

Chapter 1: Northern Ontario

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Summary

- Northern Ontario constitutes about 87% of the landmass of Ontario and contains pockets of rich glacial soils that jut like fingers throughout the boreal Precambrian shield.
- Within this context 26 food hubs that are community-based catalysts for addressing local food systems have emerged.
- These local food systems incorporate the promotion of access and availability of healthy local foods through initiatives that promote increased local production and distribution.
- Food was described as a vehicle for empowerment and social justice, as an opportunity to create community spaces for relationships to develop, as an essential determinant of health and dignity, as a way of strengthening the local economy, and as a way of offering healing and support to those in need. Food hubs are thus seen to be much more profound than the mere provision of food.
- These food hubs have emerged as a result of connectivity that has self-organized in diverse ways within the communities. This diversity and connectivity uniquely blends local resources to encourage vibrant community-based food systems, and thus appears to provide a resilient shadow system to the mainstream commodity-based food system. The mainstream and shadow food systems are co-evolving, each influencing the other, and each exhibiting adaptive patterns in an environment that is demanding access to more local healthy food.
- To date all of the existing northern food systems are supported by short-term funding and huge amounts of volunteer time. Whether the current local food hubs can transform and scale up to become a dominant food system that integrates access to healthy nutritious food with production and distribution infrastructure that is social justice and equity based remains an open question.
- Our research shows that current policies and regulations add to the resilience of the mainstream commodity based food system and create barriers to the emergence of the alternative food hubs.
- Pivotal to the transformation of food hubs are support systems that encourage local processing and storage, regionally-based distribution systems and policies and regulations that support a place-based food system.

Background

Northern Ontario is comprised of 11 districts in total and has a land area of 802,000 square kilometres, which constitutes about 87% of the land area of Ontario (See Figure 1.1). Thus, Northern Ontario is a significant component of the geospatial area of Ontario

with potential for both cultivated and boreal food sources including fish, blueberries and mushrooms. Two-thirds of this landmass is traditional territory of First Nation peoples through Treaties 3, 5, 9 and Robinson-Superior Treaty. Aboriginal peoples comprise approximately 2% of the Ontario population and approximately 20% of Northern Ontario.



Figure 1.1: Districts of Northern Ontario

Source: http://www.mndmf.gov.on.ca/nohfc/northern_ontario_districts_e.asp

For the purposes of this study, Northern Ontario included all the districts in Northwestern Ontario (Kenora, Rainy River and Thunder Bay) and the districts of Cochrane and Algoma-Manitoulin in Northeastern Ontario. Table 1 provides an overall comparative look at the relative position of Northern Ontario (Northeastern and Northwestern areas) with regard to farmland.

Climate change is expected to have major implications for the length of the growing season, the variety of crops grown and grain yields in northern Ontario. In examining climate change scenarios for Canada, Qian et al. (2005) predict that the number of frost-free days is expected to increase by 30-45 days in northern Ontario by the middle of the century. The predicted changes for the frost dates indicate an earlier ending of frosts in spring and a later starting of frosts and killing frosts in the fall (Cummings, et al., 2009a-g).

Table 1.1: Total Land Area, Workable and Non-workable, Reported by Farms in the Study Area, Northern Ontario, and Ontario, 1996-2006 (acres) (Modified from Table 5.2 <http://www.nodn.com/upload/documents/thunder-bay-district-agri-impact-report-final-oct.-26-2009.pdf>)

	1996			2001			2006		
	Total farms	Total acres	Average farm	Total farms	Total acres	Average farm size	Total farm	Total acres	Average farm size
Ontario	67520	13879565	206	59728	13507357	226	57211	13310216	233
Northern Ontario	2915	1025190	352	2635	1012026	384	2479	1022060	412

The stability over time of agricultural activity in northern Ontario is seen as a moderating effect on the boom and bust cycles of the forestry and mining sectors, the predominant income sources. Since 2006, the forest product sector has experienced both contraction and closure of large-scale sawmill operations and forest processing mills. This decline is associated with a decreasing demand for newsprint and the downturn in the U.S. housing market. In contrast, mining potential has been rapidly expanding with notable developments like the chromium Ring of Fire in the western Hudson Bay lowland areas. Both the mining and forestry management practices and northern policies have placed tensions between increasing local food sources and these extraction resource industries that are accompanied with potential for long term soil, water and air toxic contamination. Several of the local food hubs studied in this report have focused on local food sources that include both cultivated and forest food sources. Contamination from flooding of land associated with hydroelectric energy projects, leakage of toxic substances from improper mine closures and limitations in environmental safety of current mining processes and forest management practices such as herbicidal spraying have added challenges to the revitalization of the mixed economy cultivated and traditional food acquisition practices of Northern Ontario’s aboriginal peoples (Stroink & Nelson, 2009).

Forest food sources are key to flourishing local food systems in the region. However, there is a complexity of interwoven factors that have kept forest food sources from becoming an intimate part of the local food system. First, fish and forest food do not factor into the definition of food and thus are denied eligibility for support from funding sources focused on developing local food sources. Second, the regulatory system assumes a homogenous, agriculturally-focused food system across the province. Third, food gathered from the informal economy of an individual’s fishing or securing moose, grouse or caribou cannot be ‘sold at the gate’, for there is no regulatory gate as on farms for selling of these local food products. This is of special concern to urban aboriginal organizations that wish to serve traditional foods to their client base. Fourth, those who obtain a hunting tag for moose or those living on First Nations find that fuel costs are making hunting prohibitive. Moreover, fire suppression policy has added to distancing of food sources and thus the cost of forest food sources, as fire is needed for moose and deer browse. Fifth, policies that appear geared to protect against overfishing by tourists may compromise food security as an abundant food system source is limited by quotas,

including the number of fish that one can keep in home freezers. In addition, in Northern Ontario, Species at Risk listing of sturgeon and caribou may impact on availability of local food sources.

The physical infrastructure is diverse, but not developed in a way that facilitates regional local food system marketing. Both the Canadian National and Canadian Pacific Railways create a national transportation system across the country but two of the secondary rail lines that facilitated transportation within Northern Ontario (Sioux Lookout line and one from Longlac to Thunder Bay) have been totally dismantled. Hence, the total potential of rail to facilitate regional local food movement has been compromised and diminished.

Similarly, the largest outbound port on the St. Lawrence Seaway system is located in the City of Thunder Bay, but provides no infrastructure for moving goods within Northern Ontario. Infrastructure has been developed for an export market rather than a regional market. Northern Ontario is served by two major highways, Highway 11 and 17, that are both part of the TransCanada Highway and provide an east-west distribution channel but only as a ribbon located between 2 - 300 km north of the U.S. border. Other road transportation is more seasonal including the use of logging roads (which are often closed by forest companies) to access forest food sources such as blueberries, fish and mushrooms and the 3000 km of ice roads that weave through the north for 2-3 months each year. It should be noted that, perhaps due to climate change, the capability to use ice roads for transportation of heavy food goods to northern communities has been severely compromised by insufficient cold weather to develop the ice needed to support these large northern transport crawlers.

There is substantial air service throughout the region with the City of Thunder Bay and Sioux Lookout being two of the busiest airports in Ontario. However, air cargo is expensive for shipping local food. Currently, a small percentage of food that is flown to the Northern Stores does begin the trip north from Northern Ontario communities including Thunder Bay, Timmins and Sudbury. However, the historic food distribution pattern to northern First Nation communities is Minneapolis to Winnipeg and then north.

Development of the regional food system in a way that emerges organically from the unique human and ecological setting will strengthen the autonomy and economic vitality of all Northern Ontario communities. In terms of local food hubs reaching the northern communities, there is scant infrastructure that connects to the emergence of the local food system as described in this chapter. Northern Ontario embraces a complexity of food systems (traditional, forest, agricultural, mainstream imported) across huge scales. There is currently a lack of bridging among these different food systems reinforced by the physical infrastructure but discouraged from emergence by food histories and a policy framework that only speaks to one food system (Food Secure Canada, 2011).

Northern Ontario has proven itself to be a source of agri-food innovation. Since the Premier's Award for Agri-Food Innovation Excellence was established in 2006, sixteen food hub producers have been recognized for their innovation and contribution to the community and economy.

There is also growing involvement in value-added farm activities in northern Ontario. In some cases farmers are working independently on their value-added activities while in other cases producer cooperatives have been established. Producer cooperatives are viewed as an effective way to facilitate value-added product development and the establishment of support infrastructure including processing, marketing and distribution systems. Agri-sector stakeholders acknowledge the need for greater networking between producers and community organizations. Moreover there is a high demand by local food producers for additional access to processing and storage facilities viewed as critical to the expansion of value-added local food products that can extend the season for availability of local food. Of particular interest in Northern Ontario is the establishment of additional local poultry abattoirs. Currently there is only one for this vast area. This is a particular challenge in that poultry must be processed near to where they are raised. The current situation of one abattoir for 87% of Ontario's land mass is thwarting local food hub development. Last year in the City of Thunder Bay, \$13 million was spent on importing chicken as a food source.

A regional analysis of agri-related business activity in the combined areas of Thunder Bay District, Kenora District, Rainy River District and Cochrane District reveals that agriculture is making a significant contribution to the wider economy beyond the farm gate. Collectively, the 840 farms and the 270 agri-related businesses in this northern Ontario study area generate approximately \$140 million in agri-related sales consisting of \$62.1 million in direct sales (farm receipts) and \$77.9 million in indirect sales (agri-related business sales). The associated sales expenditure multiplier indicates that for every dollar of farm income there is an additional \$1.30 in business sales activity in the wider economy (Cummings, 2009 d-g).

Additionally, the agriculture sector in this study area supports between 2,520 and 3,465 jobs consisting of 1,120 direct jobs (on farm jobs), 455 indirect jobs (agri-related business jobs) and between 945 and 1,890 induced jobs (jobs in government sectors). The associated employment multiplier indicates that for every job in the agriculture sector an additional 1.3 to 2.1 jobs are supported in the wider economy. The high range job multiplier is more closely linked to the Thunder Bay region given the concentration of dairy and other agriculture sectors in the region and the larger agri-related business.

There are numerous agricultural resources in Northern Ontario, most of which have provincial ties but promote agriculture in place-based ways that ensure the viability of food production in the North. These resources include Federations of Agriculture, research stations, Soils and Crop Improvement Associations, Cattlemen's Associations, Dairy Associations, farmers markets, Christian Farmers Association, agriculture societies with provincial charters, Slow Food, and Health Units that monitor food safety and promote local food. The agriculture research stations are catalysts for providing localized field trial information about the suitability of crop varieties and crop choices for northern climates. The Thunder Bay Agriculture Research Station is operated by a nonprofit Board of Directors and the New Liskeard Agriculture Research Station (NLARS) also operates the Verner Test Site in Nipissing District and the Emo Agricultural Research Station in Rainy River District. NLARS is managed by the University of Guelph Kemptville

Campus. In addition, the National Farmer's Union has a presence in Northern Ontario as well as the federal Kapuskasing Experimental Farm. All of these resources provide a diversity of approaches to adapting agricultural practices to northern conditions. They frequently partner with the academic institutions in the north to introduce new topics such as viability of organic certification in the north, blueberries as a farm crop, chick peas and crop planning for vegetable production.

With continued financial growth shown in the historical data and with great potential for expansion of agriculture in the future, farming in Thunder Bay District is a "spot of sunshine" in the economy of Northwestern Ontario. With over \$32.3 million in gross farm receipts and 605 on-farm jobs, just the direct-farm impact is significant. With indirect and induced jobs, total jobs as a result of agriculture are between 1400 and 1850 (Cummings, 2009g). "This report indicates that farming is on the rise in the area," stated Peggy Brekveld, president of the Thunder Bay Federation of Agriculture (TBFA). "By continuing to support our research facilities and developing more added value opportunities, agriculture will continue to be a driving force in our local economy." Area gross farm receipts are the highest for Northern Ontario at \$30,600/farm, and well above the provincial average of \$26,200. As well, the number of farms in the Thunder Bay district grew between the last two census reports to 252, up from 238. [<http://www.tbfarminfo.org/facts.shtml>.]

Agriculture in Kenora District continues to have competitive advantages and economic opportunities including a substantial farmland base that supports the growth of a variety of crops, lower land prices relative to land prices in Southern Ontario, and access to a large regional market (Northwestern Ontario). There are opportunities for further expansion of crop production in the District. Based on projections from climate change models, the growing season in the southern portion of Kenora District is expected to gradually increase over the next 100 years, which will result in further crop production opportunities for the region (Cummings, 2009 e).

Rainy River District reported over 211,000 acres of farmland from 312 farms in 2006. This represents the largest area of farmland of any District in Northern Ontario and is more than double the farmland area reported by most other Districts. The average farm size in Rainy River District is 678 acres, which is substantially larger than the average for northern Ontario (412 acres) and the provincial average (233 acres). Agricultural soils in Rainy River District are fair to moderately high in productivity and can support a range of crops with good crop and soil management practices. The soil and climate conditions in the region allow for the production of a variety of field crops including barley, wheat, oats, corn, alfalfa, and other hay crops. In 2006, almost 60,000 acres or 28% of the total farmland base in Rainy River District was reported in crop production. Rainy River District farms are also involved in variety of livestock production including beef, dairy, sheep, goats, and pigs as well as farm raised bison, deer/elk and llama/alpaca (Cummings, 2009 f).



Agriculture in the Algoma - Manitoulin region continues to have competitive advantages and economic opportunities including a substantial farmland base that supports the growth of a variety of crops; lower land prices relative to land prices in Southern Ontario, its isolation from the threat of contaminants from industrial farms; and its access to a regional market (Northeastern Ontario) (Cummings, 2009 a).

Participants

Over forty initial contacts were made resulting in studying a total of 40 food hubs in the North. Of these 40 initial contacts, 26 were contacted for interviews. Interview participants represented a diversity of food hub activities in 15 different communities throughout the region. This exercise presented a significant opportunity to identify, explore and connect with these initiatives, and has illuminated a very vibrant, innovative, progressive and widespread local food movement in Northern Ontario. There were two co-operative ventures, two for-profit producers, two OMAFRA representatives, three farmers' markets, four economic development committees, five emergency food and social advocacy organizations, two academic networks, five community health unit representatives, and four community development initiatives.

Table 1.2: Interviewed initiatives by typology

Due to the diverse nature both within and among the 26 food hubs represented in this study, we have opted to identify the typologies with which each initiative identifies. There is much overlap, and several initiatives fall under multiple typologies, as shown in Table 2. This illustrates how numerous northern food initiatives are multi-faceted.

Initiative		Typology							
		Urban	Rural	Small-scale	Large-scale	Producer/Farmer	Social/Community work	Academic	Gov't.
1	True North Community Cooperative-Thunder Bay	x	x	x			x		
2	Moosonee Native Friendship Centre-Moosonee		x				x		
3	Algoma Food Network/NORDIK Institute, Algoma University-Sault Ste. Marie	x	x				x	x	
4	Thunder Bay Country Market-Thunder Bay	x	x	x			x		
5	Willow Springs Creative Centre-Lappe		x	x		x	x		
6	Northwest Ontario Women's Centre-Thunder Bay	x	x				x		
7	Food Action Network-Thunder Bay District Health Unit						x		
8	AGRIVA-Hearst	x	x	x			x		
9	Food Security Research Network-Thunder Bay	x	x				x	x	
10	Taste of Timmins, Naturally Pure Farms, Urban Park Market-Timmins		x	x		x			
11	OMAFRA-Thunder Bay		x						x
12	Northwestern Health Unit-Dryden		x				x		x
13	Rainy River District Abattoir-Rainy River		x	x					
14	Northwestern Health Unit-Fort Francis		x				x		x
15	Cloverbelt Country Farmers' Market-Dryden		x	x			x		
16	Regional Food Distribution Association-Thunder Bay	x	x				x		
17	Local Food Box-Rainy River		x	x		x			
18	Ogden Simpson and East-End Veggie Garden Project-Thunder Bay	x				x	x		
19	La Maison Verte-Hearst		x	x	x	x			
20	Economic Development Corporation-Wawa (Wawa Farmer's Market)						x		x
21	OMAFRA-Verner		x						x
22	Kitchenuhmaykoosib Inninuwug		x				x		
23	Northwestern Health Unit-Kenora		x				x		x
24	Northeast Superior Community Forest-Chapleau		x				x		
25	Northwestern Health Unit--Sioux Lookout		x				x		x
26	Ignace Blueberry Initiative-Ignace/Thunder Bay		x	x			x		

Analysis of Interview Data

Operational Details of Reported Local Food Hubs

All but three respondents discussed the operations of the project or hub in which they were involved. One Public Health Dietician and two OMAFRA representatives spoke generally about the diversity of operations and organizational structures that exist, depending on the particular hub. Six food hubs operate as non-profit organizations with a Board of Directors. Two respondents represented or discussed for-profit food hub models, and two represented blended for- and not-for profit social enterprise

organizations. Six informal organizations or networks were discussed that included four multi-organization partnership projects. Two non-profit co-operatives were discussed, as were two university-based food hubs. Five District Health Unit municipal offices were discussed, as were two food hubs operating as municipal committees.

Table 1.3: Categorization of northern food hubs by type of organization

Type	Examples named	Specific comments
Non-profit with board	Moosonee Native Friendship Centre	“Through volunteer labour, contributions of board members, partner agencies. Lots of in-kind donations as well as volunteer hours.”
	Northeast Superior Community Forest	
	Thunder Bay Country Market (Farmer’s Market)	
	NWO Women’s Centre	
	Taste of Timmins (committee of BIA)	
	Regional Food Distribution Association	
For-profit business	Clover Valley Farmer’s market	
	Cornell Farms	
Blended	La Maison Verte	“Board driven not-for-profit with a for-profit storefront.”
	Willow Springs Creative Centre	“In the process of evolving from non-profit model to social enterprise model. This blends a business model with a not-for-profit.”
Informal organization or network	Apple Core Atikokan (Northwestern Health Unit interview)	“Both are grassroots groups. They have terms of reference. No funding. They have a chair and co-chair. There are 5 to 6 different organizations involved in both groups.”
	Rainy River Valley Food For All	“Not a lot of organizational structure. Currently there are two farmers who are president and secretary. They keep the books and call the meetings; it is very informal.”
	Cloverbelt Farmers Market (Dryden)	
	Ogden Simpson Veggie Garden Project	
	Kitchenuhmaykoosib Inninuwig Garden Initiative	
Ignace Community Blueberry Initiative		
Non-profit co-op	True North Community Co-op	“A non-profit cooperative, the governance structure is based on democratic control and rooted in the cooperative principles, autonomy being the most important.”
	Rainy River Abattoir	

Academic	Food Security Research Network (Lakehead University, Thunder Bay)	“We are a network that is based on complexity theory. We have over 160 partners, they come from agricultural groups, research stations, soils and crops, Federation of agriculture, schools, aboriginal groups, social services and health.”
	Nordik Research Institute (Algoma University, Sault Ste. Marie)	
District Health Units	Thunder Bay District Health Unit (Food Action Network)	“Health Unit has a paid employee, who is the lead on the projects administratively, and then works with different organizations and others...”
	Northwestern Health Unit – Dryden	
	Northwestern Health Unit – Sioux Lookout	
	Northwestern Health Unit – Kenora	
	Northwestern Health Unit – Fort Frances	
Municipal Government	AGRIVA (committee of Hearst EDC)	“AGRIVA is a subcommittee of the Hearst Economic Development Corporation. A very small portion of the budget comes from revenues of the market. In-kind support from the EDC.”
	EDC Wawa with municipal tourism department (Wawa Farmer’s Market)	

Size of operating budgets varied from zero to \$150,000 / year. Sources of funding included government and foundation grants, provincial funding for interns applied for annually, in-kind contributions of other entities, and fee-for-service or profit generating activities. Twelve respondents identified at least one partnership with another organization as being an important part of their operating structure.

The non-profits tend to be heavily staffed by volunteers and operations depend on volunteer contributions. The informal organizations and networks tend to be more emerging and newer than the other organizational types, and are either not yet at the point of becoming incorporated, lack the resources and time to do so, or the nature of their role in the local food movement means it is best to remain dynamic, informal, and emergent. The latter is particularly true of partnership-based projects where the work is being done by collections (sometimes ad hoc or per project) of other people and organizations pooling resources to achieve a common goal. District Health Units play an important background role in supporting and making possible the diversity of small-scale emergent community initiatives. Some Economic Development corporations, universities, and municipal offices also play this supportive or incubating role.

Reflections on Personal Involvement, Concerns, and Motives

All respondents except the two OMAFRA reps indicated that they were personally involved in local food hubs. Of the 11 respondents who indicated how long they had been involved, length of time ranged from less than 1 year to 12 years (mean = 4.8 years). One indicated having “always been a foodie.” The nature of the respondents’ involvement included being part of their job (12), being a volunteer (4), being a Board member (1), Board official (4), or founding member (2), or being a producer (2). Note that some individuals indicated being involved with their food hub in more than one capacity over time (e.g., volunteering then assuming a paid role). Many of these individuals are involved in or volunteer with multiple initiatives. All but one respondent indicated that they would like to stay involved or increase their involvement in a variety of targeted ways. One, who had been the manager of a farmers’ market for 12 years, felt it was time to start decreasing his formal involvement due to age.

Table 1.4: Motivation for involvement in local food hubs

Motivation	Number	Quotes
Social justice	8	“My understanding of how justice happens...food is a perfect vehicle for that because you can still grow your own food. That is a perfect place for empowerment, where people can garner control over their lives, and there are spinoff benefits – increased health, good for the environment, feeds back into local economy.”
Community development / social capital	7	“AGRIVA and the market have to create a space within the community where relationships can develop. Provides a community space.”
Viable local food / agriculture	6	Creating a structure that allows producers to set their own pricing – this allows for local food production that is viable and that consumers are not exploited.”
Sustainability	5	“People are very disconnected from their food supply, and think that they act independently from nature. There is a great risk in this.”
Food sovereignty, rights, empowerment	3	“Food is one of the most basic human rights, it is an essential determinant of health and human dignity.”
Economic development	3	“My interest is in economic development and I wanted to be involved in a program that brought benefits to people and the community and could act as an incubator for local business.”

Connecting people with growing food, with the land, with each other	3	“It is about getting back to the way we used to live [in this neighbourhood] – where people helped each other. This is bigger than the food for my belly, is more about the quality of life for every person who lives here.” “The most important one is reconnecting people with growing their food.”
Food security	3	“To increase food security in Dryden, to increase access to healthy food, and to increase capacity to produce.”
Part of job / gov’t priority	3	“It was part of my job at the tourism centre.”
Food crisis	2	
Health	2	“There's also that element of horticulture therapy that is good for healing, health, development.”
Profitability	2	“Main reason was diversification, so profitability.”
Learning	1	“I want the learning experience of working with producers and learning to incorporate my personal experiences, so I can become a food producer.”
Providing food	1	“The most important motivator: providing food. The community plan recognized gaps in services available to the community homeless and at-risk of homelessness population.”

Respondents indicated 14 types of guiding motivation. The most frequently listed were social justice, community development and social capital, and the need for viable local food systems, including agriculture. This diversity of guiding motivations or concerns reflects differences in starting point or perspective. Five respondents indicated that all the potential guiding motivations listed were important and emphasized the interconnections among them.

It is difficult to rank [these motivations] because they are all interconnected – part of the same thing. I don't think you can have any sustainability without justice.

Ranking: 1) developing a more sustainable food system – this sums up a lot of different issues, it covers the environment and is also an economic choice. As you retain products locally, you ensure the viability of the entire chain.

It is interesting to note the foundational role of food in the life of living systems such as human health, community, and culture. In response to these questions, food was

described as a vehicle for empowerment and social justice, as an opportunity to create community spaces for relationships to develop, as an essential determinant of health and dignity, as a way of strengthening the local economy, and as a way of offering healing and support to those in need. Food hubs are thus seen to be much more profound than the mere provision of food.

Factors Determining the Effectiveness of Food Hubs

Respondents identified many factors that are an impact on the effectiveness of a food hub, or things that a food hub needs to do in order to be effective. Of the 22 statements offered, the identified factors fell into two broad types: (1) factors underlying the vibrancy of the hub and (2) its capacity to engage and strengthen the community.

The factors underlying food hub vibrancy included its viability and profitability, the number of producers in the area, and the hub’s capacity to add marketing strength. Clustering with other hubs and forming partnerships was seen as a way to enhance effectiveness. A coordinated regional market or network was identified as an existing need that would further enhance effectiveness.

Factors underlying the food hub’s capacity to impact the community and increase its engagement and strength included increasing individual awareness, changing people’s behaviour, getting people to recognize the responsibility that comes with certain rights, and reducing targeted needs.

Two people pointed out the unique circumstances of remote northern communities with increased cost of food and limited choices for grocers. Two people highlighted the interconnectedness among and importance of all examples offered. One indicated that it is difficult to measure these indicators of a hub’s effectiveness, so it is challenging to determine the impact of the hub.

Many of these are not very measurable (i.e. health). It is difficult to know if you're improving people's health.

Table 1.5: Factors determining effectiveness of local food hubs by theme

Theme	Number	Quotes
<i>Hub Vibrancy:</i>		
Profitability / viability	9 (3 of those viability)	“Instead of profitability for producers, we should be talking about viability. It is not about profitability, it is about viability and the pricing structure [being] set up to ensure viability of local businesses.”

Accessibility of local food	6	“Accessibility issue – Dryden is a convenience-based community.”
Marketing of local food, provision of space, premium pricing at market	2	“The most important thing is to provide a space to market their products.”
Clustering with others, regional market need; cross-supporting each other	2	“More interaction is needed across the region. The market should be developed regionally and support each other, cross promote and strengthen the food system.”
Food security (including number of producers)	2	“Food security issue: not enough producers to fill the demand.”
<i>Impact on Community:</i>		
Community building and engagement	2	“Contribution to community building and education. We try as much as possible to encourage membership, volunteerism, and community engagement.”
Meeting community needs	2	“It has to be built around and reflect the needs of the community and what they want.”
Health	2	“Health and nutrition awareness built from buying local, benefits to the local economy.”
Education and awareness, behavior change	4	“We need to develop habits around supporting local food and this means behavioural changes.”
Role of isolation / small communities; cost of food, alternative to one grocer	2	“The most important factor that determines the effectiveness of food hubs in my community is our cost of living in an isolated community.” “We only have one grocer so not a lot of local competition. This [a market] gives an alternative.”
All items listed and interconnectedness among them	2	“All factors are important, it is difficult to separate them from one another.”

Barriers Constraining Development of Local Food Hubs

Table 1.6: Barriers affecting the development of local food hubs by theme

Theme	Number	Quotes
Policies and regulations for producers, amount of paperwork, also MNR for forest food	14	<p>“Policy presents a real conundrum because it's written at 20,000 foot level and looks at the big picture; it is a one-size-fits-all. It's all generally well intended for the betterment of people but it may not be most appropriate for some local producers.”</p> <p>“Food inspection laws are way too tight. Regulators are stimulating the uninspected market because they make it too difficult. If the goal is to increase food safety, they are not doing it properly. Local producers spend too much time overcoming regulation. The average consumer has no idea how difficult it is for the local food movement to cross all these hurdles.”</p> <p>“MNR politics and [herbicidal] spraying [affects blueberry initiatives].”</p>
Education, including consumer education, food preservation and skills, beliefs about mill towns, fear of change, behavior change	12	<p>“There is a continued assumption that we need education from outsiders. We are not respecting our internal knowledge. We need to talk to our own people. Need to look at expertise of farmers and growers.”</p> <p>“Teaching people that our town can be known for something other than its mill.”</p>
Limited funding, administrative needs, consistency in staff	7	<p>“Specifically for us, it is funding. In order to have a consistent operation we need to have a staff person.”</p> <p>“Funding. There is a need to employ someone in an administrative position year-round. There is a need for continuity.”</p>
Seasonality, climate (and effects of same on market's visibility)	5	<p>“Also lack of availability, year-round, of produce. We have two large potato producers, but these don't want to sell year-round. That is the biggest barrier – people don't see it [the market] there all the time.”</p>

<p>Isolation of Northern communities (both a strength and a barrier), costs of transportation, lack of local entrepreneurs and human resources to run markets etc.</p>	<p>5</p>	<p>“Our location is both a strength and weakness. We have added costs for transportation of goods. But this distance also acts as an extra buffer which perhaps might help create stronger local markets.”</p> <p>“We are an isolated community, so there are high distribution costs and transportation costs. We need to develop better partnerships to share costs.”</p> <p>“Small population – can't sustain a large greenhouse operation. Lack of local entrepreneurs to build projects.”</p> <p>“The Sioux Lookout Market is on a weekday and you have to pay for a table so anyone who is interested in developing a product is typically working full-time and unable to attend the market.”</p>
<p>Distribution processes and costs if not in a system (e.g., Co-op)</p>	<p>4</p>	<p>“Insufficient distribution systems is a real problem in the north.”</p> <p>“Insufficient distribution possibilities is only a problem if you're not integrated into the system.”</p>
<p>Lack of supply, lack of producers, training and encouragement for farming</p>	<p>4</p>	<p>“For the most part [outside of peaks] there is barely enough supply to meet the local demand there already is at the market.”</p> <p>“We do not have a lot of local producers and so there is a lack of knowledge and skill. . . There's a problem with the education system in that farming is not promoted or supported as a career choice.”</p>
<p>Access to land, municipality for gardens and MNR for crown land</p>	<p>2</p>	<p>“We are surrounded by Crown land and it is difficult to access this land and change the zoning to agricultural.”</p>
<p>Lack of infrastructure</p>	<p>1</p>	<p>“There is insufficient infrastructure. This has been difficult for producers to have steady supply of product for the consumers.”</p>
<p>Conflict among local food organizations and definitions of local</p>	<p>1</p>	<p>“Another concern is that large scale producers are marketing their products as local when they are not. They're fooling the public and being dishonest. They have large amounts of money for their marketing strategies whereas we have smaller budgets.”</p>

All but one respondent listed several barriers to the development of local food hubs. The most frequently-cited issue was the policies and regulations facing producers and potential producers. While food safety regulations were recognized as important and generally well intentioned, the one-size-fits-all approach to these policies were seen as too cumbersome for smaller producers who cannot compete and get their products into the mainstream market. In addition to the policy and regulation barriers facing agricultural producers, two respondents also mentioned the challenges experienced by those wishing to harvest and market forest foods such as blueberries. The policies and practices of the Ministry of Natural Resources are not set up to deal with forest food and favour timber production. This hampers both access to Crown land and the safety of forest food as a result of herbicidal spraying practices.

The second most frequently-cited barrier was education, including consumer awareness and behaviour change as well as lack of support, education, and training for those potentially interested in food as a career choice. One respondent specifically highlighted the challenge of convincing community members that the town could be something other than a mill town, referring to the deeply-rooted mindset of people in long-established single-industry resource towns. Two respondents also highlighted concerns with barriers to exchanging and nurturing local, place-based, internal knowledge of food practices, as well as people's wariness of outside knowledge and the actual limitations of that knowledge.

Four respondents mentioned a lack of local producers to supply sufficient local food to meet demand. One interviewee mentioned a lack of young farmers in her community and a small, aging group of existing farmers. Note that this issue varies considerably across the region, as Thunder Bay has a growing population of young farmers while smaller communities in the region are losing their farming base.

The small, isolated populations of northern communities was mentioned and described as both a challenge and an advantage by five respondents. Challenges include increased distance from other communities and the associated transportation costs. Producers seeking to sell their products often have to travel long distances throughout the region to access markets. Other challenges include the small populations unable to support entrepreneurial efforts. The advantage of being isolated, however, is that the distance provides a buffer that may strengthen the local market.

In addition to listing multiple barriers, several respondents highlighted the interconnections among the various barriers.

Personal Approaches to Overcoming Barriers to the Promotion of Local Food Hubs

All but one person had ideas to share as to how they were personally working to overcome barriers to the growth of local food hubs. Fourteen responses focused on advocacy type of food hub activities. There was quite a diversity of approaches to advocacy.

Table 1.7: Approaches to overcoming barriers

Advocacy	Number	Specific comments
Funding for charitable food distribution	1	“I look into different funding opportunities.”
Informal word of mouth	1	“Wearing my red market hat!”
Grant applications (enhance local food assets, explore niche markets and introduction of new food crops)	3	“Working on the blueberry project in Chapleau. Trying to get government on board and to give us a break on the land. I feel they need to make some accommodations for isolated communities.” “Trying to reach new markets.” “Looking for money, trying to renovate.”
Writes articles for national magazine	1	“I write for COG – I have written articles about these barriers.”
Networking and building partnerships both within and across communities	5	“[I] work with communities to increase their awareness of what they can do to promote local food.” “Partnership with BIA, helping to develop a new culture of consumption around food and inspiring new connections between producers and consumers.” “We are doing so by asserting our autonomy and building our own relationships and reputation based on our actions.”
Land tenure reform	3	“We are surrounded by Crown land. We need more access to land and change zoning bylaws to make it agricultural.”
Youth entrepreneurship	1	“We have programs for youth entrepreneurs. We hope to encourage someone who will take on such a [food hub] project.”
Policy advocate (federal, provincial and municipal)	3	“Federally: a national food policy and strategy for food. Provincially: more support for local producers. Municipally: more support for local production.” “It comes back to the same complaint: there's not as much work being done in northern Ontario. We are generally overlooked; many people don't realize this part of Ontario exists. There are a lot of policies in place that are irrelevant.”

Six of the responses focused on consumer education as a way that they could personally contribute to building local food hubs. Personal growth including further education and practicing what one advocates was mentioned by four respondents.

By 'doing the do'.

One of the respondents who directs a charitable food distribution centre for over two dozen regional food banks is engaged in a shift within his organization to work and pay local farmers to grow food for charitable distribution. This is challenging the existing organization to move from a charitable model to an empowerment model where local farmers are paid a sustainable wage and charitable consumers have access to more nutritional local food.

Reflections on Policy Issues and Local Food Hubs

There was a consistent theme among 16 of the respondents that many existing policies work as brakes on the further development of local food systems.

Not being so controlling of the development of things. For example, the poultry issue. To do this in Thunder Bay would have to overcome all of these issues. The politicians have gone beyond helping everyone. There are too many regulations.

Moreover, there is a need for policies that are flexible and attentive to nurturing place-based food systems.

Policy should start from the local economies, conditions, policies, needs of the communities, to get away from the big business model. There needs not only to be regulations that address the rationale of local food production....

We are generally overlooked; many people don't realize this part of Ontario exists. There are a lot of policies in place that are irrelevant.

There needs to be more flexible policy. We're dancing with the bylaws all the time.

Reference was made to unique food sources in the North that are currently curbed as local food sources because of regulations.

Look at the restrictions of wild game. There should be ways around this. Blueberry tenure problems. We don't have anything that facilitates keeping fish local because our policy for fish is based on tourism and export markets. It works against food security. We need to redirect provincial programs to support local including tax breaks for selling locally.

The special needs of the northern most parts of Northern Ontario were acknowledged.

The northern fly-in communities are 100% dependent on food that is flown in. We need to dedicate resources to develop self-sufficiency food systems.

The current regulations embody the interests, values and asymmetrical power relations of different actors in the mainstream value food chain. The respondents voiced frustration in how these current regulations are used to govern the agri-food systems that leave the north thwarted in their endeavours to build a resilient local food system.

Currently the government does not do enough to support local producers. It's basic economics: small business is what the rest of the economy rests on. Should have policies to get licensing geared toward smaller farms. All levels of government should be concerned because food is critical for all.

Two respondents mentioned the need for a national food policy. Three respondents described the need for policies focused on individual behavioural shifts that would encourage the promotion of local food.

Any new policies should emphasize 'buy locally grown' as much as possible.

Two respondents mentioned funding for consumer education and for operational dollars for running existing programs.

Programs for consumer education. Programs that support local food knowledge and preservation.

In summary, there is a strong consensus that the northern approaches and solutions to building a local food system are not adequately supported by existing provincial policies. More place-based 'made in the North' policies are viewed as a key mechanism for releasing the current constraints on northern food production and distribution.

Effective Mechanisms for Promotion of Local Food Hubs

From the 26 case studies, five respondents provided no specific activities or projects. Two responses mentioned several of the better known programs in Southern Ontario and one person mentioned the importance of La Foire Gourmande.

The best way to get people interested in food is to actually celebrate it and taste it.

Seven respondents mentioned community gardens as an effective approach to introducing local foods. Those programs that help people to be more self-sufficient in their food knowledge and food production are, in the long-term, the most effective.

Of special note is that three of these community gardens are situated in unique settings: a provincial correctional facility that trains participants in life-long gardening, animal husbandry skills, a non-profit group that provides wheelchair accessible gardening units to twelve homes for adults with specialized needs, and a garden at a mental health facility that teaches skill development.

The second most frequent response of five was local food boxes, sometimes referred to in this region as Good Food Boxes and sometimes as Locavore boxes. The specific funding support and means of distribution vary widely among these local food box programs.

Within the Northern region, Nutrition North was mentioned as an effective mechanism for distributing food in the fly-in communities and two responses named CSA (community supported agriculture) as an effective distribution approach to building local food hubs. Two respondents mentioned the importance of local country markets and one had cautions about accessing provincial funding for markets.

There are government resources available to start these things (i.e. money for accessibility). Otherwise I would suggest staying away from any government funding because they can gain more control over what you are doing. Funding for local food comes from the provincial government, but we don't use it.

Two respondents did not mention specific activities but confirmed the importance of partnering to build local momentum for food hubs. Singular diverse answers included having a university or college working with a local food group as effective, the local fresh food guides and the Wabigoon Lake blueberry initiative.

Unique Types of Food Hubs for Northern Ontario

The responses to this question reflected some of the unique geospatial aspects of northern Ontario. Of the 26 respondents, four provided no suggestions.

Three of the food hub responses were directly related to the local food sources that are a challenge to tap into due to existing provincial policies. Specific mention was made of the abundant opportunities and the demand for commercial blueberry production. One person stated, “There is a lot of demand for fish and wild game but there is a lot of red tape associated with this.”

The vastness of the area and the variety of community situations was noted. Specific mention was made for the need to source more food to the northern remote communities. More connectedness, making use of online resources and a knowledge hub were mentioned by five of the food hub respondents.

Because of our geography we are isolated from one another. Would like to see greater connections....

I am excited about this project because it will make us better aware of what exists. This project will help us become more aware of viable food hub models and provoke more intense collaboration within the region.

Don't want to create more organizations, but having an Internet site where all of the local food initiatives are linked so everyone knows what everyone else is doing.

Another seven respondents focused on shoring up food hub resources within their particular communities; and the related support for local knowledge in the emergence of community-based food hubs.

*[A Food hub] has to be about community development and social justice.
We need more community level discussions.*

Other specific suggestions included: the procurement of local food by grocery stores and restaurants, expansion of self-sufficiency gardening, and the need for winter and communal food storage to support local food hubs.

Funding Sources for Northern Food Hubs

Of the twenty-six food hub respondents, two did not know of any sources of funding for local food initiatives, three did not respond and one felt they were ineligible for funding because they were had unincorporated status. Of the twenty that did respond, there was diversity in scale from international to local funding sources. One commonality is that all of these funding sources are project based and do not provide long term sustainable operational or capital infrastructure support.

Table 1.8: Indicated funding sources

Scale			
International	National	Provincial	Local
Evergreen Foundation	Metcalf Foundation	Trillium	Patterson Foundation
Earth Society Foundation	J.R. McConnell Family	OMAFRA	District Health Units
	TD Bank	NOHFC	Private donations
	United Way Canada	Ministry of Health (promotional and Healthy Community Fund)	Municipal
	FedNor Community Development NonProfits		School-based funding

Additional Thoughts from Respondents

Ten of the 26 food hub respondents had no additional responses. Other responses fell into the categories of:

Knowledge Diffusion

It is good to gather information from lots of different initiatives as it could give good ideas of how others can do this.

We can help each other.

Future Networking

Would like to know what is happening in other communities in the North and be connected with them.

The potential to grow a regional food network.

Food Hub Models

One respondent recognized the importance of the food hub movement transitioning from charity models to community-based empowerment models. Another respondent specifically referred to The Stop as a good example of a food hub that is diverse in its approach.

Education modules to work to bring communities from a charitable model to an empowerment model. To move through the community food security continuum. Really defining this more and making it into something we could use in workshops in the community.

[The Stop] recognizes immigration issues, growing food, they look at food in the social context, in terms of poverty, racism, low income neighbourhoods....Food is an important link – it isn't the port and nexus – we have to deal with it all in this broad and chaotic context.

Report

Two respondents specifically mentioned a report as an outcome of this research study. One respondent saw the need to use this report as a mechanism to get better connected to both resources and funding. The other respondent encouraged the use of accessible language in the report so that "...everyone can read it and understand." This respondent also hoped that the report would provide local knowledge about farming and allow for emergent, organic approaches to food hubs rather than advocating for adoption of best practices across the study area.

Would like to see recommendations on how to make things flexible and adaptable for each region, to get back to each region and build something based on the contributions of the real stakeholders who have been around. Need to be respected and included. We need to take a page from our First Nations neighbours who respect their elders and go to them for information/knowledge.

Emerging Themes and Conclusions

The interviews and case studies conducted as part of this study revealed a vibrant and dynamic patchwork of local food hubs emerging in Northern Ontario. Common themes that emerged across these varied initiatives will be discussed here and will point to some recommendations for future work.

The Northern region is geographically large but relatively small in terms of population. However, as in other parts of the province there is a strong and committed movement to foster local food hubs. The advocates of this movement are driven by a concern with ensuring social justice, community development, and a viable local food foundation for their communities. In order to achieve these aims, people are forming innovative and collaborative models of local food hubs. Critically, they are drawing on partnerships to bring together the resources and capital contained in various existing entities, such as universities, health units, and libraries to nurture and incubate projects and initiatives. These approaches are essential given the lack of consistent funding available to form and operate stand-alone food hub ventures.

An additional advantage of the partnership and project-focused approach to forming local food hubs is that the lack of fixed structure allows the hub project to be flexible and emergent, and thus more responsive to situational changes and community needs. Another notable feature of the studied hubs is the use of innovative organizational models. In addition to two co-operative ventures, there were two hubs that adopted or were exploring blended for- and not-for profit social enterprise models, and a complexity-inspired academically-based food network. Such innovative organizational models may be a strategic advantage in nurturing food hub movements in the shadow of the industrial food system.

Many of the individuals who participated in this study were inclined to view the complex challenges and other factors shaping the local food movement through a lens in which interconnections are brought into focus. The interconnectedness and big picture story underlying the various examples offered in the interview guide were highlighted repeatedly by several respondents. This tendency to focus on connections and the big picture may be a valuable attribute self-selected in food hub advocates.

One notable observation is the manner in which food was understood. While basic food access was an important motivator for many food hub advocates, so too were health, community, and culture. Thus, food is being seen as foundational to a holistic notion of life lived well. For example, food was described as a vehicle for empowerment and social justice, as an opportunity to create community spaces for relationships to develop, as an essential determinant of health and dignity, as a way of strengthening the local economy, and as a way of offering healing and support to those in need. Food hubs are thus seen to be much more profound than the mere provision of food.

One potentially unique factor for consideration in this northern portion of the study is the importance of forest food in ensuring local food viability. While this only emerged indirectly in two respondents' concerns with the MNR and other regulations affecting

forest food, this may reflect an underground and informal quality to forest food hubs making them less amenable to study than other local food hubs. For example, while it is not possible to market and sell locally-caught fish without a commercial license, there are certainly dense informal networks of families and friends through which legally-caught fish are shared. The same would be true of locally-hunted game, particularly in First Nation communities (Nelson & Stroink, 2010). Thus it could be argued that a form of local food hub exists for forest foods that is less formal and developed than other local food hubs, but no less important, particularly for those many communities in the far north where large scale cultivated food systems are not feasible.

Limitations

There were a number of limitations regarding the scope of this northern regional research. Specifically, we did not contact the representatives of any of the existing agricultural bodies in the region, such as the research stations, soils and crop associations, or agricultural federations. These individuals may have had a revealing perspective on the emergence of local food hubs in the region.

We were also unable to include only two food producers. This was in part due to the timing of the research (spring-summer data collection), but more of these voices including the aging and younger farmers in various communities would have added valuable perspective.

Finally, we were only able to include two respondents who dealt in non-timber forest products (i.e., blueberries). This is in part due to the shift in mindset that would be required to recognize an informal forest food hub. For example, fishers who give away their locally-caught fish may not realize that they are acting as a food hub. The for-profit company, Forbes Wild Foods, which markets forest food from across Canada but originated in northern Ontario, would have been a valuable contact with an interesting perspective.

Recommendations

Three main recommendations for next steps emerged from this study.

Recommendation 1

The first is the repeatedly articulated need for greater regional collaboration and partnership among local food hubs and other supportive organizations and entities. Many of the respondents interviewed were excited about the opportunity to learn about food hub activities in other neighbouring communities; it was noted in several interviews that individuals felt alone with their communities in attempting to address local food viability and food security. Therefore, it is recommended that future work explore options for regional networking, coordination, and communication. This includes a longer-term goal of considering a coordinated approach to a regional food market. The True North Community Co-op is beginning to build a regional food distribution network within their model and thus presents one approach for further consideration.

Recommendation 2

The second recommendation is the considerable need for policy work through which to facilitate and support the emergence of a complexity of local food systems from under the shadow of the dominant food system. This work should reflect a broader definition of food and be inclusive of fish, game, and other forest foods. The task would be to examine current policies and approaches to such issues as food safety and conservation with innovative approaches to ensuring local food security as a guiding factor. This would require the integration of forces currently housed within separate ministries and governed under different layers of government.

Recommendation 3

Finally, there is a need for further research on the nature of local food hubs dealing with forest foods. Hubs of knowledge and skill in acquiring forest food could be identified and mapped, as could the networks of food sharing and exchange that occur with this food. While this food sharing may not currently be able to be part of the dominant economy, it would be important to explore how reciprocity and trade through informal economies takes place in these food hubs.

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Case Study 1: Eat Local Sudbury (ELS)

Prepared by Lee-Ann Chevrette, Connie Nelson, and Mirella Stroink

Location: Sudbury Ontario

Interviewees: Allison Muckle, local producer and founding member of ELS; Maureen Strickland, Coordinator of Eat Local Sudbury

In person interviews and site visit August 16, 2011

Overview

Allison was one of the original members of the group that started Eat Local Sudbury in 2006. She had recently completed a Craft Farm apprenticeship and was very interested in the concept of the hundred mile diet. She wanted to eat local and began working to figure out where to source local food in the Sudbury area. Between September 2005 and March 2006 Allison and her partner did a 150 mile diet; the research they did in order for them to source local foods was the foundation for Eat Local Sudbury.

Initially, two farms came together to discuss doing a CSA. They applied for and received approximately \$500 to print brochures for promotion of the CSA. Two farms did a CSA in 2006 and 2007. They received federal funding through the Cooperatives Development Initiative in 2007 to conduct a feasibility study and then from FedNor in 2008 to open a local food retail outlet. The main vision was to create a food hub, and to increase the accessibility and availability of local food.

Eat Local Sudbury was incorporated in November 2007. The first board consisted of five members. They conducted a feasibility study to explore having a stall at the farmers market and not an actual storefront location. Once the study was complete, they began with stalls at the farmers' market and, based on that success, opened a storefront location in downtown Sudbury once the farmers' market closed for the season. In 2008 Allison was the paid coordinator for Eat Local Sudbury (funding through FedNor). They also had two job creation partnership positions through Employment Ontario. At that time they had one outdoor booth and two indoor booths at the Sudbury farmers' market.

They began wondering what to do once the market was finished and so, with funding through FEDNOR, they moved into a downtown location. They then received a Trillium grant for three years, which paid for a coordinator. There are several local producers that continue to sell their products through ELS. Approximately 20% of the produce that goes to the store is from Dalew Farms in Lavigne, Ontario; however, Dalew have supplied approximately 80% of the produce sold at the market.

Maureen was hired as the new coordinator in March 2011. She came from Nova Scotia with a background in community development, social enterprise, and business. She comes to the organization in the third year of a three-year Trillium grant; she describes her challenge as establishing the organization as independent from external funding, and creating a model of self-sufficiency.

Currently ELS receives an NOHFC-funded intern, who acts in the capacity of Institutional Purchasing Coordinator, a Canada summer job student, who acts as Market Produce Assistant, an ONFresh/GreenBelt Fund-funded part-time employee for deliveries, and a Wikwemikong First Nation-funded position to run the store. They essentially have five positions in the summer; this will drop down to three in the fall.

The organization is evolving; it is established as a co-op. It provides local food to consumers, acts as a business incubator for growth of existing and aspiring local producers, and provides consumer education.

Uniqueness

ELS was the first food co-op in northern Ontario. At the time that it was started it was very unique to have a store that was selling strictly locally-produced goods. Also, it was unique in that it was started by farmers and consumers collectively; originally 50% of the Board was made up of farmers.

Human Resources

ELS currently has five staff members: one full-time coordinator (Maureen), one full-time one year intern, one summer intern, one part-time delivery driver, and one summer student position. They source local food products from numerous local producers.

Physical Infrastructure

Eat Local Sudbury has a storefront location; they share the building with ReThink Green at 176 Larsh Street in downtown Sudbury. They have a van which they have retrofitted for deliveries, several fridges and freezers, computers, and a point-of-sale system. They have only one phone line for five staff members, which is sometimes problematic. Maureen feels that they need to invest in better communications and marketing. Maureen feels that in terms of long term sustainability, ELS should consider purchasing real estate.

Financial Resources

They have received significant funding. Currently ELS has funding from the Ontario Trillium Foundation, the Greenbelt Fund, NOHFC for an internship and the Cooperative Development Initiative.

Community Resources

ELS has a partnership with ReThink Green. They share office space and other resources. They provide office space for the Food Charter Animator, and the Good Food Box Coordinator. ELS collaborated with the Social Planning Council of Sudbury and the Sudbury Food Connections Network on a Trillium grant. ELS is planning to build a walk-in cooler. Co-op Boreal runs out of College Boreal, and they do institutional purchasing through ELS. ELS also sells to Science North, and Laurentian University. There also are members of Ontario Natural Food Co-Op.

Community Resources/assets we would like to be connected to

ELS would like to explore more opportunities for institutional purchasing. For example, Co-op Boreal provides food to the francophone daycares in the area and ELS may be able to provide food for them. ELS would also like to tap into social enterprise and

cooperative funding streams, and to explore opportunities to be a training ground for employability skills.

Constraints/Overcoming Them

One of the key constraints is that there is inconsistency because a new intern is hired every year. They are relying on externally funded positions and so there is a lack of consistency. There is also too much work for the amount of staff that they currently have.

Allison feels that it is difficult to have a co-op that includes farmers/producers and consumers. Farmers are exceedingly busy during the summer months and they have little time to participate. There is some difficulty in involving farmers in the operations of the co-op. They have significant time constraints and traditional meetings do not work well. Allison suggested that the farmers could perhaps form an advisory group or have one farmer representative that meets with the Board. She feels the organization is going through a natural evolution, and is focusing on developing more policy and procedures now. It is evolving from a grassroots group.

Coordinating vegetable production with multiple producers is also a challenge, and it is difficult to keep things fresh in the store. What is required is better communication and coordination. It is also difficult to keep things in stock because of irregular hours at the abattoir and irregular deliveries.

Currently, the bulk of revenue in the store comes from value-added products and meat, as opposed to the produce. If they did not have an NOHFC intern to manage and sell the produce, they could not cover the costs.

Maureen feels that one of the greatest barriers has been a lack of long term visioning, and a business plan to ensure the viability of the initiative beyond the term of its external funding.

Successes

Eat Local Sudbury appears to be very well-regarded; many other organizations and academic institutions have approached them to study their structure and their approach to building a local food co-op. They have managed to put local food in Sudbury on the map and get the community talking about supporting local producers. Eat Local Sudbury has also been instrumental in increasing traffic at the local farmers market.

Relevance

In Sudbury, the producer community is very small, so this may be relevant to other small communities. Other cooperatives, such as the True North Community Co-op, have explored the model used by Eat Local Sudbury, and have used this information to inform some decisions in developing their own initiative.

Resources

Eat local Sudbury has a website (www.eatlocalsudbury.com/), and brochures.

Case Study 2: Food Security Research Network (FSRN)

Prepared by Lee-Ann Chevrette, Connie Nelson, and Mirella Stroink

Location: Thunder Bay, Ontario

Interviewee: Connie Nelson, Professor, co-founder, and director of FSRN

In person interview and site visit

Introduction

The Food Security Research Network (FSRN) is acknowledged as an important catalyst for promoting agriculture and food security in the region – which has indirectly helped to support the growth of farm operations and other agri-related initiatives (e.g., small scale farming, community gardens) that have a specific focus on promoting local food production and consumption. There is also growing interest in organic farming in the area and direct marketing activities such as farm retail outlets and farmers’ markets. Although only recently established, FSRN has become a very important institution for the local agriculture sector. As described by agri-sector stakeholders, FSRN has attracted the interest of and successfully engaged younger people in agri-related activities with a strong emphasis on promoting production activities for the local market. FSRN is credited with fostering optimism for growth in the local agri-sector and local food production activities. (Thunder Bay District Agriculture Impact Study, October, 2009 <http://www.tbfarminfo.org/facts.shtml#agri>)

The Food Security Research Network was a key participant in the national People’s Food Policy Research Project funded by Heifer International. The Project held ‘table talks’ across the nation to determine what federal policies may facilitate principles of food sovereignty and to provide the framework for a just and sustainable food system in Canada. FSRN launched our first Table Talk at the World Food Day on October 16, 2009. It was a resounding success. FSRN supported the PFPP in two key ways:

1. Dr. Mirella Stroink was the Chair of the national committee for developing food policy based on the ‘table talk’ data from rural and remote communities.
2. Lee-Ann Chevrette was our local ‘Community Food Animator’ and was the organizer of many table talk initiatives throughout the data gathering phase.

The unique context of building local food systems in underdeveloped and remote areas has resulted in the Food Security Research Network writing the food security and food sovereignty theme paper for the International Forum on the Social and Solidarity Economy: Government and Civil Society Montreal, Quebec (Canada), Palais des congrès, October 17-20, 2011

Overview

Northern Ontario offers unique conditions in which to explore the challenges, opportunities and solutions for food security from many different vantages. FSRN strives to bring together the resources and innovation needed to engage in these solutions. The

FSRN began in 2006 with a focus to bring together a unique blend of resources from the academy and the community for the following purposes:

- Capacity building in socio-economic development towards a northern regional food system
- Developing resilient, thriving and adaptive local food systems in Northern Ontario through community service learning (CSL), graduate student theses and community-based research
- Giving participants life-influencing experiences in being a symbiotic part of the organic transformation to an ecological focused food system

Physical Infrastructure

FSRN is a large network of over 60 community partners in Northern Ontario including: (a) local agriculture organizations (TBARS, TBFA, TBSCIA and Cattlemen's Association), farm producers, emergent new farm markets, community gardens, CSA; (b) umbrella First Nations' organizations Nishnawbe Aski Nation, Mattawa First Nations, Independent First Nations as well as specific communities; (c) schools in the development of school gardens and related curriculum; (d) charitable and social organizations. Our FSRN Network is based on complex adaptive systems theory which we call the Contextual Fluidity Partnership model.

Since 2006, FSRN has provided the infrastructure support system for faculty in 12 disciplines spanning five academic Faculties – Business, Education, Natural Resource Management, Health and Behavioural Sciences, and Social Sciences and Humanities to deliver a community service learning program that focuses on building capacity in a resilient local food system for Northwestern Ontario. Through the FSRN food security CSL program, knowledge travels back and forth between the classroom and the community, providing all of us with opportunities to *learn* from each other and from shared experiences.

FSRN employs through the Ontario Work Study Program for both 16 weeks in the summer and during Fall/Winter terms, university students who reach out and assist community groups with their food-hub-related initiatives. This has included assistance with programming for wheelchair accessible raised bed gardens for over a dozen group homes for developmentally challenged adults, support for a community garden project in an urban core area of Thunder Bay, assistance to a First Nation in the development of a viable market for blueberries, assistance in the development of a cooperative food hub, guidance with market garden training for a fly-in remote First Nation community and support with our FSRN Campus Community garden.

For the last 6 years, FSRN has promoted local food systems by sponsoring World Food Day where a core message is the importance of local food, and of allowing international countries to produce local food for themselves rather than exclusively for the export market.

The Annual FSRN-sponsored Food Forum provides a community gathering for sharing and discussing local food system initiatives. Both the Food Forum and the World Food Day events are attended by faculty, staff, and students from Lakehead University, as well as individuals and organizations from the broader Thunder Bay community.

Natural Resources

Roots to Harvest: An Urban Youth Garden Initiative – ‘Punks Growing Food’.

Through a three year external grant from the Ministry of Research and Innovation, FSRN initiated an urban garden that serves high risk youth in the community. FSRN partners with YES employment to hire 10 – 15 young people between the ages of 15 and 18 to work as apprentice market gardeners for July and August. YES employment fully subsidizes the wages of these youth to work with Roots to Harvest for 6 weeks in the summer. The apprentice youth market gardeners work a minimum of two days at a ‘home base’ garden site then spend the rest of the five-day week working with farms, researchers and community organizations around Thunder Bay. From these experiences, the students learned about soil remediation, the dynamics of growing in northern climates, pest control, weather mapping, GPS plotting, berry production, greenhouse plant production, planting to attract beneficial insects, companion planting, bee keeping, flour milling, fish management and much more. The students also harvested weekly food baskets for three local women with children, through a partnership with the Faye Peterson transitional house. Networks of partners have evolved that look forward to the collaborations with the programs, the students, community workshops and the involvement in the food action community. The youth have transitioned to continue to be valued food community members. The university community that have mentored the youth have found an eager outlet and an information gap that had previously not been filled. The schools see Roots to Harvest as a valuable resource and make requests for workshops.

FSRN Campus Community Garden.

This was the third year of food production at the FSRN Campus Community Garden. The garden, which is nestled between the Hangar and the McIntyre River on Lakehead University Campus, is a vibrant garden that combines a 120-plot community garden, with an additional 23 plots, which are allocated for research and demonstration activities. In total, there are 143 garden plots in the garden, the majority of which measure 10’ x 10’. This year the membership rose to over 80 gardeners, many of whom were returning gardeners who opted to have multiple plots. The garden membership is diverse, and includes faculty, staff and students from Lakehead University, as well as members and organizations from the broader community. A number of community organizations have been involved in the garden. Nishnawbe Aski Nation (NAN) had two plots in the garden. NAN hired a young woman, who is from a remote northern community and currently studying at Lakehead University. It was her first experience with gardening and she enjoyed it tremendously. Superior Science Children’s Camp also participated in the garden. Children from the camp helped to plant, tend and harvest the veggies they grew on their plot. Nanabijou Childcare Centre, located at Lakehead University, also had a plot in the garden, and the children participated in planting, tending, harvesting and eating a diversity of vegetables from their garden plot. Brain Injury Association of Thunder Bay (BIATBA) had six plots in the garden this year. Together with their clients, staff from the

BIATBA planted, tended and harvested a variety of fresh vegetables and herbs over the course of the season. BIATBA also facilitated two 'Art in the Garden' events where clients and their friends and families were invited to come to the garden to participate in an art activity with a local artist. Both events were well attended. This year the garden membership donated their volunteer hours to growing food communally, for donation to the Lakehead University Student Union Food Bank and the Regional Food Distribution Association. We ran a very successful 4-month gardening workshop series, wherein we brought in local experts to share their knowledge and engage with the gardening community. All workshops were open to the public and were well attended.

FSRN has also provided financial and academic support to a graduate student in the Masters of Environmental Studies (MES) program as she completed a two-year research study on the garden. She explored motivations and benefits of participation, specifically perceived food security, well-being, knowledge and connection to nature.

FSRN's Outreach to Building Other Community Gardens. (Regional Community Gardens <http://www.foodsecurityresearch.ca/index.php?pid=57>)

Interest has been rapidly spreading in the development of new community, school, church, and individual family gardens both within the city of Thunder Bay and in the region of Northwestern Ontario. The [Ogden-Simpson & East End Veggie Garden Project](#) now includes a large six city-lot community garden, alleyway gardens and over two dozen individual family gardens.

"We've been taking direction from the Food Security Research Network, who've started gardens all over the city, so we can grow vegetables right here for their residents."

-- David Legge, president of the Port Arthur Rotary Club. As quoted in The Chronicle Journal on September 23, 2009.

Click here for more information on the Port Arthur Rotary's Field of Greens project.

The regional Upsala School Garden has incorporated their schoolyard garden into the school curriculum. Examples include: JK/SK – Living and Non-Living Things, Gr. 1 and 2 – Needs and Characteristics of Living Things, Grs. 3/4/5 – Habitats and Communities, Grs. 6/7/8 – Biodiversity and authentic, real-world mathematical problems such as older students calculating the capacity of the raised beds. Participating were the students of the school, the teachers and staff, and the community through Keeping Good Schools Open.



Gardens in Ginoogaming, Aroland, and Constance Lake First Nations are also bringing new options for food security through both cultivated boxes and raised bed gardens and the rediscovering of accessing traditional food sources in the boreal forest.

[Download our Regional Gardening Initiatives report for summer 2009.](#)

Successes

The Food Security Research Network has launched some pivotal and key economic development initiatives in this area:

1. Through two research grants from FedNor and the Agriculture Adaptation Council, FSRN carried out the marketing research to establish market demand and value food chain information for the establishment of Brule Creek Farm flour mill which in its short existence of 2.5 years has already generated a multiplier effect of 3 for direct employment with Brule Creek and additionally in providing local farmers with another outlet for their grain crops.

<http://www.thunderbaycountrymarket.com/index.php?pid=80>

2. Through an NOHFC grant, FSRN launched the first CSA operation in Northwestern Ontario located at Boreal Edge Farm.

<https://sites.google.com/site/borealedgefarm/csa>

3. Through a research grant from the Ontario Cattlemen's Association and from the Thunder Bay Cattlemen's Association, a consumer marketing study was completed which demonstrates high potential for growth in grass-fed beef in Northwestern Ontario. Grass-fed beef has been scientifically proven to have high nutrient values.

4. FSRN assisted Aroland First Nation for two years in developing a viable economic initiative for selling their abundant and very tasty blueberries. This initiative has become self-sustaining and is now being run by Aroland First Nation.

5. FSRN assisted in the launching of the True North Cooperative which is a non-profit community co-operative selling local food and other regionally-produced goods. The goal of True North is to improve the resilience of our community through a stronger localized economy. In order to centralize marketing and storage, we have a downtown storefront in Thunder Bay but our distribution network extends throughout the region of Northern Ontario.

6. We recently completed a chicken abattoir marketing study through a Business course CSL initiative. Last year, several local farmers were fined by the provincial government for selling chickens at the farm gate. FSRN seeks to find a solution to this present situation by assisting in the establishment of a local chicken abattoir.

7. A marketing study resulted from our OMAFRA three year grant *Determining health benefits, horticultural and market potential of wild blueberry ecotypes from Northwestern Ontario* which includes research on value-added blueberry products in the Ignace area and with Aroland First Nation.

8. FSRN has an agreement with Kitchenuhmaykoosib Inninuwug First Nation to facilitate the development of a long term farming program for the community that works toward their objectives of providing food self-sufficiency. This year we provided northern local food system training in establishing a northern market garden.

9. FSRN is assisting in establishing Roots to Harvest as an independent non-profit organization serving youth in gaining skills to contribute to the local food system.

Financial Resources

The Food Security Research Network operates from a diversity of funding sources such as J.W. McConnell Family Foundation, SSHRC, Ontario Ministry of Research and Innovation, Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities, Ontario Cattlemen's Association, Canadian Council on Learning, Agricultural Adaptation Council, Health Canada's Aboriginal environmental health research programs, and Ontario Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Rural Affairs.

Policy and Program Resources

Connie Nelson states: "While our focus is on working as insiders to the community to build a more resilient local food system, we need to be addressing both municipal and provincial and sometimes even federal policies that are currently constraining the development of the local food system. In order to effectively work on these policies, we nurture close and active working relationships with Food Secure Canada, Sustain Ontario, CCEDNet, People's Food Policy Project, and Farm Start." In order to have some immediate models of success, some of FSRN's early socio-economic developments were focused in areas where they could build capacity without having to secure policy changes. Examples are starting the first local flour mill, a CSA, a large community garden, a film - Northern Grown - highlighting local system entrepreneurs, and supporting the publication of a short growing season northern garden book. Now that we have established these initiatives and these local food system businesses have become mentors for the region, we are moving into more challenging initiatives that involve policy issues such as approval for a local poultry abattoir, changes in the provincial quota system for laying hens, organic food labels, and food processing needs.

Desired Assets

There is a need for a significant shift in both federal and provincial funding to encourage economic activity that is socially driven to support a resilient local food system. FSRN sees a critical need for revamping the agri-industrial funding system to allow more opportunity for individuals and organizations to be eligible for funding a local food system that aims to integrate health, sustainability and the economy. Connie Nelson reflects, "This funding shift is key to having local food produced, harvested, distributed and processed through ecological practices that build resilience. Our current silos of having nutrition discussed by health and production by agriculture is putting a brake on the development of local food systems based on values of local nutritious foods that put dollars back into the hands of local producers and provide the consumers with quality nutritious food."

Constraints/Overcoming Them

In the north we need to build production capacity in areas that may not be 'new development' for southern parts of the province, but are very new to us. If we are going to shift from transporting foods over a 1000 km from Southern Ontario then we need to

investigate processing and production in unique northern situations. Moreover, some of our niche markets are sometimes not considered foods, like blueberries and mushrooms. Connie Nelson states, “I have had many discussions on this issue with potential funders.”

There are many challenges to developing a vibrant local food system for our northern First Nation communities (~ 60). Traditional food systems have been undermined by generational loss of knowledge during the residential school system era, industrial development that has contaminated the natural land base, the reserve system itself that concentrates population and thus puts pressure on existing food resources, the high cost of transportation and the limited transportation options like air and winter roads. Post residential school has been characterized by a culture of expecting outside mainstream society food sources to be better than local sources. The Food Security Research Network provides training for First Nation communities that wish to enhance an integrated system of local food sources and cultivated gardens.

Relevance

FSRN works from an inside the community perspective in spawning regional socio-economic development. Relationship building and trust are essential before successful collaborations can occur that support building a local food system. It is important to focus early on building capacity. The switch from an agri-industrial system to a local food system is revolutionary in its impact on how we eat and what we eat. In order to extend the availability of local food, there needs to be a multiple approach to preserving and processing local food for local distribution.

First Nations’ local food system issues need to be approached by blending cultivated and boreal forest food sources.

The Food Security Research Network and the [Community Service Learning](#) program is in itself a new way of addressing food security, coupling university resources – faculty, students and staff – with dedicated Northwestern Ontario partners in a Contextual Fluidity Partnership Model designed to foster growth in knowledge.

Case Study 3: La Maison Verte

Prepared by Lee-Ann Chevrette, Connie Nelson, and Mirella Stroink

Location: Hearst, Ontario

Interviewee: Manon Cyr, General Manager

In person interview and site visit August 19, 2011

Overview

La Maison Verte (LMV) is a not-for-profit organization that was started in 1982 by l’Association Parmis-Elles, a women's group located in Hearst, Ontario with the mandate to create financial opportunities and promote well-being for women in the area. In 1981

the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources awarded potential tree growers a five-year black spruce seedling contract. The Association was looking to invest in a project with greenhouses and, together with private funding, they created what was the beginning of LMV. Seventy local investors established the greenhouses with some help from government funding. Michelle Lamy was involved in the project for 29 years; she retired in July, 2011, and was replaced by Manon Cyr who has taken on the role of General Manager.

Initially LMV was contracted by the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources to grow 2 million seedlings. In 1988 and 1991 contracts with forest companies increased production to 6 million seedlings, and later gradually increased production to about 9 million seedlings annually. LMV had a 12 million tree capacity with two major clients: Hearst Forest Management, and Nagagami Forest Management. Over those years LMV contributed significantly to the regional economy through jobs creation for the community.

As a result of the sharp downturn in the forest industry in the 1990s, LMV lost 80% of its seedling business. Consequently, they recognized the need to diversify their operations.

In 1994 they started to produce tomatoes in the greenhouses. In 2009 they began to grow cucumbers. The tomatoes and cucumbers are started in December and are available for sale between April and October. They plant 2000 beefsteak tomato plants, 1000 cherry tomato plants, and 200 cucumber plants. These tomatoes and cucumbers are distributed both locally and regionally. Locally, they are sold to individual community members and local businesses, including grocery stores and restaurants. They also distribute to numerous grocery stores in communities across the northeastern Ontario region. In order to do so, they were required to have their product barcoded, which they did in 2010. LMV has a partnership with the local youth group that buys their green tomatoes at the end of every growing season; they make green tomato relish, and sell it as a fundraiser.

In 2011 LMV started a local food basket program. It is similar to Community Supported Agriculture (CSA), in that individuals purchase a share/weekly basket in advance. Thirty-two people purchased shares in 2011, and received 15 weekly baskets over the course of the growing season. LMV is planning to increase the shares to 50 in 2012. Any extra produce that is grown is brought to the weekly farmers' market. They are also exploring developing a multi-producer CSA, of which they can be one producer.

The original impetus for the initiative was job creation and profitability. Over time, additional objectives have been included in the initiative. These include increasing community resilience through local food production, community building and education. LMV is exploring partnerships with the local Health Unit to get local food baskets to young families, single mothers, and other individuals who may be marginalized economically.

Human Resources

LMV has an eight-member Board of Directors. They currently have six full-time employees and hire approximately 20 part-time/seasonal employees from April to June.

The majority of their full-time employees have been working there for between 15 to 25 years. The majority of the employees are women. They also have numerous volunteers who work for several hours each morning. Their employees and volunteers are very committed, and have been instrumental to the success of the initiative.

Physical Infrastructure

LMV owns numerous greenhouses. The majority of these greenhouses are allocated to seedling growth. One greenhouse is allocated to tomato and cucumber production. One greenhouse is allocated to growing the vegetables for the local food basket. LMV owns three Gators (6-wheelers), and two forklifts. They also have a store, which is the for-profit center where they sell tomatoes, cucumbers, garden supplies, bedding plants, herbs, shrubs, trees, and giftware.

Financial Resources

Over the years, LMV has received external funding for the development of the initiative. In 2009, they were awarded \$50,000 to conduct a research and development project on reclamation with willow. In 2011, LMV received \$2810 from Nord-Aski, a regional Economic Development Corporation that promotes economic growth in northeastern Ontario municipalities. These funds were used to develop and promote LMV's newly established local food basket initiative. LMV is currently in discussions to receive 50% funding from NOHFC for a geothermal project. The greenhouse operations are not-for-profit. If the greenhouses generate a profit, there is a formula for redistribution of this profit to its employees. LMV's gift store, on the other hand, is a for-profit center.

Community Resources

LMV is a non-for-profit initiative that is run by L'Association Parnis-Elles. They have numerous informal partnerships within the community including restaurants, local businesses, and a youth group.

Constraints/Overcoming Them

The greatest challenge has been the loss of 80% of their business due to the downturn in the forestry sector. They have overcome this by diversifying their operations and moving into growing food. Transportation and distribution are significant challenges due to the nature of the geographic location of the communities and the large distances between neighboring communities. Currently, local businesses work independently but LMV sees a need for greater efforts to cooperate, and pool resources, so that transportation and distribution systems may be improved. Manon is interested in exploring a distribution/delivery system along the transportation corridor that could be shared among businesses in the Northeastern Ontario region.

Other challenges include the "one-size-fits-all" approach to government regulations and policy relating to food production. LMV feels there are unrealistic expectations on small, local producers who do not have the same resources available to them as do large scale producers. LMV feels that the policies that affect them do not necessarily reflect the reality of what is happening on the ground.

For example, for their safety policies, LMV is expected to meet all of the requirements that large corporations are expected to meet, but with only a fraction of the budget. Although safety is a very high priority, they simply do not have the same resources available to develop their internal policies, rules, and procedures. They feel that the rules and regulations are prohibitive, and deter a lot of people from starting their own small business practices. For example, in the larger stores such as Walmart, binders that include all of the health and safety and other policies, including training manuals, come with the store. For smaller operations, the responsibility is on the business person to develop the necessary policies to meet higher level requirements.

There is a significant loss of expertise when old farmers retire, because this knowledge stays with them rather than being passed down to younger generations, as has been traditionally done for many generations. However, younger generations are generally not interested in taking over their parents/grandparents' farms, as they do not feel that farming is a viable career. Consequently Manon believes we are experiencing the loss of local food producers.

In order to get into the mainstream market, LMV had to research and invest in a barcode system for their packaging/products. They recognized this as a necessary investment, which enabled them to move into that market and distribute to local and regional grocery outlets. Another constraint is the seasonality of their food production operation, and the highly perishable nature of their products.

Successes

Their greatest success lies in the fact that, in 2012, they are celebrating their 30th year in business. Although the organization has seen many changes over the last 30 years, it has demonstrated its ability to adapt to a fluctuating and declining forest sector and to diversify its operations in order to survive. This diversification has enabled the operation to maintain all of its six full-time jobs, as well as its 20-25 seasonal jobs. These individuals have been able to remain in their home community and raise their families there. LMV has ongoing community support, and tremendously dedicated staff and volunteers. They recently celebrated the retirement of Michelle Lamy, who has been with the project since its very beginning (29 years). In August 2011, LMV was on the front cover of Northern Ontario Business magazine. The new barcoding system for their packaging/products has enabled them to move their products into the mainstream market. LMV was awarded "Prix Phénix – Nord de l'Ontario" in 2002.

Uniqueness

LMV is unique in many ways. It is owned by a not-for-profit women's association whose objective since the early 1980s has been to set up business ventures that create jobs for women. Hearst is an isolated rural northern Ontario community with few employment opportunities for its local residents. LMV has provided six full-time and 20-25 seasonal jobs for last 29 years. Despite an 80% loss in their seedling business as a result of the downturn in the forest industry, LMV was able to diversify their operations and maintain all of these jobs.

They are also unique in the ways in which they have diversified their operations. Given the fact that they had the infrastructure, it was relatively easy for LMV to move into local food production. They have abundant capacity to increase local food production and to explore the development/growth of additional crops.

Relevance

LMV has demonstrated its ability to adapt to changing economic conditions, identify opportunities and needs, and diversify their operations in order to capitalize on these opportunities and meet these needs. It demonstrates that there is a need to 'change with the times' in order to maintain viability; it is necessary to be able to adapt and diversify. They have demonstrated how a small, remote northern community may create and maintain a successful business that creates long-term jobs for its community members, while creating products that are safe and healthy for its local residents and regional neighbors.

Resources

LMV has a website: www.lamaisonverte.info/index.html. They will be creating a Facebook page in the fall of 2011.

Case Study 4: True North Community Cooperative

Prepared by Lee-Ann Chevrette, Connie Nelson, and Mirella Stroink

Location: Thunder Bay, Ontario

Interviewees: Joseph LeBlanc (Chair), Serena LeBlanc (Board Member), Ryan Sitch (Board Member)

In person interviews and site visit September 2011

Overview

The True North Community Cooperative is a not-for-profit co-op that was initiated by Joseph LeBlanc, Heidi Zettle, Bryan Dowkes and some students at Lakehead University in January 2009. These individuals identified a need to increase availability and accessibility to local food in Thunder Bay and Northern Ontario as a whole. While they were working as students for the Food Security Research Network, they wrote a paper for a TD Go Green Challenge, in which they outlined their vision for the Northern Ontario Food Production and Distribution Network. The Food Security Research Network employed one summer work-study position to help move the study forward, and provided in-kind support throughout the early stages of the development of the initiative. By the end of summer in 2009, a founding Board was identified. The Co-op was incorporated in November 2009.

The co-op's governance structure is based on democratic control and is rooted in cooperative principles, autonomy being the most important. The Board can have up to 11 members. Special advisors to the Board exist, who can be past Board members or general members. The role of the special advisors is to offer specific expertise, while not having to commit to full participation on the Board. Board members come from different backgrounds and affiliations, and act as representatives of the co-op, not of their affiliated organizations (employers).

The geographic scope of the cooperative is the region of Northern Ontario as defined by FEDNOR: Muskoka/Mattawa River, all of northern Ontario to Québec, Manitoba and the Nunavut borders.

The co-op has three different levels of membership: individual, producer and commercial/organizational members. Currently, the co-op has 298 individual members, 51 producer members, and 8 commercial/organizational members. Products carried by the co-op are not limited to food and can include anything that is produced in northern Ontario by their producer members (i.e., anything from their lands or their hands). Some of the products they sell include, vegetables, fruits, berries, cheeses, forest foods, meats, eggs, chips, flour, rolled oats, herbal teas, honey, herbs, mushrooms, preserves, wool, knitting, skin care products, photography, jewelry, pottery, clothing and toys. They do

have policies that restrict them from carrying anything from outside Northern Ontario and from selling products from non-member producers. They have exempted dairy and poultry products from these restrictions as heavy regulation in these industries limit their availability.

Uniqueness

True North Community Co-op is unique in many ways. One thing that makes the coop unique is its focus on Northern Ontario, including remote communities. There is a strong focus on social justice issues relating to local food accessibility. The co-op Board's motivations and work are not exclusively focused on the storefront; their focus is on the community of Northern Ontario collectively.

The co-op is also unique in its funding structure, its working Board of Directors, its regional approach to 'local' food, the fact that it is community-based, and the broad focus on not only selling and consuming local food, but also education, community development, and social justice. The co-op seeks to provide a fair and stable market for local producers, to improve access for consumers to healthy, local food, to connect producers and consumers, to cluster and share resources with other businesses, and to facilitate the equitable distribution of food to under-serviced remote Northern Ontario communities.

There is a ribbon of intense agricultural production in the southern part of the Northern Ontario region, and very little agricultural production in the northern portion of the region. Traditionally, there has not been a strong relationship between these two sub-regions. The co-op aims to build a bridge to facilitate the distribution of this food to the more northern regions, where the need for fresh healthy food is high, and the current capacity to grow it is low. The co-op is building the capacity to enable this, and to build these markets so that both sub-regions benefit. They also facilitate relationship building between and among producing members so that they may expand their markets.

Human Resources

Their 8-member working/volunteer Board of Directors takes on the majority of the responsibilities for the co-op's operations. There are a number of sub-committees, or task groups, all of which share the diverse operational responsibilities of the co-op. These task groups include both Board members and individuals from the general membership. They have a diverse age range of Board members which allows for diverse perspectives, knowledge and sponsored ability sharing, and the building of resilience. During the summer of 2011 they were able to hire a summer student for 12 weeks, after receiving funding support through Canada Summer Jobs. They have recently hired another student for a 12 hour per week position; her wage will be funded by the co-op.

Physical Infrastructure

The co-op runs out of the storefront location in downtown Thunder Bay. Their infrastructure includes a standup fridge, a standup freezer, and a chest freezer. They share their storefront with another local business called The Green House, with whom they also share some of the other physical infrastructure, including the computer and a point-of-sale system.

Financial Resources

The co-op has an operating budget of about \$10,000 per year. Most of the financial resources are derived through the storefront sales and membership sales. They charge 30% above the product costs set by the producers; much of this funds the operations of the co-op. They have deliberately chosen to grow naturally rather than to have funding that extends them beyond their natural capacity to grow (i.e., they have not sought operational funding). The goal is to remain self-sufficient in terms of funding.

Community Resources

The co-op is very strategic in terms of its partnerships. All partners are membership-based. They currently have eight commercial/organizational members: Nishnawbe Aski Nation, The Green House, Bay Credit Union, Bonobos Foods, Growing Season Juice Collective, Peetabeck Health Centre, Gargoyles, and the Bean Fiend. They are also associated with Ontario Co-operative Association, and the Paro Center for Women's Enterprise.

Community Resources/assets we would like to be connected to

One of the co-op's most critical needs is for someone to undertake a research project that would explore the current food distribution networks in Northern Ontario. There is a strong need to understand the structure of these networks as they exist currently. There are numerous existing channels for food distribution to all of the communities in Northern Ontario; however, no one has committed to identifying and exploring these. It is also necessary to identify opportunities to access, share, and work within these existing structures to distribute and increase access to healthy, locally and regionally produced foods. Moreover, such a project may also identify additional and perhaps alternative food distribution channels. There are over 80,000 individuals living in Ontario's remote northern communities, which are fundamentally dependent on these food channels.

Constraints/Overcoming Them

Some of the co-op's constraints involve the lack of operational funding. As the co-op grows there is a need to hire more permanent staff and they are in the process of building capacity to support this growth. Because of the co-op's desire to grow naturally and sustainably, it takes time to create and establish the diverse initiatives they would like to explore. They are not able to take a lot of risks. They will only take steps forward if there is a solid foundation to stand on.

Successes

There have been numerous successes in the year and a half that the co-op has been operating. One of the greatest successes is the opening of a storefront location that serves to increase the availability and accessibility of local foods to individuals living in and around Thunder Bay. The co-op is open six days a week, and provides a centralized location for local producers to sell their products and for local consumers to access them.

Another success is a tremendous community support and interest that the cooperative has received. To date, there are 51 producer members, 298 individual members, and 8 commercial/organizational members. These memberships are from across the region and not just around Thunder Bay, demonstrating substantial regional support for the initiative.

Connections have been made between the co-op and local businesses and organizations, and they try to work co-operatively to develop relationships that are mutually beneficial. For example, the co-op works with two other local businesses to share shipping costs for certain products that they source from producers in the region.

Another success is that they have been able to maintain the autonomy of the organization. They have been very conscious of developing a structure that allows them to stand on their own two feet, and to not depend on external influences. Rather, they have sought to focus on meeting the identified needs in the region.

This year the co-op started a multi-producer co-operative community supported agriculture (CCSA) initiative, which includes nine local producer members and 43 individual members (i.e., they provide 43 local food boxes/shares weekly over the course of 12 weeks). Twenty six shares are split among seven remote communities, while the remaining 17 were sold within the city of Thunder Bay.

The co-op is an active participant in the Nutrition North Program; of 33 national suppliers they are the only non-profit organization that was accepted into the Program, and the only one focused on local food. They receive a subsidy for delivering healthy foods to remote northern Ontario communities. Through the CCSA program, they send food regularly to Fort Albany, Kashechewan, Attawapiskat, Peawanuck, Fort Severn, Muskrat Dam, and Bearskin Lake First Nations.

The co-op also has a federated co-op in Fort Albany. True North Community Co-operative Fort Albany has become a catalyst for food security initiatives in the remote First Nation. Members had been undertaking numerous food initiatives independently for approximately four years. Since pulling together under the co-operative structure, individuals have begun undertaking collective projects and moving forward long-held dreams, turning them into a reality. With support from the Board of Directors, producer members, and organizational members individuals in Fort Albany have begun community and household gardens, a poultry project, good food boxes, placed individual orders for food, and added regionally produced goods to the list of products available through their alternative markets. The autonomy of members in Fort Albany is of the utmost importance. Eventually these members will incorporate an autonomous co-operative of their own and TNCC has and will continue to lend their knowledge and resources towards this end goal.

Relevance

Over the course of the development of the co-op, a number of individuals met with another co-op in Northern Ontario that had started just a couple of years prior to the opening of True North Community Co-op. They were able to gather information about the challenges and successes of the other co-op and to implement different strategies to avoid similar mistakes. They have made a conscious effort to grow the co-op naturally and sustainably and to build a strong foundation for its success. They have developed relationships with local businesses to sustain themselves; through these mutually

beneficial relationships, they share capacity, overhead, infrastructure, and staffing. It is a very collaborative initiative.

The initiative is community-based and seeks to help redefine the vision of community. The initiative seeks to reflect the interconnected reality between human players and the natural systems that sustain us. This requires a systems approach. We must take into consideration all of the factors that affect our food system.

This is a model that could be used in other communities to increase availability and access to local foods, and to connect local producers and consumers. This co-operative creates a structure that allows producers to set their own price for their products; this supports the viability of local food production and ensures that neither producers nor consumers are exploited. They focus on true value pricing, which means that prices are consistent regardless of where the product is sold.

They are a regional co-op so their storefront is only one component of their operations. Most sales occur beyond the store, primarily through the CCSA, and through the Nutrition North Program, where food is shipped to several remote Northern Ontario communities.

The commitment to the initiative is based on community economic development, social justice and food sovereignty. The co-op encourages active community engagement and volunteerism. It demonstrates that one need not be a primary producer to be an active part of the local food system, and that consumers need to be valued as much as farmers. They believe that all individuals working towards building a strong local food system should be valued.

Resources

The co-op has a website: www.truenorthcoop.ca (under construction), a Facebook page (www.facebook.com/truenorthcommunitycooperative), a quarterly newsletter, pamphlets, and membership cards. They also produce an Annual Report which is available to the public.

Case Study 5: Northern Ontario Health Units

Prepared by Lee-Ann Chevrette, Connie Nelson, and Mirella Stroink

1) Northwestern Health Unit:

First round interviewees: Jennifer Maki, Public Health Nutritionist (Sioux Lookout), Stephanie Cran, Public Health Educator (Dryden), Chelsea LeCain, Public Health Dietitian (Kenora), Megan Bale, Public Health Dietitian (Fort Frances), Lisa Haessler (Coordinator for CloverBelt Country Farmers' Market and Locavore Box)

Case study interview: Stephanie Cran, Public Health Educator (Dryden), Jennifer Maki, Public Health Nutritionist (Sioux Lookout)

2) Thunder Bay District Health Unit:

First round interviewee: Catherine Schwartz-Mendez, Public Health Nutritionist

Case study interviewee: Catherine Schwartz-Mendez

3) Sudbury & District Health Unit:

Case study interviewees: Bridget King, Public Health Nutritionist, Lesley Andrade, Public Health Nutritionist

Introduction

Health units in northern Ontario play a significant role in the development and support of local food system initiatives within their communities, districts and regions in northern Ontario. It appears that they face numerous and similar challenges and opportunities, and provide significant resources to building community food security.

This case study explores the efforts of three distinct health units in Northern Ontario. These include: the Northwestern Health Unit, the Thunder Bay District Health Unit, and the Sudbury & District Health Unit; these three health units serve northwestern and northeastern Ontario. It should be noted that four additional Northern Ontario health units, namely the Timiskaming Health Unit, the Porcupine Health Unit, the North Bay Parry Sound District Health Unit and the Algoma Public Health Unit, share many similar challenges and opportunities to these three included in the case study. In fact, all seven of these Northern Ontario health units work collaboratively on food security issues through the Northern Healthy Eating Project, an initiative that will be explored in greater detail below.

Although the food system initiatives that each of these health unit supports may be unique to their particular health unit and reflect the circumstances within its own catchment area, they share numerous similarities in their approaches, and the ways in which they act as food hubs within their regions. Additionally, these health units work collaboratively to share resources and information in order to address community food security.

In the following sections, specific details on each of the three health units are provided, as well as a description of their similarities, and collaborative efforts. It is important to note that the mandate of the District health units does not extend to the far north on-reserve communities in northern Ontario.

Overview

Northwestern Health Unit

The mission of the Northwestern Health Unit is to improve the quality and length of life in our communities - healthy lifestyles and longer lives lived well. The Northwestern Health Unit (originally named the Kenora-Keewatin Area Health Unit) was established in 1948; at that time it served only 6 communities. Today, the Northwestern Health Unit covers the Districts of Rainy River and Kenora, and has 13 offices which serve 19 municipalities and unorganized territories (from Pickle Lake to the American border to the Manitoba border). Staff involved in this study were contacted in the Sioux Lookout, Kenora, and Dryden and Fort Frances offices.

The number of staff has grown from 6 in 1948 (with a budget of \$25,000) to the present complement of 119 permanent staff and 33 temporary or contract staff (with a budget of approximately \$11.4 million for 2006). The present area of the Health Unit is about 77,700 square kilometers, with a population of about 90,000, which has increased from approximately 12,000 people in 1948.

The degree of involvement of Health Unit staff in the development of local food systems varies from providing support and planning, and information for funding resources to very hands-on local food initiative support.

Thunder Bay District Health Unit

The Thunder Bay District Health Unit is a non-profit agency funded jointly by the provincial government and the municipalities that they serve. The Health Unit is governed by a Board of Health which is comprised of twelve municipal representatives and three provincial appointees. Their main office is in Thunder Bay, but they have branch offices in Geraldton, Marathon, Manitouwadge, Nipigon and Schreiber.

The Food Action Network (FAN) is a network that brings many groups together to improve access to enough affordable, nutritious, safe, environmentally sustainable food for all. The Thunder Bay District Health Unit was an original partner, since 1995 when the Food Action Network was created. The NorWest Community Health Centre led the first group meeting; at that time, the initiative was more focussed around emergency food/food banks. A couple of years later, the Thunder Bay District Health Unit took on the Chair role for the group, because it fit better within its mandate. They have been the clearinghouse and administrative lead on FAN since 1998. The purpose of this group is to create awareness, support food projects, promote local food, advocate for policies that support community food security, and act as an information centre for community food security in the District of Thunder Bay.

The Sudbury & District Health Unit

The Sudbury & District Health Unit is a public health agency committed to improving health and reducing social inequities in health through evidence-informed practice. Their main office is in the City of Greater Sudbury and they have four branch offices throughout the districts of Sudbury and Manitoulin.

The Health Unit has over 250 staff who deliver provincially legislated public health programs and services. The Health Unit is governed by the Board of Health, has strong community and inter-agency partnerships, is part of a provincial network of 36 non-profit public health agencies, and is funded jointly by local and provincial governments. They work with individuals, families, the community and partner agencies to promote and protect health and to prevent disease.

The Health Unit prepares the annual Sudbury and Manitoulin Districts' Community Food Security Directory, which serves to increase community food security in the Sudbury & District Health Unit catchment area by:

- linking individuals with food programs and other food resources in their community
- increasing awareness of the healthy community food systems approach and the City of Greater Sudbury (CGS) Food Charter.

Human Resources

Northwestern Health Unit

The Public Health Dietitians, Public Health Nutritionists and Public Health Educators have the greatest involvement in local food security initiatives within the Health Unit. There are two Public Health Nutritionists and they provide support and planning to food system initiatives across their region.

Thunder Bay District Health Unit/FAN

FAN has one paid staff person, Catherine Schwartz-Mendez, who acts as Chair, and provides support and planning to a diverse number of local food initiatives that are affiliated with FAN. They also have a summer student, and have other Health Unit staff who provide administrative and other in-kind support to the network.

The Sudbury & District Health Unit

Lesley Andrade is the Chair of the Northern Healthy Eating Program and a Public Health Nutritionist. The SDHU has 7 Registered Dietitians (2 public health nutritionists and 5 public health dietitians).

Financial Resources

All three Health Units receive provincial and municipal funding support. They also apply for additional external funding for projects and have been successful in receiving funding from such funding bodies as OMIF, Futures, and PACE.

Programs

There are numerous programs which have been initiated across northern Ontario with the assistance of staff and resources from the Health Units. Some of these are listed below; additional details on each initiative are provided in the original interviews.

Northwestern Health Unit

- Healthy Living Food Box (Kenora)
- Clover Valley Food Box (Fort Frances)
- Rainy River Valley Food For All-Rainy River District
- Apple Core (Atikokan) (group)
- Farmers Markets in Kenora, Dryden/Oxdrift, Fort Frances, Sioux Lookout
- Locavore Box (Dryden)
- Community Gardens
- Nutritious Food Basket

Thunder Bay District Health Unit/FAN

- Good Food Box (launched)
- Thunder Bay Food Charter
- Community Garden Collective
- Get Fresh Guide (directory of local producers)
- Nutritious Food Basket annual survey and report
- School nutrition programs
- Partnerships with numerous local food initiatives

The Sudbury & District Health Unit

- Sudbury and Manitoulin District's Community Food Security Directory
- Sudbury Food Charter
- Nutritious Food Basket annual survey and report
- Community Gardens
- School nutrition programs
- Partnerships with numerous local food initiatives

Constraints/Overcoming Them

Many of the barriers relating to the development of local food systems are consistent across these three Health Units. All provide services across large geographic areas. There are significant issues with accessibility to local food, including transportation and distribution barriers. In some northern communities, there are very few (and in some cases no) local producers. This means that the existing local producers typically travel large distances to provide local food to communities in the North. This is, in part, out of necessity; due to the relatively small populations of these northern communities, there is a need to access additional markets to increase viability and profitability.

Climatic challenges were identified as a significant barrier to developing a local food system; the growing season in the north is relatively short and local fresh produce is available for only a few months per year. Additionally, the agricultural community (i.e., local producers/farmers) is relatively small in the North. There is a significant concern about the loss of farmers and the subsequent loss of agricultural knowledge and skills. Farming is not considered to be a viable career choice by most, and it is certainly not promoted as such in the current educational system. A loss of traditional food preservation skills have compounded this, because even if there is an abundance of food

grown during the available growing season, few individuals are knowledgeable of methods to preserve these foods for winter use.

Lack of available funding is a significant constraint, as is time availability. Health Unit staff are involved in numerous initiatives and provide whatever assistance they can to support these initiatives; however, consistent funding to hire coordinators has been recommended several times as a possible solution.

Policy constraints on local food production were also identified, including the ‘one-size-fits-all’ issue with respect to policy that is written for larger producers. These policies often create significant barriers that are prohibitive to small local producers.

Consumer education was also identified as a significant barrier to the development of the local food system. There is an expressed need to develop more educational programs that will highlight the many important benefits of supporting the development of a strong local food economy.

Because the health units have enforcement powers and responsibilities, it was identified that there are, at times, challenges in dealing with local producers, whose efforts they ultimately want to support. Although some government policies may not be entirely applicable or relevant for small producers, it is the Health Unit’s responsibility to uphold these regulations.

It is more relevant in the North to look at a regional food system as opposed to a local food system. Due to geography, climatic, and transportation/distribution barriers, many of the existing local producers travel significant distances to access markets. It is not uncommon for individuals to refer to food that has traveled upwards of 500 km from another northern Ontario community as ‘local’.

Lack of both provincial and national food policies were also considered a significant barrier constraining their ability to advocate for change to the current food system model. Such policies would help to increase awareness of what is required and what steps they can take to get there. Positive changes to the education system and to the activities of communities/municipalities would result from such policies.

There is also a significant interest in the North in wild fish, game, and plant harvesting; however, there are significant constraints in terms of public health. These issues were not covered in this case study.

Successes

There were numerous successes identified through this case study. Aside from their involvement in the development and ongoing support of numerous local food initiatives, their collaboration efforts are also a success.

All seven northern Ontario Health Units collaborate through the Northern Healthy Eating Project. This initiative, which is the result of the merging of two separate networks (the Northern Nutrition Personnel and the old Northern Healthy Eating Program), is a network

and sharing collaboration, with a food security and advocacy focus. Registered dietitians from these Health Units come together three times per year via teleconference to discuss community food security. One face-to-face planning meeting is also scheduled.

In 2010, the group came together and did some strategic planning. They identified that there are unique needs in the north and not as many resources available to individuals. There is a vast geography, and it became apparent that there was a need to pool resources, share knowledge and skills and support each other. The group felt that they would have a louder collective voice in advocacy for the north for community food security.

Uniqueness

The uniqueness of these Health Units lies perhaps in the large geographic distances that they serve, and their apparent ability to connect with numerous sectors involved in the development of a strong local food system within their respective locales. Particularly in the smaller northern communities, the mandate of these Health Units allows them to play a central role in supporting the efforts of diverse groups and initiatives. They provide staff time, funding and in-kind support, and are often the administrative lead on projects.

Relevance

The role played by these Health Units in the development of local food systems is significant and appears to be consistent across Northern Ontario. They certainly appear to act as food hubs and are often the ‘go to’ organization when it comes to local food security initiatives within their respective communities. Although there are four additional northern Ontario Health Units, as mentioned above, that were not included as part of this case study, an investigation of their roles as local food hubs would be of interest to the broader picture in northern Ontario food hubs. They likely play a very similar role in the development of local food systems to the three Health Units included in this case study.

Resources

Northwestern Health Unit

Website: www.nwhu.on.ca

They have publications and links to other resources at their website.

Thunder Bay District Health Unit/FAN

Website: www.tbdhu.com

<http://www.tbdhu.com/HealthyLiving/HealthyEating/FoodSecurity/FAN.htm>

They have publications and links to other resources at their website.

The Sudbury & District Health Unit

Website: www.sdhu.com

They have numerous publications and links to other resources on their website.

Nutrition Tools for Schools

School Vegetable and Fruit Action Guide, Paint your plate. Create a masterpiece. (Both of these initiatives were collaborations with many health units).

Additional Notes

All of the individuals who were interviewed while conducting this case study identified both a desire and a need for greater knowledge and resource sharing, and communication and collaboration among those working in the realm of community food security in Northern Ontario. There appears to be a shared experience in the North, with individuals/organizations experiencing similar opportunities and constraints; providing opportunities to share these experiences and learn from one another appears to be a priority. The idea of a 'Northern Food Network' to connect these initiatives, was identified on several occasions.