



REGINA COMMUNITY FOOD ASSESSMENT

Final Report

Regina Community Food Systems Steering Committee

INTRODUCTION

Food security exists when a community's residents have equal access to a safe, culturally acceptable, and nutritionally adequate diet in a sustainable food system. Community Food Assessments (CFAs) are a growing trend across Canada and internationally to analyze community assets, identify gaps, and develop action plans to improve food security across all sectors of a food system including production, processing, distribution, consumption, and waste recovery. CFAs are proven to be effective in building community capacity, developing strategic partnerships, and improving the health of a population - particularly the most vulnerable.

Food insecurity is a hidden crisis in our community. Despite low rates of unemployment, the number of people relying on food banks in Saskatchewan increased by nearly 40 percent from 2008 to 2012, with 47.5 percent of clients being children.¹ With vacancy rates hovering just above one percent and rents soaring, our most vulnerable residents are finding themselves with ever-diminishing resources to spend on nutritious food for their families.² Research demonstrates that those most at risk are children, older adults, Indigenous people, people with disabilities, and those living in poverty - all populations that are growing in Regina.³

THE COMMUNITY FOOD ASSESSMENT PROCESS

The Regina CFA is a participatory, collaborative process that brings together community organizations, farmers, nutritionists, activists, and academics with the goal of improving the security and sustainability of the food system in Regina. Under the direction of the Community Food Systems Steering Committee, it includes representatives from the City of Regina, Regina Education and Action on Child Hunger (REACH), Regina Qu'Appelle Health Region, Regina Public Interest Research Group (PRIRG), the University of Regina's Community Research Unit, Regina and District Food Bank, Regina Open Door Society, the Saskatchewan Environmental Network, Green Ranch, Heritage Community Association, Root & Branch, and Eat Healthy Foods.

The first step undertaken by the Regina CFA was an **Environmental Scan** that analyzed conventional and Indigenous food systems in the Regina area in collaboration with First Nations University of Canada. The Environmental Scan examined food production, processing, consumption, and waste disposal as well as the social, environmental, economic, and cultural context of the food system. The Environmental Scan also identified key indicators and datasets that can be used to monitor Regina's food system and evaluate the success or failure of policy changes. Finally, the Scan identified critical information gaps where more research is required, including Indigenous food system data, the role of culture and tradition in determining food choices, tracking the consumption of local foods, and the relationship between climate change and food production in Saskatchewan.

As the Environmental Scan states, "if food production tonnage alone could ensure food security, Regina would be among the most food secure places on earth" (p.27). However, hunger and food insecurity persist in Regina amid millions of tonnes of surplus food. Thus, the primary obstacles to food security in Regina are problems of distribution rather than production. Among the most significant conclusions of the Environmental Scan is that the loss of livestock and grain processing capacity in the area has impaired residents from accessing the food that surrounds them in addition to increasing green house gas emissions.

Following the Environmental Scan, the Regina CFA hosted a series of community consultations and focus groups to gain a better understanding of local citizens' experiences, needs, and perspectives on how to build a more socially just and environmentally sustainable food system. Regina residents were also invited to contribute their thoughts online. The consultations and focus groups posed the following questions: What are the strengths of our current food system? What are the gaps and challenges, and what should we do about it? Based on the feedback of a broad range of participants - including new immigrants, older adults, youth, Indigenous populations, food producers and distributors, and chefs - the CFA developed an **inventory of assets and gaps** in the food system.

At the conclusion of the focus groups and community consultations, participants had an opportunity to **prioritize actions** to improve food security. Highlights from the responses of the 425 participants include:

- Facilitate greater communication and coordination between local producers and restaurants and among public and non-profit organizations offering food programming to the community.
- Expand education about food systems for youth.
- Improve awareness of, access to, and support for local food.

The information generated from this process formed the basis of a **Draft Action Plan** with five themes: research, public awareness, education, infrastructure, and policy. The Draft Action Plan was taken back to the public to engage the community once again, both to gain feedback and also to mobilize support for implementing some of the Draft Action Plan's proposals. Two community consultations were held on June 11, 2014, in addition to making the Draft Action Plan available online for feedback. Priorities identified by over 60 respondents include the following:

1. *Improve the infrastructure for local food production and distribution, particularly in food-insecure neighbourhoods.*

This includes providing greater support for - and expansion of - community gardens as a means of improving access to quality, local food as well as meeting educational objectives; institutionalizing farmers' markets to ensure year-round options in multiple locations and expanding the central market to six days per week; establishing community facilities for local food storage; implementing a city-wide composting program.

2. *Improve education and awareness.*

In the school system, this includes incorporating into the curriculum discussions around traditional foods, where food comes from, and food politics; re-introducing home economics; and establishing after-school gardening/horticultural clubs. In the broader community, this is focused primarily on improving awareness of local food options and food programming.

3. *Implement pilot projects.*

Research food security initiatives in similar cities to identify possible pilot projects for improving Regina's food system.

4. *Advocate for policy change.*

This includes developing local food policy that levels the playing field between local and large-scale providers and makes local food more visible and affordable; improving transparency in food labeling; reforming bylaws specific to urban agriculture, food access, and land use; and increasing income supplements and advocating for a guaranteed minimum income.

Based on the priorities identified by stakeholders and other interested community members in the consultations, the Steering Committee identified the following priorities for the upcoming year:

- Develop a permanent food security coalition to oversee the progress of the CFA Action Plan.
- Develop a comprehensive communications strategy to enhance awareness of local food programming in Regina, promote sources of local food, and expand engagement in the movement for a more just and sustainable food system.
- Compile an inventory of existing food security initiatives in Regina and gaps to be addressed.
- Host an annual open house to highlight the progress of the Steering Committee and increase awareness of other local food security initiatives.

LIMITATIONS OF THE PROCES

As in any consultative process, ensuring diversity of representation and engaging those not already passionate about the topic is a challenge. While we feel this was mitigated in the first round of consultations, the second round of consultations was limited to a single day and engaged only those who were able to attend. While online feedback was also sought, it was only for a limited time. Among our priorities for the upcoming year is expanding involvement in the process beyond those already engaged.

EVALUATING THE PARTNERSHIP

Concurrent with the CFA was the evaluation of our community-university partnership, funding for which was provided through the Community First: Impacts of Community Engagement (CFICE) program at Carleton University. The evaluation focused on two distinct levels of partnership: 1) The involvement of academics in research for the Environmental Scan, and 2) The participation of university organizations on the Steering Committee. The evaluation found that while university organizations are viewed as integral to the work of the Steering Committee, individual academics are viewed as having more limited participation and operating outside of the “community partnership” model.

The evaluation concluded that there was consensus among participants in their level of commitment to the work of the partnership, and a belief that it has succeeded in achieving what could not be done by individual people or organizations. While the university’s role is sometimes characterized as disconnected, bureaucratic, and inward-looking, participants felt that it served a necessary role in research and knowledge production.

CONCLUSION

The citizens of Regina want action. While some may be disappointed that the priorities chosen for the upcoming year are not large-scale projects, it is important to first increase public engagement and to improve awareness of current programming and the local foods that are presently available. To this end, the Steering Committee will focus on developing a food security coalition, highlighting the strengths of our current food system, and building the capacity of what is working well - imperative steps toward improving community food security for the City of Regina.

For more information, find us on **Facebook** and **Twitter**, or see **foodregina.ca**. To access the full text of the Environmental Scan and Draft Action Plan, see foodregina.ca/resources.

This process could not have occurred without funding from: United Way Regina, REACH, Community Research Unit, Regina Public Interest Research Group, First Nations University of Canada, and Regina Qu'Appelle Health Region.

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1. "Hunger Count 2012," Food Banks Canada, 2012.
 2. "Regina CFA Environmental Scan (Draft)," Regina Community Food Systems Steering Committee, 2013.
 3. "Accessing Healthy Food Choices in Regina," RQHR and Saskatchewan in Motion, 2012; "The Cost of Healthy Eating in Saskatchewan," Public Health Nutritionists of Saskatchewan Working Group, 2009.