

## Cooperative Food Distribution Initiative Backgrounder

### Our broad objectives are to:

1. Improve food security for youth, families, elders and all citizens in Kingston
2. Improve the health of our community by increasing access to fresh produce, reducing fossil fuel emissions and pesticides, and improving air quality
3. Build partnerships within and between sectors in our local food system

What follows from these broad objectives are **specific project goals** for the Cooperative Food Distribution Centre:

1. Reclaim food from grocers, restaurants and institutions to be distributed to meal providers, the Foodbank, the Good Food Box, and the Food Sharing Project.
2. Increase the amount of sustainably grown local food distribute to grocers, restaurants and institutions.
3. Long-term: increase the percentage (set targets) of fresh food from sustainable, local farms being provided to hungry Kingstonians through food justice organizations.

Note: One of the key questions facing this innovative collaboration is how to legally structure the relationship between not-for-profit food provider/food justice organizations and local farmers. The feasibility study and development phase of the project will explore various options, including:

- a) Farmers leasing the use of resources from food providers/food justice organizations
- b) Food providers/food justice organizations organizing the sale of sustainably grown local foods as a health priority and fundraising activity. In this scenario, local food would be purchased from farmers for fundraising purposes and delivered to grocers, restaurants and institutions while picking up reclaimed food.

### Local needs have led to the development of this project:

#### 1. Food Insecurity:

**Household:** Food insecurity is a recognized problem in Kingston and area. A survey found that 11.5% of respondents in KFL&A were experiencing food insecurity.<sup>1</sup> The *Food Reclamation Program*, a study conducted in 2003 through Queen's, asserted that nutritious food costs more than other foods by about 6-13% which is a cost increase that low income individuals and families cannot afford.<sup>2</sup> Likewise, Food Providers are struggling for donations and therefore could use food that would otherwise be wasted.<sup>3</sup> However, income is not the only concern when thinking about health and diet. We need to look no further than the north end of Kingston to find what some have called a food desert.<sup>4</sup> 16% of North Kingston households surveyed in 2006 had not purchased fresh fruits and vegetables in the previous two weeks.<sup>5</sup> With no full service grocer at the moment, residents must travel far for fresh food. And with limited bus access and expensive cab fares, getting downtown on a regular basis is not a realistic option for many.

**Community:** Less than 5% of what is eaten in Kingston is grown within 100 km.<sup>6</sup> Although much research remains to be done, it is clear that Kingston is a food insecure region. Simultaneously, 81% of local consumers are interested in purchasing local

food.<sup>7</sup> The gap between supply and demand needs to be narrowed and one of the key components of this is distribution.

2. **Community Health:** Food production and consumption have many implications for the health of our community. It has been estimated that 80% of cardio-vascular disease, 90% of type II diabetes and 30% of cancer is linked to a poor diet.<sup>8</sup> Youth, families, elders and all citizens need access to fresh foods in order to have a healthy diet. Additionally, some fruits and vegetables are not as nutritious due to depletion of soil minerals and early harvest, among other factors.<sup>9</sup> Eating local produce can prevent early harvesting and reduce the travel time, which means healthier for our bodies and a reduction in fossil fuel emissions. Another health concern, which is trickier to address is pesticide exposure. Research has demonstrated that there are “positive associations between solid tumours and pesticide exposure.”<sup>10</sup> For these reasons there is a clear need for access to more fresh produce in general, and more sustainably grown fresh local produce, in our City.
3. **Farm and Food Community:** Farms are decreasing in number, which is unsurprising given that net income of Canadian farms is negative.<sup>11</sup> Kingstonians want a more self-reliant food system, so we need to foster one. This means fair trade for local farmers so that they can earn a living wage for contributing food to our community. By supporting a fair wage for local farmers, we are supporting local trade and the growth of other much needed local businesses, like small-scale artisanal food processors and independent food retailers who create meaningful employment in our neighbourhoods.
4. **Food Waste:** In Kingston, “more than half of household waste is organic matter.”<sup>12</sup> While there are no statistics for waste from Canadian commercial retail food stores, in the United States, the overall loss of saleable food is 5.63%, which translates into roughly 54 billion pounds per year.<sup>13</sup> This “waste” presents an opportunity to reclaim and distribute fresh produce through to those who need it, while reducing the waste burden on our City.

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<sup>1</sup>Rapid Risk Factor Surveillance System Survey (RRFSS), 2005

<sup>2</sup> Anderson, Larissa and Andrea Hook, “Food Reclamation Program.” Queen’s University. 2003

<sup>3</sup> Anderson, Larissa and Andrea Hook, “Food Reclamation Program.” Queen’s University. 2003

<sup>4</sup> Food Down the Road Backgrounder, p23

<sup>5</sup> “Kingston’s Food Desert? The closure of the Kingslake IGA and community food access”, Queen’s Geography Jan, 2007

<sup>6</sup> ibid

<sup>7</sup>Blay-Palmer, Alison, Mike Dwyer and Jennifer Miller, “Sustainable Communities: Building Local Foodshed Capacity in Frontenac Lennox-Addington Counties Through Improved Farm to Fork Lines.” 2006.

<sup>8</sup>Jobin, N. 2006 Presenter, Plenary Session IV New Realities: What Are the Implications of Canadian Consumer Food Choices? The McGill Institute for the Study of Canada Annual Conference: *What Are We Eating? Towards a Canadian Food Policy*, Montreal, February 15-17

<sup>9</sup> Linder, M. “Food quality and its determinants from field to table: Growing food, its storage and preparation.” Nutritional Biochemistry and Metabolism with Clinical AScience.

<sup>10</sup> Ontario College of Family Physicians, “Comprehensive Review of Pesticide Research Confirms Dangers.” Media Release, Toronto, April 23, 2004

<sup>11</sup> Food Down The Road Backgrounder, p. 13

<sup>12</sup> Food Down The Road Backgrounder, p. 26

<sup>13</sup> Jones, Timothy W., “Using Contemporary Archaeology and Applied Anthropology to Understand Food Loss in the American Food System.” University of Arizona. p. 3-4