



TO: Chair and Members of the Board of Health

FROM: Christopher Mackie, Medical Officer of Health and CEO

DATE: 2015 September 17

WORKING TOWARDS THE VISION OF A HEALTHY AND SUSTAINABLE LOCAL FOOD SYSTEM

Recommendation

It is recommended that Report 52-15 re Working Towards the Vision of a Healthy and Sustainable Local Food System be received for information.

Key Points

- The food system is the complex set of activities and relationships related to every aspect of the food cycle, including production, processing, distribution, retail, preparation, consumption and disposal.
- Building a healthy, sustainable local food system is an essential component of a healthy community.
- Many residents and organizations across Middlesex-London have shown active interest in developing a more sustainable local food system.
- A comprehensive Community Food Assessment encourages engagement of diverse stakeholders, including the general public, and will help to inform potential actions of a future Middlesex-London Food Policy Council to achieve a healthier and more sustainable food system.

Background

The food system is commonly defined as the complex set of activities and relationships related to every aspect of the food cycle, including production, processing, distribution, retail, preparation, consumption and disposal. According to the American Public Health Association, a sustainable food system provides healthy food to meet current need, while at the same time, keeping the ecosystem and environment healthy so that food can be provided to future generations. A sustainable food system promotes local food production and distribution and ensures that healthy food is available, accessible and affordable to all. Building a healthy local food system is an essential component of a vibrant and healthy community, which is integral for chronic disease prevention and healthy childhood growth and development.

The Vision of a Healthy and Sustainable Local Food System

Momentum towards the development of a healthy and sustainable local food system in Middlesex-London has been growing for the past few years. In 2011, London City Council endorsed [London's Food Charter](#), which establishes a vision of London as a food secure community. The Charter guides and informs all levels of government, businesses, non-profit and faith organizations, communities, families and individuals by linking sustainable food security policies to community action. In 2013, the [Local Food Act](#) was enacted to help support the growth of successful and resilient local food economies and systems throughout Ontario.

Several recent actions on the part of the City of London and the County of Middlesex demonstrate their commitment to a sustainable and healthy local food system:

- The [Middlesex County Economic Development Strategic Plan](#) was released with recommendations to build and support a sustainable local economy, with a strong emphasis on the agricultural sector (May 2014).

- The [County of Middlesex Agriculture Strategy Report and Recommendations](#) was released with the guiding principle of increasing employment, investment and production in a sustainable manner (April 2015).
- [The London Plan](#), second draft, specifically addressed strategies for building a sustainable and strengthened local food system under “City Building Policies” (May 2015).
- The London Community Garden Program Strategic Plan (2015-2019), attached as [Appendix A](#) was endorsed by the City of London’s Community and Protective Services Committee (August 2015).
- City of London’s Community and Protective Services Committee passed a motion to direct Civic Administration to consult with stakeholders on the feasibility of an urban agriculture policy (August 2015).

Many community stakeholders have identified the need for a sustainable, coordinated, viable and health-promoting food system in Middlesex-London. In February 2014, attendees at a stakeholder forum, hosted in part by the Health Unit, expressed unanimous support for a future Middlesex-London Food Policy Council (FPC) to help move this vision forward. A volunteer task group, representing stakeholders across the food system including the Health Unit, was formed to research and make recommendations on the best structure for a FPC. In October 2014, attendees at a second forum unanimously expressed support for a partnership model for a future FPC co-led by two community organizations. In order to inform strategies for action for a future FPC, the group recommended a community food assessment (CFA) be completed as the next step. A second volunteer task group was formed to assist with the CFA.

In 2015, the Health Unit increased its capacity by 0.5 FTE Registered Dietitian to better position the Health Unit to address the environmental, economic, social and nutritional factors connected to the increasing number of local food-related problems including food insecurity, increased consumption of nutrient-poor foods and rising rates of unhealthy weights and related chronic diseases.

Opportunities for Action

The food system is complex and involves many varied stakeholders. Ultimately, the consumer is the target; therefore, public input and engagement is critical to making meaningful change. The Community Food Assessment (CFA) community survey, launched as part of the CFA, provides community members with an opportunity to share concerns related to the local food system and to gauge support for potential solutions to the most prevalent challenges. The CFA also includes an environmental scan of existing resources and assets, stakeholder interviews and focus groups. The CFA addresses issues across the food system including food production, distribution, purchasing and consumption, food literacy, waste management, and food policy.

Understanding the challenges within our local food system will help the community move toward workable solutions. The results of the CFA, expected by the end of 2015, will inform recommendations and strategies for action to help support the development of a healthy and sustainable local food system and provide insight into the required membership and mandate of the future Middlesex-London Food Policy Council.

This report was prepared by Ms. Ellen Lakusiak and Ms. Kim Leacy, Registered Dietitians, and Ms. Linda Stobo, Manager, Chronic Disease Prevention & Tobacco Control Team.



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<p>This report addresses the following requirements of the Ontario Public Health Standards (2014): Foundational Standards 1, 2,3,4, 5, 8, 9, 10; Chronic Disease Prevention 3,5,6, 7,8, 11, 12</p>
