12.0 COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

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The process of a community food assessment involves engaging a broad set of actors from across the community to gather their expertise on different aspects of the community and food system. Residents of the community are so important to engage because they contribute valuable knowledge, skills and perspectives that cannot be captured by other actors. By involving everyone throughout the process, a community food assessment can help to increase community participation in addressing local issues and help to empower people.[351]

Through this community food assessment process, the community was engaged in a number of ways in order to gage their input and perspective on the Middlesex-London food system. Community members were engaged through interviews, a community survey, an asset mapping session and an action planning session. This section of the community food assessment details the inputs that were received through various community actors.

12.1 Community Survey

As part of this community food assessment, residents of Middlesex-London were engaged through a community survey. Residents were able to complete the survey online, or through paper copies provided through local libraries. The purpose of the survey was to gage resident's perspective on local food system issues; in particular, assess the importance they attribute to numerous food system issues. For an analysis of the survey sample, please see Section 3.0 Methodology – Primary Research. Within Sections 2.0-11.00 each of the questions within the community survey pertaining to each of the sections throughout the report has been identified and discussed. This section of the report will analyze the responses to each of these questions previously highlighted in contrast to one another, and therefore, will allow one to understand which food issues were prioritized the highest amongst Middlesex-London residents.

Survey Responses

Survey participants were asked to indicate how much they agreed or disagreed with 11 questions about the Middlesex-London food system. For each question, participants ranked on a scale of 1-7 (with one being "strongly disagree", six being "strongly agree", and a seventh option for "don't know") their degree of agreement with the statement. Out the 779 people who completed the survey, response rates for questions pertaining specifically to the Middlesex-London food system ranged from 701-706 individual responses. The survey results for each question are included in Figure 54.

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[351] K. Pothukuchi, et al., *What's Cooking in Your Food System? A Guide to Community Food Assessment*, 2002, Print, p.8-11.

Overall, there is a high level of support for each of the 11 food system questions. The percentages of respondents who selected "strongly agree" range from 58.4% to 84.4%. If we look at overall level of agree ("strongly agree" responses and "somewhat agree" responses) the percentages range from 85.92%-90.46%. When analyzing solely the responses for which respondents selected "strongly agree," the most important issues are (from greatest importance to least):

1. Healthy food is affordable for everyone in Middlesex-London; followed by,
2. Children, youth and young adults learn about food and the food system; and lastly,
3. As local farmers get older, others are supported to start farming.

The eleven issues, and the percentage of respondents who responded, "strongly agree" to each issue, are included in Figure 55.

Given the survey results, showing a high level of support for each food system issue, it appears that a "social desirability bias" was present within survey responses. This type of bias describes the tendency of survey respondents to answer questions in a manner that they believe will be viewed favourably by others. In other words, people respond to questions based on what they think other people may want them to answer. This bias is highlighted in one survey respondent who stated, "What kind of person would have a response other than strongly agree or agree to the questions in part 3." Recognizing this social desirability bias is important because it helps to explain why the survey results were overwhelmingly positive.

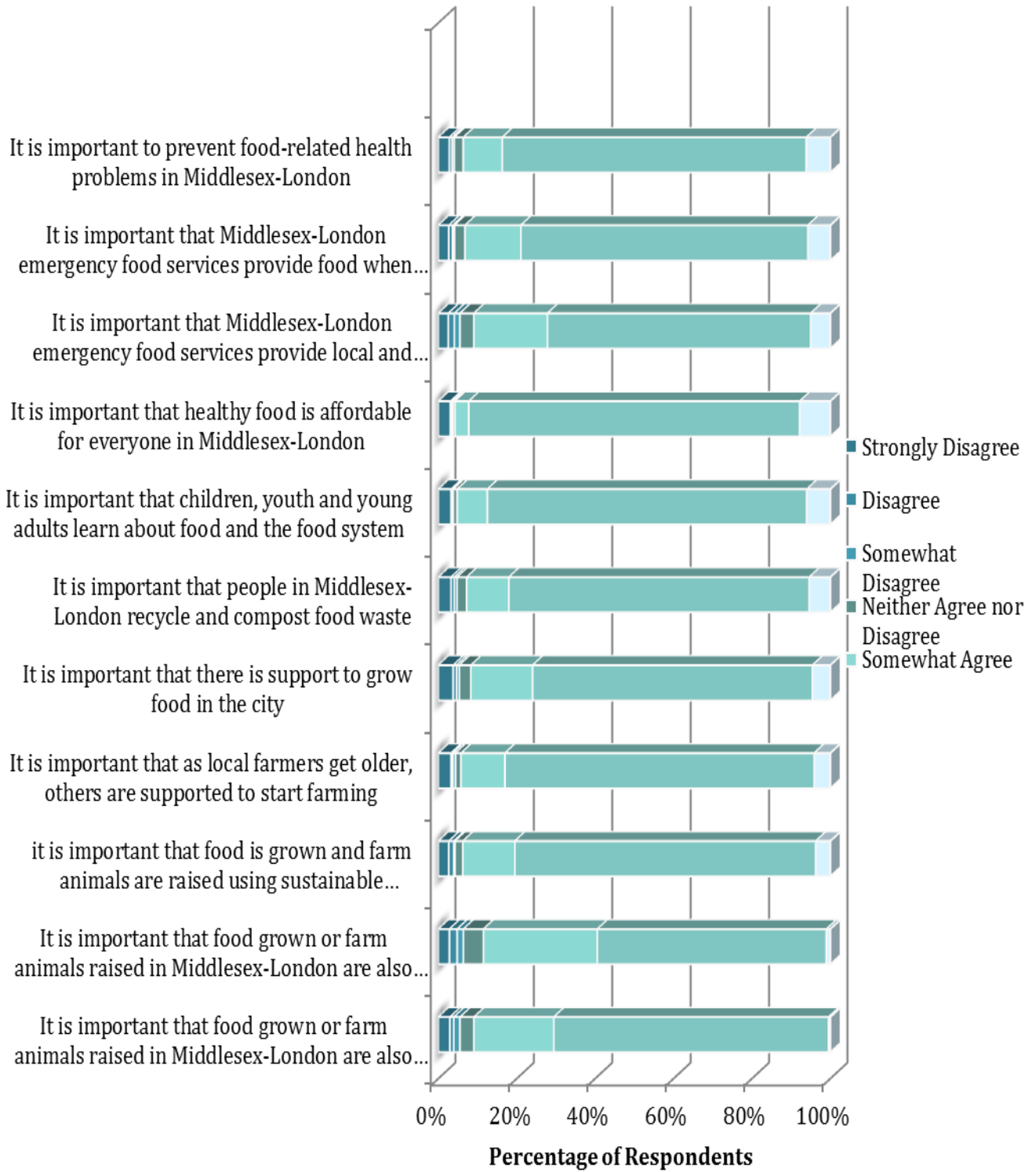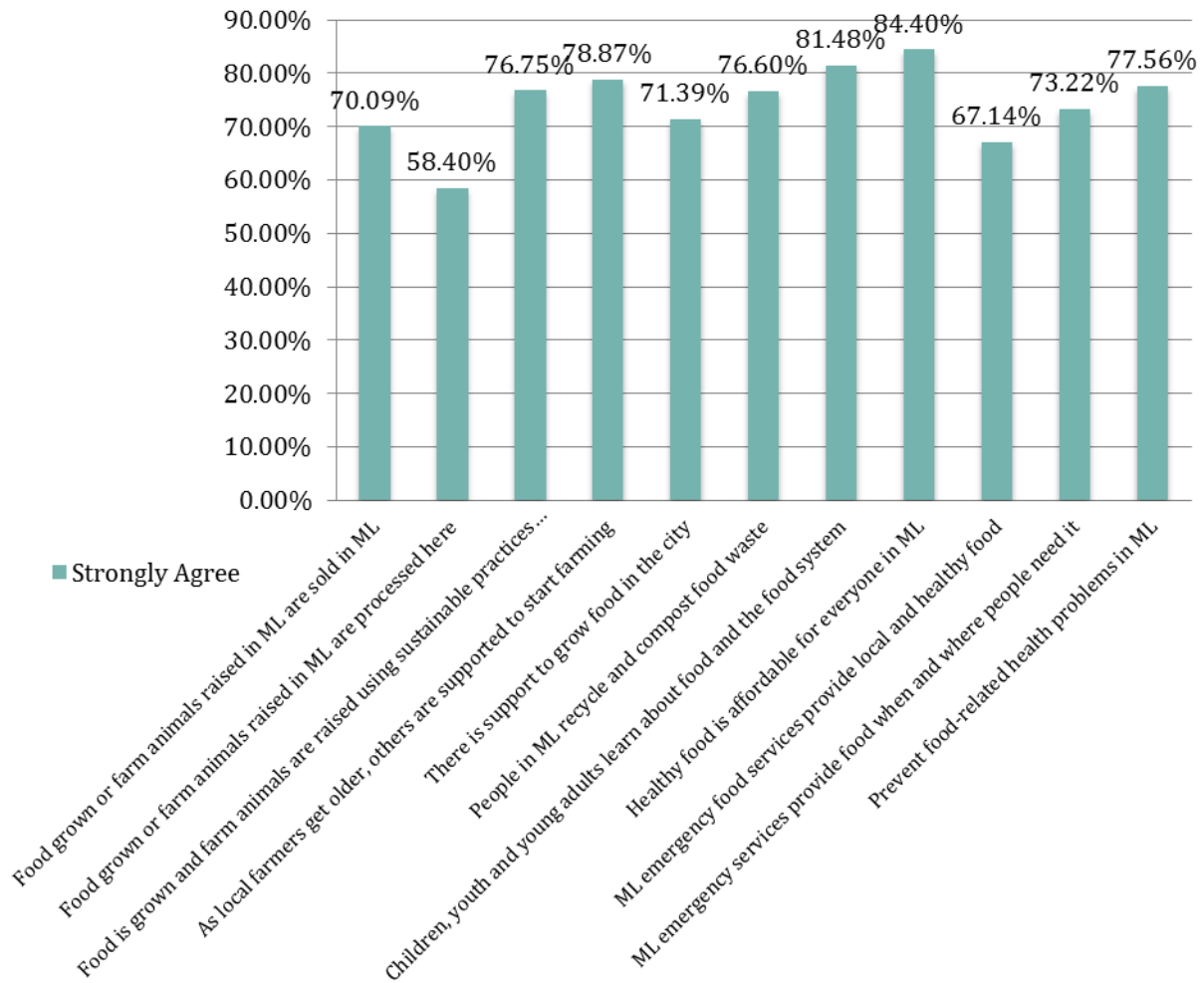**Figure 54: Survey Respondents Priorities within the Middlesex-London Food System**

Legend:
- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Somewhat Disagree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Somewhat Agree

Categories (top to bottom):
- It is important to prevent food-related health problems in Middlesex-London
- It is important that Middlesex-London emergency food services provide food when…
- It is important that Middlesex-London emergency food services provide local and…
- It is important that healthy food is affordable for everyone in Middlesex-London
- It is important that children, youth and young adults learn about food and the food system
- It is important that people in Middlesex-London recycle and compost food waste
- It is important that there is support to grow food in the city
- It is important that as local farmers get older, others are supported to start farming
- it is important that food is grown and farm animals are raised using sustainable…
- It is important that food grown or farm animals raised in Middlesex-London are also…
- It is important that food grown or farm animals raised in Middlesex-London are also…

X-axis: Percentage of Respondents (0%, 20%, 40%, 60%, 80%, 100%)

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Figure 55: Percentage of Strongly Agree for Food System Issues

When the scales for the different levels of importance are weighted (where "strongly disagree" is rated the lowest and "strongly agree" is rated the highest) we can get a clear picture of which initiatives received the most support from survey respondents. Through using this type of analysis, the top three most supported issues are:

- Healthy food is affordable for everyone in Middlesex-London;
- Children, youth, and young adults learn about food and the food system;
- Food-related health problems are prevented in Middlesex-London; and People are supported to start farming as local farmers get older (tied with a weighted average of 5.65).

The results of the weighted scores are the same as when the results for "strongly agree" are analyzed based on percentage in each response category, with the exception of preventing food-related health problems being added to the top three for weighted scores.

> "Green space is good for emotional health in addition to providing sources of food."
> - *Survey Respondent*

Table 53: Middlesex-London Food System Issues Responses with Weighted Average

Middlesex-London Food System Question	Weighted Average
It is important that food grown or farm animals raised in Middlesex-London are also sold here.	5.49
It is important that food grown or farm animals raised in Middlesex-London are also processed here. (Examples of processing include preparing, canning and packaging food.)	5.33
It is important that food is grown and farm animals are raised using sustainable practices in Middlesex-London. Sustainable practices help protect the environment and health of humans and animals. Sustainable practices could use less water and energy	5.62
It is important that as local farmers get older, others are supported to start farming.	5.65
It is important that there is support to grow food in the city. (For example, rooftop gardens, community gardens and public fruit trees.)	5.52
It is important that people in Middlesex-London recycle and compost food waste.	5.61
It is important that children, youth and young adults learn about food and the food system.	5.70
It is important that healthy food is affordable for everyone in Middlesex-London.	5.76
It is important that Middlesex-London emergency food services, such as food banks and community meals, provide local and healthy food.	5.48
It is important that Middlesex-London emergency food services, such as food banks and community meals, provide food when and where people need it.	5.60
It is important to prevent food-related health problems such as obesity, diabetes and heart disease in Middlesex- London.	5.65
*Note: for each of these questions the response "Don't Know" was weighted as a '0' as not to affect the weight of the agreement levels.	

Table 53 above notes the average rating (by weighted average) for each question.

As can be seen in Table 53, there is an overall high level of agreement with each of the 11 questions on the local food system. Even the weighted average for the most important issue (healthy food is affordable – 5.76) is not much higher than the least supported issue (processing locally grown food or animals raised – 5.33).

Survey analysis also included disaggregating survey responses by demographic characteristics (place of residence, age, gender, and household income). When this type of analysis was performed the top two most supported issues and the least supported issue remained true regardless of demographic characteristics. Overall, there was agreement that healthy food being affordable for everyone is the most important issue, having opportunities for children,

youth and young adults to learn about food and the food system is the second most supported issue, and processing Middlesex-London grown produce or raised farm animals within Middlesex-London is the least supported issue. For some of the demographic analysis, responses differed on the third most important issue and the second and third least supported issues; however, these differences were not significant. These results show that overall; there is great consensus on food system issues in Middlesex-London. When looking to build a stronger, more sustainable food system, the results of this survey can help change makers and community leaders to identify which issues are most supported by the community and thereby, identify priorities for a Food Policy Council that are most applicable to the community.

Through the community survey residents were also able to comment on local food system assets, cultivation areas, and opportunities for a stronger more sustainable food system. These comments have been included in Section 4.0 Community Food Assessment.

12.2   Asset Mapping

Introduction

In the asset mapping session, community leaders came together to analyze and discuss the assets located within the local food system. Working groups were provided with a list of assets that were identified during the environmental scan and key informant interview process. The groups worked to group these assets according to the asset type to which they belonged (e.g. social and political, intellectual, living etc.).

In the end, each asset within Middlesex-London was mapped onto a large format visualization of the local food system. Figure 56 shows the 7 food system areas (i.e. farm inputs, production, etc.) along with the types of assets that can be found in each area (identified as black icons and corresponding to the legend). Figure 56 also shows which types of assets cross the food value chain in Middlesex-London.

"It is time to take charge of our health."
- *Survey Respondent*

Figure 56: Middlesex-London Food System Asset Map

Legend	
Asset Type	
Living	🌱
Material	🏠
Cultural & Spiritual	✋
Intellectual	📚
Experiential	🔨
Financial	💧
Social & Political	👥

12.3   Community Action Planning

Introduction

The community action planning session, which followed directly after the asset mapping session, saw 22 key community members and leaders come together to build upon the preceding session. The primary objective of this interactive and participatory session was to co-design and vote on mini action plans for the Middlesex-London community.

During the session, 10 cultivation areas were introduced to the group (cultivation areas are an identifiable area within a local food system where both challenges and opportunities exist and can be explored by the community towards creating the change they want to see). The cultivation areas were identified through the environmental scan and key informant interviews.

Participants were then asked to identify other cultivation areas within the London-Middlesex food system that could be worked within to make the local food system stronger, healthier and more sustainable. Together, the following 14 areas were identified:

- Food literacy
- Small-scale agriculture production
- Young and new farmers
- Emergency food access
- Sustainable production
- Health and wellness
- Food accessibility

- Food waste reduction
- Local food processing and distribution
- Rural-urban connection
- Food policy
- Urban agriculture
- Land protection
- Public media campaign

These 14 areas were narrowed down to six by the group and then they decided, collectively, to focus on developing initiatives within four of the six areas; these included: food waste reduction, small-scale agriculture production, food literacy, and local food processing and distribution. Food policy and food funding served as overarching areas for each of the four cultivation areas of focus.

Within each cultivation area, the working group decided on three initiatives that could be implemented to make that specific cultivation area stronger within the local food system. The entire group then voted on the top initiative within each cultivation area and a work plan was developed on that one initiative. The work completed in each of the cultivation areas is discussed below.

Cultivation Area: Food Waste Reduction

The food waste reduction group brainstormed three initiatives that could be worked on to strengthen this area of the food system. They are as follows:

1. Quantification exercise to determine how much food waste there is in Middlesex-London
2. Local food hub (e.g. Western Fair project)
3. Compost awareness project

Through a democratic voting process, participants prioritized the quantification exercise as the most promising initiative within food waste management. A subsequent work plan for this initiative was then developed.

Work Plan

Table 54: Work Plan for Food Waste Reduction

Cultivation Area	Food Waste Reduction
Initiative	Quantification exercise to determine how much food waste there is in Middlesex-London
Goals or Objectives	- Discover how much food comes into Middlesex-London - Redefine definitions - Establish baselines
Action Items (Steps to be taken)	- Define food waste in Middlesex-London
Needed Resources (financial/human)	- Hardware and software power/ human interface/ research - Someone to build the database - Research to discover current model for similar action - Neighbourhood association champions - Ontario Trillium Fund - Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs - City of London - Greenbelt Fund - Federal energy/consent
Assets to Leverage	- Online systems - POP surveys - Neighbourhood association champions
Measures of Success (outcomes)	- Database - Definitions of waste, inputted food, outputted food - Estimate of amount of food in the streams - Build a robust tracking system

Cultivation Area: Food Literacy

Within the food literacy group three initiatives were devised that would help to increase food education, knowledge and/or literacy amongst Middlesex-London residents. The group selected the following as their top three initiatives:

1. Food literacy working group (that develops a common food literacy message and filters it out through networks and media to residents)
2. Pilot a project (i.e. a school garden) and evaluate whether it increases food literacy
3. Media campaign to increase food literacy in Middlesex-London

Participants selected the establishment of a food literacy working group as their top priority amongst the three; the group then developed a work plan according to how this group would be formed and function within Middlesex-London.

Work Plan

Table 55: Work Plan for Food Literacy

Cultivation Area	Food Literacy
Initiative	Food literacy working group
Goals or Objectives	- Cross sector membership of food literacy champions - Unify food literacy message - Combine resources and define gaps in food literacy - Define target groups - Form tangible solutions - Engage in advocacy efforts - Training through train-the-trainer model
Action Items (Steps to be taken)	- Develop common message and subsequently, adjust one's own work environment to incorporate this messaging - Pilot projects focused on food literacy with an evaluation component - Recruit members - Find funding and administrative support - Engage in advocacy opportunities - Participate in outreach opportunities - Create a directory
Needed Resources (financial/human)	- Funding - Working group members could include: student volunteers, food retailers, farm to fork, education, community groups, churches, media, senior centres, child care centres, farmers markets, food festivals
Assets to Leverage	- Beautiful Edibles, Middlesex-London Health Unit (Cooking Matters, food

Cultivation Area	Food Literacy
Initiative	Food literacy working group
	safety training), Food Not Lawns, Life Spin, Middlesex 4-H Association, Community Resource Centres, Healthy Kids Community Challenge, London Training Centre, Cooking Matters, London Gets Local, Growing Chefs!, libraries, Grow Cook Learn, YMCA, Girl Scouts, Boy Scouts, Cherry Hill, Kiwams, Master Gardeners, churches, community gardens, London Environmental Network, London Parks and Recreation, summer camps
Measures of Success (outcomes)	The food literacy working group's success will be determined by: - Reach - Adoption of messaging - How many current programs integrate the unified food literacy message - Any change that occurs through advocacy For the pilot project, measure of success will be determined by: - Pre and post evaluation

Cultivation Area: Local Food Processing and Distribution

Initiatives

The group working on the local food processing and distribution area talked through a number of different initiatives related to their area, and selected the following three as their top initiatives.

1. Municipal policy bylaw mandating public institutions to procure a designated percentage of local food in their menus
2. Regional branding (verifying that the product was grown/raised in Middlesex-London)
3. Co-operatively owned distribution

Of the three initiatives, the top initiative selected by the group was the opportunity to create a municipal policy bylaw mandating public institutions to procure a designated percentage of local food in their menus. The group then worked together to create a work plan that established what was needed to make this initiative come to life.

Table 56: Work Plan for Local Food Processing and Distribution

Cultivation Area	Food Processing and Distribution
Initiative	Municipal policy bylaw mandating public institutions to procure a designated percentage of local food in their menus
Goals or Objectives	- Achieve council support for a bylaw to mandate a percentage of local food in all London operated facilities that have food.
Action Items (Steps to be taken)	- Research similar examples - Look for other municipalities that have done this - List all food sales spots within the corporation - Anticipate issues and solve as many problems - Establish transition period - Locate a council champion - Define local in this context - Framework for tracking success and progress
Needed Resources (financial/human)	- A person to lead the process or coordinate the process - Western University students - Middlesex-London Health Unit food system person - City of London staff - Media support
Assets to Leverage	- Small and large scale farmers - Existing transportation and distribution systems - Existing demand for local food in the community - Existing production facilities - Food system funding
Measures of Success (outcomes)	- Bylaw passed - Leading by example - Increased capacity in the local food system - Others institutions follow suit

Cultivation Area: Small-scale Agriculture Production

Initiatives

The small-scale agriculture production group brainstormed three initiatives that they believed would be particularly useful in strengthening this area of the food system. The top three are:

1. Food hub: customers, logistics and storage
2. Education to scale up and manage growth within Middlesex-London
3. Business model that fosters mentorship and support (e.g. an incubator model to provide training to new farmers)
4. Farm Co-operatives to help bridge farmers (who have business training) to land

The development of a food hub was voted by the group to be the most promising initiative of the three. Next, in their smaller group a work plan was developed that outlines the goals, steps, needed resources, assets, and measures of success for a Middlesex-London food hub (with customers, logistics and storage).

Work Plan

Table 57: Work Plan for Small-scale Agriculture Production

Cultivation Area	Small-scale Agriculture Production
Initiative	Food hub: customers, logistics and storage
Goals or Objectives	- Central locations (multiple hubs) - Easy access for producer and buyer to obtain local, quality products - Equitable for all parties - Fair prices - Financial viability for producers - Increase markets (increase sales)
Action Items (Steps to be taken)	- Marketing to customers - Creating value added options - Location - Producers to work with - Staff - Communication
Needed Resources (financial/human)	- Producers - Partners - Local champions - Funding - Transportation (accessible to all)
Assets to Leverage	- Farm community - The demand for product is nearby (large population in London) - Packaging - Existing locations - Large restaurant potential in the area - Many institutions in the area - Western Fair and existing farm markets
Measures of Success (outcomes)	- Increase in sales - Sustainability - Growth in the number of producers using the hub to market their products

Summary

During the Community Action Planning Session food waste reduction, food literacy, local food processing and distribution and small-scale agriculture production were prioritized as the areas to begin working on. The groups developed work plans for initiatives that aim to quantify how much food waste exists in Middlesex-London; form a food literacy working group; advocate for a municipal policy bylaw mandating public institutions to procure a designated percentage of local food; and create a food hub with customers, logistics and storage. Each of the work plans developed was highly supported by the larger group. Also, each of these initiatives can be further prioritized and developed by a local food policy council given that there is a large amount of community support to strengthen these areas of the Middlesex-London food system and also a significant number of community leaders willing to contribute to the success of these initiatives.