

*Creating a
Food Revolution:*

*A Healthy Community
Food System Plan
for Sarnia-Lambton*



Sarnia-Lambton

FoodCoalition

...cultivating fresh ideas

June 2011

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of Ontario





We would like to thank the 101 **community members** who attended roundtable discussions across Sarnia-Lambton in September 2010 to share food issues that matter to them. We would also like to thank the 41 **community members** who attended the Sarnia-Lambton Food Summit in November 2010 and proposed actions to address local food issues identified during the roundtable discussions. We appreciate your time and your commitment to improving the health of our local food system.

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A Healthy Community Food System Plan for Sarnia-Lambton is a report prepared by the Sarnia-Lambton Food Coalition. This report presents a community food system plan developed through community consultation to guide action for the creation of a healthy food system for Sarnia-Lambton.

The "food system" includes all of the activities and relationships related to every aspect of the food cycle, including growing, harvesting, transporting, processing, distributing, marketing, selling, preparing, consuming, and disposing of food.¹

A healthy community food system integrates all of the pieces of the food system to enhance the environmental, economic, social and nutritional health of a community.²

A healthy food system would benefit Sarnia-Lambton by:

- Fostering food-friendly neighbourhoods
- Promoting social justice
- Supporting nutrition and disease prevention
- Building strong communities
- Creating local, diverse and green economic development
- Protecting and sustaining the environment
- Empowering people with food skills and information
- Nourishing links between city and countryside³

Background to this Report

In January 2010, representatives from the City of Sarnia, County of Lambton Community Health Services Department, Inn of the Good Shepherd and Lambton Federation of Agriculture met to discuss current food issues in Sarnia-Lambton. The working group felt, that to best address these issues, better connections between different sectors of the local food system were needed.

The working group held a community meeting for individuals and organizations interested in establishing a unified community body that would identify and address food issues in Sarnia-Lambton. Attendees included community members, representatives of local not-for-profit organizations, farmers, business people, educators and health professionals.

The Sarnia-Lambton Food Coalition (SLFC) formed in July 2010 as an outcome of this community meeting. The SLFC envisions a healthy food system that boosts the nutritional, environmental, economic, and social health of Sarnia-Lambton. The SLFC recognized that the first step toward achieving a healthy food system was championing the development of a food system plan. This plan identifies a list of actions that can be used to improve the health of our food system.

¹ Toronto Public Health. (May 2010). Cultivating Food Connections: Toward a Healthy and Sustainable Food System for Toronto.

² Region of Waterloo Public Health. (April 2007). A Healthy Community Food System Plan for Waterloo Region.

³ Toronto Public Health. (May 2010). Cultivating Food Connections: Toward a Healthy and Sustainable Food System for Toronto.



January 2010	Working group formed to discuss local food issues; a need to form better connections within the local food system identified.
June 2010	Over 30 community members interested in local food issues attended the community meeting <i>"Building a Strong Voice for Local, Healthy Food."</i>
July 2010	Sarnia-Lambton Food Coalition established.
September 2010	Community roundtables held in Alvinston, Mooretown, Sarnia, Thedford and Wyoming to identify food issues that matter to Sarnia-Lambton residents.
October 2010	Two focus groups held to gather input from the low-income community.
November 2010	Sarnia-Lambton Food Summit held to identify strategies to address local food issues.
June 2011	A Healthy Community Food System Plan for Sarnia-Lambton completed.

Community roundtables were held to identify food issues of importance to the community and gather comments. Roundtables were held throughout Sarnia-Lambton to allow for greater opportunity for community residents to provide input. Two focus groups were held with low-income residents to identify food issues specific to this population. A total of 101 community members participated in these discussions.

Community member input was compiled and the following recurring food issues emerged:

- access to healthy food for all
- ensuring everyone can afford healthy food
- skills for growing and preparing food
- public engagement in food system issues
- returning more of the food dollar to farmers
- local food processing and distribution
- links between urban and rural areas
- healthy food policy at all government levels

On November 20, 2010, 41 community members attended the Sarnia-Lambton Food Summit, including:

- Community groups
- Not-for-profit organizations
- Food retailers
- Producers
- Health professionals
- Political leaders
- Community residents

The purpose of the summit was to discuss how to address and prioritize the above food issues. Attendees were broken into discussion groups, where they identified SMART actions for a specific food issue.

After reviewing all of the proposed actions, attendees prioritized the food issues based on importance. The top 2 food issues were: **access to healthy food for all** and **ensuring everyone can afford healthy food**.

This report synthesizes community input from the roundtables and food summit to propose a goal for achieving a healthy food system in Sarnia-Lambton and several objectives, strategies and actions for reaching that goal.

The SLFC summarized community input and evaluated the comments according to:

- local community support
- community readiness for activity
- ease of implementation
- financial support needed
- potential impact on the local food system



HEALTHY COMMUNITY FOOD SYSTEM PLAN FOR SARNIA-LAMBTON



Goal: To give Sarnia-Lambton residents control over a food system where everyone has access to and can afford safe, nutritious, culturally-acceptable food that is produced in an environmentally sustainable way and sustain our rural communities.

OBJECTIVES	STRATEGIES	ACTIONS
Increase accessibility of healthy food	Ensure all residents can afford to buy healthy food.	Advocate for increased social assistance rates, minimum wage, and affordable urban housing. Investigate new payment options for Garden Fresh Box.
	Ensure healthy food is available in every neighbourhood.	Conduct food desert mapping (including food retail locations and transportation supports) to support advocacy for improved access to healthy food. Conduct feasibility study for establishment of a grocery store in downtown Sarnia. Conduct feasibility study for establishment of mobile farmers' markets throughout S-L. Advocate for the establishment of by-laws that support farm sales in urban locations. Establish a Garden Fresh Box site in every municipality. Advocate for municipal buildings and workplaces to adopt healthy food policies.
	Increase urban agriculture	Establish a community garden network to determine and address needs and gaps related to community garden development. Additional directions may include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing a local community gardening manual. • Applying for start-up funding (which may include a paid Community Garden Co-ordinator position). • Identifying potential garden locations. • Advocating for municipal support (e.g. land access including city property, schools, parkland, etc.) • Identifying community volunteers to provide education including growing, preparing, and storing food. Partner with a school to pilot a school gardening program for students. Investigate the development of an "urban land-exchange" initiative in Sarnia-Lambton that links people with unused yard space with those looking for a place to grow food.
Strengthen residents' food skills	Partner with education system to provide food skill-building opportunities	Investigate existing food skill program manuals that parent groups could utilize to teach children and youth how to grow, prepare, and/or preserve food.
	Establish Community Kitchens	Investigate local kitchen facilities that could support establishment of community kitchens. Promote existing community kitchens on County of Lambton Community Health Services website. Investigate implementation of existing food preparation programs for general population (e.g. Cook It Up). Develop an annual, food-focused social marketing campaign. Work with local emergency food suppliers to expand to community food centres.



OBJECTIVES	STRATEGIES	ACTIONS
<p>Connect urban and rural areas through food</p>	<p>Engage the public in food system issues</p>	<p>Develop a series of annual food-focused social marketing campaigns. Support promotion of agricultural education in the classroom. Investigate alternative means for providing agricultural education to consumers in connection with LFA, commodity groups, etc.</p>
	<p>Improve promotion of local food</p>	<p>Establish a website to connect local producers with consumers through farm gate sales mapping, a discussion forum, recipes utilizing local products, etc. Partner with current downtown events (i.e. First Friday, Artwalk, etc.) to highlight local food. Expand the Locally Lambton label. Connect with Tourism Sarnia-Lambton to promote local food and farms in Lambton County. Support "Locally Lambton farm map committee" during future revisions of Food and Fun on the Farm. Connect with Lambton Federation of Agriculture to expand farm tour to include transportation support (e.g. bus) from urban areas and strengthen hands-on agricultural education.</p>
<p>Support farms that sell food locally</p>	<p>Increase farm gate sales</p>	<p>Investigate farm sales in urban locations, including reviewing municipal bylaws.</p>
	<p>Promote farm-to-institution food sales</p>	<p>Investigate farm-to-institution programs in Lambton County and promote development.</p>
	<p>Support co-operation between producers</p>	<p>Establish a network of producers to collaborate to sell food in local markets (e.g. online ordering, shared supports including retail space, shared expenses including transportation and marketing costs). Re-organize the Garden Fresh Box to include produce bought directly from local producers.</p>
<p>Advance food-based community economic development</p>	<p>Improve local food processing accessibility</p>	<p>Work proactively with food processors to identify potential resources. Investigate subsidies and support programs for local food processors (e.g. tax breaks, incubator kitchens, food processing co-operatives).</p>
	<p>Support new local food businesses</p>	<p>Identify supports that should be developed to encourage establishment of new food businesses.</p>
<p>Develop partnerships to support implementation of the community food system plan</p>		<p>Establish Sarnia-Lambton Food Coalition, which includes representatives from different food system sectors to oversee implementation of the plan.</p>
	<p>Establish Sarnia-Lambton Food Charter</p>	<p>Develop food charter that identifies community's food-related values and beliefs by Fall 2011. Advocate for adoption of food charter by all municipalities.</p>



NEXT STEPS

A Healthy Community Food System Plan for Sarnia-Lambton was developed through consultation and collaboration among many different sectors of the food system. To successfully implement this plan, continued creativity, co-operation, communication and co-ordination of stakeholders is essential.

The SLFC intends to build awareness and support for this food system plan through development of a Sarnia-Lambton Food Charter in Fall 2011. This charter will describe our community's vision of a healthy food system by outlining our values and beliefs about food and building support for a healthy community food policy among decision makers.

Increasing the accessibility to healthy food as a key objective for Sarnia-Lambton was identified by community members. To support advocacy for improved access to healthy food in our community, the SLFC will conduct food desert mapping in 2012. This process will map and measure access to healthy food retailers in Sarnia-Lambton and provide recommendations for improvement.

CONCLUSION

Sarnia-Lambton residents identified a range of health, social, and environmental problems related to food. **A Healthy Community Food System Plan for Sarnia-Lambton** proposes strategies and actions for building a healthier community, where everyone has access to, and can afford to buy safe, nutritious, culturally-acceptable food that is produced in an environmentally sustainable way and sustains our rural communities. It is essential that stakeholders from all sectors of the local food system continue to build on this momentum and commit to working in partnership toward this goal.