KPU | Institute for Sustainable Food Systems

Food Systems Planning in Canada

A toolkit of priority practices for planners

March 2024

Compiled by Kwantlen Polytechnic University's **Institute for Sustainable Food Systems**

About ISFS

The **Institute for Sustainable Food Systems** (ISFS) is an applied research and extension unit at Kwantlen Polytechnic University in BC, Canada, that investigates and supports regional food systems as key elements of sustainable communities.

Our applied research focuses on the potential of regional food systems, including agriculture and food, economics, community health, policy, and environmental integrity. The ISFS also facilitates extension programming which provides information and support for farmers, communities, business, policy makers, and others. Community collaboration is central to our approach.

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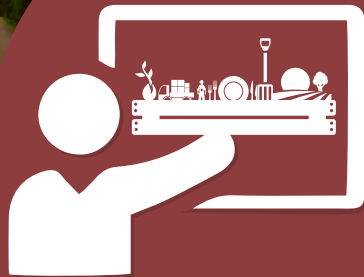✉ Kaelan.Watson@kpu.ca

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1 Introduction

Introduction

Although food is integral to the well-being of our communities, it has not been comprehensively addressed in Canadian planning practice. At the same time, food systems challenges are increasing in their visibility and urgency. The ISFS conducted **a survey of planning practitioners across Canada** to assess the knowledge, skills, and attitudes of the planning profession in Canada concerning food systems planning. The survey revealed a lack of resources and information available for planners with respect to food systems planning and an interest in developing knowledge and skill sets in this emergent area of planning. The survey also revealed that planners are often unsure how food systems fit in relation to their other work priorities.

Following the survey and response analysis, the ISFS conducted an in-depth analysis of the planning environments in which food systems planning occurs in Canada to pinpoint priority practices and determinants of success. The analysis aimed to understand the structures, models, and jurisdictions in which we plan for food, and to produce a resource to guide planners in integrating food systems planning into their practice.

The analysis included research about innovative food systems planning initiatives nationwide. From this, we compiled an inventory of communities conducting successful food systems planning. We interviewed practitioners from selected case study communities about their food systems planning activities, successes, and challenges. For greater detail about our process and findings, view the Phase II project report on the **ISFS project website**. While many communities are doing impactful work, we were limited in the number of interviews we could conduct. The communities interviewed to inform this toolkit included:

- Town of Banff, AB
- City of Brandon, MB
- City of Burnaby, BC
- Capital Regional District, BC
- District of Saanich, BC
- City of Edmonton, AB
- Greater Sudbury, ON
- Halifax Regional Municipality, NS
- City of Kamloops, BC
- Metro Vancouver, BC
- City of St. John's, NL
- City of Thunder Bay, ON
- City of Vancouver, BC
- City of Winnipeg, MB

After a thorough analysis of interview results, we identified and compiled common themes to create this series of process-related priority practices to help guide planners in advancing food systems planning in their communities. This 'toolkit' focuses on priority practices that describe planning processes or structures rather than specific programming or project types. Since the applicability of programs and initiatives (eg. community gardens, particular bylaws, or land protection programs) will vary widely between communities, we believe that focusing on processes and structures will increase the relevance of findings across jurisdictions and community contexts.

2 How to Use this Toolkit

Priority Practices Themes:

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4.1 Setting a Vision for your Food System

4.2 Dedicating Resources

4.3 Championing Food Work

4.4 Collaboration

4.5 Monitoring, Evaluation and Knowledge Sharing

For each practice, the toolkit provides a description and highlights examples from communities across Canada. Considerations relevant to particular practices are highlighted throughout. Links lead to more information about precedents or practices, where available. Relevant resources have been included where available.

Priority practices presented were current at the time interviews were conducted. However as planning practice can change rapidly, we cannot guarantee they will not have changed by the time this toolkit is published.

The Considerations section at the end of this document reflects on the implementation of these practices. While some of the practices profiled in the toolkit may seem obvious, we opted to include them regardless as they arose as critical components to food systems planning through our work.
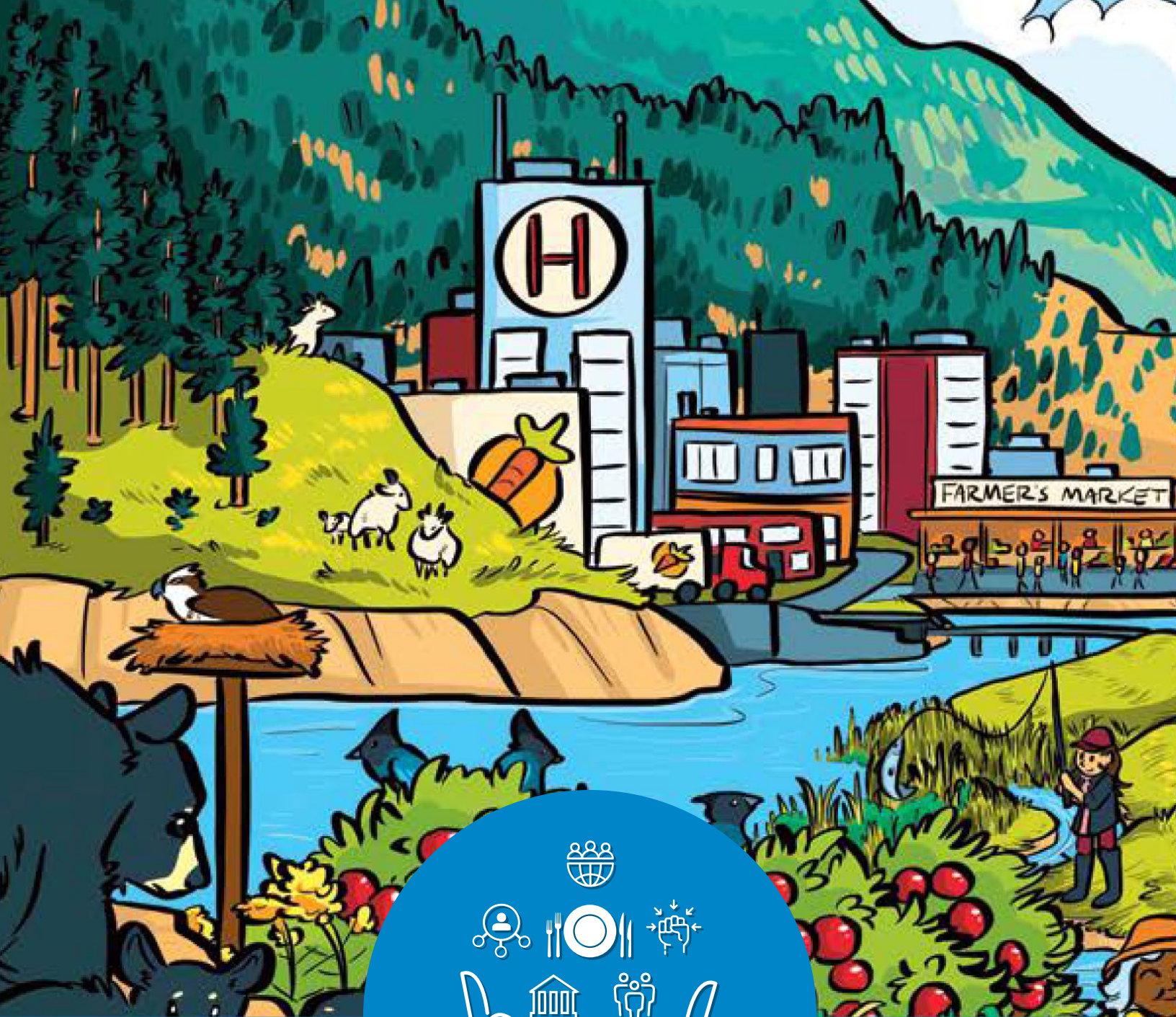
3 Conditions Supporting Food Systems Planning

The following factors emerged from our research as impactful conditions for food systems planning. These factors are not under the direct control of planning practitioners, but instead exist as part of the context for planning work. More details can be found in the phase II project report on the **ISFS website**.

3) **Conditions Supporting Food Systems Planning**

3.1) **Political Will**

> 👤 *Council is fully on board, 100% unanimous, and signed on* [to the food charter]. *So I think that's huge, and that's allowed us to have conversations so that food systems thinking is embedded in everything we do.* [Participant 4]

Food systems planning can be more readily advanced when food system issues are understood and prioritized among elected officials, facilitating funding, dedicated staff time, policy development and other resources. Where political will is lacking, planners and practitioners must work to build support through advocacy and education activities.

3.2) **Autonomy**

> 👤 *We have a lot of autonomy at a staff level to drive food systems planning efforts forward, it just comes down to capacity and bandwidth.* [Participant 5]

The degree to which practitioners have the necessary authority and autonomy to carry out food systems work without excessive oversight or red tape is important to the success of their food planning efforts. References to autonomy included where planners had the jurisdiction to make decisions, and the authority to do so. Where adequate authority exists, efforts are more easily undertaken and success more likely.

3.3) **Community Support**

> 👤 *I think there's an engaged public who are quite passionate about local food production and about the potential in the region which I know doesn't always exist elsewhere, and that I think that there's a group of farmers who are also probably quite interested in supporting that type of thing.* [Participant 1]

Community support is highly influential in the outcome of food systems planning efforts, as it is in any planning process. Some practitioners enjoy a high level of community support if the community has a general passion for food. This is often the case in communities with significant agricultural land or a strong agricultural history.

However, negative public opinion can contribute to project or program failure due to influence on elected officials who may vote against implementation. Similar to political will, planners can work to increase public support through education and advocacy activities.

3.4) **Local Champions**

> 👤 *If they were to leave, that would be a massive hole to fill. They're kind of the driving force with all that. They're... a good one to look at as far as getting everybody to the table and they're very influential with all levels of government.* **[Participant 3]**

Committed, passionate individuals to "champion" food systems work and carry it through the planning and decision making processes greatly helps initiatives to succeed. This could include a passionate planner with a food portfolio, knowledgeable staff from a local food non-profit, an academic, a keen elected official, a member of a local Food Policy Council, or a community member. Having champions lead the work and keep the food agenda moving forward is important to success.

3.5) **Governance**

Food systems planning can be driven by governments, NGOs, or community champions individually or in collaboration. In local and regional governments, food systems planning was held by various departments (eg. sustainability, community development, social policy, economic development). The structure of decision-making in an organization impacts how food systems planning can occur, however there is no single best structure that emerged to enable food systems planning. Understanding the decision-making context in your organization and thinking about how to integrate food systems is likely to be most effective.

4 **Priority Practices**

4.1) Setting a Vision for Your Food System

4.1.1) IDENTIFYING A CORE MOTIVATOR

Description:

Connecting food systems planning to community motivations and goals helps build political will, and prioritize programs and decisions in the planning process. Defining the core motivation to direct the intent of coordinated food systems planning provides clarity, continuity and direction for developing a food system that meets community needs.

A core motivator is not necessarily discussed and decided on but is likely to become apparent when analyzing community needs within the food system.

Examples of primary motivators include;

- *reducing food insecurity,*
- *addressing climate change impacts,*
- *improving community sustainability or resilience,*
- *achieving increased food self-reliance,*
- *bolstering economic development,*
- *and preserving agricultural heritage.*

Considerations:

- *As an active decision maker or community member, this motivation may be obvious. However, engagement across diverse stakeholders in the community helps to define the most significant needs that can guide food systems planning in communities.*

Food Security

Food security was a key motivator in many communities in Canada as rates of food insecurity increase across the country[1]:

> 👤 *We know that* [City] *is the most food insecure urban municipality in Canada. It affects more than one in six households in the city, which is a significant portion of the entire province. So the scope of that issue is large here, and that gets to the roots of poverty. It gets to the cost of living. So… we know this is a big issue and an element that has to be addressed.* [Participant 7]

Food First Newfoundland's motto is "Healthy Food For All" and their work defines food security as existing "when all people at all times have physical and economic access to adequate amounts of nutritious, safe, and culturally appropriate food to maintain a healthy and active life."

https://www.foodfirstnl.ca/what-is-food-security

Improving Food Self Reliance

In discussions with the Thunder Bay and Area Food Strategy coordinator, there was no hesitation in indicating food self-reliance as the primary motivator (paired with food security) in coordinated food systems planning efforts in that region.

> 👤 *We are a two-day drive to Toronto and one day drive to Winnipeg and those are the biggest urban centers nearby… Thunder Bay is very reliant on importing for our food needs… that has driven the interest in our local food system because there's an interest in having more stability and not being reliant on bringing everything up* [to Thunder Bay]*.*

A desire to improve food access and self-reliance is evidenced in both the **City's Official Plan** that identifies a need to "increase residents' access to nutritious, safe, and healthy local food, while increasing opportunities for residents to grow and raise their own food" and the **Thunder Bay and Area's Food Strategy** that lists Food Access as it's first strategic pillar.

Economic Development

The **City of Edmonton's FRESH (Food and Urban Agriculture Strategy)** opening statement is "Edmonton has an opportunity to consider the role of food and urban agriculture in its economy and in the lives of its citizens." and the document identifies "a stronger, more vibrant local economy" as the first listed objective of the strategy. Implementation of the strategy falls into the portfolio of the Manager of Strategic Investments in the City's Department of Economic Investment Services.

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1   Li T, Fafard St-Germain AA, Tarasuk V. (2023) Household food insecurity in Canada, 2022. Toronto: Research to identify policy options to reduce food insecurity (PROOF). Retrieved from **https://proof.utoronto.ca/**

## 4.1.2) EMBEDDING FOOD IN COMPREHENSIVE PLANS

Description:

Comprehensive plans are high-level policy documents that guide a community's planning and development decisions. These typically have longer-term planning horizons of approximately 10-30 years. They can be called Official Community Plans, Regional Growth Strategies, Comprehensive Community Plans, Official Plans, Master Plans, Municipal Development Plans, or other terms depending upon the jurisdiction. Comprehensive plans are typically undertaken through extensive public consultation to identify community values and priorities and develop goals, strategies, policies and action areas. As comprehensive plans, they originate from the awareness that issues including transportation, land use, housing, environmental protections, economic development, parks and open space, governance, recreation and tourism cannot be addressed in isolation. Local government policies may benefit from increased buy-in and relevance when stemming from an official or comprehensive plan (Robert and Mullinix, 2018)[1].

Including food in comprehensive plans clearly establishes it as a priority for the organization. Once this high-level policy direction is set, staff and/or community champions can point to the overarching policy direction as validation for pursuing food systems planning projects and activities. In this way, including food in comprehensive policy documents sets the stage for advancing food systems planning throughout the organization and is "an appropriate vehicle for food system planning" (Robert and Mullinix, 2018)[1].

Considerations:

- *Embedding food throughout the various sections of a comprehensive plan helps to state the intent and direction of a community's food system planning approach, and recognizes the multifaceted nature of food systems. Specific, tangible strategies can then also be outlined in a food-focused policy document such as a Food System or Food Security Strategy. For even greater integration of food in a community's planning approach, food systems should also be embedded in other focused policy documents (eg. an official transportation plan) and bylaws at various levels.*
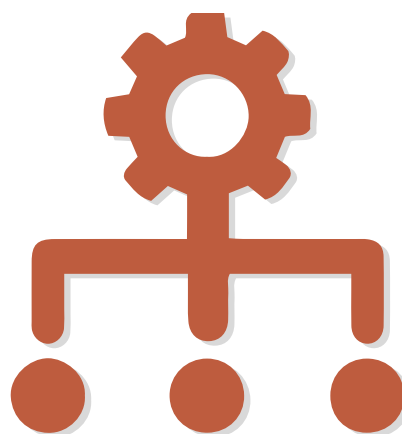
1   Robert, N., & Mullinix, K. (2018). Municipal Policy Enabling Regional Food Systems in British Columbia, Canada: Assessing Focal Areas and Gaps. Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Community Development, 8(B), 115–132. **https://doi.org/10.5304/jafscd.2018.08B.003**

The City of Thunder Bay's Official Plan (2019)

As a result of close work with local networks and non-profits, the City of Thunder Bay was able to incorporate food systems strategies throughout all sections of their official plan, from natural heritage, development, cultural heritage, infrastructure, and community services. In this way, food is not treated as an afterthought, but an integral component of a vibrant and healthy community.

Edmonton's City Plan (2020)

Edmonton's City Plan incorporates agriculture and food systems considerations throughout. In addition, these considerations are embedded in their **economic action plan** and other policy documents demonstrating a comprehensive approach to food systems planning in the City.

The City of Greater Sudbury Official Plan Review

The City of Greater Sudbury is currently undertaking a two phase process to revise their official plan. Food Systems are a key component of this revision. Consultation with the food policy council and other groups led to a broadening of the existing agriculture policies to a much wider food systems lens around Growing It; Making It; Selling It; Eating It; and Returning It. The staff **Position Paper on Local Food Systems and the Official Plan** outlines these changes and the process undertaken in the plan revision.

4.1.3) CENTERING EQUITY

Description:

Food system inequalities are structured around systemic racism, colonialism, economic disparity and other forms of oppression and disenfranchisement that disproportionately disadvantage Indigenous, racialized and less affluent communities. In the food system, this is visible in patterns of food access and insecurity, wages and job security, and workplace safety issues.[1]

With the understanding that negative food system outcomes disproportionately impact certain communities, adopting an equity-based approach to local-regional food systems planning and development is imperative. Such an approach requires policy development processes that center the perspectives, knowledge and lived experiences of the communities most acutely impacted by societal inequities, namely racialized, Indigenous, and low income communities.

Considerations:

- *Recognize and support marginalized community leadership: This may mean additional efforts to build and support relationships, in and outside of formal planning processes, with communities that have been historically marginalized in professional planning, including Indigenous and racialized communities.*
- *Relationship building takes time: When working cross-culturally it takes time to build trust, relationships, follow protocols, and develop a shared vision. Budgets and processes should be designed with flexibility to be responsive as needs are identified.*
- *Education and initiative: Planners should take time to educate themselves on the ongoing influence of white privilege and dominancy culture within organizations, including planning institutions, and take measures to name, address and dismantle these to facilitate equitable collaboration.*

1 Public Health Agency of Canada [PHAC]. (2018). Key Health Inequalities in Canada: A National Portrait. Ottawa: Public Health Agency of Canada. Retrieved from **https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/publications/science-research-data/inequalities-food-insecurity-canada-infographic.html**

Thunder Bay Indigenous Food Circle

The Indigenous Food Circle is an Indigenous-led initiative and was established in 2016 to remedy the absence of Indigenous engagement and perspectives in ongoing food systems work in the region (namely the **Thunder Bay and Area Food Strategy**). The Indigenous Food Circle brings together 14 First Nations communities in Northwestern Ontario in partnership with Lakehead University to "reduce Indigenous food insecurity, increase food self-determination, and establish meaningful relationships with the settler population through food." The partnership is rooted in the theory and practice of **Indigenous food sovereignty**, which upholds the right of Indigenous people to steward and make decisions about their food systems.

St. John's Community-Led Food System Assessment

> 👤 *Having diverse stakeholders involved was really important, and not just people who see themselves as a planner or policymaker. The model that FoodFirstNL developed is a community led food assessment model…It involves some people who are academics, people who were community leaders and people who have had lived experience of food insecurity and poverty. And so that group coming together and being cohesive to guide this work as well as the input of the St. John's Food Policy Council gave us a really strong foundation of the variety of issues, and the depth of knowledge and experience that really enhances the process.* **[St. John's]**

In the City of St. John's, Food First Newfoundland, a Provincial non-profit, worked with residents most impacted by food security to undertake a community-led food system assessment. Food animators with lived experience of food insecurity in each of the five wards of the City of St. John's received formal training in food security and related skills including meeting facilitation, running food programs, and grant writing among others. These animators then led the engagement and planning process for the assessment in their home wards, and were paid an honorarium and reimbursed for transportation and childcare expenses to reduce barriers. The assessment included an environmental scan, gap analysis, priority setting and action planning, all of which informed the food action plan for St. John's.

Working Group on Indigenous Food Sovereignty (WGIFS)

The WGIFS was established in BC in 2006 to address the underlying issues impacting Indigenous peoples' ability to respond to their own needs for healthy, culturally adapted Indigenous foods. It includes representation from traditional harvesters, hunters, fishers and gatherers; farmers; indigenous community members; researchers; civil society and non governmental organizations; political advocates, and others.

Toronto Black Food Sovereignty Plan

In October 2021, The City of Toronto announced Canada's first Black Food Sovereignty Plan for Toronto to address the problem of food insecurity experienced by many Black Torontonians. This is a community-led Confronting Anti-Black Racism Unit Plan to address chronic food insecurity, anti-Black racism and structural inequity in Toronto's local food system to create immediate and long-term change to improve the health, wellbeing and capacity of Black Torontonians.

Toronto Black Food Sovereignty Plan

4 Priority Practices

4.2) Dedicating Resources

Dedicating resources to food systems planning activities is a critical determinant of successful outcomes. These can be both financial (i.e. funding for specific projects or activities), as well as human resources (i.e. full-time or half-time positions dedicated to food systems planning activities or consultants).

4.2.1) STAFF AND TIME

Description:

Increasingly, communities are dedicating entire positions to food systems planning. This role's entire portfolio is made up of food systems work. The position can be internal - within local government - as seen with the District of Saanich example, or external - through a non-profit or arms-length organization - as seen with Thunder Bay. Both models can be effective but must have designated funding and structures to support the role.

Some communities who do not have a dedicated role have staff members with a defined number of hours or a specific percentage of their portfolio dedicated to food systems planning. Positions with dedicated food systems time allocations are not always situated in the same department but may report to a single position that manages the food portfolio.

This practice is a suitable alternative to a dedicated position but ideally leads towards a role dedicated to food planning where possible.

Competing Priorities:

A common barrier mentioned was keeping food relevant among the many pressing and valid priorities competing for attention within the local government's responsibilities. Having food work formalized within a role, accompanied by a line-item budget allocation and reporting structures, can help keep food on the agenda in times of shifting political priorities.

District of Saanich *(internal)*

The first priority action item from Saanich's **Agriculture and Food Security Plan** was to "provide staff resources to take a leadership role in the implementation of the Agriculture and Food Security Plan." The District hired an Agriculture and Food Security Planner in 2019 to implement the food security plan on a two-year contract, which was recently extended.

In addition, Council directed $150,000 from Council's Contingency Funds to support strategic implementation by funding the Agriculture and Food Security Planner and for implementation activities, consultants, public engagement, and producing educational material. See the **staff report** for further details.

Thunder Bay *(external)*

The City of Thunder Bay provides core funding of $50 000 (as of 2020) to support a coordinator role responsible for implementing the **Thunder Bay and Area Food Strategy**, which is currently housed within a non-profit organization. This coordinator acts as the point person between the elected council, the Thunder Bay and Area Food Strategy group (which is essentially an acting food policy council) and the wider community. The City of Thunder Bay replicates this external implementation model with other official strategies as well, including the **Thunder Bay Poverty Reduction Strategy** and the **Age Friendly City Services Action Plan**.

City of Vancouver *(internal)*

The City of Vancouver has had a dedicated food systems position since 2005. Housed in the Social Policy Development department, this position also originally included childcare in the portfolio, but at time of writing was solely focused on food policy. Additional staff time was added such that in 2022, the City of Vancouver's food team existed as 2 positions for a total of 1.75 FTE, with a minimum allocation of 1.1 FTE since the position was created. In addition, the City also has a full time staff working specifically on food waste reduction.

4.2.2) FUNDING

Description:

Having funding explicitly dedicated to a food portfolio or food planning activities supports consistent, more thorough food systems planning work. Dedicated funding can include a piece of or an entire operating budget dedicated to food planning activities, funding earmarked to carry out specific plans, strategies or projects, and/or grant programs designated for food initiatives.

There are various successful models for funding food systems work. Some communities have budgets earmarked explicitly for facilitating Food Policy Council work. Some practitioners with food in their professional portfolio have a specific percentage or allocation of their annual operating budget dedicated to food work. Other communities have food as a line item in their department's operating budget that can only be used for food-related activities.

Burnout:

Burnout is common in food systems work, particularly across non-profit and volunteer actors who are stretched and operating with minimal resources. A model based on volunteer dedication and passion is not sustainable. Improving funding access for food systems work improves the likelihood of recruiting quality expertise and sustaining prolonged efforts in coordinating the food system.

City of Edmonton

The City has allocated a budget to implement its Food and Urban Agriculture Strategy (**FRESH**). While they do not have a dedicated FTE, they do assign staff time to implementation activities.

Town of Banff

The Town of Banff's Community Development Coordinator - who takes on the food portfolio - is funded through a Provincial Government Partnership (the Family and Community Support program) and the Town's Community Services operating budget. The latter is explicitly earmarked for any food work the role takes on (along with other work) at the practitioner's discretion.

City of Vancouver Grants

The City of Vancouver distributes **Sustainable Food Systems Grants**. While not funding staff time or programs within City departments, these grants support "neighbourhood and community-scale efforts that facilitate community connectedness and catalyze action, knowledge, and skill-building on food system issues." This three year granting program runs from 2022 to 2025 and features a streamlined and flexible application process to minimize administrative burden for award holders. Grant programs such as these are one way to dedicate resources directly to Food Systems projects.

Growing opportunities for future food systems work:

The development of sustainable and just food systems cannot rest on the backs of those willing to put in time and effort for free. Providing funding and opportunities for experts and organizations with the knowledge, passion and willingness to better the food system will continually reinforce the validity of food systems work as a legitimate area of practice. An common alternative to funding this work internally is to direct funds to external consultants with demonstrated food systems planning experience.

4 Priority Practices

4.3) Championing Food Systems Work

As food systems planning continues to advance as a compelling domain of planning practice, it requires a champion (or champions) with the expertise, passion and stamina to continually push food forward on planning and decision-making agendas. At some point in the future, planners and practitioners will be equipped with a baseline knowledge of the intersections between food systems and standard planning practices and decisions. However, food systems planning is currently relatively nascent and typically falls within the skill and knowledge set of "experts." Bringing experts into the fold with the passion and the perseverance to put (and keep) food on the agenda can markedly advance food systems work and improve buy-in and longevity of food systems initiatives.

4.3.1) FOOD POLICY COUNCILS

Description:

Food Policy Councils (FPCs) bring together a diverse set of stakeholders to build capacity for citizen-informed policy action to improve the ability of food systems to meet the needs of a given community.

The governance structure of FPCs varies. Some are grassroots initiatives (e.g Kamloops Food Policy Council), while others are embedded within local governments (e.g. City of Vancouver) or a hybrid of the two (e.g. Comox Valley Food Policy Council). Regardless of which entity houses and operates the FPC, it will typically report to a council member or a committee of a local council. FPCs can play an instrumental role in coordinating activities across various food systems sectors (such as grassroots, non-profits, local government, health authorities and academia). FPCs can use their position as a network hub to best understand the range of community needs and utilize this information to inform their policy recommendations. A **2017 research paper from York University** outlines the various structures found in food policy councils in Ontario, as a useful resource.

There are over 300 food policy councils in North America[1]

Considerations:

- *Can often be an outcome of the establishment of a food charter (like in the example of Greater Sudbury).*
- *Structure and governance (eg. whether a committee of local government or an arms-length/civil society organization) can influence the degree of influence, but also independence from government decision-makers.*

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1   Cooper, Celine. 2018. "The rise of food policy councils in Canada." Policy Options, February 13, 2018.
https://policyoptions.irpp.org/magazines/february-2018/the-rise-of-food-policy-councils-in-canada/.

City of Winnipeg - Winnipeg Food Council

The Winnipeg Food Council is a Citizen Advisory Committee established by the Winnipeg City Council. Their vision is for "all Winnipeggers have what they need to eat well,all of the time" and their mission is to "work with the Mayor, Councillors and the Public Service to fix food systems issues by advising on policy, relaying research and sharing lessons learned through continual consultation."

The Winnipeg Food Council was developed from a recommendation from the City's Family Farm Report that the City initiate a food policy council. The City's Urban Planning Division conducted research and recommended the formation of a FPC to council, which was approved in 2017.

The Winnipeg Food Council reports to the Executive Policy Committee. The council is made up of 12 representatives from across various sectors impacted by food and food policy including City Council, Health, Food production, Food businesses, Academia and research, Community groups or networks connected to food issues, Citizen members at large with specific skills, experience and interests increase diversity and add value to particular initiatives, and the Province of Manitoba (non-voting).

City of Greater Sudbury - The Greater Sudbury Food Policy Council

The Greater Sudbury Food Policy Council was created in 2013 by local community leaders and stakeholders to help move the region's Food Charter (2004) forward and address food insecurity in their community. Their mission and vision surround food insecurity and are driven by language outlined in their food charter. Their council has both voting and resource members representing various sectors affected by their greater food system.

City of Kamloops - Kamloops Food Policy Council

The Kamloops Food Policy Council is the longest-standing independent food policy council in Canada and has been operating since 1995. It strives to build a local food system that is regenerative, sovereign and just, and grassroots community capacity through policy, programs, education, and partnerships.

The Kamloops FPC is a non-profit and consists of staff, an elected board and diverse network of members from Kamloops, including volunteers, donors, and representatives from government and non-profit partner organizations. Local government employees sit in on meetings and the local government provides some funding to the FPC, though the FPC does not report to the City or its council in any formal capacity - though this is a route they are interested in pursuing.

4.3.2) EDUCATION AND ADVOCACY

> 👤 *It requires a lot of generalist knowledge and the ability to show people how what they're doing is impacted by what you're doing and how they actually have a role to play, so you kind of got to sell it. … you want to convince decision makers that food can help them achieve their goals…. as opposed to [being] something that you have to worry about in addition.* **[Participant 12]**

Description:

Currently, food is not usually a major consideration in many planning projects or strategies. This is primarily due to an unclear understanding of the intersections between food systems and other traditional planning priorities. A significant responsibility falls on the planner with food systems in their planning portfolio to highlight these connections, build interest and buy-in from other decision-makers, and ultimately situate food as a valid and pressing priority in significant planning decisions.

> 👤 *Food is so ubiquitous, and it's so multifaceted and it's so removed from our daily lives that I think trying to get that buy in of "why would we need a person who does food or why do we need policies surrounding food" …it's just about drawing those connections and starting with education - pointing to things and saying, this is why it's relevant.* **[Participant 11]**

Educating other departments and decision-makers about food systems and their intersections can take a few forms:

- *Informal discussion with colleagues*
- *Roundtable discussions with various departments on intersections of food with their work*
- *Presentations or workshops within the organization*
- *Presenting motions to council*
- *Advocacy to senior levels of government*

In addition to advocating for food systems work within organizations, there may be a role for local governments to play in advocating to higher levels of government.

> 👤 *We as much as possible try and connect with the province to determine if what we're doing is feasible, if there's collaborative effort that we can have with them, perhaps we share research or we do a joint project.* **[Participant 13]**

Considerations:

Educating and advocating for food within local government is critical in building political will to support food systems work. However, political will often closely follows the needs and priorities of the broader community. Therefore working with decision-makers alone is likely inadequate to advance food systems work. Disseminating information to the broader public on the impacts of food systems in generating community well-being is crucial in developing community awareness, political will, and inspiring action in food system development. To do so, planners and practitioners can collaborate with networks and local food champions to raise interest and understanding of healthy food systems amongst community members. It is however, also important to listen - in most cases, community groups hold detailed and specialist knowledge of the food systems issues in a particular community, and so learning can and should be a mutual journey.

Capital Region Food and Agriculture Initiative Roundtable (CRFAIR)

CRFAIR is an NGO working in the Capital Region on Vancouver Island, BC. They have produced a **policy brief on the role of local government in Farmland and Farm Viability**. Their "Next Steps" section on page 4 outlines tangible actions local governments can take to support food systems planning and local agriculture. Documents such as this can help governments to understand the role they might play in food systems work. Partnership with high impact organizations like CRFAIR can help with this education and advocacy work, both within local government but also with the broader public.

The **City of Vancouver Food Strategy**

(2013) includes 5 goals, the 5th of which is to "Advocate for a just and sustainable food system with partners and at all levels of government." This goal recognizes the limits that municipalities have in their ability to take action on food systems, and underscores the need to promote food issues at provincial and national levels, with a range of key partners and stakeholders. Examples of advocacy actions identified in the strategy include advocating for support of local (B.C.) farmers and protection of Agricultural Land Reserve, and Neighbourhood Food Networks to partner with funders, health authorities, and other levels of government.

New Westminister Homelessness Coalition Society

In New Westminister BC, the **New Westminister Homelessness Coalition Society** partnered with New West Community Food Action to work with the City and Fraser Health to implement the New Westminister Food Security Action Plan. As part of the plan implementation, they produced a series of education factsheets and hosted events on food insecurity aimed at dispelling common myths and raising awareness of food insecurity among community and businesses. They have also convened a working group to amplify voices of those experiencing food insecurity.

4 Priority Practices

4.4) Collaboration

Given the interconnected nature of food systems, collaboration is critical in food systems planning efforts. Though broader collaboration outside regional boundaries is also beneficial, regional and local collaboration is essential in effectively managing and planning for all key elements of the food system.

Collaboration can and should occur at three different levels:

- *Between government departments*
- *Between governments (Indigenous, local, regional, provincial, and federal)*
- *Between government and regional food system stakeholders*

Adopting collaborative approaches can help align the food system priorities of communities within a region, leading to more strategic planning and resource allocation for regional food systems development.

4.4.1) COORDINATED PLANNING ACROSS LOCAL GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENTS

Description:

Planning, by definition, must address the wellbeing of people, place, land and resources. No individual planner is expected to possess expert, in-depth knowledge in each of these domains, and therefore planning practice is strengthened by collaboration across departments.

As food systems touch most traditional planning domains - transportation, housing, sustainability, etc - food systems planning work is strengthened when efforts and objectives are coordinated across various departments. Just as land use planning should consider environmental impacts and interface with transportation plans, housing plans should consider food access for residents and transportation routes should be planned to link rural and urban food production and consumption. Breaking out of the silos that commonly exist and integrating planning efforts between departments will not only advance food systems work but make for more resilient and robust communities in general.
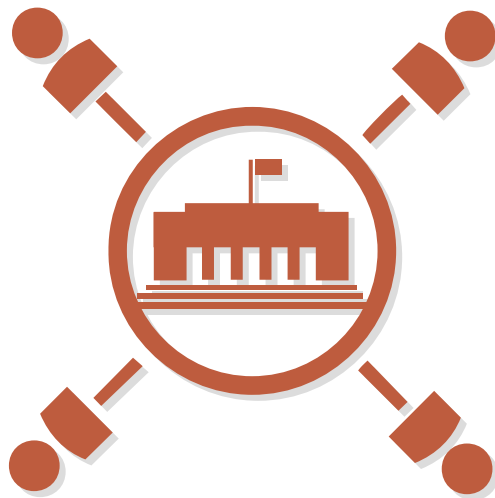
Examples in Practice:
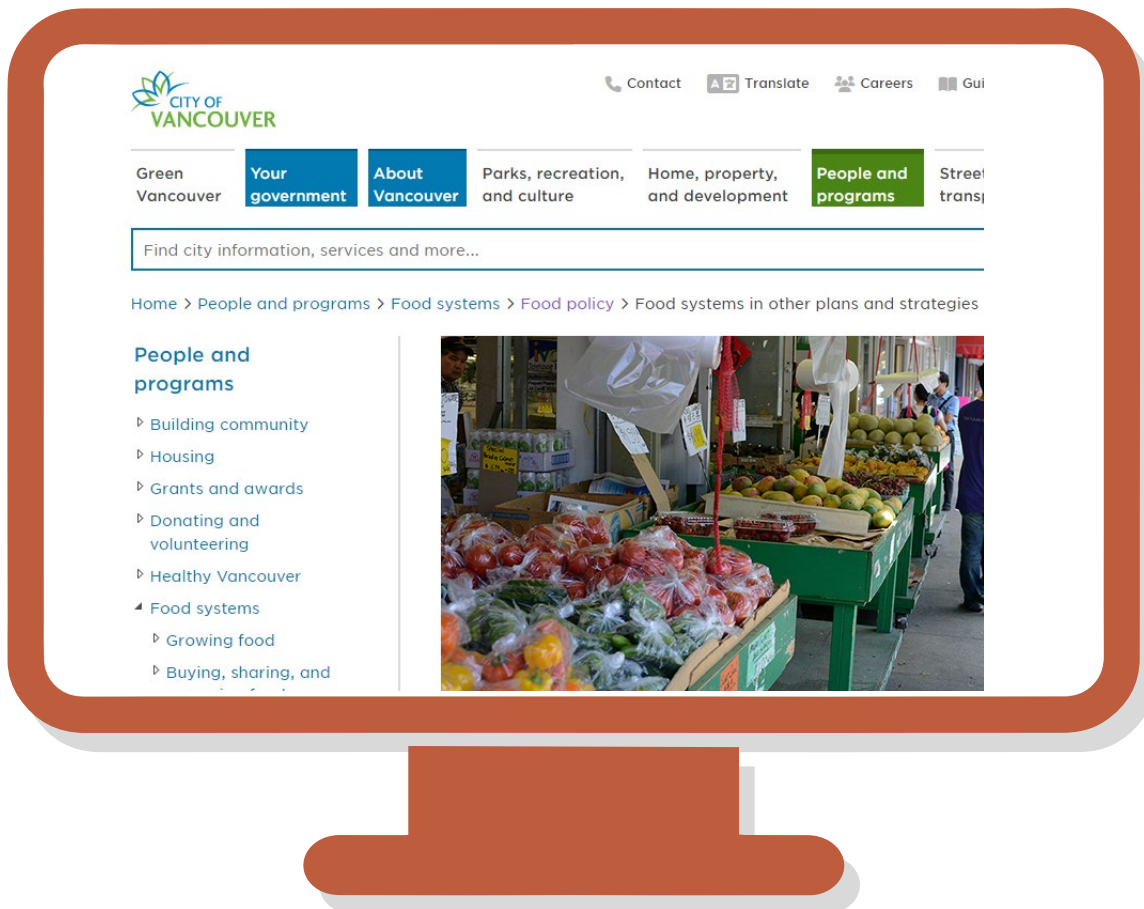
City of Vancouver

The City of Vancouver previously had a technical food committee that included representatives of the major departments (including engineering and parks among others). This committee was coordinated by a food systems planner and met monthly to ensure that food was considered in all current planning and development projects in the city.

Currently, the City has a page of their **website dedicated to the integration of food systems in other plans and policies**. The site outlines how food systems are incorporated in each plan (including the Vancouver Plan, Social Infrastructure Strategy, Zero Waste Plan, Neighbourhood and Major Project planning, and zoning and land use documents).

4.4.2) COORDINATED PLANNING WITH OTHER GOVERNMENT ENTITIES

Description:

Just as coordinating efforts between government departments creates more thoughtful and robust food systems planning practice, so does coordination between neighbouring and various levels of government. This concept is exceptionally important in planning for food systems at a regional or bioregional scale (see ISFS's **Okanagan Bioregion Food Systems Project** for more details on the economic, environmental, and social benefits and trade-offs of regional food systems). Concentrations of food production, processing, transportation and consumption rarely occur within the same community (or even region), so understanding how relationships between communities support the greater region is important to successful food systems planning efforts. Additionally, it is also important to understand food system objectives, strategies and actions taken by regional, Indigenous, provincial and even federal governments, and to explore the intersections and synergies these might nurture.

The Okanagan Basin Water Board

Established in 1970 to provide leadership on water issues in the Okanagan Valley of BC, the Board is advised by a **Water Stewardship Council** of stakeholders from agriculture industry organizations, provincial ministry representatives (from a variety of ministries), conservation organizations, local and regional governments including first nations, land-based stakeholder organizations and local post secondary institutions. The Council meets monthly to provide independent advice and policy recommendations for sustainable water management in the region.

Vancouver Island's Capital Regional District has a Regional Agriculture and Food Security Task Force. The Task Force was created as the first recommendation that stemmed from the region's **Food and Agriculture Strategy** which suggested the development of a task force to "support regional and cross sectional relationships." Founded in 2016, the task force provides input to the CRD's planning transportation and protective services committee and includes non-profits, municipalities with significant agricultural land holdings or interests in food and agriculture, First Nations and the B.C. Ministry of Agriculture.

Networks

There are a variety of organizations and networks that bring together food systems stakeholders from across Canada:

- *Food Communities Network*
- *Food Secure Canada*
- *Coalition for Healthy School Food*
- *Working Group on Indigenous Food Sovereignty*

Regional and Provincial food networks are also becoming more common. For example:

British Columbia:

- *Good Food Network (Vancouver Island, BC)*
- *CRFAIR (Vancouver Island, BC)*

Alberta:

- *Bow Valley Food Alliance*

Ontario:

- *Eastern Ontario Agri Food Network*
- *York Region Food Network*

Quebec:

- *Local and Integrated Food System in Montreal (SALIM)*

Manitoba:

- *Food Matters Manitoba*

Newfoundland:

- *Food First NL*

Nova Scotia:

- *The Island Food Network (Cape Breton)*

Territories:

- *Northern Food Network*
- *Nunavut Food Security Coalition*

4.4.3) MEANINGFUL COLLABORATION WITH STAKEHOLDERS

Description:

Involving a range of stakeholders in food systems planning is integral to success in any planning process, but particularly so with respect to food systems due to the multiplicity of impacts and cross-cutting nature of food systems. Bringing together non-profits, local champions, and industry representatives to share, discuss, and plan aligns decision-making with community needs. Gathering input from all types of voices ultimately improves the likelihood of developing successful, long term food system solutions that meet the needs of the affected land and population.

Considerations:

- *Collaborative planning can be formal (eg. a council or board) or informal (eg. consulting various groups to inform specific projects or plans).*
- *Collaboration with stakeholders should be built on trust, genuine interest and mutual respect. These types of relationships are meant to be forged over longstanding, meaningful engagement.*

JustFOOD Action Plan for the Halifax Region

In the public engagement of Halifax's JustFOOD Action plan (adopted in 2023/2024), the Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM) included a wide range of stakeholders including:

- *29* community-based organizations
- *6* provincial partners
- *9* HRM business units
- *Thousands* of HRM residents

Barriers to participation by marginalized groups were anticipated and engagement delivered through trusted community partners, while compensating these participants for their time and expertise. The "**Summary of Engagement**" details the stakeholders, processes and themes that emerged during the engagement phase.

> 👤 *There really is a need to be centering racial equity and increasing community power… So we've really tried with our engagement to make sure that we are working with a diverse group and with a lot of the underrepresented voices that are often missing these conversations and people who are trusted in community to make those connections…. and to pay people for participation… We're really trying to increase people seeing themselves in the development of the plan… so it eliminates some of the barriers that would have kept them from being part of the Food policy alliance up to date.* **[Halifax]**

4 Priority Practices

4.5) Monitoring, Evaluation, and Knowledge Sharing

An effective monitoring and evaluation program needs to be implemented to ensure that food systems planning project goals and objectives are met, and to glean lessons that can impact future work within the organization and beyond.

4.5.1) INTEGRATING LOCAL METRICS

Description:

Good decision-making requires good data. Data collection is an important component of developing public policy and monitoring its impacts. As local governments become increasingly active in food system planning and policy, there is a need to select and monitor metrics that represent the comprehensive nature of food systems planning. In Canada, food system performance has been measured at provincial and national scales with an often singular focus on economic growth and outcomes. Outcomes related to health, community and individual well-being, and ecological integrity are not often considered when evaluating food system policy. Food system decision-making requires data that acknowledges the comprehensive and cross-cutting nature of food systems work, and therefore metrics need to address the range of food system domains rather than a single component. Local-level food systems metrics across food consumption, agriculture, environment and economy should be integrated with existing local-level data on health, affordability and community well-being to present a more comprehensive picture of local-level food system outcomes and connections. This kind of integrated data enables nuanced analysis and decision-making, and an understanding of the trade-offs inherent in complex systems.

Considerations:

- *Collecting integrated data will most likely require the cooperation of various departments or agencies, in terms of sharing and merging existing data, or identifying data needs and collecting new data.*
- *Partnerships can be an effective means to collect data and metrics. For example, academic research units in your area may be well versed in data collection and analysis methods and may even be collecting data relevant to food systems work already.*
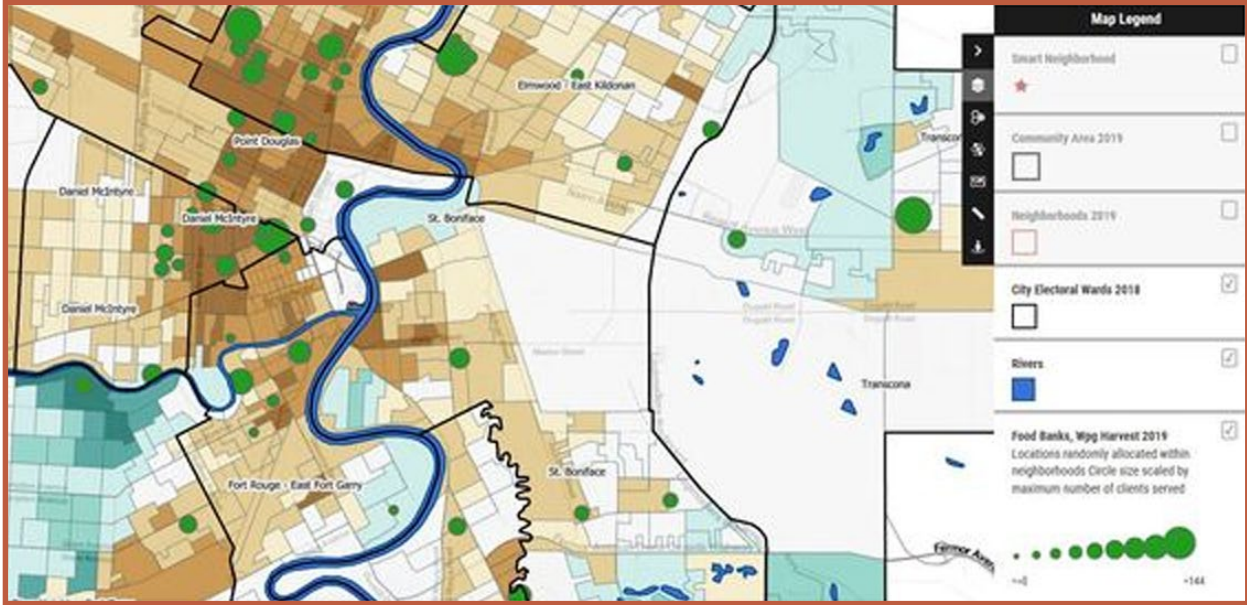
Winnipeg Food Atlas

The Winnipeg Food Atlas is a community-developed resource to facilitate discussion and action around food and nutrition security issues in the Winnipeg Health Region. The Atlas spatially depicts the Winnipeg Health Region foodscape and important contextual features. Participating partners include: Social Planning Council of Winnipeg, Food Matters Manitoba, Winnipeg Harvest, Winnipeg Regional Health Authority, and the University of Manitoba (Project Lead: Dr. Joyce Slater, University of Manitoba).

The Winnipeg Food Atlas consists of two interactive components:

1. *a mapping application, and*
2. *supporting data dashboards.*

These tools allow users to assess food-related assets by City Ward and neighbourhoods, and to explore how indicators of food and nutrition insecurity vary across the Winnipeg Health Region. Data presented includes food system data (eg. farmer's markets, food stores, meal programs, schools, food deserts etc.) and socio-economic data (eg. household income, immigrant and indigenous populations, health indicators like the incidence of diabetes and life expectancy).

4.5.2) MONITORING, EVALUATION AND REPORTING PRACTICES

Description:

Too often, planning and policy development projects are undertaken with an eye to completion and/or implementation - but less frequently are resources directed to monitoring and evaluation. In order to be most effective, a policy or program's efficacy must be evaluated regularly and adapted as required to changing conditions. This requires effective monitoring, evaluation and reporting. Monitoring and evaluation could involve developing and monitoring indicators that show progress toward stated goals, regular reports and progress updates to Council, or, a more formal evaluation process at predetermined intervals.

Considerations:

- *Consider the ideal time horizon for ongoing monitoring and evaluation activities. This may be an annual activity, or a longer time interval may be appropriate depending upon the context.*
- *Often, evaluation processes are conducted in-house, but occasionally outside consultants or evaluators may be brought in to evaluate progress.*

Saanich Climate Plan Annual Report Card

Although not specific to food, the Saanich Climate Plan Annual Report Card is an excellent example of annual reporting using a variety of metrics to measure progress toward targets across a range of policy areas. Presented in a graphically pleasing format, it makes it easy for policymakers and the public alike to understand progress (or lack thereof) towards goals set out in the plan. Similar reporting tools could be utilized for food systems plans and programs.

Thunder Bay Food System Report Card

In 2015, the **Thunder Bay + Area Food Strategy** created the Community Food System Report Card that

established a snapshot of the challenges and opportunities within the regional food system. Beyond compiling a wealth of data, the initial Report Card also served to increase public awareness of food system issues and to attract broader interest in building a more equitable and sustainable food system.

A more healthy, equitable and sustainable food system demands a coordinated approach to addressing food issues and to designing solutions that protect and nourish the environment, foster local and diverse economic development, build community, improve access to food, and much more.

The Report Card establishes baselines around the seven pillars of the Thunder Bay + Area Food Strategy so that progress toward food sovereignty can be measured. It will be kept as a living document that will be updated regularly with data from the community. Involvement and support from all community sectors will continue to be essential in this work. Similar to the Winnipeg Food Atlas above, it also integrates food system data with socioeconomic data in a comprehensive approach.

Capital Regional District Regional Growth Strategy Indicator Report

While not food specific, this regular reporting tool is another example of indicators to measure progress toward defined objectives. Using a dashboard-style reporting summary, readers can easily see progress or lack thereof. Each indicator area is accompanied by a detail page that summarizes what is being measured, why it is important, the target or desired trend, and the performance toward that objective. The report is produced annually, though because of data limitations some metrics are only updated every 5 years. The Report includes food systems indicators such as hectares of farmland and age of farmers.

4.5.3) EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION AND KNOWLEDGE SHARING

Description:

Our work has revealed much interesting, innovative, and successful food systems planning work happening across the country. Numerous interviewees remarked how useful it would be to know about work occurring in other communities, as few had the time to network and learn from peers or knew where to access relevant resources and networks.

While this toolkit is one mechanism to advance knowledge sharing about food systems planning, other tools or approaches include:

- *Accessible reports and communication formats*
- *Developing communities of practice*
- *Online resource sharing - eg. websites, databases, e-newsletters etc.*

Considerations:

- *Dissemination of results can often be achieved through partnerships with community organizations or networks that have pre-existing media and communications channels to reach a broader audience - for example, food policy councils or food networks.*
- *Academic partners may also be appropriate in having resources to compile and disseminate this data (eg. John Hopkin's and KPU examples below).*

Thunder Bay & Area Food Strategy Community Food System Report Card Website

While the report card has already been profiled above, the online presentation of its findings is relevant here. An easy-to-navigate website presents information clearly, and much use of infographics is made. This type of easily accessible information supports use by advocacy and community groups, as well as other communities wishing to undertake similar processes.

Food Communities Network

The Food Communities Network (FCN-RCN) is a National network of food systems practitioners. The network conducts research, creates and shares resources, hosts knowledge sharing events, and hosts webinars and trainings. FCN maintains a listserve linking professionals and also sends a regular e-newsletter. In 2023 FCN took a pause but appears to be active again as of early 2024.

Johns Hopkins University Food Policy Networks.org

Because collaboration amongst diverse sectors—community, government, nonprofit and private— has emerged as a long-term strategy to create systemic and meaningful improvements in the food system, the Food Policy Networks project focuses on Food Policy Councils to build collaborative capacity of food system stakeholders to reform food systems through public policy. The online website includes a sign-up link for an active listserve that connects food policy actors; a resource database; and education opportunities.

KPU's BC Food System Policy Database

This database is a centralized resource for planners, policy makers, community advocates, local organizations, and the policy curious to search for policy precedents and to better understand how local government policy in B.C. is addressing local food systems. Users may search by a range of characteristics to find food system policies that have been adopted by local governments across B.C.
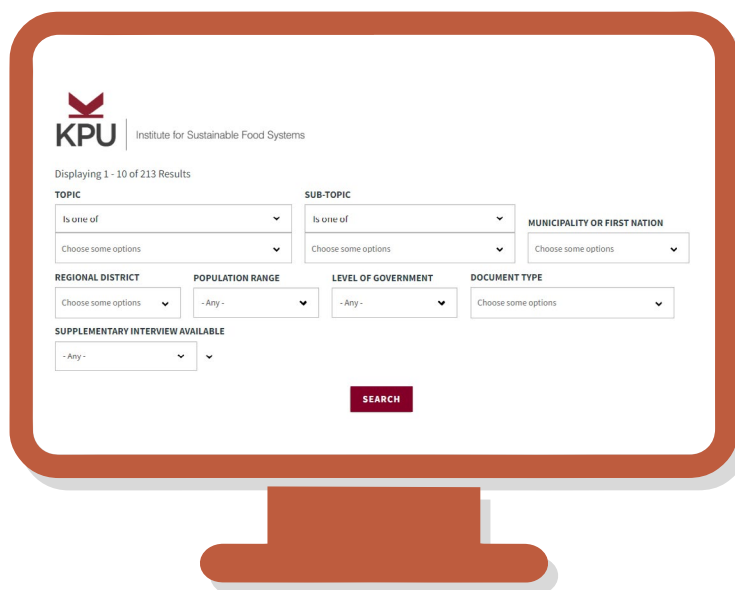
5 Final Considerations

This toolkit was developed as part of research conducted in partnership with the Canadian Institute of Planners. This partnership broadened the reach of the initial phases of the research, allowing the development of this toolkit to be based on a diverse set of insights and lessons from across Canada's planning community. Detailed results of this research are available in **a separate report on the ISFS website**. This toolkit intends to share these lessons, and hopefully inspire a community of planners dedicated to the development of sustainable and just food systems. There may be a role for the national planning organization to support the formation of a community of practice dedicated to the advancement of food systems planning in Canada. Such a network could broaden the impacts of this toolkit beyond the planning practice of individual communities and help forge a strong network, provide professional development opportunities, and support formal induction of food planning in the education of planners.

The case studies examined in the development of this toolkit represent some of the diversity of Canadian community types, but not all. Many amazing examples of innovative food systems planning work exist in Canada and this toolkit outlines just a few. Though there are a range of community populations, typologies and locations represented in the case study samples, there is a lack of representation of Indigenous communities and communities from Northern Canada. Though this toolkit underscores the importance of embedding Indigeneity and equity across all planning work, in every community, it should be acknowledged that a different set of priority practices may better reflect the needs and challenges of Indigenous and Northern communities.

Community context is important and implementation of the priority practices presented within this toolkit will look different in each community. As a result, planners, who have intimate knowledge of their community and priorities, challenges and potential, will need to shape these practices to best fit their needs. Sharing their successes and challenges through communities of practice and working with their peers across the country to refine and develop further priority practices will more quickly advance food systems planning as a discipline in Canada.

Local and regional governments and the staff that drive them have a critical role to play in advancing food systems planning, even if that role has been unclear in years past. This toolkit provides some guidance and resources to help strengthen that role, for the betterment of our food systems and communities into the future.

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