

NIAGARA FOOD SYSTEMS:

Who is Doing What in Food Systems in Niagara and Beyond

FINAL REPORT 2014

A report commissioned by Healthy Living Niagara,
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On Behalf of Niagara Connects
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1.0 Introduction

Food systems are a complex topic as they not only represent the cycle of growing, distributing, eating and recycling of food but also all the factors that affect this cycle whether it be social systems, culture, political systems or economic systems. It is about food being central, food sovereignty and about how food connects us all. Food systems work represents the coordinated efforts, actions, structures, priorities, strategies and initiatives that contribute to a healthy food system that accomplishes a vision that has been set out for it.

*"Food is at the epicenter of our nation's most pressing issues – from poverty and poor health, to the environment and economy – and communities need to make these critical connections so Canadians can mobilize more effectively."*¹

In March and April 2013, Healthy Living Niagara supported a project furthering exploratory efforts into food systems work in Niagara. Part of this project involved completing a preliminary environmental scan and developing recommendations for a data collection strategy. The results of the scan and recommendations are detailed in *Getting Curious about Niagara's Food System: A Preliminary Exploration of Potential Opportunities, Next Steps and Future Directions, November 2013.*²

In November 2013, Niagara Connects was asked to build upon the preliminary environmental scan and explore the opportunity to complete network mapping for food systems in Niagara. This report presents the findings of the environmental scan and highlights recommendations on how this data can be used as part of a food systems data collection strategy. It builds on the environmental scan completed for Healthy Living Niagara in 2013. The final report and the accompanying database provides details on groups, organizations, documents, reports, plans, events, projects and programs involved in food systems work. The data represents a collection of what is happening and/or what is planned in Niagara, Ontario and Canada. Understanding what has already been done and how it fits into an approach looking at food systems in Niagara is a necessary task.

This report also summarizes the findings of background research completed on network mapping and community food assessments and their applicability to food systems work.

Methodology – The data was collected building upon and consolidating data from consultant's existing knowledge, information gained from prior key informant interviews, internet searches, and in consultation with key individuals.

Although detailed and inclusive of most food system sectors and interests, it is important to note that this environmental scan should not be considered comprehensive or representative of all sectors involved. It has not been verified by key players within each sector/area of interest to assess its completeness or accuracy. Parameters were not set for the environmental scan as to what to include and exclude nor a purpose for the scan established prior to its completion other than to look more in depth as to who is doing what in Niagara.

¹ Community Foundations of Canada. (2013). Fertile Ground: Sowing the seeds of change in Canada's food system. <http://www.vitalsignscanada.ca/en/fertileground>

² Healthy Living Niagara. (2013). Getting Curious about Niagara's Food System: A Preliminary Exploration of Potential Opportunities, Next Steps and Future Directions. www.healthylivingniagara.com/files/folders/875/download.aspx

The environmental scan process represents one individual's scan, knowledge, interpretation, synthesis and organization of the data collected. The project also identified gaps that could not be addressed within the scope of this project. Despite limitations and gaps in information, it does provide an important and in-depth 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.

Figure 1.0 Data Collection Recommendation

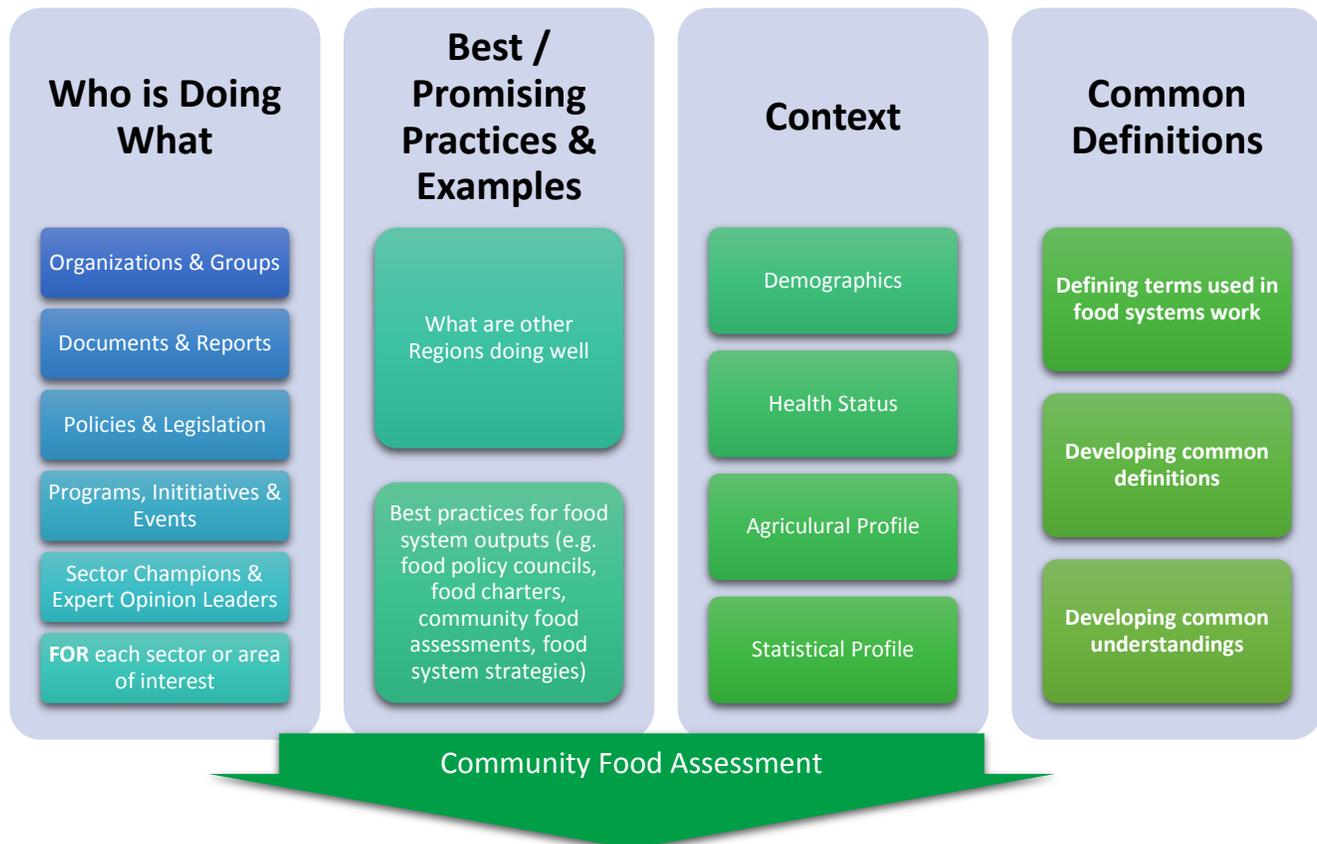


Figure 1.0 summarizes recommendations for a data collection plan that was detailed in *Getting Curious about Niagara's Food System: A Preliminary Exploration of Potential Opportunities, Next Steps and Future Directions, November 2013*.³ The environmental scan detailed in this report primarily focuses on the first column of "Who is Doing What." Efforts were made to identify organizations, groups, documents, reports, policies, legislation, programs, projects, initiatives and events relevant to a broad definition of food systems. In addition to highlighting what is happening in Niagara, it was considered important to include relevant provincial and national scan results as they 1) have implications for what it possible in Niagara (e.g. by setting a broader context) and/or 2) may have a direct connection to Niagara (e.g. as a board member or key player at the provincial level).

While the scan did identify some documentation related to best/promising practices and examples related to what others are doing well and related to implementation activities such as food policy councils and food

³ ibid

charters, this was not the focus of the scan. Several communities and regions in Canada have demonstrated great leadership in food systems work. Although their approaches may not be entirely relevant or applicable to the Niagara context, there is great value in learning from those who have already embarked on and are implementing coordinated food systems work. It is valuable to explore and assess aspects of these groups, such as governance structure, engagement strategies, processes, initiatives, projects and monitoring and evaluation in order to help inform potential directions and identify keys to success and strategies to overcome challenges. Canadian leaders are the Waterloo Region Food System Roundtable, Toronto Food Policy Council and the Vancouver Food Policy Council. Other groups in Ontario known to be involved in food systems work, (all with varying structures, initiatives, focuses, priorities and stages) include the Halton Food Council, Just Food (Ottawa), Food Partners Alliance Simcoe County, Thunder Bay Food Action Network, Guelph-Wellington Food Roundtable, Harvest Haliburton, Sudbury Food Policy Council, Let's Talk Food (Chatham-Kent), and York Region Food Network.

Documentation does exist in regards related to best and promising practices related to food systems implementation activities, whether that be food policy councils, food charters, eat local food guides or food system strategies. There are regional, provincial, national and international sources of this information. This information could help inform a food system strategy for Niagara.

The statistical profile and social-demographic information for Niagara, including information about the make-up of Niagara; the health of its residents and the most prevalent determinants of health that affect them; and population predictions are well documented in sources such as A Picture of Health in Niagara Report of Statistical Support to Inform Community Recommendations for Action, Healthy Living Niagara (2011);⁴ Living in Niagara 2011. Niagara Connects (2011);⁵ and Health Story of Niagara: a collection of health data by topic and by municipality, available on the Niagara Region website.⁶ In addition, the agricultural profile of Niagara is reviewed in the Regional Agricultural Economic Impact Study⁷ completed in 2003 and updated in 2010. An updated agricultural profile based on the 2011 data is expected to be released in 2014. While attempts were made in this environmental scan to identify sources of statistical profiles and data to provide context to food systems, it is not inclusive of all data that may be relevant to food systems work and the development of a food systems strategy.

There are generally six commonly accepted steps or aspects in a food system, often referred to as the local food value chain. They are also sometimes referred to as sectors. They represent the cycle and processes related to food and provide a broad view of a food system. The six steps in the local food chain are food production; food processing; food distribution; food access and retailing; food preparation and consumption; and food waste. In addition to the steps in the local food value chain, food systems work also considers the factors

"The food system includes each one of us because we all eat food and we all maintain the ability to insert ourselves within the food system at every link of the chain!"⁸

⁴ Healthy Living Niagara. (2011) A Picture of Health in Niagara Report of Statistical Support to Inform Community <http://healthylivingniagara.com/content/Priorities.aspx>

⁵ Niagara Connects. (2011). Living in Niagara 2011. <http://www.livinginniagarareport.com/>

⁶ http://www.niagararegion.ca/living/health_wellness/health-story/default.aspx

⁷ Regional Municipality of Niagara. (2010). An Update to the Regional Municipality of Niagara Agricultural Impact Study. http://www.niagararegion.ca/living/ap/raeis_download.aspx

⁸ Jon Steinman. (2011). Towards a Regional Food System Alliance Development Strategy for the West Kootenay: An analysis of best practices for forming and sustaining a regional food system alliance for our region. <http://www.cjly.net/deconstructingdinner/wkfoodsystem.htm>

that affect the cycle (e.g. social, cultural, political, economic) as well as the sectors that are commonly included in food systems work. These sectors may include public and community health; government (various levels, structures and mandates); planning (regional and municipal / urban and rural); culture and community; emergency food assistance and poverty reduction; education and research; food industry; the environment; and economic development.

After identifying all items in the environmental scan, they were organized into the following twelve categories:

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

Each category and an explanation of what they include are detailed in the subsequent sections. It is important to note that due to the complex nature of food system issues and relationships, many items identified were not easily categorized into a single category. There is considerable overlap and inter-weaving of the different sectors. Items were placed into categories based on the consultant's interpretation of best fit. The data could be re-organized and re-categorized based on its intended purpose.

The environmental scan data collected is recorded as Appendices A through L, in the form of excel spreadsheets. These spreadsheets are working documents that support this particular document; they offer the functionality of being able to manipulate, filter, and update data for desired purposes. For example, they can be filtered for a particular local municipality in Niagara. Although efforts were made to complete as many categories as possible, data was not always accessible. The social media category was added but not completed. Identifying Facebook pages and Twitter accounts provides an opportunity to follow several key groups and leaders involved in food systems work. It will first be an important step to identify what should be followed, who is going to follow it and how the information will be used and made meaningful for the overall purpose at hand.

The database identifies whether the item is Niagara, Provincial or National. For those items that are specific to Niagara they are either identified as "wide" meaning they are region-wide representing all or most Niagara municipalities or the specific municipality/municipalities are identified. Twelve Niagara municipalities are identified with the corresponding associated communities.

- Fort Erie – The Town of Fort Erie and the communities of Crystal Beach, Stevensville, Ridgeway, Bridgeburg/North End/Victoria, Black Creek, Crescent Park, Port Abino and Snyder
- Grimsby – The Town of Grimsby
- Lincoln – Communities of Beamsville, Jordan, Vineland, Campden, Jordan Station, Vineland Station, Pelham Union, Rockway and Tintern
- Niagara-on-the-Lake – The Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake and the communities of St. David's, Virgil and Queenston

- Niagara Falls – The City of Niagara Falls and the community of Chippawa
- Pelham – Communities of Effingham, Fenwick, Fonthill and Ridgeville
- Port Colborne – The City of Port Colborne and the community of Sherkston
- St. Catharines – The City of St. Catharines
- Thorold – City of Thorold and the communities of Allanburg and Port Robinson
- Wainfleet – Township of Wainfleet and the community of Long Beach
- Welland – The City of Welland
- West Lincoln - Communities of Smithville, Caistor Centre, Grassie, St. Anns, Bismark and Wellandport

Note: The above information about neighbourhood names is based on local people's use of historical names to identify where they live.

The in-depth environmental scan on who's doing what in food systems in Niagara and beyond provides an important and in-depth 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. This report reviews the findings and provides recommendations on how to address next steps and make the data collected meaningful to the process and food systems stakeholders. Background information on community food assessments and network mapping is also detailed below.

2.0 Agriculture

Agriculture is an essential feature of Niagara's landscape and an extremely important sector of Niagara's economy. Niagara's soil and climate are unique providing an ability to produce crops that no other regions of the province can produce. Niagara is recognized as a leader in agriculture in the province.⁹

Food systems work often refers to sustainable agriculture. Sustainable agriculture examines the links between farm and table and their implications for people, the economy, and the planet. Food connects us all. Investing in agriculture is a strategy for achieving goals related to poverty and hunger, nutrition and health, local food, economic growth, education and preserving the environment.

"The presence of a prosperous agricultural sector in Niagara contributes to more than just the economy of the Region and the province. A prosperous agricultural sector enhances the quality of life of the citizens, contributes to the sustainability of the community, is an essential part of tourism and supports a local food supply provincially."¹⁵

Appendix B details the environmental scan completed for agriculture. It includes groups and organizations; projects and initiatives; reports and relevant documentation; events; and a list of producers. It encompasses

⁹ Regional Municipality of Niagara. (2010). An Update to the Regional Municipality of Niagara Agricultural Impact Study. http://www.niagararegion.ca/living/ap/raeis_download.aspx

¹⁰ ibid

the food production stage in the local food value chain - the farming and growing practices that include growing raw food crops (vegetables, fruit, grains) and animal-based foods (meat, dairy, eggs). Food production also encompasses community gardens and urban agriculture but these are documented in a separate section (see Appendix K).

While this database attempts to identify producers in Niagara it is in no way to be considered comprehensive, nor representative of all commodity groups or types of farm production. Approximately 150 producers, farms or wineries are listed in the database as part of the environmental scan. Niagara Region's 2010 Agricultural Economic Impact Study based on 2006 census data identifies over 2200 farms in Niagara. The breakdown for this includes Dairy 74; Cattle 119; Hog 30; Poultry & Egg 158; Wheat 10; Grain and Oilseed 212; Field Crop 122; Fruit 771; Vegetable 84; Miscellaneous Specialty 276; Greenhouse Product 224; Nursery Product and Sod 76; and Lifestock/Other Combination 80 (where Grain & Oilseed includes oilseed, corn for grain, dry field pea & bean, and other small grain; Field Crops includes hay & fodder, forage seed, tobacco, potato, and other field crop; Miscellaneous Specialty includes sheep & lamb, goat, horse & pony, fur, other specialty livestock, mushroom, and maple & Christmas tree).¹¹

The producers included in the database are mostly those that have been highlighted on websites that promote buying local in Niagara. Therefore a large proportion of the businesses included in the database offer retail sales at the farm-gate; or opportunities for people to pick-your-own produce; or are highlighted as part of Niagara's agri-tourism industry (e.g. wineries). Tags and commodity group headings are provided on the producer page to add additional functionality of being able to filter the spreadsheet according to commodities produced or other relevant tags (e.g. organic, pick your own farms, farm-gate retail).

Additional sources of data on Niagara's producers not identified in the environmental scan may already exist in which this data is already available. Should the data collection strategy find value in a complete list of producers, it is suggested the Niagara North Federation of Agriculture, the Niagara South Federation of Agriculture, and Niagara Region Planning and Development department be consulted to assist in obtaining this data.

Over fifty regional, provincial and national groups with an interest or focus on agriculture are identified in the scan. This includes provincial organizations and marketing groups that are specific to various commodity groups. Several of these provincial organizations have associations directly with Niagara such as being located in the region or having Niagara representation on their boards of directors. Although attempts were made to identify these Niagara connections, the scan was not able to accurately identify all connections and those identified will likely change over time.

Leadership in agriculture is well-established in Niagara, particularly related to the Regional Municipality of Niagara, the Niagara North Federation of Agriculture and the Niagara South Federation of Agriculture. In 2013, the Regional Municipality of Niagara established the Agricultural Policy & Action Committee (APAC). The Committee has been established to advise Regional Council on issues that impact the agricultural industry and support Regional Council, reporting through the Planning and Development Committee, by initiating, developing, implementing and participating in actions and strategies needed to advance the agricultural industry and preserve the agricultural land base throughout the Niagara Region.¹²

¹¹ ibid

¹² <http://www.niagararegion.ca/government/committees/apac/default.aspx>

Key reports that address a broad food systems approach, most notably the Golden Horseshoe Agriculture & Agri-Food Strategy's *Food & Farming: An Action Plan 2021*¹³, are included in the environmental scan.

Agriculture is intricately linked with all other sectors. The scan revealed several examples of groups, programs and initiatives which demonstrate these connections. Many of these are included in other sections of the environmental scan. For example, commodity groups provide information on how to select, prepare and store various produce and commodity groups (food skills); alternate distribution channels such as food co-ops and CSAs (food distribution); agricultural program at DSBN (education); agri-tourism and its impact on the economic status and growth of Niagara; getting local food into retail chains (local food) and efforts in protecting and preserving agricultural land (land-use planning and the environment). Although the links with agriculture are often clear, what is less understood is how players and those who work in this area see themselves as being connected or involved in broad food systems work, beyond agriculture.

Gaps exist in the completeness of the agriculture environmental scan. Pending the development and direction of a food systems data collection strategy, these gaps could be filled. This includes:

- developing a comprehensive list of producers in Niagara
- identifying relevant and current Niagara connections to provincial and national agricultural organizations
- filling in data gaps (e.g. contact information, descriptions, social media links)
- identifying connections with other food system sectors
- interviewing stakeholders to assess completeness, accuracy and to identify additional groups, organizations, reports, programs, initiatives, events, legislation, etc.
- identifying groups and individuals who recognize themselves or are recognized as being leaders in this sector
- identifying groups and individuals who recognize themselves or are recognized as being connected to and/or interested in being engaged in broad food systems work
- identifying social media (who to follow)

¹³ GTA Agricultural Action Committee. (2012). Golden Horseshoe Agriculture & Agri-Food Strategy. Food & Farming: An Action Plan 2021. <http://www.foodandfarming.ca/food-and-farming-action-plan/>

3.0 Land Use Planning

Much of Niagara Region and the Niagara Escarpment are included within the protected Greenbelt. Enactment of plans such as the Greenbelt Act (2005)¹⁴, the Places to Grow Act (2005)¹⁵, and the Niagara Escarpment

“Food systems have long been linked to planning and are a key consideration for complete and healthy communities. Involving community planners in planning for food systems can result in healthier outcomes for Ontarians. Planners are in a unique position to identify problems and challenges within the food system and to lead and foster the development of solutions.”²⁴

Planning and Development Act (2012)¹⁶ protect agricultural land from a land use planning perspective. In addition, publications such as *Planning for Food Systems in Ontario: A Call to Action*¹⁷ and *Planning Regional Food Systems: A Guide for Municipal Planning and Development in the Greater Golden Horseshoe*¹⁸ raise awareness and highlight key issues so that planners and communities can address the challenges associated with planning for food systems.

Appendix C details the environmental scan completed for land use planning. It includes groups and organizations; projects and initiatives; reports and relevant documentation; as well as events related to land use planning and preservation of agricultural lands and the environment. In terms of steps in the local food value chain, it encompasses food production (e.g. farming and growing practices, community gardens), food access and retailing (e.g. location of retail locations, food deserts, walkable access to food) and food waste (disposing/recycling/composting of waste materials from food production).

The twelve municipal planning departments and their respective official plans are identified in the scan. There is a potential opportunity to conduct a scan of the municipal plans and the official regional plan in Niagara to obtain a baseline inventory of components in these plans that contribute to a healthy food system plan and identify potential opportunities and gaps in these plans. It is unknown whether this type of scan has already been completed. Healthy Living Niagara's *Policy Scan Report for Niagara* (2011)²⁰ could provide an initial framework for initiating such a scan.

Gaps exist in the completeness of the land use planning environmental scan. Pending the development and direction of a food systems data collection strategy, these gaps could be filled. This includes:

- identifying whether regional and municipal plans have been reviewed with a food systems planning lens

¹⁴ Government of Ontario. (2005). Greenbelt Act. <http://www.mah.gov.on.ca/Page195.aspx>

¹⁵ Government of Ontario. (2005). Places to Grow Act. https://www.placestogrow.ca/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=4&Itemid=9

¹⁶ Government of Ontario. (2012). The Niagara Escarpment Planning and Development Act (NEPDA). <http://escarpment.org/landplanning/developmentact/index.php>

¹⁷ Ontario Professional Planners Institute. (2011). Healthy Communities and Planning for Food Planning for Food Systems in Ontario: A Call to Action. <http://ontarioplanners.ca/PDF/Healthy-Communities/2011/a-call-to-action-from-oppi-june-24-2011.aspx>

¹⁸ Ontario Farmland Trust. (2006). Planning Regional Food Systems: A guide for municipal planning and development in the Greater Golden Horseshoe. <http://www.ontariofarmlandtrust.ca/places-to-grow-food/for-planners>

¹⁹ Ontario Professional Planners Institute. (June 24, 2011). Media Release - Healthy Communities and Planning for Food Planning for Food Systems in Ontario: A Call to Action from the Ontario Professional Planners Institute. <http://ontarioplanners.ca/PDF/Healthy-Communities/2011/oppi-media-release-june-24-2011.aspx>

²⁰ Healthy Living Niagara. (2011). Policy Scan Report for Niagara. <http://www.healthylivingniagara.com>

- identifying names of municipal planners in the twelve Niagara municipalities
- identifying Niagara planners with experience an interest in food systems planning
- filling in data gaps (e.g. contact information, descriptions, social media links)
- identifying connections with other food system sectors
- interviewing stakeholders to assess completeness, accuracy and to identify additional groups, organizations, reports, programs, initiatives, events, legislation, etc.
- identifying groups and individuals who recognize themselves or are recognized as being leaders in this sector
- identifying groups and individuals who recognize themselves or are recognized as being connected to and/or interested in being engaged in broad food systems work
- identifying social media (who to follow)

4.0 Local Food

Awareness and action of the “buy local, eat local” movement is growing. This is evidenced by consumer behaviour, increasing availability of local food in retail locations as well as government mandates. For example, promoting local food is an important mandate of the Ontario government and its plan to strengthen the agri-food industry, build stronger communities and create jobs that will grow the economy. The *Local Food Act*²¹ (Bill 36) was passed in Ontario’s legislature on November 5, 2013. The purpose of the act is to support local food, raise awareness of local food and to encourage new markets for local food.

*“Eating local isn’t just good for Ontario families – it’s good for our economy. That’s why our government will continue to work with the agri-food sector, including retailers and food service operators, to bring more Ontario food to the table.”*²⁷ Kathleen Wynne, Premier and Minister of Agriculture and Food

Promotion of local food and changing the way we access food to include more local food has impact to affect the larger food system, particularly economic development and health. Promoting and eating local food is about working towards sustainable food systems for our neighbourhoods, our communities, our region, our province and our country. Several regions in Ontario have developed buy local maps and guides. Discover Niagara’s Bounty²³ was a partnership between Niagara Region, Niagara Economic Development Corporation, Foodland Ontario and the Niagara North Federation of Agriculture. These partners worked on behalf of many other organizational groups in Niagara to promote buying locally grown food. This initiative is no longer in use. Resources still available include a find a farmers’ market tool, what’s in season chart, recipes, and local food videos.

The *Local Food Action Plan: Setting a Course for the Future of Food in Niagara*²⁴ is a key plan in outlining actions that need to be taken to support, enhance and promote local food products. In recent months, Region of

²¹ Government of Ontario. (2013). Local Food Act (Bill 36). http://www.ontla.on.ca/web/bills/bills_detail.do?locale=en&Intranet=&BillID=2754

²² Kathleen Wynne Premier and Minister of Agriculture and Food. <http://news.ontario.ca/omafra/en/2013/03/ontario-serves-up-local-food-bill.html>

²³ <http://www.niagararegion.ca/government/initiatives/lfap/discover-niagaras-bounty.aspx>

²⁴ Niagara Region. (2008). Local Food Action Plan: Setting a Course for the Future of Food in Niagara. <http://www.niagararegion.ca/government/initiatives/lfap/default.aspx>

Niagara's Planning and Development department has initiated a process to revitalize the Local Food Action Plan. The revitalization is viewed as a necessity as situations change and actions are completed and as priorities change. It will be important to assess how actions included in the updated plan can be incorporated into the development and implementation of a larger food systems strategy.

Appendix D details the environmental scan completed for local food. It includes groups and organizations; projects and initiatives; reports and relevant documentation; as well as events related to the promotion of and access to local food and broad food systems work. The scan includes field-to-table operations and eating establishments that are committed to utilizing foods grown locally, local food procurement, food processing using foods produced locally, agri-tourism links that highlight opportunities to buy local (e.g. pick your own farms and farm-gate retail), blogs and newsletters profiling local food and local food producers and provincial organizations dedicated to the promotion of local food. The scan also includes several reports and legislation helping to guide local food and food systems work. It also includes how we celebrate Niagara's locally grown food, highlighting several events. Additional events are included in the Agriculture environmental scan (Appendix B). In terms of the local food value chain, local food encompasses all steps from food production through to food waste. It is particularly linked to food distribution; food access and retailing; and food consumption. Several other items are directly related to local food but are documented in separate sections. For example, community-shared agriculture (CSAs) and farmers' markets are included in Food Distribution (Appendix F) and pick-your-own farms and farm-gate retail are included in Agriculture (Appendix B). The Local Food environmental scan basically includes items that do not fall within Food Distribution or Agriculture.

It is well-known that the local food movement is inter-connected with other sectors of food systems. The scan revealed several examples of programs and initiatives which demonstrate these connections. What is perhaps less understood is how players and work in other sectors see themselves as being connected or involved in the local food movement and where they think that the opportunities and challenges lie.

Gaps exist in the completeness of the local food environmental scan. Pending the development and direction of a food systems data collection strategy, these gaps could be filled. This includes:

- understanding the activities, plans, priorities and opportunities related to the revitalization of the Local Food Action Plan
- filling in data gaps (e.g. contact information, descriptions, social media links)
- identifying connections with other food system sectors
- interviewing stakeholders to assess completeness, accuracy and to identify additional groups, organizations, reports, programs, initiatives, events, legislation, opportunities being created, etc.
- identifying groups and individuals who recognize themselves or are recognized as being leaders in this sector – who are Niagara's "local food" champions
- identifying groups and individuals who recognize themselves or are recognized as being connected to and/or interested in being engaged in broad food systems work
- identifying social media (who to follow)

5.0 Economic Development

Economic development is tied closely to food systems work and in many communities economic development has been the main lens that has secured funding and buy-in to successfully progress food systems work. Niagara has a large agricultural base and its economic health is tied greatly to agricultural growth and viability in the region. Niagara is a tourist destination and as such its economy is also tied to the tourism, agri-culinary tourism and hospitality industry. The economic health of Niagara includes rates of poverty, homelessness and low income which are directly related to the food security of Niagara's residents and its neighbourhoods.

The Golden Horseshoe Agriculture & Agri-Food Strategy's *Food & Farming: An Action Plan 2021*²⁵ is a key plan that recognizes Niagara (along with the regions of Durham, Halton, Peel, York, the Holland Marsh and the Cities of Hamilton and Toronto) as a geographic region with an opportunity to enrich its food and farming cluster to enhance economic growth and produce innovation.

Appendix E details the environmental scan completed for economic development. Although economic development encompasses many things, for the purposes of this scan, economic development includes groups and organizations; projects and initiatives; reports and relevant documentation; as well as events related to workforce planning and employment; tourism, particularly agri-tourism; food processing and food production; agri-food technologies; and agri-business. Items such as pick-your-own farms, farm-gate retail, "local" food restaurants, wineries, farmers' markets and food events are all important aspects of Niagara's agri-tourism industry. These are incorporated as part of other scan databases (see Appendices B, D and F). In addition, this scan does also not incorporate levels of poverty, homelessness or low income which has been incorporated in the food security and poverty reduction section (see Appendix A). In terms of the local food value chain, economic development encompasses all steps from food production through to food waste.

It is well-known that the economic development is inter-connected with several sectors of food systems. The scan revealed several examples of programs and initiatives which demonstrate these connections. What is perhaps less understood is how players and those who work in these sectors see themselves as being connected to economic development. It would be worthwhile to explore the nature of these connections, explore opportunities and assess challenges.

Gaps exist in the completeness of the economic development environmental scan. Pending the development and direction of a food systems data collection strategy, these gaps could be filled. This includes:

- Identifying key individuals and food systems champions in economic development and agri-tourism
- Identifying aspects of economic development not reflected in the scan (e.g. migrant workers, hospitality industry)
- Identifying and understanding the links of economic development to education and research
- Identifying and understanding the existing links to agriculture and Niagara's producers
- Identifying and understanding food processing, food manufacturing, and agri-food technologies in Niagara
- filling in data gaps (e.g. contact information, descriptions, social media links)

²⁵ GTA Agricultural Action Committee. (2012). Golden Horseshoe Agriculture & Agri-Food Strategy. *Food & Farming: An Action Plan 2021*. <http://www.foodandfarming.ca/food-and-farming-action-plan/>

- identifying connections with other food system sectors
- interviewing stakeholders to assess completeness, accuracy and to identify additional groups, organizations, reports, programs, initiatives, events, legislation, opportunities being created, etc.
- identifying groups and individuals who recognize themselves or are recognized as being leaders in this sector
- identifying groups and individuals who recognize themselves or are recognized as being connected to and/or interested in being engaged in broad food systems work
- identifying social media (who to follow)

6.0 Food Distribution

Food distribution is a step in the local food value chain and is about how food gets from farm to table and all the stops along the way. This includes conventional distribution channels such as warehousing, storage and delivery to retailers. It also includes alternate distribution channels such as food box programs, community shared agriculture programs (CSAs), farmers' markets and food cooperatives.

Appendix F details the environmental scan completed for food distribution. It includes groups and organizations; projects and initiatives; and reports and relevant documentation related conventional and alternate distribution channels. This includes Niagara food and grower co-ops, farmers' markets, the Good Food Box program, mobile markets, wholesalers, and CSAs. It also includes provincial and national large-scale foodservice distributors. Provincial and national organizations and programs related to alternate distribution channels are also included in the scan.

Food distribution is key to developing sustainable local food systems and in promoting the retailing and consumption of local foods. Alternate distribution channels are generally well connected to local food and to food systems work. Less understood and reflected in the scan is the identification of conventional distribution channels and more importantly how these are connected to broad food systems work in general and specifically in Niagara.

Gaps exist in the completeness of the food distribution environmental scan. Pending the development and direction of a food systems data collection strategy, these gaps could be filled. This includes:

- identifying a comprehensive list of and understanding conventional distribution channels in Niagara
- filling in data gaps (e.g. contact information, descriptions, social media links)
- identifying connections with other food system sectors
- interviewing stakeholders to assess completeness, accuracy and to identify additional groups, organizations, reports, programs, initiatives, events, legislation, opportunities being created, etc.
- identifying groups and individuals who recognize themselves or are recognized as being leaders in this sector
- identifying groups and individuals who recognize themselves or are recognized as being connected to and/or interested in being engaged in broad food systems work
- identifying social media (who to follow)

7.0 Retail and Food Outlets

Retail is a step in the local food value chain that describes where and how people get their food. Accessibility and affordability of retail locations is a key consideration in community food security. Promotion and availability of “local” food in retail locations and local food procurement are key aspects of sustainable local food systems.

Appendix G details the environmental scan completed for retail. It is limited to include only the names of retail locations in Niagara in eight different categories: large grocery chains (e.g. No Frills, Sobeys); superstores or department stores with grocery departments (e.g. Walmart, Giant Tiger); independent grocers; convenience stores (e.g. corner stores); specialty food stores (e.g. bakeries, butchers); cultural food stores; fruit, vegetable and specialty markets; and others (e.g. pharmacies, dollar stores). For most of the categories listed, only examples are provided. This is not a comprehensive list of all food retail in Niagara. The list would be extensive and beyond the scope of this environmental scan. Farm-gate retail, farmers’ markets, and food cooperatives are all important parts of the retail scan but are documented under Agriculture (see Appendix B), Local Food (see Appendix D) and Food Distribution (see Appendix F). It is also important to note that people are also accessing food through a variety of food banks, food pantries, and meal programs which are reflected in the food security and poverty reduction scan (see Appendix A). Other than field-to-table restaurants and food trucks, a list of restaurants and cafeterias where people are also accessing food was not included in this environmental scan.

Gaps exist in the completeness of the retail environmental scan. Pending the development and direction of a food systems data collection strategy, these gaps could be filled. This includes:

- Identification of whether food retail locations been mapped
- Identification of institutional foodservice establishments including school, workplace, and hospital cafeterias in Niagara
- Identification of restaurants in Niagara
- identifying a comprehensive list of food retail locations in Niagara and key contacts for these locations
- filling in data gaps (e.g. contact information, descriptions)
- identifying connections with other food systems sectors
- identifying groups and individuals who recognize themselves or are recognized as being leaders in this sector
- identifying groups and individuals who recognize themselves or are recognized as being connected to and/or interested in being engaged in broad food systems work

8.0 Health

The food we eat is tied to our health. We cannot talk about food without talking about health and we cannot talk about health without talking about food. Health in its broadest definition encompasses many aspects related to food including:

- Dietary intake - Consumption of unhealthy foods affect health. Patterns of unhealthy food intake coupled with inactivity contributes to a population with high and increasing rates of overweight, obesity and chronic disease such as heart disease, cancer and diabetes.

- Food accessibility, availability and affordability. Healthy food needs to be available, accessible and affordable to support healthy eating choices.
- Environmental health. Access to foods that have been produced, stored, sold or prepared in a safe manner that prevent food-borne illness
- Mental health

“A healthy community food system approach goes beyond individual dietary behaviour, and examines the broader context in which food choices occur. It seeks to build healthy communities by considering the ways in which social, economic and environmental conditions determine health.”³¹

Appendix H details the environmental scan completed for health. It includes groups and organizations; projects and initiatives; reports and relevant documentation; as well as events related to the promotion and protection of the health of Niagara’s residents. It primarily includes those involved in promoting health and providing health services. It includes chronic disease prevention and primary health care. It includes hospitals, Community Health Centres, Family Health Teams, as well as the various departments of Niagara Public Health including chronic disease prevention, family health and environmental health. It includes other organizations promoting health and health charities, and the programs and initiatives that are providing nutrition information, food skills and safe food handling. It reflects the food consumption step in the local food value chain but it is important to recognize that other steps in the local food value chain directly affect health, including agricultural production methods, food processing, food distribution and food access.

Stakeholder interviews completed as part of *Getting Curious about Niagara’s Food System: A Preliminary Exploration of Potential Opportunities, Next Steps and Future Directions*²⁷ revealed divided opinions on the importance, link and role of health to the food system. This indicates that health is perhaps not a well-understood lens and points to an opportunity to articulate and provide clarity of the link of health and public health to food systems. As a key player in food systems work, Niagara Region Public Health and other health interests have the opportunity to articulate the link as well as develop the partnerships and connections needed to integrate with the other sectors and bring the health lens and expertise to the table.

The degree and connection within the health sector itself is not well understood or documented. There may be value in exploring these connections further should that be identified as being beneficial to the overall data collection and food systems strategy. Identifying roles that different players in the health sector could contribute is also a worthwhile discussion (e.g. public health inspectors, health promoters, clinical practitioners, etc.).

Gaps exist in the completeness of the health environmental scan. Pending the development and direction of a food systems data collection strategy, these gaps could be filled. This includes:

- filling in data gaps (e.g. contact information, descriptions)
- identifying existing connections with other food systems sectors

²⁶ Region of Waterloo Public Health (2005). Towards a Healthy Community Food System for Waterloo Region. http://chd.region.waterloo.on.ca/en/researchResourcesPublications/resources/FoodSystems_Report.pdf

²⁷ Healthy Living Niagara. (2013). Getting Curious about Niagara’s Food System: A Preliminary Exploration of Potential Opportunities, Next Steps and Future Directions. www.healthylivingniagara.com/files/folders/875/download.aspx

- interviewing stakeholders to assess completeness, accuracy and to identify additional groups, organizations, reports, programs, initiatives, events, legislation, opportunities being created, etc.
- identifying groups and individuals who recognize themselves or are recognized as being leaders in this sector
- identifying groups and individuals who recognize themselves or are recognized as being connected to and/or interested in being engaged in broad food systems work
- identifying social media (who to follow)

9.0 Food Security and Poverty Reduction

Community Food Security means that all people have access to safe and nutritious food. Community food security can be achieved if we develop food systems that can be sustained in the long term, offer healthy food choices, enable the community to be self-reliant and provide equal access to affordable food for everyone.²⁸ By definition, community food security has a broad scope – one that involves the larger food system, long-term planning and a wide range of stakeholders.

It is important to make the distinction between individual and household food insecurity and community food security. Individual and household food insecurity is only one part of a larger context of community food security that includes the economic, social and food systems, food policies, food culture, and the engagement of community in shaping the context. It includes a continuum of short-term relief or emergency/charitable food programs such as food banks and soup kitchens that address immediate hunger; capacity-building programs such as community kitchens and community gardens that have the potential to empower participants through education and training; and a systemic redesign of the food system through initiatives such as implementation of food policies.²⁹

Appendix A details the environmental scan completed for food security and poverty reduction. It includes groups and organizations; projects and initiatives; reports and other relevant documentation; as well as events related primarily to the short-term relief aspect of the community food security continuum. Although capacity-building programs such as community gardens are a key component of the community food security continuum, the environmental scan for these is documented in a separate section (Appendix K). This environmental scan builds upon the Environmental Scan of Food Access and Distribution³⁰ and Food For All³¹ resources prepared by Niagara Region Public Health. In terms of the steps in the local food chain, it primarily encompasses food access (consideration of whether food is affordable and accessible) as well as food preparation and consumption.

The items included in the food security and poverty reduction scan are those related to food security, food access, emergency food assistance, poverty reduction, social assistance, food banks, food pantries, soup kitchens, drop-in meal programs, meal programs and other emergency services. It includes services targeted to all life stages from pre-natal to older adults. Many of the items are specific to Niagara but several relevant provincial and national items have been included as well.

²⁸ Dietitians of Canada. <http://www.dietitians.ca/Dietitians-Views/Food-Security/Community-Food-Security.aspx>

²⁹ BC Provincial Health Services Authority. (2008). Community Food Assessment Guide. [http://www.healbc.ca/files/Community_food_assessment_guide_final_\(2\).pdf](http://www.healbc.ca/files/Community_food_assessment_guide_final_(2).pdf)

³⁰ Niagara Region Public Health. (2012). Environmental Scan of Food Access and Distribution in Niagara Region.

³¹ Niagara Region Public Health. (2012). Food for All.

Access to food cannot be looked at in isolation. Many individuals in Niagara cannot afford the basics of life and may struggle to pay rent, utility bills, bus fare, or food. People often borrow from their food budget or skip meals to be able to pay for other necessities. Therefore, all activities related to social assistance whether they are housing, income support, homelessness or other emergency services are intricately woven with food security and poverty reduction and linked with broad food systems work as it relates to the affordability of or access to food. While some of these are reflected in the environmental scan, it is not comprehensive of social assistance supports available in Niagara.

The existence and accessibility of information on several different networks in Niagara (e.g. Fort Erie Food Security Network), initiatives (e.g. Niagara Prosperity Initiative), resources (e.g. Food For All), and data sources (e.g. Niagara Region Nutritious Food Basket Data) suggest that this is an area that may be considered well-researched, well-documented and well-connected. Stakeholder interviews completed as part of the *Getting Curious about Niagara's Food System: A Preliminary Exploration of Potential Opportunities, Next Steps and Future Directions*³² report confirms this finding. Leadership in this sector appears to be well-established, particularly at the municipal level.

Despite knowledge that there is a great deal of connection within the food security and poverty sector, documentation does not appear to exist as to the nature of these connections. There may be value in exploring these connections further should that be identified as being beneficial to the overall data collection and food systems strategy.

It is well-known that the sector of food security and poverty is connected with other sectors of food systems. The scan revealed examples of programs and initiatives which demonstrate these connections. For example:

- retail locations or producers donating to shelters;
- tree gleaning programs that are providing fresh produce to food banks;
- high school students preparing pre-packaged holiday meals for distribution at food banks;
- farmers' markets that offer market bucks programs; and
- drop-in centres providing people with opportunities to gain food skills that lead not only to individual food security but potentially employment skills as well.

What is perhaps less understood is how players and workers in this area see themselves as being connected or involved in broad food systems work, beyond the concept of community food security.

Gaps exist in the completeness of the food security and poverty reduction environmental scan. Pending the development and direction of a food systems data collection strategy, these gaps could be filled. This includes:

- filling in data gaps (e.g. contact information, descriptions, social media links)
- identifying connections with other food system sectors
- interviewing stakeholders to assess completeness, accuracy and to identify additional groups, organizations, reports, programs, initiatives, events, legislation, etc.
- identifying groups and individuals who recognize themselves or are recognized as being leaders in this sector
- identifying groups and individuals who recognize themselves or are recognized as being connected to and/or interested in being engaged in broad food systems work
- identifying who to 'follow' on social media

³² Healthy Living Niagara. (2013). *Getting Curious about Niagara's Food System: A Preliminary Exploration of Potential Opportunities, Next Steps and Future Directions*. www.healthylivingniagara.com/files/folders/875/download.aspx

10.0 Child and School

“Treat the earth well: it was not given to you by your parents, it was loaned to you by your children. We do not inherit the Earth from our ancestors, we borrow it from our children”³³

Appendix I details the environmental scan completed for school and child health. It includes groups and organizations; projects and initiatives; and reports and relevant documentation related to the promotion and protection of the health of Niagara’s children and in the school setting. It was included as a separate scan but is associated and linked with health; food security and poverty reduction; and education and research scans. It includes organizations involved in promoting health and providing food availability and access to school children and their associated services. It includes items such as breakfast programs, snack programs, and after school programs. It was included as a separate category due to the potential for achieving community food security and sustainable local food systems. Students at both the elementary and secondary level are provided with food and have access to food in school, whether that be subsidized breakfast and snack programs, purchased lunches (e.g. pizza days), school events and celebration days, or school cafeterias. Many communities (outside of Niagara) are implementing school gardens. In 2011, the Ontario Ministry of Education introduced its School Food and Beverage Policy that includes nutrition standards for food and beverages sold in schools. Highlighting this as an independent sector allows the exploration of opportunities to engage youth and those involved with children and youth in achieving a healthy community food system for future generations. It primarily reflects the food consumption step in the local food value chain, and it is important to recognize that other steps in the local food value chain, including agricultural production methods, food processing, food distribution and food access directly affect health.

Gaps exist in the completeness of the school/child health environmental scan. Pending the development and direction of a food systems data collection strategy, these gaps could be filled. This includes:

- filling in data gaps (e.g. contact information, descriptions)
- identifying existing connections with other food systems sectors
- interviewing stakeholders to assess completeness, accuracy and to identify additional groups, organizations, reports, programs, initiatives, events, legislation, opportunities being created, etc.
- identifying groups and individuals who recognize themselves or are recognized as being leaders in this sector
- identifying groups and individuals who recognize themselves or are recognized as being connected to and/or interested in being engaged in broad food systems work
- identifying social media (who to follow)

³³ Ancient proverb. Origin unknown.

11.0 Education and Research

Ensuring education and research opportunities related to agricultural production, agricultural innovation, health, agri-tourism and food system planning (to name a few) will be vital in maintaining a productive and thriving agricultural sector in Niagara, growing its potential and ensuring Niagara remains globally competitive and economically strong.

Appendix J details the environmental scan completed for education and research. It includes groups and organizations; and projects and initiatives related to education and research at elementary, secondary and post-secondary levels. Programs related to food systems are identified. This scan is limited, not well-researched and requires additional investigation. In terms of the local food value chain, education and research encompasses all steps from food production through to food waste.

Gaps exist in the completeness of the education and research environmental scan. Pending the development and direction of a food systems data collection strategy, these gaps could be filled. This includes:

- identifying key players and projects at the Vineland Research and Innovation Centre
- identifying academic contacts, programs and research in Niagara in the areas of food systems, food security, agri-tourism, land use planning, agriculture, agri-business, agri-innovation and health promotion
- expanding on the academic contacts, programs and research at Niagara College in the areas of culinary management; wine and viticulture; and hospitality and tourism
- expanding on the academic contacts, programs and research at Brock University in the areas of hospitality and tourism; health promotion; and other relevant programs and faculties
- filling in data gaps (e.g. contact information, descriptions, social media links)
- identifying connections with other food system sectors
- identifying and interviewing stakeholders to assess completeness, accuracy and to identify additional groups, organizations, reports,
- identifying groups and individuals who recognize themselves or are recognized as being leaders in this sector
- identifying groups and individuals who recognize themselves or are recognized as being connected to and/or interested in being engaged in broad food systems work
- identifying social media (who to follow)

12.0 Gardening and Food Skills

Backyard gardens and community gardens provide fresh produce and a connection to the earth and the environment. Those who grow their own food may also be more apt to buy “local” and support local farmers. Community gardens also build community, build skills, often contribute to neighbourhood improvement and are linked to several prosperity initiatives. Community gardens often assist with providing seasonal food to those in need, and also provide skills that will help individuals and families become connected and ultimately more food secure. Supporting home gardeners, urban agriculture and expanding community gardens all contribute to sustainable local food systems and community and individual food security.

Food skills relate to the knowledge, skills and behaviour around how food is accessed and how food choices are made. It includes the selection, storage, preparation, and even growing of food. It also considers how people collectively interact around food and how people learn about food, both formally and informally. Building food skills is linked with health but the acquisition of food skills and gardening skills can also contribute to the development of employment skills.

The existence and accessibility of information on community gardens in Niagara (e.g. Community Garden Network) suggests that this is an area that may be considered well-researched, well-documented and well-connected. Leadership in this sector appears to be well-established.

Appendix K details the environmental scan completed for gardening and food skills. It includes groups and organizations; projects and initiatives; reports and relevant documentation; as well as events related to community gardens, home gardens (e.g. seed exchanges and gardening workshops), greening our spaces, community kitchens, and programs teaching cooking, preserving and other food skills.

Gaps exist in the completeness of the gardening and food skills environmental scan. Pending the development and direction of a food systems data collection strategy, these gaps could be filled. This includes:

- assess completeness of community gardens included in the scan with the inventory completed by Greening Niagara
- identify whether there are any school gardens in Niagara
- identify whether there are any community kitchens in Niagara
- identify whether community gardens and greening are included in regional and municipal plans
- identify other initiatives available that support the backyard gardener to grow, preserve and share their harvest
- filling in data gaps (e.g. contact information, descriptions, social media links)
- identifying connections with other food system sectors
- interviewing stakeholders to assess completeness, accuracy and to identify additional groups, organizations, reports, programs, initiatives, events, legislation, opportunities being created, etc.
- identifying groups and individuals who recognize themselves or are recognized as being leaders in this sector
- identifying groups and individuals who recognize themselves or are recognized as being connected to and/or interested in being engaged in broad food systems work
- identifying who to follow on social media

13.0 Niagara-Wide

Appendix L details groups and organizations; projects and initiatives; reports and relevant documentation; as well as events that are Niagara-wide and not specific to a particular sector.

An example of this includes the Living in Niagara 2011 Report,³⁴ a status report of Niagara describing twelve sectors that are critical to quality of life in Niagara now and for the future with a purpose of leading better-informed decision-making for a stronger Niagara. These sectors include Arts, Culture and Heritage;

³⁴ Niagara Connects. (2011). Living in Niagara 2011. <http://www.livinginniagarareport.com/>

Transportation and Mobility; the Environment; Learning and Education; Housing and Shelter; Crime, Safety and Security; Health and Wellness; Work and Employment; Economic Development, Poverty and Prosperity; Belonging, Volunteering, Giving and Leadership; Getting Started in Niagara; and Recreation and Sports.

Pending the development and direction of a food systems data collection strategy, filling in data gaps (e.g. contact information, descriptions, social media links) and interviewing stakeholders to assess completeness and to identify additional groups, organizations, reports, programs, initiatives, events, legislation, opportunities being created, etc. may be beneficial.

14.0 Community Food Assessments

Proceeding with a comprehensive data collection strategy that includes a community food assessment is recommended.

“Experience in British Columbia and in other jurisdictions has shown that conducting community food assessments result in many positive changes in the food security system.”³⁵

A community food assessment is a participatory and collaborative process that examines a broad range of food-related issues and resources in order to inform decision-making and actions to improve a community's food system. It is a process that involves a critical analysis of information for the purpose of guiding decisions on complex, public issues. The community food assessment should involve a broad diversity of stakeholders, build capacity, focus on strengths as well as gaps and issues, and use a variety of methods to collect information.³⁶

As outlined in the British Columbia Provincial Health Services Authority's Community Food Assessment Guide, there are several different strategies incorporated into a community food assessment.

- Discover – identify the community's current resources and assets
- Dream – envision the desired future
- Design – identify priorities and develop strategies to achieve the vision
- Deliver – implement approved action plans, monitor and celebrate successes

Key processes in a community food assessment include an environmental scan; assets and gap analysis; community priority setting; recommendations for proposed action; plan of action including agreed-to outcome measures; and implementation.

An environmental scan involves identifying how the context (e.g. economic, demographic, food policies, community food production, food access and distribution networks, health, social and cultural factors) contributes to the food system. More specifically this includes collecting data related to the age profile of the region, percentage of income spent on food, unemployment rates, number of farms, regulations governing food production, community food programs, rates of obesity/overweight, accessibility of transportation, etc. using

³⁵ BC Provincial Health Services Authority. (2008). Community Food Assessment Guide. [http://www.healbc.ca/files/Community_food_assessment_guide_final_\(2\).pdf](http://www.healbc.ca/files/Community_food_assessment_guide_final_(2).pdf)

³⁶ *ibid*

multiple methodologies. An environmental scan also involves creating an inventory of existing services and resources related to the food system or a particular sector.

Based on the environmental scan completed within the scope of this project, portions of a community food assessment for some of the sectors or interest areas may be complete or at least, well-informed. Much of the environmental scan information is available but not yet pulled together in an organized manner for the purpose of broad food systems work. One could also suggest that priorities and recommendations for proposed action have already emerged from the various visioning and priority setting that has happened in Niagara and at a provincial level (e.g. the strategies within *Food and Farming 2021*) or will emerge from planned actions (e.g. the revitalization of the *Local Food Action Plan*). However, the environmental scan is not comprehensive or inclusive of all relevant variables that will offer background or opportunities to inform a community food assessment and food systems work.

Identifying a lead, key partners and a reference/advisory group for identifying the process, defining the purpose and scope, determining budget and establishing a strategy for its completion within a reasonable timeframe will be necessary. *British Columbia Provincial Health Services Authority's Community Food Assessment Guide* along with its Companion Tool (providing a listing of potential indicators and links to existing data sources and tools and methods for collecting data) should be consulted as a key resource as well as connection with other jurisdictions in Ontario who have successfully implemented a community food assessment process.

15.0 Relationship Network Mapping

Creating a relationship network map to help visualize the connections that exist within and between the various sectors of Niagara's food system presents an interesting opportunity to help not only understand Niagara's food system better but also help advance broad food systems work and strategies. It is an opportunity to take what is known about who is doing what in Niagara and make it meaningful.³⁷

Connections, strengths, gaps and opportunities can be made visible through a relationship network map. Relationship network mapping helps groups look at how they are working together and the analysis of the map helps identify how they might work together more effectively in accomplishing their goals. A network map can help answer questions such as: are the right connections in place, are there connections missing, where is leadership coming from, or is the group as inclusive as it could be?

"Network mapping and analysis is a process for visualizing and interpreting connections within a group so that the group itself, and therefore its work and effectiveness, may be strengthened."³⁸

It is important to note that a relationship network map is not an appropriate way to create an inventory of community assets. Other tools such as community mapping, asset mapping, and stakeholder analyses are effective tools to accomplish that type of work.

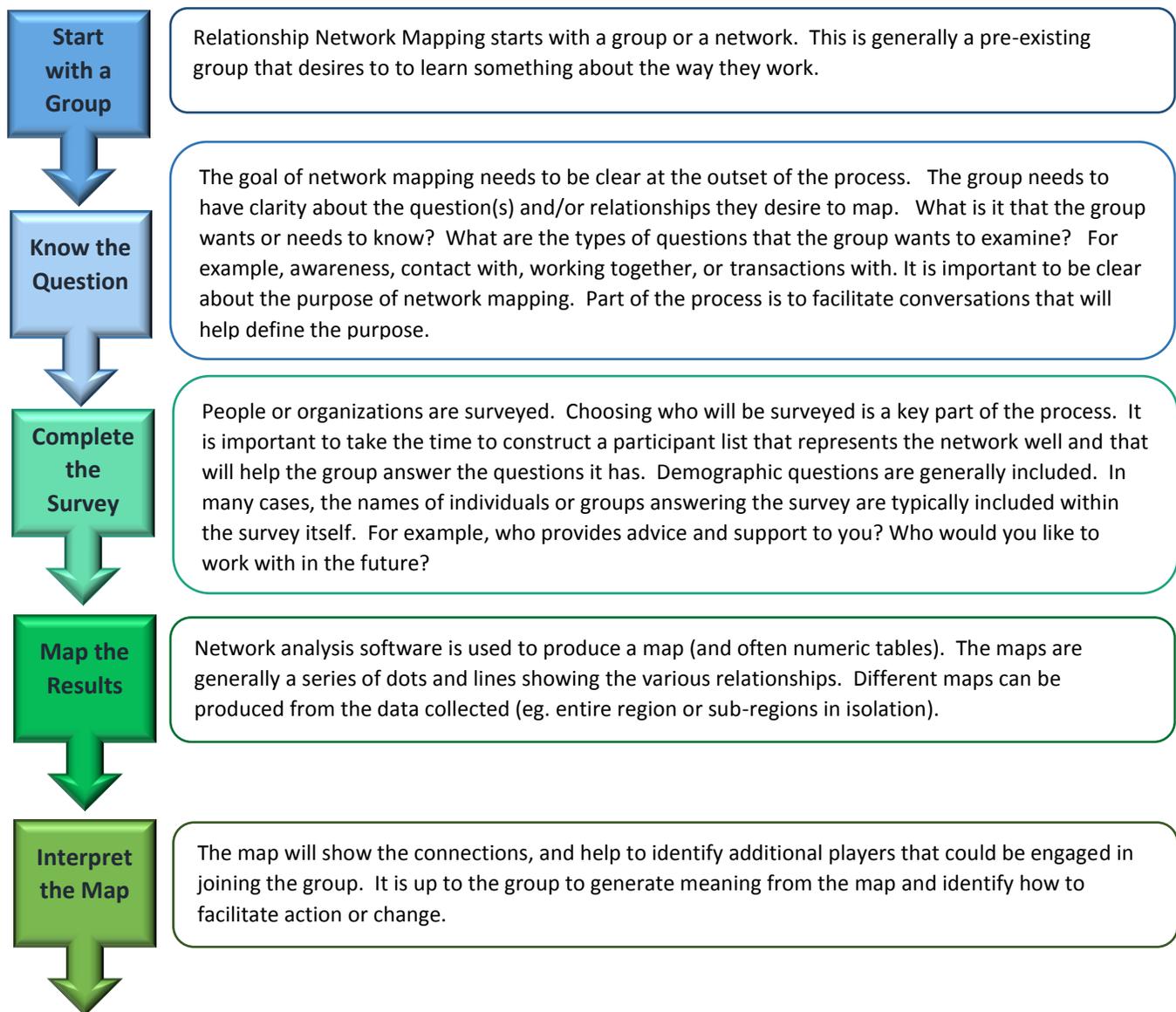
Figure 2.0 outlines the process for completing a relationship network map.

Starting with a group or network is a key first step in network mapping. It is important to identify who the group is and who should be in the group (what interests, sectors, and what steps in the local food value chain). It is also important to decide on the parameters of the network map and whether it should be comprehensive and inclusive of all sectors. What is the purpose of the group – is it primarily network mapping or are they being brought together for other purposes? Finally, it is important to identify who is going to facilitate the group.

Relationship network maps can be completed on several different occasions to demonstrate growth, development or future needs. For example, are organizations more "connected" after the implementation of a strategy? This highlights an opportunity in food systems work to do an initial map on the connections between the various sectors. The map could be repeated after a food systems strategy has been implemented to assess whether connections have changed and what is the changing nature of those connections.

³⁷ Information gathered from: Health Nexus <http://en.healthnexus.ca/topics-tools/community-engagement/network-mapping-network-development> ; communication with Health Nexus consultants Peggy Shultz and Robyn Kalda; and Niagara Connects event on Network Mapping: Visualizing and Leveraging Connectivity (November 28, 2014)

³⁸ Health Nexus. <http://en.healthnexus.ca/topics-tools/community-engagement/network-mapping-network-development>

Figure 2.0 The Process of Building a Relationship Network Map³⁹

Analysis and Recommendations

Although relationship network mapping presents some opportunities for food systems work, it is important to assess its overall applicability and feasibility given the current stage of food systems work and the complexity of its relationships.

Network mapping starts with a group and a goal. A group is required to form the purpose but also to generate meaning from the maps that are created. Neither a group nor a goal have been established for broad food systems work or for network mapping activities related to any aspect of the food system. Network mapping is

³⁹ Information gathered from: Health Nexus <http://en.healthnexus.ca/topics-tools/community-engagement/network-mapping-network-development>; communication with Health Nexus consultants Peggy Shultz and Robyn Kalda; and Niagara Connects event on Network Mapping: Visualizing and Leveraging Connectivity (November 28, 2014)

time intensive and should be initiated only with an adequate dedication of time, skill and resources. Network mapping is not an isolated activity, its feasibility and implementation should be considered as part of a larger food systems strategy. As previously noted, food systems spans numerous sectors and interests with complex interactions and boundaries difficult to define. It is likely premature to consider network mapping activities without first establishing a group or having clarity about what we want to know. More groundwork in developing a food systems strategy or plan for Niagara is needed.

If network mapping is included as part of the food systems strategy for Niagara, an option to complete a small pilot map with a small sample to help refine questions, survey design and boundaries should first be explored. An alternative option would be to embark on a network map for an existing group or network related to a specific sector or aspect of food systems (e.g. community gardens, food security, municipal planners)

16.0 Summary of Recommendations

It is recommended that a comprehensive data collection strategy be developed as part of a food systems strategy for Niagara. Significant data has already been collected specific to broad food systems work but there is need to identify and understand:

- What has already been done and what we already know
- What we NEED to know and what we WANT to know
- HOW the data should be collected and WHEN it makes sense to do it
- What do we want to do with the data
- What parameters and boundaries need to be set

A data collection strategy guided by an overall vision for food systems work would provide the framework to pull the data together and make sense of it. It is recommended that a community food assessment framework, examples from other communities and community engagement be used to help guide this strategy.

There is a need to understand what has already been done and how it fits into an approach looking at the broad food system. Approaching data collection from this perspective will ensure that it does not replace, negate, or duplicate the work that had already been done. Rather, it will help complement it, align with it, build upon it and help identify and address the gaps in the data available.

The Value is in the Process – The process by which the data collection strategy is implemented will be one key to its success. This includes HOW people are engaged, WHO is engaged, and WHEN they are engaged. People need to be able to identify with the work that is happening and it needs to be meaningful to them. The process needs to be inclusive of all interests and sectors (as defined by the parameters determined in a visioning strategy). Time, resources and consideration need to be directed towards the processes involved in the strategy. The process needs to respect the uniqueness of Niagara – its communities, its geography, its people, its strengths, and be right for Niagara.

Stakeholder interviews completed as part of *Getting Curious about Niagara's Food System: A Preliminary Exploration of Potential Opportunities, Next Steps and Future Directions*⁴⁰ revealed several important findings. The process or approach should consider and incorporate the findings from that report, as well as consider and incorporate what is learned and gathered in continued data collection efforts. This will ensure the buy-in needed to engage stakeholders and keep them engaged.

The value will be in:

- ⇒ A process that engages stakeholders in a community-driven, collaborative and meaningful manner.
- ⇒ A process with established leadership and skilled facilitation.
- ⇒ A process with committed resources.
- ⇒ A process that has acquired or working towards 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.

Forming a Reference Group – it is recommended that a reference or advisory group be formed to lead and inform the strategy and the processes. This group should be representative of all key interests and be comprised of individuals that are respected and have rapport and influence with their respected sectors or areas of interest.

Knowledge Exchange - knowledge exchange activities can be a valuable part of the strategy providing opportunities to share what is happening and to celebrate successes. It provides an opportunity to keep people engaged and excited. Potential ideas include utilizing the Niagara Knowledge Exchange, and working with Niagara Connects Knowledge Brokers to host learning webinars.

⁴⁰ Healthy Living Niagara. (2013). *Getting Curious about Niagara's Food System: A Preliminary Exploration of Potential Opportunities, Next Steps and Future Directions*. www.healthylivingniagara.com/files/folders/875/download.aspx

It is recommended that a purpose for data collection be completed prior to addressing the gaps identified in this environmental scan. It is important to first identify how the information is going to be used. Pending the development and direction of a food systems data collection strategy, these gaps may best be filled by engaging individuals through key informant interviews. In addition to sector-specific gaps identified, those identified as being common to all sectors included:

- filling in data gaps (e.g. contact information, descriptions, social media links)
- identifying connections with other food system sectors
- interviewing stakeholders to assess completeness, accuracy and to identify additional groups, organizations, reports, programs, initiatives, events, legislation, opportunities being created, etc.
- identifying groups and individuals who recognize themselves or are recognized as being leaders in this sector
- identifying groups and individuals who recognize themselves or are recognized as being connected to and/or interested in being engaged in broad food systems work
- identifying who to follow on social media

Additional gaps are likely to emerge as a data collection strategy is developed and implemented. The process should assess identifying data that is wanted, needed and that is meaningful and of value to stakeholders and the process. Strategies on how best to collect this data should also be considered.

Other important discussions and tasks would include identifying the most appropriate and meaningful categorization of data and defining what those categories mean to the key players within that sector. How do they see the sector as being defined and how do they describe the connection to food systems work?

Although interesting opportunities exist for the use of network mapping in food systems, it is likely premature to consider network mapping activities without first establishing a group or having clarity about what we want to know. More groundwork in developing a food systems strategy or plan for Niagara is needed.

17.0 Conclusion

This report reviews findings of a detailed and in-depth environmental scan of groups, organizations, projects, programs, initiatives, reports, legislation and events for eleven sectors or areas of interest in food systems. Despite limitations and gaps in information, it provides an important starting point to inform further discussion and possible action related to a data collection strategy for food systems work in Niagara.

Identifying pieces of the food system puzzle is a crucial step in exploring future direction and approaches for addressing food system work in Niagara. The pieces of the puzzle are numerous and involve many different layers and types of information. It includes and involves multiple organization levels – household, neighbourhoods, municipal, regional, provincial, national and sometimes international.

These pieces include things like:

- mandates, government structure, other existing structures, and legislation;
- existing work identifying a vision or priorities for Niagara, Ontario or Canada;
- municipal, regional, or provincial policies;
- key players, food system champions, and expert opinion leaders;

- programs and initiatives;
- organizations and groups;
- identified needs and priorities; and
- the context.

Identifying the pieces and formulating an approach to start putting the pieces together will help to start to complete the puzzle of the Niagara food system and inform directions and strategies.

The opportunity lies in finding the leadership and implementing a meaningful approach that engages all the different players in the food system to take all the pieces and put them together to form a comprehensive food system strategy and a vision that addresses the priorities and needs of Niagara as identified by what is already known and what emerges from the process.

18.0 Listing of Appendices A to L:

Following is a list of Appendices that support this document. These spreadsheets are working documents that can inform next steps to engage Niagara-wide partners in describing building blocks to build a Food Systems Framework for Niagara.

Appendix A: Food Security and Poverty Reduction

Appendix B: Agriculture

Appendix C: Land Use Planning

Appendix D: Local Food

Appendix E: Economic Development

Appendix F: Food Distribution

Appendix G: Retail and Food Outlets/

Appendix H: Health

Appendix I: Child and School

Appendix J: Education and Research

Appendix K: Gardening and Food Skills

Appendix L: Niagara-wide