to adequate amounts of food for vulnerable people;
- challenges facing the agri-food industry in Ontario's Golden Horseshoe area

Participants were unanimous in affirming that they see opportunities for people and groups working in Food Systems in Niagara to build communication pathways for sharing knowledge and information.

When asked what they believe are the topics that would benefit Niagara, in terms of people and groups sharing food systems information and knowledge, participants' responses focused on 5 main topic areas:

- Food distribution, storage, procurement, access to quality food, waste reduction
- Shared learning, baseline data-gathering, setting priorities and making a collective statement
- Education about food literacy and skills
- Healthy local food and local food production that is both economically and environmentally sustainable
- Supporting and strengthening existing agri-food system plans

Forum participants expressed a general desire to advance learning and awareness by engaging a wider range of people in the food systems conversation. They suggested this could include perspectives of farmers, retailers, processors, distributors, educators and people seeking access to food.

OPPORTUNITIES AND NEXT STEPS

Niagara food systems work completed to date indicates that diverse players in the food continuum see the usefulness of connecting, to better describe and understand how food systems assets can contribute to a stronger future for Niagara. This aligns with the broader Niagara context, in which a number of initiatives underway are bringing people, organizations, businesses and networks together through collaborative, Niagara-wide, evidence-informed planning.

Following are suggested action steps to strengthen and advance food systems work in Niagara.

- Take a Collective Impact (*see footnote 1, page 7*) approach to developing a shared understanding and common language to describe Niagara's food systems in the context of factors both internal and external to our region. Convene diverse players in the local food systems continuum to share relevant, reliable evidence (data, information and knowledge), collaborate across sectors, and make connections that spark innovations.
- Build a Reference Group of leaders that focuses on looking through the lens of local, provincial, national and international food systems, to identify components, interplay and contributing factors in Niagara's food systems that benefit the people of Niagara and Niagara's vitality as a whole.
- Better understand where food systems work in Niagara fits into, and can benefit from intentional connections with the broader picture of food systems work in the Golden Horseshoe, Ontario, Canada and around the globe.
- Explore food literacy and how it relates to health outcomes and personal and community economic prosperity, in the Niagara context. Examine how food literacy (and food skills) relate to people's broader levels of literacy, living conditions, life experiences, and access to food and facilities.
- Gain an understanding of vulnerabilities of Niagara's food systems related to climate impacts such as quality, quantity, accessibility and governance of water; and extreme weather conditions and events.
- Explore the role of food as a powerful force that can draw people together to build up their capacity and that of the community as a whole to experience security and prosperity. Relate this to the broader work of the #Rethink Niagara systems approach to investing in the people of Niagara.

APPENDIX 1

EDWARDS: We could all use a lesson in food systems

Luke Edwards

Grimsby Lincoln News | Apr 19, 2016



Bill Hodgson, regional councillor and representative from the Golden Horseshoe Food and Farming Alliance, speak to a crowd of people in the food industry Wednesday April 13 at a food systems forum hosted by Niagara Connects.



When you think of the things you need to live – I mean really need – what springs to mind?

Not your cell phone or credit card, computer or cable TV package that includes 1,400 channels with nothing on. The things we all really need to live are pretty basic: shelter, water, heat and food. While we may not be doing the best jobs protecting and providing the first three of those, when it comes to the last one we're way out there, lost in the middle of a 50-acre corn field, thinking it's mighty tall wheat.

I spent last Wednesday morning at the Niagara Connects Food Landscape in Niagara forum. It was an event where people involved in the food chain – everything from growing tender fruit to serving the peach pie – got together to map out what Niagara's food system looks like. It was an eye-opening experience, to say the least.

Most people in the food sector live, more or less, in their own little silos, pardon the pun. The farmer is so focused on growing her wheat or raising his pigs that they don't really have time to think about the delicious apple pork chops that will result when said pig ends up at a Niagara Parks restaurant. Likewise, the chef's only real interest in the farmer is to ensure the meat will taste the way it should.

But sit down and think about it, each person in that chain relies on an awful lot of people to keep the system running smoothly. From growers to distributors, wholesale and retail shops to purchasers, chefs and processing plants to the couple's table. And it doesn't end there. There's the waste and disposal, putting what you can back into the system to grow next year's crops.

Then there are the people on the outside looking in, who don't have access to the vital food many of us take for granted every day.

Niagara's food system, like any food system, is a complex web of connections. Unlike other industries there's not necessarily a neat, linear pattern to follow, and an unexpected event – say a year of drought or disease – can have drastic impacts throughout the chain.

As Bill Hodgson said at Wednesday's forum, those in every part of the food chain must routinely deal with the myths and urban legends about conventional farming and food production. But in order to fight back against those and educate the general public – unlike in past generations the vast majority of people today are completely removed from the food system – those on the inside must first understand Niagara's food landscape themselves. The Niagara Connects forum, not to mention the work being done by groups like the Golden Horseshoe Food and Farming Alliance, helps.

It's a scary thought to realize that a few years ago municipal planners would pull up information on all the food related properties in their town and look at a map that didn't include a single farm – farms were excluded from said mapping. Luckily work done by the GHFFA means policy makers now have a clearer picture of their local food system, that is, their entire food system.

As Niagara's food landscape is mapped internally, it's time for those on the inside to look outward and correct the many food system myths floating around out there.

Luke Edwards is a reporter for the Grimsby Lincoln News and editor for **Niagara Farmers' Monthly**. His column appears alternate weeks in The News' Tuesday edition. You can follow him on **Twitter** and **Facebook**.

Retrieved from: <http://www.niagarathisweek.com/opinion-story/6503422-edwards-we-could-all-use-a-lesson-in-food-systems/>

APPENDIX 2

Food Systems in Niagara: Visualizing Connectivity – Spring 2015

Niagara Connects recently engaged a core group to build a Network Map to illustrate connectivity among people and organizations involved with Food Systems in Niagara and beyond.

The *Spring 2015 Food Systems Network Map* illustrates:

- 210 people who participate in Food Systems or were identified as Food Systems connections (in Niagara and beyond)
- 143 organizations that the 210 people were associated with in their Food Systems work
- 3 individuals whose connections are the core of the map
- 10 emerging leaders have a notably high degree of connectedness

A Network Map is:

- a “fishnet”-like tool, to methodically identify and gather willing participants to support the development of an initiative;
- a method of expediting bringing people “to the table” with a higher likelihood of being inclusive than traditional methods of identifying who we *think* we should invite; and
- a basis for:
 - the early stages of an environmental scan of who is doing what. The map helps to increase the impact of an initiative that begins with a core group and engages a larger number of people in a conversation about the landscape for that initiative, and what future directions the group may choose to take.
 - creating a visual of opportunities to tighten or develop existing relationships.
 - identifying the attributes of relationships (ie: businesspeople, politicians, non-profit organizations, etc.).
 - evaluating the maturity of the network.

A network map represents people or organizations that form networks (intentional or unintentional). Analysis of these networks and the connections within them provides both a visual and a mathematical description of complex human systems and communications pathways.

Essential ingredients of a network map include: up-front engagement and trusted relationships with a core group of people; a team of skilled statisticians and cartographers; mapping software; and network analysts.

One of the objectives of building the network map is to weave together the network of people identified in the maps; to connect diverse individuals and groups; and increase the frequency and intensity of connections.

We are using a Network Map to describe Food Systems in Niagara, to:

- Gauge the breadth and depth of Food Systems work being done in Niagara
- Identify and describe pockets of activity that could converge toward a stronger effect
- Point to emerging issues, innovation, barriers to progress, assets
- Show possible conduit for communications and flow of data and information
- Identify individuals who could be engaged in the work at hand
- Unveil emerging leaders, clusters of strength, network maturity
- Describing change over time
- Collapse the time required to identify critical mass of stakeholders/participants

What to look for on a network map:

- A dense map, with far-extended edges means that the group depicted is able to mobilize relatively effectively and efficiently, enabling consensus building and coordinated action
- The more intense and the bigger the “nodes” on the map, the more the people or organizations represented by those nodes bridge to others and influence the rest of the network.
- External links outside the network are a healthy sign – they indicate that new ideas and information are coming in to the network

Food Systems in Niagara Network Map (2015) Analysis and Suggested Action Steps:

1. The 2015 Food Systems in Niagara maps are preliminary, since a “Round 2” outreach step was not taken during construction. Adding a second round step could greatly enrich the maps.
2. These maps illustrate a newly-developing network with some informal connections already existing. Based on the data gathered to construct the maps, certain organizations and people are strongly connected and others could be invited into the Food Systems in Niagara work.
3. The newly-developing network illustrated in the maps is well-positioned to move past engagement, and advance toward coming together for the purpose of gaining a better understanding of opportunities and barriers for Food Systems in Niagara.
4. Future opportunities exist to strengthen the maps by engaging the significant number of people and organizations in the periphery. All of these could be invited to take part in a Spring 2016 Food Systems in Niagara Forum, for diverse players to begin identifying top priorities on which they could collaborate, to strengthen this work for Niagara.
5. An opportunity exists to further investigate connections and communication pathways between individuals and organizations in these maps and economic development players in Niagara. This would lead to strengthened understanding of what the ‘economic development building block’ looks like for Food Systems in Niagara.
6. The benefit of engaging diverse players in Food Systems in Niagara in a process to develop a ‘Common Agenda’ (*Collective Impact, Kania & Kramer, Stanford Social Innovation Review, Winter, 2011*) is that in five years’ time, the cohesiveness of the newly-forming network portrayed in these maps will be stronger, there will be a reliable information conduit, we will see stronger collaborations across sectors, and connections will lead to sparks of innovation. New opportunities for enhancing the vitality of Niagara through collaborative Food Systems work will become obvious.

Reference: Adapted from Valdis Krebs & June Holley, *Building Smart Communities through Network Weaving*, 2002

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