

OUR CITY, OUR FOOD

Strengthening Food Systems through Local Action



The way we design our cities, develop policies and engage communities at the local level all impact our food system. The Halifax Food Policy Alliance (HFPA) has been working closely with the Halifax Regional Municipality and other stakeholders with an interest in food issues to create healthy, just and sustainable food systems in the Halifax region. This document highlights some of the food systems work that has been accomplished to date and offer some suggestions for the future. We encourage readers to use this document to enhance their understanding of the current context and consider solutions to address food systems issues.

The Halifax Food Policy Alliance (HFPA)

The HFPA was formed in 2013 as a partnership of individuals and organizations representing various facets of the food system. The HFPA is striving to build healthy, just and sustainable food systems for Halifax in order to achieve our vision:

Halifax: where no one is hungry and everyone has nutritious food that they enjoy, for generations to come, sustained by local producers.

The work of the HFPA centers around three key activities:

- Building awareness of existing and emerging food system opportunities;
- Connecting and fostering dialogue with diverse people and organizations to strengthen collaboration and advance action across the food system; and,
- Informing and supporting food related policies and initiatives that benefit Haligonians.

Since 2013, the HFPA has led and supported many initiatives in efforts to raise awareness of the connection between food systems issues and the municipal policy agenda. The work of the HFPA includes the release of *Food Counts: Halifax Food Assessment* in 2015, the development of a food planning toolkit, the completion of a policy scan of food related policies, and the engagement of food leaders through a workshop and social media.

Building on these accomplishments, the HFPA continues to seek opportunities to work collaboratively with the municipality in the development of local programs, strategies and policies that promote and support healthy, just and sustainable food systems.

The Importance of Municipal Action

The impacts of climate change, planning and development pressures, and issues of poverty and health inequities are increasingly felt at the community level. These complex issues require a collective approach across all levels of government; however, local attention and local action are particularly effective for community change. In relation to food systems the promise of local action has many benefits including:

- Strengthened regional economy and agriculture sector;
- Decreased waste and pressure on municipal systems;
- Improved public health;
- Reduce inequities related to food access and consumption, and
- Improved air, water and soil quality.

It is clear that the municipality has shown leadership and commitment to working with others to create healthy, just and sustainable food systems. Some notable examples include:

- The Regional Plan recognizes the importance of preserving agricultural land and furthered this with the 2014 amendments requiring that the design of communities promote food security. The aforementioned food planning toolkit will support this planning work.
- Since inception in 2008, community gardens on municipal properties have flourished with 20 gardens to date and many more thriving on privately owned land.
- In 2013, the Mayor’s Conversation on Healthy and Livable Communities was a catalyst for the development of urban orchards and emphasized the importance of local food. Furthermore a growing interest and focus on food is apparent in the direction to build a closer relationship with the Halifax Food Policy Alliance (HFPA).
- In 2015, Council endorsed the Healthy Environments Declaration (blue dot) which includes “the right to safe food”.
- The support of the Mayor’s office, Halifax Council, Halifax Transit and municipal staff were pivotal in the realization of the Halifax Mobile Food Market and showcased that a collaborative approach to food systems issues, like accessibility and affordability, was not only possible but extremely successful.
- The draft Centre Plan contains a number of policy statements that strengthen the support to create a healthy, just, and sustainable food system.

Building on these successes, the HFPA has identified the following 4 key actions where the municipality can further their pivotal role in supporting local food systems, community food security, and health.



ACTION 1: CHAMPION

Across the country, municipal governments are creating positive change through food systems planning and implementation of innovative food initiatives. Success requires strong leadership and coordination at all levels.

1. Build awareness and capacity of municipal staff across departments to identify challenges and opportunities related to food systems work.
2. Invest in staff and resources that will help to prioritize food and apply a food systems lens to decision making.
3. Support the HFPA in the development of a municipal wide food charter and strategy - a comprehensive plan that outlines actions, set targets and timelines, and commits resources for implementation.
4. Continue to support and pilot new solutions that learn from models and best practices in other jurisdictions (eg. Halifax Mobile Food Market).

Many cities throughout Canada have developed Food Charters and Food Strategies as a way to provide a road map for local governments and communities to integrate food systems issues into a single framework.

Some examples include Vancouver, Saskatoon, Toronto, Thunder Bay and Waterloo.



ACTION 2: MAXIMIZE & BUILD MUNICIPAL ASSETS

The municipality has many physical and social assets (schools, libraries, community centres, etc.) that hold great promise as “food hubs” that promote health and contribute to the vibrancy of our neighbourhoods. There are opportunities to maximize existing infrastructure in support of healthy, just, sustainable food systems and improved community health.

1. Assess the current regional and neighbourhood “food assets” such as urban farms, farmer’s markets, community composting facilities, shared cooking and processing spaces and work alongside the HFPA to increase the potential of these assets through investment, shared services, linkage to municipal facilities and other supports.
2. Continue to invest in programs and services through leadership, coordination, space provision, policies and programming that improve access to healthy foods and promote food literacy education, such as community cooking programs, healthy eating guidelines for sport and recreation facilities, youth-led social enterprises, incubator kitchens, etc.



ACTION 3: CREATE SUPPORTIVE POLICIES

Supportive food policies create an environment where individuals and families can access affordable housing, good transportation, and complete neighbourhoods that promote health and community food security.

1. Review, influence, and create policies that can contribute to a healthy, just, and sustainable food system. Specifically ensure that:
 - a. Land use policies promote urban agriculture and support diverse economic opportunities for healthy food retail in all neighbourhoods.
 - b. Organizational policies create supportive environments through the adoption of healthy eating guidelines, procurement practices, and waste recovery initiatives.
2. Adopt a Social Policy Framework to guide the role and approach of the municipality in engaging with social policies and programs. Please refer to the August 4, 2015 HRM staff report submitted to Community Planning Economic Development Standing Committee of Council for more information.



ACTION 4: COLLABORATE

Across the Halifax region there are many groups and individuals working to build local food systems and address community food security. This work requires effective coordination and communication amongst stakeholders.

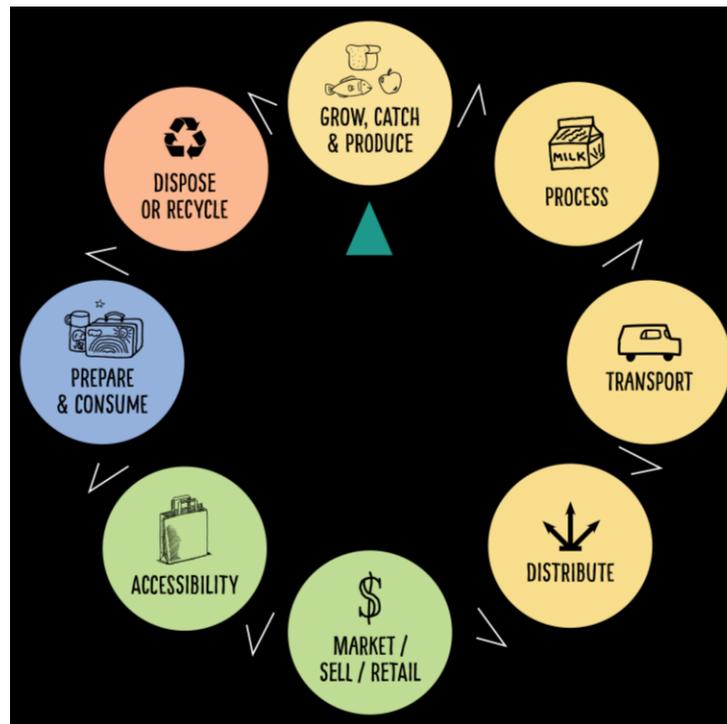
1. Collaborate with local partners to build bridges across sectors (non-profits, private sectors, government departments) and leverage resources that help to advance goals around community food security.
2. Continue to actively engage and consult with existing multi-sectoral groups to link initiatives to municipal priorities and plans. These include groups and organizations such as the HFPA and the Try Do Council.

*A 2016 Social Return on Investment report focused on the Halifax Food Policy Alliance found that “for \$1 invested in the HFPA, there is \$5.53 gained in benefits to stakeholders. In other words, **the HFPA generates more than 5 times the amount of value that it costs.**”*

Ecology Action Centre

The Food System

The food system is defined by the activities of commercial and non-commercial actors who grow, catch, harvest, process, transport, distribute, market, acquire, prepare, recycle and dispose of food within particular economic, environmental, social and political spheres of influence¹



What is a Healthy, Just, Sustainable Food System?

Healthy

“Healthy food systems provide supportive environments for equitable access to appropriate amounts of safe and nutritious foods as a resource for physical, emotional, spiritual, and mental health for all people. People are able to satisfy their needs and preferences, and have the knowledge, resources and abilities necessary to improve their own health.”

Just

“Just food systems honour the rights of all individuals to dignified and equitable access to food, including the economic and social resources to do so. People working within these systems are able to earn an appropriate living and are treated fairly. Just food systems also ensure that everyone has equitable opportunities and abilities to participate in decisions that affect them.”

Sustainable

“Sustainable food systems maintain the health of the environment without jeopardizing the ability of current and future generations to harvest and produce food (farming, fishing, hunting, and foraging). Sustainable food systems restore and protect natural resources, because without healthy environments, we will not have food.”

Source: FoodARC (2015). Make Food Matter Toolkit (p 2). <http://foodarc.ca/makefoodmatter/evidence/make-food-matter-report/>

¹McRae, R, & Donahue, K. (2013). Municipal food entrepreneurs report: a preliminary analysis of how Canadian cities and regional districts are involved in food system change. Retrieved from: http://capi-icpa.ca/pdfs/2013/Municipal_Policy_Entrepreneurs_Final_Report.pdf

