

## Healthy Food Procurement for Community Food Security

Where we live, work, learn, and play shapes the kinds of foods we eat. These **food environments** can include the number and kinds of places where people can buy food in a neighbourhood, the type of food available, the price and quality of food, and our experiences in buying food<sup>i</sup>. When healthy foods<sup>1</sup> are commonly available, it is easier for us to make healthy choices and improve our health.

The World Health Organization (WHO) recommends a number of ways to improve food environments. One key recommendation is for public organizations, such as municipalities, to purchase and provide healthy food guided by food procurement policies<sup>ii</sup>. There are a number of municipal settings where healthy and local foods could be provided including: community centres, libraries, sports and recreation facilities, and municipal offices and events.

There are different ways to value food - cost, quality, health, whether it supports people who are producing it, and environmental impact. While there may be higher upfront costs associated with purchasing healthy and local food, changing food procurement policies and practices can have many benefits such as preventing chronic diseases<sup>iii</sup>, supporting local producers and economies, reducing negative environmental effects, and raising awareness about the importance of healthy eating and where our food comes from.



### How can Halifax support Healthy and Local Food Procurement?

The municipality has taken steps to improve access to healthy food in its facilities. In several facilities where food is provided by a private company, they are required to provide healthier options. However the availability of healthy foods varies from place to place and there is a lack of coordination in procurement practices across municipal departments. As well, food is often available at many internal municipal events and public events, but there is no requirement for healthy or local choices. To strengthen municipal efforts to create healthy food environments, the Halifax Food Policy Alliance recommends the following:

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<sup>1</sup> For the purposes of this document, **healthy food** includes foods in [Canada's Food Guide](#) that are **low** in sodium, sugar, and saturated fat and **unhealthy food** includes foods **high** in sodium, sugar, and saturated fat, such as sugar sweetened beverages, cookies, cakes, other sweets, potato chips etc.

## RECOMMENDATION #1: Assess Halifax's food procurement practices

### 1.1 Request a staff report to:

- Identify Halifax Municipal departments that procure food and document existing practices or policies, including healthy food criteria used in Requests for Proposals, tenders and other agreements.
- Identify opportunities for coordinated efforts across departments to enhance the availability of healthy foods in municipal settings and limit unhealthy foods, such as sugar-sweetened beverages.

## RECOMMENDATION #2: Develop a healthy and local food procurement policy for the Halifax region

### 2.1 Create a comprehensive policy that supports the procurement of healthy food and development of healthy food environments by:

- Recognizing that long term benefits outweigh the initial costs of shifting to procuring and offering healthy foods to residents.
- Defining and standardizing the criteria for healthy food<sup>2</sup>.
- Identifying opportunities to work with other levels of government to standardize criteria for procurement processes.
- Integrating healthy food procurement criteria into existing policies.
- Addressing differences and streamlining practices across departments.
- Ensuring that any food service purchased by the municipality includes healthy food, and also limits the sale of unhealthy food and drinks.
- Supporting the implementation of healthy and local food procurement policies, setting measurable goals for increasing healthy and local food availability, and reporting on success.



## RECOMMENDATION #3: Raise awareness of Halifax residents about healthy and local food

### 3.1 Raise awareness of residents about healthy and local food options and benefits by:

- Integrating awareness campaigns on buying and eating healthy foods with other public engagement and communication efforts.
- Working with municipal staff to explore new opportunities for increasing availability, interest and awareness of healthy and local food options.

## REFERENCES

- i. Health Canada. Measuring the Food Environment in Canada. [http://www.foodsecuritynews.com/resource-documents/MeasureFoodEnvironm\\_EN.pdf](http://www.foodsecuritynews.com/resource-documents/MeasureFoodEnvironm_EN.pdf)
- ii. WHO, 2008-2013 action plan for global strategy for the prevention and control of non-communicable disease prevent and control cardiovascular diseases, cancers, chronic respiratory diseases and diabetes. Geneva: WHO, 2008
- iii. Campbell, N., Duhaney, T., Arango, M., Ashley, L., Bacon, S., Gelfer, M., Kaczorowski, J., Mang, E. et al. (2014). Healthy food procurement policy: An important intervention to aid the reduction in chronic non communicable diseases. Canadian Journal of Cardiology, 30: 1456-1459.

<sup>2</sup> Examples of nutrient criteria for foods include: [Healthy Eating in Sport and Recreation Settings Guidelines](#) and [Nova Scotia Health Authority Public Health Healthy Food and Beverages Guide](#)